



COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC

CODE OF ETHICS

Based on the Codes of Ethics
of the
American Counselling Association
and the
British Association for Counselling

with permission



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CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

The Counselling Association of South Australia is committed to sustaining and advancing good practice.

This code is intended to guide the practice of counselling and psychotherapy by all members of the Association. The code provides a set of standards by which counsellors and psychotherapists can distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable professional practice, and by which clients and the wider community can evaluate the service being offered.

For the purpose of this code the terms “counselling” and “counsellor” are used to include counselling and psychotherapy, and counsellors, psychotherapists, and counsellors using psychotherapeutic methods.

Whilst this code cannot resolve all ethical and practice related issues, it aims to provide a framework for addressing ethical issues and encouraging optimum levels of practice.

Breaching this code can lead to disciplinary action taken by the Association, including expulsion from membership. The Association has a Complaint Procedure that will handle any complaint regarding the standard of practice of any member of this Association.

The overall aim of counselling is to provide an opportunity for its recipient(s) to work towards living in a more satisfying and resourceful way. Recipients of counselling can be individuals, pairs or groups of people who are often, but not always, referred to as “clients”.

The objectives of particular counselling relationships will vary according to client needs. The counsellors’ role is to facilitate the clients’ efforts towards achieving their goals in ways that respect the clients’ values, personal resources and capacity for self-determination.

Only when the user and recipient explicitly agree to enter into a counselling relationship does it become “counselling” rather than the use of counselling skills.

This code includes the ethical principles that underpin the counselling profession together with the translation of these principles into ethical practice responsibilities.

The remainder of this code has been divided into two parts:

- a. Ethical Principles
- b. Ethical Responsibilities.



CODE OF ETHICS

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Counsellors respect the essential humanity, worth and dignity of all people, and this is reflected in their work.
2. Counsellors recognise and respect the individual uniqueness of each person and oppose discrimination and oppressive behaviour.
3. Counsellors make every effort to foster self-determination and individual responsibility on the part of clients.
4. Counsellors take all reasonable steps to cause no harm to clients during the counselling process, and to foster the client's psychological and physical well-being.
5. Counsellors respect the privacy of their clients and preserve the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of their work.
6. Counsellors make clear to clients the terms on which counselling is being offered, and establish clear agreements about the counselling process.
7. Counsellors take steps to develop and maintain their competence, and work within the limits of that competence.
8. Counsellors take the same degree of care to work ethically whether the counselling is paid or voluntary.
9. Counsellors are mindful of their obligations under the law, and to the wider community.



CODE OF ETHICS

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. THE COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP

1.1 CLIENT WELLBEING

- 1.1.1 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client suffers neither physical nor psychological harm during counselling.
- 1.1.2 Counsellors seek to promote the client's control over his/her life, by respecting and supporting the client's ability to make choices and decisions.
- 1.1.3 Counsellors are accountable for the use of their power and influence, and for their responses to the client.
- 1.1.4 Counsellors avoid actions that seek to meet their personal needs at the expense of clients.
- 1.1.5 Counsellors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients in financial, sexual, emotional or any other ways.
- 1.1.6 Counsellors avoid fostering long term dependence unnecessarily.
- 1.1.7 Counsellors, in providing the counselling service, do not usually act on behalf of their clients except when the counsellor and client mutually deem it appropriate.

1.2 BOUNDARIES OF THE COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP

- 1.2.1 Counsellors are responsible for setting and monitoring boundaries between the counselling relationship and any other kind of relationship, and making this explicit to the client.
- 1.2.2 Having more than one type of relationship may lead to enmeshment of relationship boundaries, misuse of power, and impaired professional judgement, resulting in harming the client. (Examples of such relationships include, but are not limited to, familial, social, financial, business, or close personal relationships with clients.)
- 1.2.3 When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, counsellors take appropriate precautions to ensure that their judgement is not impaired and their power is not being misused. Such precautions may include seeking supervision.
- 1.2.4 Engaging in any type of sexual intimacy with clients during counselling is unethical. It is recommended that counsellors seek consultation whenever they are unable to easily contain either their sexual attraction to a client, or a client's approaches.



