

# **IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors / Psychotherapists**

## **CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE - SUMMARY OF THE CODE**

This summary is intended to convey the essence of the Code to members of the Association and the general public. It is not intended to replace the Code: for all formal purposes (for example, ethical decision-making or complaint against a member) reference should be made to the full Code.

### **PREAMBLE**

The first paragraph of the preamble defines counselling and psychotherapy as professional activities involving Association Members, hereafter called practitioners, and their clients. The practitioner offers an impartial helping relationship which respects the client's personal values and autonomy. Practitioners recognise the importance of confidentiality in establishing such a relationship. Counselling and psychotherapy are formal activities involving an agreed contract. To maintain their effectiveness, practitioners review their work regularly in a confidential setting with a supervisor.

In joining the Association, Members agree to comply with the provisions of the Code. The Code applies to their professional activities and any behaviour that might impinge on those.

To ensure that they behave in an ethical manner, practitioners are required to use a formal procedure in examining ethical aspects of their work. In situations where ethical decisions can be complex and difficult, and different ethical principles may be in conflict, the best decision comes from considering issues systematically. Details of the recommended decision-making procedure are presented in Appendix A.

Like all other citizens, practitioners are subject to the law, and their practice must conform to the law.

# CONTENT OF THE CODE

The Code is based on four overall ethical principles, under which specific ethical standards are elaborated in greater detail.

- Principle 1: **Respect** for the rights and dignity of the client. Practitioners are required to treat their clients as persons of intrinsic worth with a right to determine their own priorities, to respect clients' dignity and to give due regard to their moral and cultural values. Practitioners take care not to intrude inappropriately on clients' privacy. They treat as confidential all information obtained in the course of their work. As far as possible, they ensure that clients understand and consent to whatever professional action they propose.
- Principle 2: **Competence**. Practitioners are required to monitor and develop their professional skills and ethical awareness on an ongoing basis. They recognize that their expertise and capacity for work are limited, and take care not to exceed the limits.
- Principle 3: **Responsibility**. In their professional activities, practitioners are required to act in a trustworthy and reputable manner towards clients and the community. They refer clients to colleagues and other professionals, as appropriate, to ensure the best service to clients. They act appropriately to resolve ethical dilemmas and conflicts of interest.
- Principle 4: **Integrity**. Practitioners take steps to manage personal stress, maintain their own mental health, and ensure that their work is professionally supervised. They are required to be honest and accurate about their qualifications and the effectiveness of the services which they offer. They treat others in a fair, open and straightforward manner, honour professional commitments, and act to clarify any confusion about their role or responsibilities. They do not use the professional relationship to exploit clients and they deal appropriately with personal conflicts of interest. They take action against harmful or unethical behaviour in colleagues.

## PREAMBLE

### *Definition of Counselling and Psychotherapy*

Counselling and psychotherapy are activities involving a practitioner, who offers a professional service as a helper, and a client, who seeks the service. The term "client" may include individuals, couples or groups of people. In what follows, the term practitioner is used to denote a counsellor or psychotherapist who is a Member of the Association.

The practitioner offers an impartial relationship in which the client can explore specific issues and develop more satisfying and resourceful ways of living. Confidentiality is recognized as a vital basis for such a relationship. The practitioner respects the client's values, personal resources and capacity for self-determination. Counselling and psychotherapy are formal activities where both parties explicitly agree a contract about participation and procedure

To ensure that their practice remains effective and appropriate, practitioners are obliged to meet regularly with a supervisor, who is an experienced colleague with whom they review their work. Information discussed during supervision is regarded as confidential.

## **The Need for a Code of Ethics**

Whatever the theoretical approach taken by the practitioner, the practitioner/client relationship is usually characterized by inequalities of knowledge and power. To protect the client, and ensure that practitioners remain alert to possible misuse of their greater knowledge and power, they accept the necessity for a code of professional ethics.

The purpose of the Code is to encourage optimum levels of practice, to establish and maintain ethical standards, and to inform and protect those who seek and use the services of practitioners. In joining the Association, Members agree to adhere to the provisions of the Code. The Association has a Complaints Committee which responds to and deals with complaints. The Code applies to Members' professional activities, and any behaviour that might impinge on those.

To ensure that they behave in an ethical manner, practitioners are required to use a formal procedure in examining ethical aspects of their work. In situations where ethical decisions can be complex and difficult, and different ethical principles may be in conflict, the best decision comes from considering issues systematically.

Like all other citizens, practitioners are subject to the law, and their practice must conform to the law.

# **THE CODE IN DETAIL**

## **1.0. RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF THE CLIENT**

Practitioners honour and promote the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of clients. They respect clients' rights to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy, consistent with the practitioner's other professional obligations and with the law.

