



Mentor's Guide for Peer Consultation: The Sage, Not the Siren Approach

Navigating the Therapist's Role

As therapists, we often find ourselves guiding clients through stormy emotional seas, helping them navigate complex decisions about relationships, careers, family expectations, and personal growth. In these moments, we face a critical choice:

- **The Siren:** The therapist who steers the ship, offering direct advice or subtly influencing the client's path.

- The Sage: The therapist who holds the lantern high, illuminating the way without choosing the direction for the client.

It's tempting to become the Siren—soothing, reassuring, maybe even steering. But when we take the wheel, we risk making the choice for them. The Sage, however, holds the lantern steady, illuminating the way while the client chooses their own path. When things go wrong, clients may feel resentful, disempowered, or even betrayed.

The Sage, by contrast, remains steady—offering insight, reflection, and tools for exploration, ensuring that clients remain the captains of their own ships. This guide is designed to help therapists cultivate the Sage mindset in various clinical dilemmas, balancing empathy, neutrality, and empowerment.

There are no absolute right answers in therapy. The way a therapist responds in any given situation depends on multiple factors: the client's needs, the therapeutic relationship, the therapist's theoretical orientation, ethical considerations, and even the specific context of the moment. This guide is not about prescribing a single "correct" way to respond—it's about deepening clinical reasoning, sharpening self-awareness, and cultivating a Sage mindset in various dilemmas.


This guide was born from a deeper exploration of the themes in this blog post. If you're interested in how the Sage vs. Siren approach applies to real-world therapy dilemmas, dive into the full discussion there.

Blog Post That Inspired This Guide: [Guiding the Ship: Navigating Relationship Storms in Therapy](#)


Scenario 1: Should I Stay or Should I Go? Navigating Relationship Decisions in Therapy

Client Presentation:

Your client, Alex, has been in a long-term relationship for seven years. Recently, they've been questioning whether to stay or leave. During today's session, Alex says:

 "I just don't know if this relationship is right for me anymore. Part of me loves them, but another part of me wonders if I'd be happier alone or with someone else. I need you to tell me—what should I do?"

As their therapist, you recognize the weight of this moment. Alex is looking to you for clarity, but as the Sage, your role is to guide, not decide. The Siren would pull them toward an answer, but your task is to reflect, reframe, and empower Alex to uncover their own truth.

 What do you do?

 A. Explore Alex's core values and how they relate to their feelings about the relationship.

✓ Reasoning: This approach helps Alex connect with their internal compass rather than making a fear-based or reactionary decision. By discussing what truly matters to them in relationships—such as emotional connection, trust, independence, or security—they can assess whether their relationship aligns with their deeper needs and values.

🌀 B. Ask Alex to visualize both staying and leaving—what do they feel in each scenario?

✓ Reasoning: This method taps into their emotional wisdom, rather than seeking external validation. Encouraging Alex to sit with the feelings that arise when imagining different futures allows them to access intuitive insights that may not emerge through logical analysis alone. This also reduces pressure to make an immediate decision and allows for emotional clarity.

⌚ C. Reassure Alex that there's no rush to decide and that confusion is a normal part of transition.

✓ Reasoning: Many clients feel urgency when making major life decisions, fearing they must figure it out immediately. This response normalizes uncertainty as part of the process, reinforcing that self-discovery takes time and that neither staying nor leaving must be decided in the moment. Slowing down the decision-making process can help Alex explore their feelings without the pressure of resolution.

↩️ D. Redirect Alex's question back to them: "What does your gut tell you?"

✓ Reasoning: This response models trust in Alex's own wisdom, reinforcing autonomy in their decision-making. It acknowledges their struggle while gently redirecting the responsibility of the decision to them. Clients who look to therapists for direct answers often need support in learning to trust themselves, and this approach subtly encourages that process.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤖 How do we support clients in making major life decisions without imposing our own values?
- 📖 What therapeutic modalities (e.g., ACT, DBT, Narrative Therapy) can be helpful in these situations?
- ⚖️ What are the ethical considerations when a client asks directly for advice?
- 😞 How do we navigate a client's frustration if they expect clear answers?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by emphasizing autonomy, self-exploration, and emotional clarity while resisting the temptation to provide a direct answer.


🔦 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by keeping the focus on Alex's internal wisdom rather than providing external validation.

The Siren might be tempted to give direct advice or validate one decision over another, but the Sage guides Alex to explore their emotions, values, and instincts, ensuring the decision is truly their own.


Scenario 2: The Career Crossroads – A Client Torn Between Two Paths

Client Presentation:


Jordan, a 32-year-old professional, has spent the last decade climbing the corporate ladder. They've recently received an offer for a new job that aligns with their personal values and passions—but it comes with a lower salary and less stability. During today's session, Jordan says:


 "I feel stuck. This new job could make me truly happy, but it's risky. My current job is safe, pays well, and I've worked so hard to get here. My family thinks I'd be making a mistake leaving. What do you think I should do?"


As their therapist, you recognize that your role is to guide, not decide. The Siren would be tempted to pull Jordan toward one path or the other, responding from personal perspective or external expectations. Instead, as the Sage, you stay grounded in neutrality, helping them connect with their own values, emotions, and aspirations.


 What do you do?