- 1.2.5 Counsellors use discretion when accepting superiors or subordinates as clients.
- 1.2.6 Counsellors avoid unnecessary conflicts of interest, and where potential conflicts do exist, these are made explicit to the client.

1.3 CONTRACTING

- 1.3.1 All information in any form given to clients before counselling commences should reflect accurately the nature of the service on offer and the training, qualifications and relevant experience of the counsellor.
- 1.3.2 Counsellors are responsible for communicating the terms on which counselling is being offered, including availability, the degree of confidentiality offered, provisions for safety, and the counsellor's expectations of clients regarding fees, cancelled appointments and any other significant matters. Particular attention is needed if counselling involves the use of communication technology (eg.Skype).
- 1.3.3 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to honour undertakings offered in their pre-counselling information.
- 1.3.4 Counsellors and their clients work jointly to define counselling aims, taking into account the abilities and circumstances of clients, and reviewing the counselling contract on an ongoing basis.
- 1.3.5 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to communicate clearly the extent of the confidentiality they are offering to clients (see also Section 2).
- 1.3.6 Counsellors endeavour to establish with clients whether there are other current therapeutic or helping relationships, or medical or other conditions that might impact on the counselling process.

1.4 RESPECTING DIVERSITY

- 1.4.1 Counsellors are aware of their own values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, and how these apply in a diverse society, and avoid imposing their values on clients.
- 1.4.2 Counsellors do not engage in unreasonable discrimination based on age, colour, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, gender identity, sexual preference or orientation, race, religion or spirituality, political orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, or any other aspect of human life.



1.5 FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- 1.5.1 It is acceptable for counsellors to provide professional services for little or no financial return.
- 1.5.2 Counsellors exercise great discretion in giving and receiving gifts and donations to or from clients during the course of counselling. A gift of substantial value or a donation of money for research purposes should only be accepted after appropriate evaluation has taken place.
- 1.5.3 Clients may use bartering when no exploitation takes place, if the client initiates such a request, and if such arrangements are clearly defined.
- 1.5.4 Introducing additional services or selling products to clients should be done with discretion and without undue pressure.

1.6 RELATIONSHIPS WITH FORMER CLIENTS

- 1.6.1 Counsellors always remain accountable for their relationships with former clients.
- 1.6.2 Counsellors exercise caution entering into any other type of relationship with former clients.
- 1.6.3 Any decision regarding any change(s) in relationships with a former client should take into account whether the issues and power dynamics present during counselling have been resolved and properly ended.

1.7 TERMINATION AND REFERRAL

- 1.7.1 Counsellors take all reasonable steps not to abandon or neglect clients at any stage of counselling. If counsellors feel unable to be of professional assistance to the client, they either avoid entering, or immediately terminate a counselling relationship, and suggest appropriate alternatives. If clients decline the suggested referral, counsellors are not obligated to continue the relationship.
- 1.7.2 Counsellors who terminate a counselling relationship give advance and sufficient notice with adequate explanation to the client of impending termination. Counsellors attempt to gain client agreement when possible.
- 1.7.3 Following termination, counsellors are required to assist their clients in making appropriate arrangements for a continuation of counselling, when necessary or required by the client.
- 1.7.4 Counsellors ensure that in the event of their own long term illness or death, provision is made for the appropriate notification of clients and assistance in seeking alternative counselling support.