More specifically, practitioners shall:

### **1.1. General Respect**

**1.1.1.** Have sensible regard for clients' beliefs and values.

**1.1.2.** Not allow their service to clients to be diminished by factors such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, age, national origin, party politics, social standing or class.

**1.1.3.** Convey sensible respect for prevailing community mores, social customs and cultural expectations.

**1.1.4.** Work in ways which promote clients' personal autonomy.

## **1.2. Privacy and Confidentiality**

**1.2.1.** Ensure that the setting for sessions is appropriately private.

**1.2.2.** Treat in confidence personal information about clients, whether obtained directly or indirectly or by inference. Such information includes name, address, biographical details, and any descriptions of the client's life and circumstances which might make the client identifiable by others.

**1.2.3.** Ensure that information which may lead to the identification of clients is not transmitted through overlapping networks of confidential relationships.

**1.2.4.** Break confidentiality only where required by law, or where there are grounds for believing that clients will cause physical harm to themselves or others. Where feasible, practitioners shall endeavour to obtain the client's consent, and consult their supervisor or an experienced colleague, in advance of any such disclosure. However, in emergencies, practitioners shall make their own judgment as to what action is best.

**1.2.5.** Minimize any breach of confidentiality by conveying only that information which is necessary, and only to relevant persons.

**1.2.6.** In supervision and consultation with colleagues, reveal only that information about clients which is relevant for those purposes.

**1.2.7.** Discuss the limits of confidentiality with the client at the time of initial contracting, the discussion to include the implications for confidentiality of the supervisory relationship.

**1.2.8.** Store, handle, transfer and dispose of all records (including written, electronic, audio and video) securely and in a way that safeguards the client's right to privacy.

## **1.3. Informed Consent and Freedom of Consent**

**1.3.1.** Ensure that the client consents to participate at all stages and respect clients' right to discontinue at any time.

**1.3.2.** Provide reasonable opportunity during the course of the relationship for review of the terms on which the service is being offered.

**1.3.3.** Not normally act on behalf of their clients. If they do, they shall ensure that the client consents in advance to any proposed action.

**1.3.4.** Where the client is concurrently engaged in another professional helping relationship, obtain the client's permission before conferring with the other professional.

**1.3.5.** Obtain the client's consent before making audio or video recordings of sessions.

**1.3.6.** Obtain the client's consent to attendance at sessions by third parties.

**1.3.7.** When publishing research or case studies concerning clients or supervisees, ensure that identities are carefully disguised and obtain appropriate consent.

**1.3.8.** Written Permission from both parents / legal guardians should be obtained (where possible) by therapists before commencing therapy with a minor.

**1.3.9** If it is not possible to obtain written permission from both parents / legal guardians then written permission must be obtained by at least one parent / legal guardian prior to the commencement of therapy

## **2.0. COMPETENCE**

Practitioners strive to ensure and maintain high standards of competence in their work. They recognize the boundaries of their competence and the limitations of their expertise. They provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by training and experience. It is an indication of competence that they recognize when they are unable to offer a professional service.

More specifically, practitioners shall:

### **2.1. Ethical Awareness**

**2.1.1.** Accept the obligation to study and understand the provisions of this Code of Ethics and Practice.

### **2.2. Limits of Competence**

**2.2.1.** Offer or carry out only those professional activities for which they have established their competence to practice.

**2.2.2.** Recognize the boundaries of their competence, and take care not to exceed these.

**2.2.3.** Refrain offering a service when their functioning is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties, illness, disability, alcohol, drugs or any other cause.

### **2.3. Continuing Professional Development**

**2.3.1.** Monitor and develop their professional competence.

## **3.0. RESPONSIBILITY**

Practitioners are aware of their professional responsibilities, and at all times take positive action to fulfill these responsibilities.

More specifically, practitioners shall:

### **3.1. General Responsibility**

**3.1.1.** Review and evaluate the effectiveness of their professional activities.

**3.1.2.** Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to undermine public confidence in the profession.

**3.1.3.** Exercise appropriate respect towards colleagues.

## **3.2. Avoidance of Harm**

**3.2.1.** Set and monitor appropriate boundaries during the practitioner/client relationship, and make these explicit to the client.

**3.2.2.** Take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client suffers neither physical nor psychological harm during the practitioner/client relationship.

## **3.3. Continuity of Care**

**3.3.1.** Refer clients to other appropriately qualified practitioners or other professionals when it is appropriate to do so.

**3.3.2.** When referring a client, maintain support and responsibility for caring until contact has commenced with the person to whom referral was made.

**3.3.3.** Give reasonable notice, and make reasonably certain that discontinuation will cause no harm to the client, before discontinuing services.

**3.3.4.** Contribute where appropriate to the co-ordination of client services in order to avoid duplication or working at cross purposes. To facilitate this process, practitioners shall maintain adequate records and communicate with other service providers.