 A. Ask Jordan to identify their biggest fears and hopes about both choices.

 Reasoning: This allows Jordan to process their anxiety and excitement without external influence. Naming fears (e.g., "What if I fail?" "What if I regret it?") alongside hopes (e.g., "What if I love it?" "What if I finally feel fulfilled?") can help clarify what is driving their hesitation. Often, naming the fear reduces its power, and understanding what excites them clarifies what they truly desire.

 B. Use a values-based approach: "Which path aligns more with who you want to be?"

 Reasoning: This shifts the focus inward rather than on external pressures (e.g., financial security, family expectations). Values-driven decision-making helps Jordan make choices rooted in long-term fulfillment rather than fear or obligation. This also reinforces self-trust—the decision is about alignment, not just risk vs. reward.

 C. Encourage Jordan to experiment: "How might you explore this decision without making an immediate commitment?"

 Reasoning: This reduces the paralysis of all-or-nothing thinking. If Jordan feels pressure to choose immediately, breaking it into smaller, manageable steps (e.g., freelancing, networking, shadowing someone in the new field) allows them to gather information and experience before committing fully.

🔍 D. Validate the difficulty of this choice and ask, “If money weren’t a factor, what would your gut say?”

✅ Reasoning: Financial concerns are valid, but they can overshadow emotional truth. By momentarily removing money from the equation, Jordan can access their deeper instincts. This doesn’t mean dismissing financial security—it’s about ensuring financial fears don’t drown out core values and desires.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤔 How do we help clients navigate career decisions without inserting our own biases?
- 📖 What therapeutic approaches (e.g., ACT, Motivational Interviewing, Narrative Therapy) can help with values-based decision-making?
- ⚖️ How do we address external influences (e.g., family expectations, financial concerns) without dismissing them?
- 🔄 When is it appropriate to challenge a client’s fears versus affirm their concerns?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by prioritizing values-based exploration and decision-making without therapist interference.

💡 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by keeping the focus on Jordan’s internal clarity rather than external validation.

The Siren might push Jordan toward what seems like the “best” option, but the Sage helps Jordan explore their values, personal fulfillment, and fear-based hesitations, empowering them to make a confident decision.

Scenario 3: The Relationship Crossroads – Stay or Leave?

Client Presentation:

Alex, 29 years old, has been in a relationship for five years and is feeling deeply conflicted. They love their partner but can’t shake the feeling that something is missing. Lately, they’ve noticed increasing resentment, less emotional intimacy, and a sense of being stuck. During session, Alex says:

💔 “I don’t know if I should stay or go. Some days, I feel like we’re just coexisting, and I wonder if I’d be happier on my own. But we have so much history, and I’m scared of making the wrong choice. What do you think I should do?”

As their therapist, you recognize the ethical importance of remaining neutral—your role is not to tell Alex whether to stay or leave, but to help them explore their emotions, clarify their needs, and gain confidence in their decision-making process.

The Siren might attempt to soothe Alex by offering reassurance or opinions, subtly influencing their choice. The Sage, however, remains steady, helping Alex turn inward and trust themselves.

👉 What do you do?

🔍 A. Invite Alex to explore their core needs in a relationship and assess whether those are being met.

✅ Reasoning: Instead of focusing on stay vs. leave, this approach redirects the conversation to self-awareness. By identifying what they need from a partner (e.g., emotional connection, shared values, communication styles), Alex can determine whether the current relationship aligns with their long-term fulfillment.

⚖️ B. Ask, “What are the fears keeping you in the relationship, and what are the fears keeping you from leaving?”

✅ Reasoning: This helps Alex uncover whether their hesitation stems from genuine connection or fear-based attachment. Are they staying because of love, compatibility, and mutual growth, or because they fear loneliness, regret, or hurting their partner? Understanding these fears helps separate anxiety-driven indecision from true emotional clarity.

🌱 C. Use a narrative approach: “If you imagine yourself five years from now in both scenarios, what do you see?”




✅ Reasoning: This encourages Alex to mentally “try on” both decisions without pressure. Future visualization helps access intuition, allowing them to sense which scenario feels more aligned with their emotional truth. It also normalizes uncertainty by showing that both choices come with trade-offs.

🙌 D. Normalize ambivalence and say, “It’s okay to not have an answer today. Let’s focus on understanding what you truly want.”


✅ Reasoning: Alex may feel pressured to make a decision immediately, which can cloud judgment. Reframing the choice as a process rather than a sudden decision allows for deeper exploration and reduces the need for certainty before they’re ready. This approach builds self-trust rather than forcing resolution.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤔 How do we ensure we’re guiding without leading?

-  What therapeutic frameworks (e.g., ACT, EFT, Internal Family Systems) help clients make relational decisions?
-  How do we differentiate between decision paralysis and the natural complexity of relationship choices?
-  When is it appropriate to introduce structured decision-making tools versus letting the process unfold organically?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by allowing Alex to engage with their uncertainty rather than seeking an immediate solution.

 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by helping Alex slow down and connect with their deeper needs rather than making a rushed decision.


The Siren might rush Alex toward a decision to relieve discomfort, but the Sage creates space for deeper exploration, ensuring the choice aligns with Alex's long-term well-being rather than temporary emotions.

Scenario 4: The Career Crisis – Should I Stay or Go?