2 CONFIDENTIALITY

2.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 2.1.1 Unless required by law, counsellors must maintain the confidentiality of the counselling relationship.
- 2.1.2 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to protect their clients' information and identity. They avoid unwarranted disclosures of such information either by themselves or by anyone involved in their work in any way, without the express written consent of the client.
- 2.1.3 Any information about a client that may result in identification of the client, or any information given by a client, whether obtained directly or indirectly or by inference, must be treated with confidentiality.
- 2.1.4 Agreements about confidentiality continue after the client's death.
- 2.1.5 If interpreters are used in the counselling session, counsellors take all reasonable steps to insure that confidentiality is preserved.
- 2.1.6 Exceptional circumstances may arise which give the counsellor good grounds for believing that the client will cause serious physical harm to others or themselves. In such circumstances, the breaking of confidentiality may be required, preferably with the client's permission, or after consultation with a supervisor.
- 2.1.7 Counsellors do not disclose information about the criminal acts of clients or clients' allegations of others' criminal behaviour unless there is an overriding and unequivocal legal obligation, or where failure to do so may involve serious risk of harm to the client, to others or to self.

2.2 INFORMING THE CLIENT

- 2.2.1 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to communicate clearly the extent of the confidentiality they are offering to clients.
- 2.2.2 Clients should be informed if counselling includes consultations with colleagues or other professionals (see 2.3).
- 2.2.3 If client treatment involves a treatment team, the client should be informed of the team's existence and composition.

2.3 SUPERVISION / CONSULTATION

- 2.3.1 When presenting a client case in supervision counsellors provide only relevant information, and efforts will be made to preserve the anonymity of the client(s).
- 2.3.2 Counsellors take all reasonable steps to ensure that client information given during supervision, any details of the discussion, and any record of the supervision will be kept confidential by anyone present.
- 2.3.3 When it is found by the supervisor or consultant that the client discussed is previously known to them, the counsellor should be informed and an assessment made whether continuation of the supervision or consultation is appropriate.
- 2.3.4 Unless an exception to confidentiality exists (see 2.1.6), counsellors obtain written permission from clients when consulting with legitimate third parties about their case, and take steps to ensure confidentiality.



2.4 RECORDS

- 2.4.1 Counsellors inform clients about the kind of records that will be made during or following sessions, and that these will be kept confidential.
- 2.4.2 Counsellors maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of counselling records that are written, taped, video taped, computerised or in any other form.
- 2.4.3 Permission to observe or record any sessions must be obtained beforehand from both the client and the counsellor. All records made by observers are to be treated with confidentiality.
- 2.4.4 Counsellors recognise that counselling records are kept for the benefit of the client, and provide access to the client or their guardian upon reasonable request.
- 2.4.5 In the case of multiple clients, access to records is limited to those parts of records that do not include confidential information related to another client. Access to such information will be given only with the written permission of those involved.
- 2.4.6 Counsellors who are sole practitioners or in a group practice ensure that provision is made for the secure and confidential management of client records in the event of their death or incapacity.

2.5 GROUPS, FAMILIES AND MULTIPLE CLIENTS

- 2.5.1 In group work, counsellors clearly define confidentiality, its importance and its parameters for the specific group being entered, and discuss the difficulties related to confidentiality involved in group work.
- 2.5.2 When working with families and/or multiple clients, any information which is acquired by the counsellor outside a joint session is confidential and can be given to others participating in the counselling only following permission from the source of the information.
- 2.5.3 In counselling minors or individuals who are unable to give voluntary informed consent, parents or guardians may be involved in the counselling process as appropriate.

2.6 RESEARCH, TRAINING, PUBLICATION AND PRESENTATION

- 2.6.1 Data derived from a counselling relationship can be used for research, training, presentation and publication only if the content is disguised so that the individuals remain anonymous.
- 2.6.2 Identification of a client in research, training, publication or presentation is permissible only when the client has reviewed all the material and has agreed, in writing, to its release.



2.7 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- 2.7.1 When responding to legal requirements to disclose confidential information, counsellors provide only essential information.
- 2.7.2 Counsellors have a duty to inform the Court of potential harm to the client or the counselling relationship as a result of the disclosure.
- 2.7.3 Counsellors contact this Association and /or seek legal advice if in doubt about their rights and obligations regarding confidentiality.



