

# The Leaky Bucket Toolkit: Scripts for Caseload Stewardship

Therapists often know the conversation that needs to happen before they know how to say it. They can feel the client drifting, sense the therapy losing focus, notice the pattern of late cancellations, or recognize that a frequency change may not be clinically grounded. The hard part is finding language that is clear without being cold, relational without becoming vague, and boundaried without sounding punitive.

These scripts are not meant to be memorized word-for-word. They are starting points. Use them, soften them, adapt them, and make them sound like you. The goal is not to become a perfectly polished therapy robot with excellent attendance-policy delivery. The goal is to have the conversation early enough that the work stays intentional.

## Beginning Therapy: Setting the Rhythm

“Before we get too far in, I like to talk a little about the rhythm of therapy. Therapy tends to work best when we meet consistently enough to build trust, notice patterns, and keep momentum between sessions. We can always revisit frequency as your needs change, but I want us to begin with a rhythm that gives the work a real chance to take root.”

## Explaining Attendance Expectations

“I also want to make sure we are clear about attendance. Because this time is reserved specifically for you, late cancellations and no-shows are charged according to the practice policy. That is not meant to be punitive. It protects the therapy frame, respects the time being held, and helps us stay intentional about the work.”

## When a Client Late Cancels

“I understand that things come up, and I also want to stay consistent with the frame we discussed at the beginning of therapy. Since this was a late cancellation, the session fee does apply. I also think it may be helpful for us to talk next time about what got in the way and whether we need to adjust the plan so therapy remains sustainable.”

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## **When a Client No-Shows**

“I missed you today. Since we did not have enough notice to offer the time to someone else, the no-show fee applies. I also want to check in about whether this time still works for you and whether anything is making it harder to stay connected to therapy right now.”

## **When a Client Has Repeated Cancellations**

“I noticed we have had a few cancellations recently, and I want to check in with care rather than make assumptions. Is this mostly a scheduling issue, a season-of-life issue, or is something about therapy feeling harder to stay connected to right now?”

## **When a Client Keeps Rescheduling**

“I want to check whether this appointment time is still realistic. Repeated rescheduling can make it hard for therapy to build momentum, so I would like us to find a rhythm that is both doable and clinically useful.”

## **When a Client Says They Feel Better**

“I am genuinely glad things feel lighter. That matters. I also want to distinguish between relief and lasting change. Sometimes when the crisis settles, we finally have enough room to understand the deeper pattern. We can absolutely talk about next steps, but I would like us to do that thoughtfully.”

## **When a Client Says, “I Don’t Know What to Talk About”**

“That can actually be a useful moment. When there is no immediate crisis, we can look underneath the crisis cycle. We might use today to revisit what has shifted, what still feels unresolved, and what therapy needs to become now.”

## **When Therapy Feels Stale or Repetitive**

“I wonder if therapy has started to feel a little less connected to what you need right now. That is important for us to talk about. We can shift the focus, deepen the work, change the rhythm, or discuss whether you are moving toward an ending, but I do not want us to just coast.”

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## **When a Client Wants to Move to Biweekly**

“Biweekly may be appropriate, and I am open to discussing it. I also want to make sure we are choosing it because it supports your care, not only because therapy is starting to feel less urgent after a better week. Let’s look at what has changed and what still needs support.”

## **When a Client Wants to Move to Monthly**

“Monthly may make sense if we are moving into maintenance or preparing for an intentional ending. I would like us to clarify what monthly therapy is for, how we will know it is helping, and when we will reassess.”

## **When a Client Wants to Pause for Summer**

“We can talk about pausing. I also want to think through the impact so it is an intentional care decision rather than therapy disappearing because summer got loud. What support will you have while we pause? What signs would tell you it is time to come back sooner? Would a reduced rhythm be better than a full pause?”

## **When a Client Is Going on Vacation**

“I hope the trip is restorative. Before you go, let’s make sure we have our next session scheduled for when you return so the work does not get lost in the transition.”

## **Seasonal Planning Conversation**

“Summer often changes people’s routines, so I want to plan ahead. What do you already know about travel, childcare, finances, or schedule changes? We can adapt if needed, but I want us to do that intentionally rather than letting therapy disappear into the summer fog.”

## **When a Client Questions a Late-Cancel or No-Show Fee**

“I understand it is frustrating to be charged for a session you could not attend. The reason the policy exists is that the time was reserved specifically for you and could not be offered to another client with short notice. I also want us to talk about how to make scheduling sustainable so this does not keep happening.”

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## **When a Client Seems Disengaged**

“I’m noticing that therapy feels a little different lately, and I want to check in rather than assume. Are we still focusing on what feels useful and important to you? Is there anything you need more of, less of, or differently from our work?”

## **When There May Be a Rupture**

“I wonder if something may have felt off between us or in the work recently. If I missed something, moved too quickly, misunderstood you, or went in a direction that did not feel helpful, I would really want us to be able to talk about that here.”

## **When Therapy Is Moving Too Fast**

“I noticed that after we touched into some deeper material, it seemed harder to stay connected to therapy. I wonder if we moved into something too quickly or if part of you needed more support around that material. Can we slow down and talk about how to make the work feel more manageable?”

## **When Therapy Is Moving Too Slowly**

“I wonder if it would be useful for us to zoom out today and look at whether therapy is moving in the way you hoped. Sometimes therapy can feel slow because progress is happening quietly, and sometimes it feels slow because we need to adjust how we are working. Either way, I want us to talk about it.”

## **Re-Contracting the Work**

“We have been working together for a few months, and I think this is a good time to zoom out. What feels different from when we started? What still feels tender or unresolved? Do our original goals still fit, or has the work changed shape?”

## **When a Client Is Ready to End**

“I am glad you are noticing change. Rather than ending abruptly, I would like us to have at least one closing session where we review what shifted, what helped, what still needs care, and what signs might tell you to return. Endings deserve attention too.”

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## **When a Client Wants to Stop Because Therapy Is Not Helping**

“I appreciate you telling me. I would much rather we talk about that openly than have you feel like you need to disappear. We can look at whether the focus needs to change, whether something has felt missing, whether another approach may be better, or whether this is a good time to close.”

## **Notifying Admin About a Possible Opening**

“Heads up: I may have an opening coming up on [day/time] starting around [date]. My client is discussing [ending treatment / stepping down / schedule changes / a planned pause], and I will confirm after our next session. I wanted to put it on admin’s radar now.”

## **Notifying Admin About a Vacation Gap**

“My [day/time] client will be out for [number of weeks] starting [date]. I am going to try to shift another client into that slot temporarily, but I wanted admin to know in case there is a short-term scheduling opportunity or incoming client fit.”

## **Notifying Admin About a Frequency Change**

“My [day/time] client is moving from weekly to biweekly starting [date], so I will have every other [day/time] available. I am open to pairing this with another biweekly client, using it as a flexible appointment space, or considering it for a new client if appropriate.”

## **Notifying Admin About a Planned Termination**

“My [day/time] client is planning to terminate after [number] more sessions. That slot will likely open around [date]. Please consider me available for a new client match around that time.”

## **Asking for More Referrals With Caseload Context**

“I currently have [number] recurring openings: [days/times]. I also have [temporary openings / every-other-week openings / upcoming possible openings]. Recently, [number] clients ended, [number] moved frequency, and [number] are on temporary vacation holds. I have followed up with clients who have not rescheduled and have notified admin of the likely openings. I am available for new client matches in these areas: [specialties/populations/times].”

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## **Closing Reminder**

Caseload stewardship is not about saying the perfect thing. It is about saying the important thing early enough that the client, therapist, and practice can make informed choices. Clear conversations protect the work. They protect the relationship. They protect the calendar. They protect continuity of care.

And sometimes, they protect everyone from pretending the empty slot came out of nowhere wearing a tiny hat.