Client Presentation:


Jordan, 35 years old, has been working in the same corporate job for over a decade. They once loved the stability, but now they feel burnt out, uninspired, and questioning whether they're on the right path. Lately, they've been considering a major change—maybe starting their own business or transitioning to a completely different field.


In session, Jordan sighs and says:

 “Every day, I wake up dreading work. I feel like I’m wasting my life, but I can’t tell if it’s just burnout or if I’m truly meant to do something else. What if I leave and regret it? What if I stay and nothing changes? I don’t know what to do. What do you think?”

As their therapist, you recognize the ethical importance of staying neutral—your role is not to tell Jordan whether to quit or stay, but to help them explore their motivations, values, and fears so they can make a confident, informed decision.

The Siren might try to offer reassurance or personal opinions, subtly influencing the choice. The Sage, however, guides without leading, encouraging Jordan to turn inward and trust their own wisdom.

 What do you do?

 A. Ask, “If nothing changed in your job for the next five years, how would you feel?”

✓ Reasoning: This question illuminates long-term emotional impact. If Jordan feels deep discomfort at the thought of staying, that's valuable insight. If they feel neutral or relieved, their dissatisfaction may be situational burnout rather than true misalignment.

🔥 B. Explore burnout vs. misalignment: "What parts of your job drain you, and what parts (if any) still bring you meaning?"

✓ Reasoning: Differentiating between burnout (temporary exhaustion) and misalignment (deep incompatibility) helps Jordan understand whether they need restorative changes or a complete career shift.

🌱 C. Use ACT-based values work: "If you weren't afraid of failure, what would you truly want to do?"

✓ Reasoning: Fear-based decision-making often keeps clients stuck in familiar patterns. By removing fear from the equation, Jordan can explore what aligns with their values rather than what feels safest.

🌀 D. Normalize uncertainty: "Big transitions rarely feel 100% clear—what would help you tolerate the unknown as you explore this?"

✓ Reasoning: Many clients wait for certainty before making a decision, which can lead to indefinite paralysis. Helping Jordan build distress tolerance around uncertainty allows them to take thoughtful steps forward instead of feeling forced into an immediate choice.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤔 How do we help clients navigate career decisions without imposing our own values or biases?
- 📊 When is it appropriate to introduce structured decision-making tools (e.g., pros/cons lists, career assessments)?
- ⚖️ How do we differentiate between burnout, situational dissatisfaction, and deeper misalignment?
- 💰 What role does financial stability play in career decisions, and how do we hold space for practical concerns?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by guiding Jordan to separate fear from values while resisting pressure to make a quick decision.

🔍 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by helping Jordan examine their values and motivations rather than making a fear-based decision.

The Siren might try to steer Jordan toward an obvious choice, but the Sage helps them explore burnout, misalignment, and personal fulfillment while maintaining self-trust in their process.

Scenario 5: The Relationship Crossroads – Should I Stay or Leave?

Client Presentation:

Ava, 29 years old, has been in a relationship with their partner for five years. They describe their partner as kind, supportive, and reliable. However, lately, Ava has felt emotionally disconnected, questioning whether they are truly in love or just comfortable. They've been thinking about ending the relationship but feel immense guilt, fearing they might regret it or hurt their partner unnecessarily.

In session, Ava hesitates before saying:

💡 “I don’t know if I should stay or go. My partner hasn’t done anything wrong, but something feels... off. Maybe I just have commitment issues? Maybe I’m overthinking? What if I leave and realize I made a huge mistake? What if I stay and never feel truly fulfilled?”

As their therapist, you recognize the Sage, not Siren approach—you are not here to steer Ava in any direction but rather to hold space for their uncertainty and help them uncover their own truth. Your role is to empower, not persuade—guiding them toward clarity without making the decision for them.

👉 What do you do?

- ♦ A. Ask, “If nothing changed in your relationship for the next five years, how would you feel?”

✅ Reasoning: This question helps Ava explore long-term emotional fulfillment. If the idea of nothing changing feels unbearable, that’s valuable insight. If they feel neutral or relieved, their uncertainty may be based on temporary emotions rather than deep dissatisfaction.

- ♦ B. Explore attachment patterns: “When you imagine ending things, what comes up for you? Fear, relief, something else?”

✅ Reasoning: Sometimes, fear of change or attachment wounds can make people doubt otherwise fulfilling relationships. Understanding whether Ava’s hesitation stems from fear of loss, guilt, or true misalignment can bring clarity.

- ♦ C. Use parts work (IFS): “What does the part of you that wants to stay need? What about the part that wants to leave?”

✅ Reasoning: Ava’s inner conflict suggests two competing needs. Internal Family Systems (IFS) allows them to hear and validate both parts of themselves without rushing into a decision.

- ♦ D. Normalize uncertainty: “Relationships evolve. What would help you feel more confident in exploring this before making a final decision?”

✓ Reasoning: Many clients believe they need to make an immediate, absolute decision. Encouraging Ava to explore curiosity over urgency can reduce anxiety and lead to greater self-trust.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤔 How do we help clients navigate relationship uncertainty without leading them?
- 😬 When do we explore commitment fears vs. genuine misalignment?
- ⚖️ How do we work with guilt as a factor in decision-making?
- 📖 What therapeutic approaches support self-trust in big life decisions?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by encouraging Ava to explore their conflicting feelings without searching for external validation.

🔑 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by guiding Ava to engage in self-reflection and trust their internal process.

The Siren might offer a judgment about whether the relationship is “right” or “wrong,” but the Sage creates a supportive space for Ava to clarify what they truly want.

Scenario 6: The Career Crossroads – Should I Change Jobs or Stay?

Client Presentation:

Jordan, 34 years old, has been working in the same job for nearly a decade. They’re successful, well-respected, and financially stable, but they feel increasingly drained and unfulfilled. Recently, they received an exciting job offer in a new field—one that aligns more with their passions but comes with less security and a steep learning curve.

In session, Jordan sighs and says:

👛 “I don’t know what to do. I’m lucky to have a good job, and leaving feels risky. But I also feel stuck. What if I leave and regret it? What if I stay and never find real fulfillment? I keep waiting for some kind of sign, but I just feel paralyzed.”

As their therapist, you recognize the Sage, not Siren approach—your role isn’t to decide for Jordan but to help them trust their own process. You are here to guide them in exploring values, fears, and possibilities so they can make an empowered, self-directed choice.

👉 What do you do?

- ♦ A. Invite a values check-in: “What aspects of work feel most important to you—security, passion, challenge, stability?”

✓ Reasoning: This helps Jordan clarify whether the pull toward change aligns with their core values or if fear is leading the decision. It moves the conversation from external expectations to internal fulfillment.

♦ B. Explore fear vs. intuition: “Does staying feel safe but stagnant? Does leaving feel exciting but terrifying? What does your body tell you about each?”

✓ Reasoning: Fear and intuition can feel similar, but exploring the felt sense of each option helps distinguish whether hesitation comes from genuine misalignment or simple fear of change.

♦ C. Use parts work (IFS): “What does the part of you that wants to stay need? What about the part that wants to leave?”

✓ Reasoning: Jordan’s inner conflict suggests multiple parts of them have different priorities. IFS allows both parts to express concerns and needs, leading to a more integrated decision.

♦ D. Normalize career evolution: “No decision is permanent. What’s one step you could take toward exploring this without full commitment yet?”

✓ Reasoning: Many clients believe career decisions must be all or nothing. Encouraging Jordan to experiment (e.g., informational interviews, side projects) reduces the pressure of an immediate choice.

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🤔 How do we help clients navigate life transitions without directing them?
- 🤔 When do we challenge limiting beliefs vs. respect caution?
- ⚖️ How do we guide clients toward self-trust in career changes?
- 📖 What therapeutic models help clients manage decision paralysis?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by helping Jordan navigate career uncertainty through values, intuition, and self-exploration.

💡 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by ensuring Jordan stays focused on personal fulfillment rather than defaulting to fear or external pressures.

The Siren might lean toward suggesting a practical or secure choice, but the Sage recognizes that clarity comes from within, guiding Jordan to make an empowered decision.

Scenario 7: The Relationship Ultimatum – Should I Move Forward or Walk Away?

Your client, Avery, has been in a committed relationship for five years. Lately, they've felt increasingly disconnected from their partner and unsure about the future. Their partner wants to take the next step—moving in together—but Avery hesitates.

In session, they say:

💬 “I love them, but something feels off. I don't know if it's just a rough patch or if I'm avoiding the truth. Am I overthinking this? What if I leave and regret it? What if I stay and just keep feeling stuck? I wish someone could just tell me what to do.”

As their therapist, you know the ethical importance of neutrality—you're not here to sway Avery toward staying or leaving. Instead, your role is to help them clarify their own needs, fears, and relationship patterns so they can make an empowered decision. Your role as the Sage, not the Siren, is to illuminate the path forward without pulling them in a direction that is not their own.

👉 What do you do?

- ◆ A. Reflect their ambivalence: “It sounds like part of you wants to stay and part of you is unsure—what does each part need to feel safe and clear?”

💡 (This helps Avery explore their internal conflict without pressure, allowing both their fears and desires to be heard.)

- ◆ B. Explore relational dynamics: “What do you notice about how you feel in this relationship? When do you feel most connected? When do you feel distant?”

💡 (This encourages deeper awareness of patterns and emotional needs, helping Avery recognize their true experience.)

- ◆ C. Address fear of regret: “If you stayed another year and nothing changed, how would you feel? If you left and looked back, what would you hope to see?”

💡 (This invites forward-thinking perspective without pushing a decision, helping them consider long-term emotional fulfillment.)

- ◆ D. Normalize uncertainty: “Many people struggle with this decision. What helps you feel most aligned with yourself when making big life choices?”

💡 (This encourages self-trust rather than seeking external validation, helping Avery connect with their decision-making process.)

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- ◆ How do we hold space for a client's uncertainty without pushing them in one direction?
- ◆ When do we explore attachment patterns vs. focusing on the present moment?

- ◆ How do we help clients trust their own instincts when making relational decisions?
- ◆ What therapeutic models support clients in navigating big life choices?


Sage, Not Siren Moment:

Your role isn't to tell Avery what to do—it's to help them explore what they already know deep down but may be struggling to access. The Siren might try to soothe Avery with opinions or reassurances, but the Sage holds steady, guiding them toward their own inner clarity.

Scenario 7: The Relationship Ultimatum – Should I Move Forward or Walk Away?

Your client, Avery, has been in a committed relationship for five years. Lately, they've felt increasingly disconnected from their partner and unsure about the future. Their partner wants to take the next step—moving in together—but Avery hesitates.


In session, they say:

 “I love them, but something feels off. I don't know if it's just a rough patch or if I'm avoiding the truth. Am I overthinking this? What if I leave and regret it? What if I stay and just keep feeling stuck? I wish someone could just tell me what to do.”


As their therapist, you know the ethical importance of neutrality—you're not here to sway Avery toward staying or leaving. Instead, your role is to help them clarify their own needs, fears, and relationship patterns so they can make an empowered decision. Your role as the Sage, not the Siren, is to illuminate the path forward without pulling them in a direction that is not their own.

What do you do?


- ◆ A. Reflect their ambivalence: “It sounds like part of you wants to stay and part of you is unsure—what does each part need to feel safe and clear?”

 (This helps Avery explore their internal conflict without pressure, allowing both their fears and desires to be heard.)

- ◆ B. Explore relational dynamics: “What do you notice about how you feel in this relationship? When do you feel most connected? When do you feel distant?”

 (This encourages deeper awareness of patterns and emotional needs, helping Avery recognize their true experience.)

- ◆ C. Address fear of regret: “If you stayed another year and nothing changed, how would you feel? If you left and looked back, what would you hope to see?”

 (This invites forward-thinking perspective without pushing a decision, helping them consider long-term emotional fulfillment.)

- ◆ D. Normalize uncertainty: “Many people struggle with this decision. What helps you feel most aligned with yourself when making big life choices?”

💡 (This encourages self-trust rather than seeking external validation, helping Avery connect with their decision-making process.)

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- ◆ How do we hold space for a client’s uncertainty without pushing them in one direction?
- ◆ When do we explore attachment patterns vs. focusing on the present moment?
- ◆ How do we help clients trust their own instincts when making relational decisions?
- ◆ What therapeutic models support clients in navigating big life choices?

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by encouraging Avery to explore their ambivalence, attachment patterns, and personal truth rather than seeking an external directive.

🔑 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by allowing Avery to sit with uncertainty and clarify their emotions rather than making a premature decision.

The Siren might push Avery toward an answer for the sake of resolution, but the Sage helps them slow down, tolerate the discomfort of ambiguity, and uncover their authentic needs before taking action.

Scenario 8: “I Have Something to Tell You... But I Can’t Say It Yet”

Your client, Jordan, a 34-year-old professional, arrives at their weekly session looking distracted and tense. They avoid eye contact and seem hesitant. After a few minutes of small talk, they sigh deeply and say:

🗨️ “There’s something I really need to talk about, but... I can’t. Not yet.”

They shift uncomfortably, their voice trailing off. You can sense the weight of what they’re holding, but you also recognize the importance of allowing them to open up at their own pace. Your role as the Sage, not the Siren, is to create a safe, non-pressuring environment while staying attuned to potential risk factors.

👉 What do you do?

- 🧡 A. Validate their hesitation: “It makes sense that this feels difficult to share. We don’t have to rush, but I want you to know I’m here when you’re ready.”

- (Offers safety and permission to take their time, reducing pressure.)

- 🧐 B. Gently explore their readiness: “What feels like the hardest part about saying it out loud?”
 - (Encourages self-reflection on their internal barriers without forcing disclosure.)
- ⌚ C. Normalize pacing: “Some things take time to put into words. Is there anything we can do today that would help you feel more comfortable sharing when you’re ready?”
 - (Affirms their control while inviting small steps toward disclosure.)
- ⚠️ D. Assess potential risk factors: “If this is something that’s causing distress or making you feel unsafe, we can explore it at a pace that feels right for you.”
 - (Balances respect for autonomy with ethical responsibility, ensuring client safety.)

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🗂️ How do we balance patience with clinical intuition when a client withholds information?
- ⌚ When is it appropriate to probe further vs. letting the client lead the timing?
- 🔑 What techniques help clients feel safer opening up without feeling pressured?
- ⚖️ How do we manage our own anxiety when a client is holding back something significant?

Sage, Not Siren Moment

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by prioritizing safety, trust, and client readiness while resisting the urge to force disclosure.

🔍 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by creating a space of patience and non-judgment, allowing Jordan to open up at their own pace rather than feeling pressured.

The Siren might push for immediate disclosure out of curiosity or concern, but the Sage recognizes that meaningful conversations unfold in their own time. By modeling trust in Jordan’s process, the therapist strengthens the therapeutic alliance and encourages self-agency.

Scenario 9: A Couple’s Therapy Session Turns Into a Shouting Match

You’re facilitating a couples therapy session with Taylor and Chris, who have been struggling with communication and trust. Today’s session starts with some tension, but before you know it, their voices are raised, accusations are flying, and they’re locked in a heated argument.

Chris stands up, exasperated:

💢 “You always twist everything I say! Why do I even bother?”

Taylor, equally fired up, responds:

💢 “Oh, like you’re the victim? You’re the one who never listens!”

The energy in the room is intense, and neither of them is hearing the other. Your role is not to be the Siren, swooping in to “fix” things or dictate the right path. Instead, as the Sage, your job is to hold steady, de-escalate, and guide them back toward constructive engagement—without taking sides or reinforcing unhealthy dynamics.

👉 What do you do?

- 🛑 A. Ground the session: “I can see emotions are running high. Let’s take a breath and slow this down so we can actually hear each other.”
 - (Brings immediate regulation to prevent further escalation.)
- ⚖️ B. Interrupt and set boundaries: “I want to remind both of you that this is a space for discussion, not a battleground. Let’s shift the focus back to understanding, not attacking.”
 - (Re-establishes the therapy space as a structured and safe environment.)
- ⏸️ C. Offer a pause: “Let’s take two minutes in silence to gather our thoughts before we continue.”
 - (Gives them a reset moment to cool down and re-engage productively.)
- 🎧 D. Use reflective listening: “Chris, I hear that you feel unheard. Taylor, I hear that you feel dismissed. Can we try to focus on sharing rather than blaming?”
 - (Encourages mutual understanding and shifts from argument to dialogue.)

💡 Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

- 🗑️ How do we de-escalate conflict in couples therapy while remaining neutral?
- ⏳ When should a therapist intervene versus letting the couple work through it?
- ⚖️ What are the ethical considerations when a session becomes too volatile?
- 🔄 How do we ensure each partner feels heard without reinforcing unhealthy dynamics?

Sage, Not Siren Moment

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by helping clients regulate emotions, slow down, and communicate effectively—without the therapist taking control.

💡 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by maintaining neutrality and guiding the couple toward constructive dialogue rather than stepping in as a referee.

The Siren might take sides, attempt to mediate too heavily, or allow the conflict to escalate unchecked. The Sage holds a calm, grounded presence, redirecting the session toward emotional awareness and productive conversation rather than escalating tension.

Scenario 10: A Client Texts Your Personal Phone Number After Hours

It's 9:45 PM on a Friday, and you're settling into your evening when your phone buzzes. You glance at the screen and see a text from your client, Riley:



📱 "Hey, sorry to text, but I'm really struggling right now. I don't know what to do. Can you talk?"

Your heart sinks a little. You weren't expecting this, and now you're navigating a boundary dilemma. You care about Riley and their well-being, but you also know that therapy happens within the structured space of sessions—not on demand.





Your role as the Sage is to support Riley's autonomy without fostering dependence—to guide them toward using their own coping tools rather than turning to you as an emergency fix. The Siren reaction would be immediately responding and rescuing, reinforcing an expectation that you're always available. Instead, as the Sage, you model boundaries while still honoring the therapeutic relationship.

👉 What do you do?

- 📌 A. Gently reinforce boundaries:
 - Don't respond immediately. In your next session, say:
 - "I noticed you reached out after hours. Can we talk about what was happening for you in that moment and how you can navigate that in the future?"
 - (Encourages reflection while maintaining clear professional boundaries.)
 - 💬 B. Acknowledge their distress within limits:
 - Reply briefly:
 - "I see you're struggling. I'm not available outside of session, but let's discuss this in our next appointment. If you need immediate support, please reach out to crisis resources."
 - (Validates their distress while setting a clear expectation about availability.)


-  C. Assess for crisis without overextending:
- If you suspect immediate safety concerns, you might reply:
- “Are you in immediate danger or unsafe right now? If so, please call emergency services or a crisis line.”
- (Balances ethical responsibility with boundaries—only engaging if safety is at risk.)
-  D. Revisit boundaries proactively:
- In the next session, say:
- “I want to clarify expectations about communication between sessions. Let’s discuss when and how to seek support in a way that’s helpful for you.”
- (Prevents future occurrences by establishing a clear framework.)

Reflection Questions for Peer Consultation:

-  How do we handle boundary-setting with clients who seek contact outside of session?
-  When should a therapist respond to a client’s text, and when should they wait?
-  What are the ethical considerations in responding (or not responding) to after-hours communication?
-  How do we balance client care with self-care and professional limits?

Sage, Not Siren Moment

This scenario fully integrates the Sage vs. Siren framework by modeling boundaries, self-sufficiency, and appropriate help-seeking behaviors.

 This scenario reinforces the Sage role by maintaining therapeutic boundaries while ensuring that the client has the tools and resources to navigate distress independently.

The Siren might respond immediately, engage in after-hours support, or blur professional lines. The Sage recognizes that boundaries are an essential part of client empowerment and long-term resilience, ensuring that therapy remains a structured and sustainable process.

Bonus Section: Rapid-Fire Therapist Dilemmas – Sage vs. Siren in Action

This section offers quick responses to common therapist dilemmas, ensuring that the Sage guides rather than directs, while the Siren avoids pulling clients toward external validation or premature decisions. Each scenario highlights a key challenge and how to navigate it with wisdom, neutrality, and client empowerment.

Dilemma 1: The Client Who Says, “I’m Too Broken for Therapy”

- ♦ “I think I’m just too messed up. Maybe therapy can’t help me.”

Sage Response:

✨ “It makes sense that you feel this way, especially if you’ve struggled for a long time. But let’s explore—what would ‘help’ even look like for you? If therapy could work, what would you want it to do?”

Why This Works: Instead of rejecting their belief outright, this response meets them where they are while creating a bridge to hope without forced positivity.

Dilemma 2: The Client Who Rejects Exploration & Wants Direct Answers

- ♦ “I don’t want to analyze this. I just need you to tell me what to do.”

Sage Response:

✨ “I hear that reflection feels frustrating right now. My role isn’t to tell you what to do, but to help you feel confident in your own decision. Let’s figure out what’s making this decision so overwhelming.”

Why This Works: This validates their frustration while gently redirecting them toward curiosity rather than demanding immediate insight.

Dilemma 3: The Client Who Feels ‘Pressured to Forgive’

- ♦ “Everyone says I have to forgive them, but I don’t know if I want to.”

Sage Response:

✨ “Forgiveness is a personal choice, not an obligation. Let’s set aside what others think for a moment—what would feel most healing for you?”

Why This Works: This decentralizes external expectations and helps the client identify their own path to healing, whether or not it includes forgiveness.

Dilemma 4: The ‘Therapy Avoidant’ Client Who Keeps Canceling

- ♦ A client has been missing sessions, apologizing profusely each time, but still avoiding therapy.

Sage Response:

✨ “I’ve noticed it’s been hard for you to make it to sessions lately. No judgment—let’s talk about what’s coming up for you. What’s making it tough to be here?”

Why This Works: Instead of calling them out or letting it slide, this response opens the door for honesty about possible avoidance, discomfort, or therapy resistance.

Dilemma 5: The Client Who Is Afraid of ‘Making the Wrong Choice’

- ♦ “What if I choose wrong? What if I ruin everything?”

Sage Response:

✨ “What would it mean to ‘get it right’? What’s the worst outcome you imagine, and what would you need to handle it?”

Why This Works: Instead of downplaying their fear, this approach externalizes it and encourages resilience by helping them envision how they’d navigate challenges.

Dilemma 6: The Client Who Asks If You’ve Been in the Same Situation

- ♦ “Have you ever gone through this? What did you do?”

Sage Response:

✨ “I get why you’re curious, and while I won’t make this about me, I will say—people navigate this in many ways. Let’s talk about what might work for you.”

Why This Works: Instead of self-disclosure or avoidance, this response redirects the focus back to the client’s own experience.

Dilemma 7: The Client Who Wants to Quit Therapy Abruptly

- ♦ “I think I want to stop therapy.” (But their tone is uncertain.)

Sage Response:

✨ “I hear you’re thinking about ending therapy, and I want to support whatever decision is best for you. What’s making you feel like stopping now?”

Why This Works: Instead of convincing them to stay, this response creates space for exploration, ensuring they leave therapy for the right reasons, not avoidance.

Dilemma 8: The Client Who Keeps Seeking Reassurance

- ♦ “Are you sure I’m doing the right thing?”

Sage Response:

✨ “It sounds like part of you is looking for certainty, which makes sense—big choices can feel scary. If you weren’t looking for reassurance from me, where else might you find it?”

Why This Works: This response names the need for certainty, but instead of feeding reassurance, it helps them find internal validation.

Dilemma 9: The Client Who Wants to Process a Major Regret

- ♦ “I can’t stop thinking about what I did. I feel like I’ll never move past it.”

Sage Response:

✨ “That sounds incredibly painful. Let’s sit with this—what does this regret say about who you are today? What does it mean about what you value?”

Why This Works: Instead of dismissing the regret, this response honors it while using it as a tool for self-growth and meaning-making.

Dilemma 10: The Client Who Struggles to Trust Their Own Instincts

- ♦ “I never know if I’m making the right decision. I always second-guess myself.”

Sage Response:

✨ “Let’s talk about a time you did trust yourself. What helped you feel confident then? How can we bring that into this decision?”

Why This Works: This response reminds them of past self-trust, helping them build confidence in their own wisdom rather than seeking external direction.

The Sage vs. Siren Takeaway

These rapid-fire dilemmas showcase how easy it is to slip into ‘Siren mode’—giving too much reassurance, leading the conversation, or making decisions for the client. However, the Sage approach remains steady, fostering internal wisdom, self-reflection, and resilience.

🌱 The Sage doesn’t rush to fix but helps the client sit with discomfort and find their own way forward.

Frequently Asked Questions: Navigating the Sage vs. Siren Challenge

Therapists often struggle with balancing guidance, neutrality, and empowerment without falling into Siren tendencies (giving advice, rescuing, or over-directing clients). This FAQ section addresses common challenges and practical responses for maintaining the Sage role in complex therapy moments.

1. What if a client gets frustrated when I won't give direct advice?

- ♦ "Ugh, I just want an answer! Why won't you tell me what to do?"

Sage Response:

✨ "I hear that this feels really frustrating. Sometimes, not knowing is the hardest part. My job isn't to tell you what to do, but to help you trust yourself. Let's explore what makes this decision feel so overwhelming."

Why This Works:

Instead of getting defensive or shutting the client down, this validates their frustration while reinforcing their autonomy.

2. What if a client misinterprets neutrality as indifference?

- ♦ "Do you even care what happens to me?"

Sage Response:

✨ "I care deeply about you, and part of that means helping you make the best choice for yourself—not deciding for you. Tell me more about what it feels like when I hold space instead of giving an answer."

Why This Works:

Instead of over-explaining neutrality, this leans into emotional processing while reassuring them of your presence and investment.

3. What if a client keeps coming back to the same dilemma?

- ♦ "I still don't know what to do. Can we go over it again?"

Sage Response:

✨ "It makes sense that you're still feeling stuck. Let's check in—are we missing something new here, or does this feel like circling the same thought patterns? What would help you break out of the loop?"

Why This Works:

Instead of repeating the same discussion, this names the stuckness and invites a shift toward deeper insight or decision-making strategies.

4. What if a client asks for reassurance but actually needs self-trust?

- ♦ "I need to know I'm making the right choice."

Sage Response:

✨ “Let’s pause—if I did say you’re making the right choice, how would that change things for you? What would it give you that you don’t already have?”

Why This Works:

Instead of withholding reassurance outright, this helps the client examine their need for external validation and begin building internal confidence.

5. What if a client resists self-exploration and just wants a quick solution?

- ♦ “This isn’t that deep. Just tell me what to do.”

Sage Response:

✨ “I hear you—sometimes, we want a simple answer. If we could zoom out for a moment, what do you think might be getting in the way of finding one?”

Why This Works:

Instead of forcing introspection, this meets the client’s frustration while subtly inviting them into a deeper conversation.

6. What if a client insists, “Just tell me what you would do”?

- ♦ “If you were in my shoes, what would you do?”

Sage Response:

✨ “Even if I had an answer, my life, values, and experiences aren’t the same as yours. But I’m happy to help you figure out what matters most for you. What would it look like if we worked through this together?”

Why This Works:

Instead of shutting them down completely, this reframes their question into a collaborative process rather than a directive answer.

7. What if a client is scared of making the ‘wrong’ choice?

- ♦ “What if I make the wrong decision and regret it?”

Sage Response:

✨ “That’s a real fear, and it makes sense that you’d want certainty. If we fast-forward a year, what would it take for you to feel at peace with your choice—no matter what happens?”

Why This Works:

Instead of downplaying the fear, this helps them define success and resilience beyond just making the 'right' call.

8. What if a client views therapy as a place for 'fixing problems,' not exploration?

- ♦ "I'm not here for all this self-reflection—I just want solutions."

Sage Response:

✨ "I hear that—therapy isn't about overanalyzing, but about finding tools that actually work for you. Would you be open to trying an approach that balances practical strategies with understanding what's underneath the issue?"

Why This Works:

This validates their desire for action while gently introducing the idea that deeper work can enhance problem-solving.

9. What if a client feels pressured by others to make a specific decision?

- ♦ "Everyone says I should forgive them / take the job / break up, but I don't know if it's what I want."

Sage Response:

✨ "Let's put everyone else's opinions aside for a moment. What would it look like if this decision was only yours? What changes when you take external voices out of the equation?"

Why This Works:

This helps the client separate personal truth from social pressure, giving them space to reclaim autonomy over their decision.

10. What if a client seeks constant therapist validation?

- ♦ "I just need you to tell me I'm doing this right."

Sage Response:

✨ "I see how much you're craving certainty, and I want to honor that. What does 'right' even mean to you in this situation? If we take validation off the table, what else might reassure you?"

Why This Works:

Instead of reinforcing the need for external approval, this shifts the focus to internal reassurance and self-acceptance.

Final Thoughts: The Sage vs. Siren Reminder

These common therapist dilemmas highlight how easy it is to accidentally slip into Siren mode, offering too much guidance, reassurance, or validation. But when we remain in the Sage role, we help clients:

- ✓ Strengthen self-trust instead of relying on external validation.
- ✓ Navigate discomfort and uncertainty instead of escaping it.
- ✓ Develop autonomy in decision-making rather than seeking quick solutions.
- 🌱 The Sage doesn't give answers—they help clients discover their own.

🚨 Siren Watch: Common Therapist Traps to Avoid

Even the most seasoned therapists can accidentally slip into Siren mode when faced with a client's distress, indecision, or repeated questioning. Here are a few common pitfalls to watch for in your own practice:

- ♦ The 'But I Just Want to Help' Trap – You feel your client's distress so intensely that you instinctively offer a solution just to ease their discomfort. Instead of tolerating uncertainty, you fill the space with an answer—robbing them of the chance to trust themselves.
- ♦ The 'Therapeutic Ego' Trap – You sense the right path for your client, and it's tempting to lead them toward it. But the moment we believe our insight is the missing piece, we risk stealing their agency. Wisdom isn't about showing them the answer—it's about helping them uncover it themselves.
- ♦ The 'Over-Reassurance' Trap – Your client is spiraling in self-doubt, and you want to ease their anxiety by saying, "Yes, you're making the right choice!" While well-intentioned, this reinforces dependence on external validation rather than strengthening distress tolerance and self-trust.

✓ Sage Check-In: Next time you feel the urge to fix, direct, or reassure, pause and ask:

"Am I offering clarity, or am I taking the wheel?"

🕯️ The Sage's Lantern: A Final Reflection

The Sage doesn't offer easy answers—they help clients find their own clarity. By resisting the Siren's temptation to steer, we ensure that our clients leave therapy feeling more empowered, confident, and capable of navigating their own lives.

But this isn't just a concept—it's a practice.

✨ ✨ Reflection for the Reader: As you move forward in your work, take a moment to check in with yourself:

- ♦ Where do I naturally lean toward Sage vs. Siren in sessions?
- ♦ What's one specific way I can deepen my Sage mindset this week?

Every session is an opportunity to refine our presence, build client autonomy, and trust the process. The Sage doesn't rush—they illuminate the way forward.

To many heroic adventures ahead,

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