3 PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

3.1 COMPETENCY

- 3.1.1 Counsellors actively maintain and advance their competence by means which may include education, training, personal development and supervision.
- 3.1.2 Counsellors recognise their competence levels and boundaries, and practice only within these, unless adequately supervised.
- 3.1.3 Counselling requires ethical competence. Counsellors have a responsibility to read, understand and adhere to this Code of Ethics (see 6.1).
- 3.1.4 Counsellors take reasonable steps to consult with other counsellors or related professionals when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations or professional practice (see 6).
- 3.1.5 Counsellors refrain from offering professional counselling services when experiencing personal difficulties which are likely to lead to harm to clients. Counsellors are knowledgeable about issues of impairment, and are sensitive to signs indicating it. They seek help for their personal problems, and when necessary, limit, suspend or terminate their professional obligations.
- 3.1.6 It is an indication of the competence of counsellors when they recognise their inability to help clients at any point in their counselling relationship and find the appropriate alternatives.

3.2 TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

- 3.2.1 Counsellors conduct training programs in an ethical manner.
- 3.2.2 Counsellors adhere to the principles of this code when working with students or supervisees, recognising the power differential that may exist.
- 3.2.3 Counsellors, through ongoing evaluation and appraisal, endeavour to be aware of the academic and personal limitations of students and supervisees that might impede performance.
- 3.2.4 Counsellors make every effort to ensure that clients are aware of the qualifications of students, supervisees and novice counsellors rendering counselling services.
- 3.2.5 Students and supervisees have the same ethical obligations to clients as those required of counsellors.



4 RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

4.1 RESEARCH RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1.1 Counsellors plan, design, conduct, and report research in a manner consistent with pertinent ethical principles, national and state laws, host institutional regulations, and scientific standards governing research with human participants.
- 4.1.2 Counsellors who conduct research with human participants are responsible for the participant's welfare throughout the experiment and take reasonable precautions to avoid causing psychological, physical or social harm.
- 4.1.3 If a participant's consent (see 4.2.1) is withdrawn at any time, it is the researcher's responsibility to address any adverse effects of discontinuing participation.

4.2 INFORMED CONSENT

- 4.2.1 In obtaining informed consent for research, counsellors use language that is understandable to research participants and that:
 - a. accurately explains the purpose and procedures to be followed.
 - b. identifies any procedures that are experimental or relatively untried.
 - c. describes the attendant discomforts and risks.
 - d. describes the benefits or changes in individuals or organisations that might be reasonably expected.
 - e. discloses appropriate alternative procedures that would be advantageous for subjects offers to answer any inquiries concerning the procedures.
 - f. describes any limitations on confidentiality.
 - g. instructs that subjects are free to withdraw their consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time.
- 4.2.2 Counsellors do not conduct research involving deception unless alternative procedures are not feasible and the prospective value of the research justifies the deception. When the methodological requirements of a study necessitate concealment or deception, the investigator is required to explain clearly the reasons for this action as soon as possible.
- 4.2.3 Participation in research is typically voluntary and without any penalty for refusal to participate. Involuntary participation is appropriate only when it can be demonstrated that participation will have no harmful effects on subjects and is essential to the investigation.
- 4.2.4 Information obtained about research participants during the course of an investigation is confidential (see also 2.6).
- 4.2.5 When a person is incapable of giving informed consent, counsellors provide an appropriate explanation, obtain agreement for participation and obtain appropriate consent from a legally authorised person.



4.3 REPORTING RESULTS

- 4.3.1 When reporting research results, counsellors explicitly mention all variables and conditions known to the investigator that may have affected the outcome of a study or the interpretation of data.
- 4.3.2 Counsellors plan, conduct, and report research accurately and in a manner that minimises the possibility that results will be misleading. They provide thorough discussions of the limitations of their data and alternative hypotheses. Counsellors do not engage in fraudulent research, distort data, misrepresent data, or deliberately bias their results.
- 4.3.3 Counsellors are obligated to make available sufficient original research data to qualified professionals who may wish to replicate the study.