## **3.4. Resolving Dilemmas**

**3.4.1.** Use a systematic procedure for making ethical decisions and resolving ethical dilemmas (see Appendix A for the recommended procedure).

**3.4.2.** Take an active role in resolving conflicts of interest between themselves and third parties (for example, colleagues, employers, employing agencies) where there are implications for the client.

## **4.0. INTEGRITY**

Practitioners seek to promote integrity in the practice of their profession. They recognize their professional limitations and ensure that they receive appropriate support and supervision from colleagues. In their professional activities they are honest, fair and respectful of others. They clarify for relevant parties the roles which they are performing, and attempt to function appropriately in accordance with these roles.

More specifically, practitioners shall:

### **4.1. Recognition of Professional Limitations**

**4.1.1.** Engage in self-care activities which help to avoid conditions (for example, burnout, and addictions) which could result in impaired judgment and interfere with their ability to benefit

their clients.

**4.1.2.** Monitor their own personal functioning and seek help when their personal resources are sufficiently depleted to require such action.

**4.1.3.** Obtain professional supervision regularly in proportion to the amount of their work with clients.

**4.1.4.** Where appropriate, seek consultative support from colleagues.

## **4.2. Honesty and Accuracy**

**4.2.1.** Ensure that they and others accurately represent their education, training, experience, membership status within the Association, and the effectiveness of the services which they offer, in all spoken, written or printed communications.

**4.2.2.** Make a clear contract with the client which includes issues such as availability, fees, and cancelled appointments. They shall ensure that the contract is agreed before work commences. Any subsequent revisions of the contract shall be agreed with the client before they take effect.

**4.2.3.** When advertising, avoid misrepresentation or exaggeration about services offered.

## **4.3. Conflict of Interests and Exploitation**

**4.3.1.** Be acutely aware of the power dynamics of the practitioner/client relationship and shall not exploit clients in any way, either during the relationship or after its conclusion.

**4.3.2.** Be acutely aware of the problematic nature of dual relationships (for example, with trainees, business associates, employees or clients), and recognize that it is not always possible to avoid them (e.g. when offering services in a small community, or engaging in training). Where it is possible, practitioners shall avoid such relationships; where it is not, they shall take appropriate steps to safeguard the interests of those involved.

**4.3.3.** Where possible, avoid conflicts of interest that may affect their relationship with the client, and where it is not possible, shall make these conflicts of interest explicit to the client.

**4.3.4.** Offer the same standard of service whether the work is paid or voluntary.

**4.3.5.** Seek supervision and/or consultative support on all issues relating to conflict of interests.

**4.3.6.** Ensure that their supervisor does not occupy other significant roles in their lives.

## **4.4. Actions of Colleagues**

**4.4.1.** Remonstrate privately with a colleague if that colleague appears to be engaging in unethical behaviour; where this action does not resolve the issue, they shall bring the matter confidentially and without malice to the attention of the Association's Complaints Committee.

The first edition of this code was adopted prior to 1991.

The second edition became operative on 25th April, 1998.

This Code of Ethics was ratified at the AGM 2005

## APPENDIX A

### **Recommended Procedure for Ethical Decision-Making**

Section 2.1 of the Code deals with ethical awareness, and Clause 3.4.1 states that practitioners shall use a systematic procedure for making ethical decisions. The following procedure is recommended for dealing with both immediate dilemmas and routine work-related issues.

1. Define carefully the issues and parties involved (the latter may include the practitioner, the client, members of the client's family, the practitioner's own employer and co-workers, organisations purchasing or providing services, and the general public).
2. Consult the Code, and identify relevant principles and clauses. Also consult other applicable professional guidelines (e.g. from government departments, health boards) and any pertinent legislation.
3. Evaluate the rights, responsibilities and welfare of all affected parties.
4. Generate as many alternative decisions as possible - the more the better.
5. Evaluate carefully the likely outcome of each decision.
6. Choose what, in your professional judgment, is the best decision, implement it, and inform relevant parties.
7. Finally, take responsibility for the consequences of the decision.

The complexity of ethical issues makes it likely that different principles and clauses will occasionally clash; in addition, the provisions of the Code may also clash with the law and/or other relevant guidelines. Unfortunately, the resolution of ethical dilemmas is not guaranteed to be simple.

However, the law accepts that professionals may make errors of judgment, and that these are not the same as malpractice. The formal decision-making procedure is intended to reduce the incidence of decisions which are mistakes because they are taken in the heat of the moment, without consideration of all the relevant factors. What is required, in all cases, is a considered professional judgment taken in a systematic way.

It is desirable to keep a written record of deliberations at each stage of the process.

# **Additional Code of Ethics & Practice for IACP Accredited Supervisors**

## **IACP CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE FOR SUPERVISORS OF COUNSELLORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS**

### **Introduction**

Supervision is a formal mutually agreed arrangement within which the supervisee discusses work regularly with the supervisor.

The term “supervision” encompasses a number of functions concerned with monitoring, educating, developing and supporting individuals in their counselling / psychotherapy work. To this end supervision is concerned with:

- a) The relationship between supervisee and client, to enhance its therapeutic effectiveness
- b) Monitoring and supporting the supervisee in the counselling / psychotherapy role,
- c) The relationship between the supervisee and the supervisor so as to enable the supervisee to develop and enhance professional skills and abilities through reflection and exploration on the work.
- d) Ensuring that ethical standards are maintained throughout the counselling / psychotherapy work and that it is conducted in an appropriate setting.

### **A. Code of Ethics**

A1 The purpose of this Code is to establish and maintain standards for supervisors in their supervision work with counsellors / psychotherapists, hereinafter referred to as supervisees, and to inform and protect supervisees seeking supervision.

A1.1 Ethical standards comprise such values as integrity, responsibility, competence and confidentiality.

A1.2 Supervisors in assenting to this Code reaffirm their assent to all other Codes of the IACP and accept their responsibilities to supervisees and their clients, their agencies, to colleagues, the wider community and this Association.

A1.3 There are various models of supervision. This Code applies to all supervision arrangements.

## **A2 Issues of Responsibility**

A2.1 Given that the primary purpose of supervision is to ensure that the supervisee is addressing the needs of the client:

- a) Supervisees are responsible for their work with the client, and for presenting and exploring as honestly as possible that work with their supervisor;
- b) Supervisors are responsible for helping supervisees reflect critically upon that work.

A2.2 Supervisors and supervisees are both responsible for setting and maintaining clear boundaries between working relationships and friendships or other relationships, and making explicit the boundaries between supervision, consultancy, therapy and training.

A2.3 Supervisors and supervisees must distinguish between supervising and counselling the supervisee.

A2.4 Supervisors are responsible for adhering to the principles embodied in this Code of Ethics and Practice for the Supervision of Counsellors / Psychotherapists, and the Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors / Psychotherapists.

A2.5 Supervisors must recognise the value and dignity of supervisees and clients as people, irrespective of origin, status, sex, sexual orientation, age or belief.

A2.6 Supervisors should not exploit supervisees financially, sexually, emotionally or in any other way.

A2.7 Supervisors are responsible for establishing clear working agreements, which indicate the responsibility of supervisees for their own continued learning and self-monitoring.

A2.8 Both are responsible for regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the supervision arrangement, and changing it when appropriate.

A2.9 The supervisor and supervisee should consider their respective legal liabilities to each other, the employing or training organisation, if any, and to the client.

## **A3 Supervision of Trainees**

A3.1 Supervisors must ensure, when working with trainee counsellors / psychotherapists, that the supervision contract includes assessment of the client work. Such assessment is in the interests of clients, the profession and those responsible for the training of the supervisee. The criteria by which assessments are to be made must be agreed between supervisees and the training agency, or other bodies responsible for the accreditation of trainee counsellors/therapists.

A3.2 All external supervisors must supply reports on student work to the training institute's assessment panel, and these reports should be co-evaluated by the trainee and supervisor.

## **A4 Issues of Competence**

A4.1 Supervisors should continually seek ways of increasing their own professional development, including, wherever possible, specific training in the development of supervision skills.

A4.2 Supervisors are expected to make arrangements for their own consultancy and support to help them monitor and evaluate their supervision. This includes having supervision of their supervision work.

A4.3 Supervisors have a responsibility to monitor and maintain their own effectiveness. There may be a need to seek help and/or withdraw from the practice of supervision, whether temporary or permanently.

A4.4 All supervisors should maintain a practice in counselling / psychotherapy.

## **B. Code of Practice**

### **Introduction**

This Code of Practice is intended to give more specific information and guidance regarding the implementation of the principles embodied in the Code of Ethics for Supervision of Counsellors / Psychotherapists.

### **B.2 The Management of the Supervision Work**

B2.1 Supervisors should ensure that their supervisees subscribe and adhere to the IACP Code of Ethics and Practice for Counsellors / Psychotherapists or an equivalent code.

B2.2 Supervisors should be explicit regarding practical arrangements for supervision, paying particular regard to the length of contact time, the frequency of contact and the privacy and safety of the venue.

B2.3 Fees required should be agreed in advance and any increase in fees should be negotiated.

B2.4 Supervisors and supervisees should make explicit the expectations and requirements they have of each other. This should include the manner in which any formal assessment of the supervisee's work will be conducted. Each party should assess the value of working with the other and review this regularly.

B2.5 Supervisors should ensure that their supervisees are aware of the supervisor's qualifications, theoretical approach and method of working.