4.4 PUBLICATION

- 4.4.1 When conducting and reporting research, counsellors are familiar with and give recognition to previous work on the topic, observe copyright laws, and give full credit to those to whom credit is due.
- 4.4.2 Counsellors give credit through joint authorship, acknowledgment, footnote statements, or other appropriate means to those who have contributed significantly to research or concept development in accordance with such contributions.
- 4.4.3 Counsellors submit manuscripts for consideration to only one journal at a time, unless acknowledgment and permission from a previous publication has been obtained.
- 4.4.4 Counsellors are required to disclose all sources of sponsorship.



5 RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHERS

5.1 TO OTHER COUNSELLORS

- 5.1.1 Counsellors do not conduct themselves in their counselling-related activities in ways which undermine public confidence in either their role as counsellors or in the work of other counsellors.
- 5.1.2 Counsellors have an obligation not to impair the legitimate work of their colleagues, and to accept the client's right to seek a second opinion.
- 5.1.3 Counsellors at all times act without malice in their professional dealings with other counsellors.

5.2 TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

- 5.2.1 Counsellors inform themselves about current law affecting their work.
- 5.2.2 Counsellors who provide knowledge, advice or comment to the public through the media take reasonable precautions to ensure that:
 - a. the statements are based on appropriate professional counselling literature and practice.
 - b. the statements are consistent with this Code of Ethics.
 - c. the recipients of the information are not encouraged to infer that a professional counselling relationship has been established.
- 5.2.3 While being mindful that other approaches to counselling may legitimately differ from their own, counsellors are committed to protecting the public against incompetent and dishonourable practices and are prepared to challenge these practices.

5.3 ADVERTISING

- 5.3.1 Any publicity material and all information in any form should reflect accurately the nature of the service offered and the training, qualifications and relevant experience of the counsellor.
- 5.3.2 Advertising should be realistic and clear.
- 5.3.3 Credentials are presented according to guidelines that have been established by the entities that issue them.
- 5.3.4 In order to avoid undue influence, counsellors who use testimonials should not solicit them from clients.
- 5.3.5 Counsellors promoting products or additional services to clients do so in a manner which is not deceptive, and which avoids undue influence.



6 RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

6.1 ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- 6.1.1 Counsellors are familiar with this Code of Ethics. Lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of an ethical responsibility is not a defense against a charge of unethical conduct.
- 6.1.2 When uncertain as to whether a particular situation or course of action may be in violation of the Code of Ethics, counsellors consult with other counsellors who are knowledgeable about ethics, with colleagues, or with appropriate authorities.
- 6.1.3 If the demands of an organisation with which counsellors are affiliated pose a conflict with the Code of Ethics, counsellors specify the nature of such conflicts and express to their supervisors or other responsible officials their commitment to the Code of Ethics. When possible, counsellors work toward change within the organisation to allow full adherence to the Code of Ethics.

6.2 SUSPECTED VIOLATIONS

- 6.2.1 Counsellors expect professional associates to adhere to the Code of Ethics.
- 6.2.2 When counsellors have reasonable cause to believe that another counsellor is violating an ethical standard they may attempt to first resolve the issue informally with the other counsellor if feasible, providing that such action does not violate confidentiality rights that may be involved.
- 6.2.3 When an informal resolution is not appropriate or feasible, counsellors, upon reasonable cause, may take action such as reporting the suspected ethical violation to the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of this Association.
- 6.2.4 Counsellors do not initiate, participate in, or encourage the filing of ethics complaints that are unwarranted or intend to harm a counsellor rather than to protect clients or the public.
- 6.2.5 Counsellors assist in the process of enforcing the Code of Ethics, and cooperate with any reasonable requirement of the Ethics Committee.
- 6.2.6 Counsellors ensure that reasonable professional indemnity and public liability insurance covers their therapeutic work.

This Code operates in conjunction with
the Code of Ethics of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia