



**The Counseling & Social Work Superstore**

## **“ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES”**

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# "ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES"

## **3 CEU Credit Hours**

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**NOTE:** This PeachTree Professional Education, Inc. Online CEU Course entails this packet of information, and also requires reading of your corresponding professional association's Code of Ethics. (External internet links are provided within this course material.)

### **Course Description:**

This course covers the fundamental components of professional ethics in concept, discusses standards and practical use, and provides a model for making ethical decisions.

### **Course Objectives:**

At the conclusion of this course, the professional will be able to:

- 1.) Verbalize an understanding of current ethical guidelines for the mental health professional.
- 2.) Resolve ethical dilemmas using professional guidelines
- 3.) Manage client care within the context of an acceptable ethical framework
- 4.) Respond to ethical dilemmas posed in professional treatment settings that facilitates a client-centered treatment approach.

### **Course Outline:**

Part 1: Course organization, Documentation and Introduction.

Part 2: Reading of the course materials (this document)

Part 3: Reading of your corresponding professional association's Code of Ethics

Part 3: Administration and Completion of the Evaluation of Learning

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### **3 Clock Hours / CE Credits**

If you ever have any questions concerning this course, please do not hesitate to contact **PeachTree at (800) 390-9536**.

Your instructor is **Richard K. Nongard**, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist and a Certified Personal Fitness Trainer.



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# Professional Ethics Guidelines

## Course Outline:

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## **Preface**

The *Professional Ethics* course has been developed for mental health professionals who wish to attain further training or simply refresh their prior knowledge in this crucial area of practice.

The course includes an introductory module to professional ethics which explores the purpose of ethical standards and how to solve ethical problems. This is followed by an overview of the eight broad ethical standards and the core principles that relate to each. Participants will become familiar with their professional responsibilities, client welfare considerations, confidentiality principles, professional considerations in assessment, research, teaching and private practice in addition to an overview of ethical requirements for supervisors.

The ethical principles outlined and discussed in this course are reflective of the standards published for various helping professional roles including social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists and counselors. Herein, the general title 'helping professional' or 'professional' is used throughout the course.

The following bodies provide ethical standards and code of conduct guidelines for professionals including the National Association of Social Workers, The American Counseling Association, the National Board of Certified Counselors and the American Psychology Association. All these standards are similar in intent and general principles from each of these guidelines will be drawn on throughout this course. However, it is recommended that you become familiar with the specific standards that are relevant to your own professional roles.

Each module in the course has reflective activities and ethical dilemmas for participants to consider. The purpose of these activities is to reflect on ethical behavior and consider alternate behaviors for potentially unethical situations. In general, there is no clear right or wrong answers for these activities, but each standard discussed will guide you towards making decisions of an ethically reliable nature.

By the end of this course, participating professionals will have a better understanding of the importance of behaving ethically in the workplace, how to guide decisions about ethical dilemmas and ways to resolve ethical problems that may arise. Furthermore, this course will provide you with a thorough understanding of the key ethical standards relevant to various helping professional roles.

# 1. Introduction to professional ethics

To ensure that ethical practice is adhered to in the workplace it is important to understand what ethical behavior involves, how to solve ethical dilemmas and ways to maintain professional boundaries and improve ethical behavior in professional practices.

## 1.1 What are ethics?

In the context of professional practice, 'ethics' refers to the concept about what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Mental health professionals are required to meet minimum ethical standards which outline the behavioral expectations of professionals as prescribed by the associations that govern their profession.

## 1.2 Purpose of ethics

Ethical standards aim to protect the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring helping professionals are fit to practice and strive to meet these expectations. Professionals who provide a service to the public have a responsibility to ensure their welfare and wellbeing by adhering to ethical practice standards.

## 1.3 Ethical standards

Ethical standards are developed to provide guidance to professionals about standards of professional conduct. These standards do not necessarily form a basis of civil liability. The ethical standards covered in this course are intended to cover most situations encountered by mental health professionals.

It is important that mental health professionals are familiar with the ethical requirements of their profession and each individual need to be aware of any particular areas where they may be vulnerable to ethical behavior problems. This requires a professional to have a thorough understanding of their own values, beliefs and personal limitations.

## 1.4 The Ethical Decision-Making Process

It doesn't matter how experienced or responsible a professional you are, you are not impervious to the potential of unethical behavior. Ethical dilemmas can be difficult to identify and some can be difficult to resolve. Ethical dilemmas can arise due to ignorance on the part of the professional or lack of understanding of the ethical standards that they are governed by.

This step by step decision making process will guide you to resolve ethical practice dilemmas that may arise in the workplace.

1. **Recognition**- identify what the ethical problem is and what parties are involved? Does the problem involve yourself, a colleague or the organization? The better awareness you have of your own thoughts, feelings and behaviors, the better the

chance that you will identify ethical problems before they become a breach of an ethical standard. Addressing an ethical problem early will reduce the risk of harm to the client.

2. **Consultation-** Discuss the problem with your supervisor or manager. Consult your professional body's code of conduct and ethical standards. Are there policies and procedures addressing this problem in your workplace? It is important that you are fully informed of your ethical responsibilities and this should be discussed with your supervisor.
3. **Options-** List all the options possible and the potential consequences of each. It is important to consider the various actions you can take on the matter. Exploring the consequences of each can assist in choosing an option that will be most ethically sound.
4. **Action-** Choose the best option that is in line with your organizations and profession's ethical standards and code of conduct. You may need the assistance of a supervisor or manager to make the most appropriate decision. Reporting to an ethics investigative body may be required in cases that cannot be dealt with at a local level.
5. **Evaluate-** Check the outcome of your action and re-consult if needed. It is important to consider whether the ethical dilemma has actually been resolved and whether further action is required. Evaluating the outcome is a useful way of reflecting on one's practice and considering how a similar ethical problem could be prevented in the future.

Helping professionals must cooperate with ethics investigations of any affiliation they belong to. Professionals must not report ethical complaints while knowingly having incorrect facts about those involved.

### **1.5 Setting Professional Boundaries**

Professional boundaries are designed to protect the therapeutic experience of the client. Boundaries are required in any therapeutic relationship to minimize a potential breach of ethical standards.

Listed below are ideas of how to set boundaries in the helping relationship:

- Define the length, time and frequency of counseling sessions
- Outline the fees and charges for appointments including any cancellation fees
- Determining how the client and professional will address each other e.g. by first name
- Limiting self-disclosure
- Refraining from physical contact
- Declining social contact with clients

- Remaining neutral with clients expressed views, especially if they differ from the professionals
- Ensuring the client is aware that it is a professional relationship not a personal one
- No tolerance for physical or verbal aggression during sessions
- Discussing confidentiality and consent issues

Professional boundaries help create a safe and trusting relationship with your client which is an essential component of the helping professional's role.

#### Reflection Exercise

- Why are boundaries important in your practice?
- How do you set professional boundaries within client relationships?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Rowena is a helping professional who uses her personal experience of post-natal depression to relate to the women she works with in the perinatal field. Sometimes, Rowena's experiences will dominate the session but she feels that hearing about her success in fighting depression would be helpful for the client. Has Rowena set sufficient professional boundaries with her client? How could this behavior be detrimental to the client's outcomes?
2. Roger feels guilty for agreeing with his clients racist remarks that were made in their last session. Roger doesn't really share the same views but didn't want the client to get angry if he disagreed with him. Is Roger having difficulties maintaining boundaries with his client? How could Roger have behaved more ethically, whilst maintaining the client relationship?

### **1.6 Supervision for the Helping Professional**

Supervision provides an opportunity to be supported and challenged both professionally and personally by another more qualified and experienced helping professional. Supervision is a professional service where the supervisor is in the role of a consultant.

Supervision can take many forms including:

- Personal- one-on-one supervision
- Group supervision- a supervisor provides a learning space for a group of professionals
- Peer supervision- a group of professionals supervise each other
- Telephone supervision- can be arranged when supervisors are located at a distance

Supervision is an important part of the helping professional's practice by promoting self-awareness, self-reflection and skill development.

There are various benefits of supervision for professionals which include but are not limited to:

- Assisting professionals to discover and understand personal limitations in practice
- Discussions with a supervisor can provide broader perspectives and interpretations of issues, particularly with client problems and treatment approaches that are being implemented
- Supervision promotes shared responsibilities of the counseling practice
- New staff have an opportunity to be supported through the early stages of skill development and practice reflection

Supervision serves various functions that benefit the helping professional which include:

- Identifying opportunities to develop skills and exploring training and development options
- Gaining an understanding of specific client issues and differing approaches to treatment
- Reflection on practice
- Reviewing relevant agency policies, laws and ethical standards of practice
- Discussing service feedback and monitoring the quality of service provision
- Dealing with personal issues that may arise during the counseling process
- Managing personal stress in the workplace
- Achievement validation
- Discuss and address professional relationships across the organization

Supervision helps the professional in the areas of professional development, maintaining ethical standards, personal support and systemic practice. Ideally, supervision should be set up with a supervisor on a planned basis e.g. one hour per month, to provide the professional with a reliable means of communicating about practice issues.

#### Thinking Points

- Consider supervision practices in your workplace. How is the supervision process structured? Do you feel that your needs are being met through current supervision practices?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Suzanne is experiencing significant personal issues and finds that she is less focused at work and this affects her emotional availability to her clients. How might Suzanne benefit from supervision? What strategies could she use to minimize the impact on her clients?
2. Natasha is a highly experienced mental health professional amid a multidisciplinary team. Her manager often postpones supervision as they believe that she has ample experience and would not really benefit from supervision. As a senior clinician, how would Natasha benefit from the supervision process? Has Natasha been unknowingly unfairly treated by her manager? Why should supervision be a priority for professionals of any experience level?

## 2. Professional Responsibilities

Mental health professionals have a professional obligation to uphold the ethical standards of their profession. This includes respectful behavior, competent practice and non-discriminatory behavior.

### 2.1 Respect

Helping professionals should treat colleagues of the same or other professions with respect and should avoid unnecessary negative criticism of colleagues in communications with clients or with other professionals. Criticisms include but are not limited to undignified comments about the colleague's level of education or experience or individual characteristics such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, religion or disability.

It is important that helping professionals engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and should participate in decision making that affect the wellbeing of a client who is involved with more than one professional. This involves collaborating with other professionals in your organization who have involvement with your client as well as external service providers (if the client consents to information sharing). The purpose of information sharing is to improve client outcomes and continuity of care.

As helping professionals, you are not only responsible for ensuring your own ethical behavior, but are also responsible for reporting unethical behavior by colleagues or the organizations that you work with.

If you believe that a colleague is acting unethically, then you should first confront the individual in an effort to resolve the issue. If the matter is not resolved, or is of a serious nature (such as in the case of sexual relationships with clients) then it should also be reported to your supervisor. This can present a dilemma in your working relationships with colleagues but is sometimes necessary in order to protect clients. The next step may be to inform licensing agencies or professional bodies so an external body can address the issue. Use the ethical decision-making process discussed earlier to guide your avenue of problem solving.

#### Thinking Points

- What could be the consequences for a colleague if you or someone else makes demeaning comments about another's professional or personal competence?
- If you had doubts about the ethical behavior of a colleague, what steps would you take to address the problem?

#### Ethical Dilemma

- Mark and Sean are mental health professionals who despite working professionally together are not fond of each other personally. During a session, Mark is told by his client that a friend of theirs sees Sean for treatment and has found the service unhelpful. Mark agrees with the client that Sean is not a very

good mental health professional. Has Mark behaved unethically? What should Sean do if he becomes aware that this conversation took place?

## 2.2 Professional competence

Mental health is a diverse field and professionals working in this area have an ethical responsibility to make continuous efforts to improve their competence within this specialty. Continuing professional development aims to maintain and learn new insights, techniques and integrate current research into everyday practice. Self-directed learning, training, workshops, seminars and peer supervision are professional development activities that can be undertaken.

Supervision is an important professional development activity that provides a dedicated space to explore your strengths in practice and areas that require further development. It is also a way to discuss ethical practice and obtain guidance from a senior staff member. Formal goals, reviews and feedback should be part of any supervision plan.

Mental health professionals also have a responsibility to clients to practice only in their area of competency. Professionals should not claim credentials or practice in areas for which they have little training or experience and should refer to another professional if lack of competency is identified.

Helping professionals have an obligation to withdraw from practice when a psychological or physical condition which seriously impairs their ability to maintain professional judgment occurs. Serious impairment may be the result of alcohol, drugs, illness or personal stress and under these conditions, professional help should be sought to address the problem. In less serious cases of impairment, professionals should consult with colleagues or their supervisor about the ethical implications of continuing client services under these circumstances.

### Thinking Points

- What areas of your practice do you feel could be further enhanced? Are there any particular clinical skills or treatment approaches that would be important for you to develop in the mental health specialty?
- Do you have access to regular supervision? How is this supervision structured?

### Ethical Dilemmas

1. Daniel is a mental health professional who had a close relative pass away in the preceding few days. Despite feeling overwhelmed by his clients' problems during this time, he continues to provide a service as this helps keep his mind off his own problems. What are Daniel's ethical responsibilities in this situation and what would you recommend for Daniel's personal and professional welfare?
2. Leanne is a newly registered professional who has begun working in a mental health service. She has been allocated various clients with complex psychological problems and requires intensive treatment. Leanne does not feel she yet has the skills to treat these clients effectively; however her supervisor reassures her that

she will work it out along the way. What should Leanne do in this situation? What are the ethical responsibilities of Leanne and her supervisor?

### **2.3 Cultural competency**

Mental health professionals will respect the dignity and welfare of individuals and groups with whom they provide a service.

Clients have numerous characteristics that need to be considered during assessment and treatment including gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Helping professionals have an ethical responsibility to consider the specific cultural needs of their clients which extends beyond cultural sensitivity. Lack of understanding or consideration for a client's cultural needs can stand in the way of satisfactory outcomes. These factors can influence mental health assessments and treatment planning.

Special populations to consider include:

- Same sex orientation: mental health professionals need to be aware of gay cultural norms and sexual issues including discrimination and isolation.
- Societal gender roles: helping professionals should be aware that women tend to be more likely to seek mental health support and acknowledge difficulties in coping style compared to men
- Cultural factors: professionals need to recognize that words and body language have different meanings in different cultures and some cultures have varying ways of dealing with problems and ways in which they view the world.

If a mental health professional has limited knowledge and training about a particular cultural issue that a client presents, then it is ethical for the client to be informed of this and let them decide whether they wish to continue.

#### **Thinking Points**

- Where do your strengths lie in cultural competence?
- What areas require further development and training?

#### **Ethical Dilemma**

1. Rachel is a mental health professional who considers herself 'non-religious' and has been referred a client with apparent orthodox religious beliefs and reports that they are struggling with their faith. Should Rachel accept this referral? If she does, what are her ethical responsibilities to her client? What professional attributes would be required for Rachel to provide an effective service to this client?

## 2.4 Non-discrimination

Mental health professionals have an ethical responsibility to provide services to all who seek them, regardless of either their own or their client's sex, age, ethnicity, religion, disabilities or sexual orientation.

Similarly, helping professionals also have an ethical responsibility to work within their area of competence. If you don't feel that you could work with a particular individual or group of individuals in an appropriate and ethical way then a referral to another professional may be required. It is recommended that you decline referrals who you feel you would not be able to provide a competent service to.

Clients present for professional help with a variety of characteristics and various backgrounds and this requires a mental health professional to be continually reflecting on one's practice and involves rigorous self-examination.

### Thinking Points

- Thinking about your personal values and belief systems, are there any particular individuals or groups who you would struggle to provide an ethical service to?
- Do you feel comfortable accepting referrals for clients who have a different religious background to you?
- For each of the following categories listed below, explain why it is important to be aware of your own biases and values when working with these diverse populations:
  - Gay males
  - Lesbians
  - Adolescents
  - Elderly
  - A person who is HIV positive
  - A convicted child sex offender
  - A person from a different religious background to your own
  - A person you find physically attractive
  - A mentally or physically disabled person

### Ethical Dilemma

1. Jennifer is an experienced helping professional who has spent most of her working life treating women who were victims of domestic violence. Now working in a more generalist service, Jennifer has begun working with Jim, a man who seeks treatment for his violent behavior towards his wife and family. Jennifer struggles to empathize with the client and often feels disgusted by Jim and dreads their sessions together. What are Jennifer's ethical responsibilities? What recommendations would you have for Jennifer if you were her supervisor?

### **3. Client welfare and client relationships**

Clients have a right to long-term protection and enhancement of their welfare through accessing professional services. Helping professionals have a uniquely intimate relationship with the clients that they treat which involves a high degree of trust and vulnerability. Professionals need to fully understand the scope of the therapeutic relationship and their responsibilities to client welfare.

#### **3.1 Client emotional safety**

Ethically responsible behavior is expected by professionals to ensure they preserve and protect their clients' emotional safety. In general, professionals make clinical decisions about treatment approaches based on their knowledge, training and experience. Clients trust the professionals that treat them and expect to receive a service that will meet their needs.

A special situation that goes beyond clinical decision making and requires ethical consideration is the group therapy process. Group therapy can be highly beneficial for clients, but they do need to be informed of the potential for vulnerability and exposure in such an intimate setting. This approach often encourages self-disclosure of participants and so needs to be carefully organized with key deliberation for the client's emotional safety and best interests.

The formation of a group therapy situation requires professionals to screen group members, ensure compatibility and each member should be informed of the confidential nature of the group. Cultural differences among group members will also need to be factored into group design.

#### Thinking Points

- What would you do if you had incompatible clients enlisted for an upcoming therapy group that you will facilitate?
- Under what circumstances might it be appropriate to refer a client to another group or offer them a place in the same group but at a later date?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. You have heard about a radical new treatment approach that you would like to try with a client, however you have no formal training in this area and there is yet to be evidence based research to support the effectiveness of this technique. What are your ethical responsibilities to your client in this situation?

#### **3.2 Termination**

Helping professionals should terminate therapeutic services when it is no longer required or when it no longer serves in the clients' best interest. Professionals should safeguard the welfare of clients during the termination phase as it can be particularly stressful for them.

Helping professionals may terminate therapy if they have been threatened by the client or someone associated with the client. In fee for service situations, helping professionals can terminate service if the client is not keeping with the financial contract and no other resolution is viable.

Part of ethical practice involves providing conclusive treatment sessions in the termination phase of therapy or suggesting alternative referral options that the client may benefit from post therapy.

It is ethically irresponsible to continue treating a client when it becomes clear that they are not benefiting from your service. It is appropriate to refer a client to a more appropriate service that will meet their needs. Supervision or consultation with a senior professional would be beneficial in addressing these kinds of treatment issues.

Helping professionals who anticipate therapy termination should notify clients promptly and make appropriate preparations to transfer, refer or continue services in consideration of the clients' needs and preferences. Similarly, if a professional intends to leave the organization from which they provide their service then they should make appropriate preparations to ensure the client receives a continuation of service which benefits them. This may involve a handover to a colleague and preparing the client for a transfer of service.

When a helping professional becomes aware that their services will be interrupted due to an event such as unavailability, holiday leave, illness or personal issues then they should make reasonable efforts to ensure that the client receives a continuity of services. This may involve planning for a break in the treatment provided to a client or providing an adequate handover to a colleague who will take on the service provision of the client.

#### Thinking Points

- Think about the last time you discharged a client. What preparations did you make for your client? Did you receive supervision to address your own thoughts and feelings about terminating this client?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. You have been seeing a client for mental health treatment over a twelve month period. It becomes clear that the specialized approach that you are using is not helping this client and they would perhaps benefit from another treatment approach. What are your options? Consider your professional competency and ethical responsibilities.
2. You work in a mental health setting where you provide long term therapy to clients, with some clients you have been working with for over two years. You become aware that you will be taking on another role in the service for a six month period and will not be able to continue your current clinical caseload. What are your ethical responsibilities to your clients?

### 3.3 Gifts

Whether to accept a gift from a client is a problem that remains difficult for many helping professionals. Generally, it is unethical to accept gifts from clients and most organizations will have a policy around this that is made clear to clients from early on.

If a client presents a gift to a helping professional there are a number of factors that need to be considered as to whether it should be accepted:

1. The value of the gift
2. When in the course of the professional relationship is the gift being offered? (The meaning of the gift may vary whether it is given at the beginning of treatment, during or upon termination).
3. The real meaning of the gift and the client's motivation

It goes without saying that accepting monetary gifts outside of fees or gifts of significant value would be unethical. However, it is important to consider the potential psychological harm to the client should you reject a small gift. The client's self esteem needs to be considered and it may be damaging for the professional relationship not to accept it. To resolve the problem of small gifts such as food or flowers, the helping professional could publicly share it with colleagues and the agency.

Thinking points

- What gift giving practices occur in your organization?
- Have you received a gift from a client before? How did you manage this?

Ethical dilemma

1. As part of your usual helping professional role, you visit a client in their home and on this occasion the client serves you tea and biscuits? What are your ethical responsibilities? Consider cultural norms and expectations that may be present.
2. A long term client finds out your birthday, and on that week when you have an appointment together, they bring you a plate of food, flowers and chocolates. What do you do?

### 3.4 Informed Consent

When helping professionals provide a service to a client through assessment, research, therapy or consultation in person or via other forms of communication, they obtain informed consent of the individuals using simple language.

Clients should be informed of the purpose, risks and limits of the service. They must also have a right to refuse or withdraw their consent at any time and be aware of the timeframe that the consent is valid for. This can be achieved by providing clients with written or oral information about the nature of their consent and providing them with an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about this. Helping professionals are

required to document written or oral consent by the client to participate in the service provided.

If language barriers are present, then helping professionals are responsible for ensuring an interpreter is available for the client to aid their comprehension of what they are consenting to.

Informed consent by the client may not be necessary when they have been mandated by the law or government to seek treatment. Whether a client is legally inept to consent or not, helping professionals must still provide an appropriate explanation of the service and seek their agreement to participate, consider their preferences and take steps to protect the individual's rights.

If the client does not have the capacity to provide informed consent (e.g. child, developmentally delayed or cognitively impaired such as in the case of dementia) informed consent should be obtained from the person who is legally responsible for them. In circumstances where a third party is requesting a service for the client, the professional is responsible for explaining to the client who referred them and what the purpose of the service is. It is important to be aware of the age of consent in your practicing state, to ascertain whether parental consent for treatment is required.

Prior to the use of audio or video recording or third party observation of the client, helping professionals should obtain the clients' consent.

#### Thinking Points

- How do you ensure that your clients are aware of their consenting to your service? E.g. verbal explanation or information sheets. How is this documented?

#### Ethical Dilemmas

1. Peter is 75 years old, has dementia and experiencing depression following the death of his wife. He is legally under the care of his daughter Deborah who has referred him to your service. How will you seek informed consent for Peter?
2. Julia is encouraged by her husband to have counseling due to severe anxiety problems. When Julia presents to your service, she says that she does not think she has an anxiety problem and is only coming to see you to keep her husband happy. What are your ethical responsibilities? How will you seek informed consent?

### **3.5 Sexual relationships**

It is against all ethical standards in the helping professions to engage in a sexual relationship with a client - current or former.

### *Current clients*

Every professional code of ethics makes it clear that engagement in a sexual relationship with a current client is prohibited.

An important part of the helping professional's role is to maintain personal boundaries and provide some structure to the socially atypical relationship that occurs between a professional and client. Any person who seeks the assistance of mental health professionals should not be at risk of conduct on the part of the professional due to difficulties in maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Boundaries are introduced to the counseling relationship to protect the therapeutic experience for the client. Therapeutic boundaries involve the professional asking themselves whether what is introduced into therapy will serve their client therapeutically. Sexual intimacies with a client are boundary violations which can be extremely damaging.

Due to the special nature of the helping relationship, clients are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. The helping professional is in a powerful position as an authority and an expert, and so it is the professional's responsibility to behave in an ethical manner. It is unacceptable to blame the client if a sexual relationship develops. Sexual behavior with clients damages the credibility of the helping profession and its effectiveness.

There are various reasons why this standard is so important and why breach of this ethical code could cause potential harm to the client, including:

- The helping relationship is based on a platform of trust.
- The parties are not equal; there is an underlying notion of power and boundary expectations on the part of the professional.
- The professional has an element of influence over the client due to their role as an authority.
- Exploitation within a helping relationship can exacerbate the client's psychological problems.

It is also unethical to terminate a professional relationship with a client in order to start a personal one, due to the reasons stated above, in addition to the breaches detailed in the next section on Former Clients.

Physical contact (not necessarily of a sexual nature) is also advised against under most ethical codes in the helping professions. Professionals are responsible for setting clear and appropriate boundaries in relation to physical contact with clients.

Helping professionals must not engage in sexual harassment of clients. This includes sexual advances, sexual requests and any other verbal or physical conduct that is inappropriate and of a sexual nature.

### *Former clients*

Helping professionals should also never engage in a sexual relationship with a former client, as there still remains residual aspects of the professional relationship which could potentially harm the client.

Some professional entities still specify that a sexual relationship within two years of termination of therapy is unacceptable. However, many states are adopting legislation that makes it a felony offense to have sexual relations with anyone who ever was a client at any time, for any length of time.

Therefore, despite the fact that some professional associations have failed to update their ethical guidelines to be consistent with the general opinion that one should never have sex with anyone who ever has been a client, sexual relations with a client should never be considered an option for a health care provider, no matter how long it has been since the client was discharged from your care, because of the following reasons:

- Despite the amount of time passage, the client/therapist relationship dynamics have not changed; the parties are not equal; there is an underlying notion of power and boundary expectations on the part of the professional.
- The nature of the therapy and its duration and intensity have not changed; the professional has an element of influence over the client due to their role as an authority.
- The circumstances of therapy termination have not changed.
- The client's psychological and personal history have not changed, despite their current mental state; Exploitation within a helping relationship can exacerbate the client's psychological problems.
- There is substantial likelihood of harm to the client.

There are 6 billion people on the planet. It is advisable, both ethically and legally, for the professional to choose to have sexual relations with those of the 6 billion who are not and have never been their client.

Additionally, professionals should not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship, as this could also potentially harm the individual. Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries likely to be quite difficult under such circumstances.

### *Relatives of clients*

It is also considered unethical to engage in sexual intimacies with close friends or relatives of the client involved in the professional relationship. The ethical implications need to be considered as there is a risk of exploitation and potential harm to the client. It may also be difficult to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with the client and their social network.

### Thinking Points

- Do you think you could maintain professional boundaries with a client you found sexually attractive?
- Who would you speak to if you were developing feelings for a client you were currently providing therapy to?
- What would you do if you became aware of a colleague becoming involved with a former client?

### Ethical Dilemmas to Consider

1. Sandra is a mental health professional and has just been referred Damien, a client who is experiencing work injury related depression. They have an initial session which involved a thorough assessment and planning for psychological treatment. Sandra finds that she is sexually attracted to Damien and worries that this may impact on the effectiveness of therapy. What should she do?
2. James has recently bumped into a former client, Julie at a friend's party. He saw Julie for five sessions of phobia desensitization about two years ago. They find they are now attracted to each other and Julie would like to pursue a relationship. What should James do? What problems could arise if he pursues a relationship with Julie?

## **3.6 Dual relationships**

A dual relationship (also known as a multiple relationship) occurs when a helping professional is in a professional role with a person at the same time as being in another role such as professionally, socially or in business. It also refers to close friends or relatives of the person who you are providing a professional service to and promises of entering into another relationship (e.g. in business or socially) with the person in the future or persons they may be associated with.

A helping professional must avoid entering into a dual relationship that could reasonably be expected to impair the professional's competence, objectivity and ability to maintain appropriate boundaries which could harm the client. These forms of relationships are considered unethical.

If due to unforeseen circumstances a dual relationship is identified, the helping professional must take reasonable steps to resolve it in line with their ethical code of conduct and with consideration for the best interests of the client.

If a helping professional is in a position of unusual circumstances to serve in more than one role, it is important to clarify role expectations and maintain strong boundaries at the outset of the professional relationship.

## Thinking Points

- When might a dual relationship occur that due to unusual circumstances may continue?

## Ethical Dilemmas

1. Your close friend wants to refer her friend Lisa to you for short term therapy. You have only met Lisa once briefly and due to your mutual friend it is likely that you may meet socially in the future. Should you accept the referral? What are your ethical responsibilities?
2. A colleague from another team within your service approaches you for support. Given you are a specialist within your team on the particular problem your colleague is seeking help for they would like to see you for a few sessions to help them overcome it. Would it be unethical to accept the referral? What dual relationship barriers may arise?

## 4. Confidentiality

Professionals in the mental health field have an obligation to respect the privacy of clients and to take all reasonable measures to ensure it during and after the helping relationship exists. Unless required by law or by duty of care to the client or others, helping professionals must not release information about clients unless the client specifically authorizes the release, in writing.

### 4.1 Privacy

Helping professionals should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations to clients early in the relationship. Clients should be informed of the circumstances where confidential information may be disclosed due to legal obligations. The potential consequences of legal disclosures must also be explained for example in relation to criminal matters or child protection concerns.

Confidential information can be disclosed to another party when the client has provided informed consent. Helping professionals should share the least amount of the client's private information to meet the desired purpose of exchange. To exchange information with a third party payer of the service, the client must have consented to the disclosure.

In circumstances where a service is being provided to a family, couple or group of individuals the helping professional is obligated to inform each party about confidentiality limitations. Professionals cannot guarantee that all participants will honor the confidentiality agreement.

Helping professionals should not discuss confidential information with a client or anyone else unless privacy is guaranteed. Confidential information should not be discussed by the helping professional in public spaces such as corridors, waiting rooms or restaurants.

When discussing a client through consultation or supervision, the client must be de-identified unless they have consented to the disclosure. De-identification involves discussing the client in the absence of specific information such as name, age, address or employer that the other party may use to identify them.

#### Thinking Points

- How have you introduced the topic of confidentiality with clients in the past? What are the procedures governed by your employer for confidential information exchange with other services?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Noel is a helping professional who bumps into an associate, Dale from a local service at a professional networking morning tea. Dale says he has been seeing a client named Mary for the past week and she mentioned she has previously been in therapy with Noel. Dale asks Noel for some background information on Mary, to aid his assessment of her current situation. What are

Noel and Dale's ethical responsibilities? If Noel discloses the requested information at the morning tea, is he in breach of an ethical standard? How might Noel and Dale exchange this information in an ethically responsible way?

2. A client's husband phones and asks to speak with you about their wife and some concerns they have. What are your ethical responsibilities around consent and privacy? Is there a way to speak with your clients' husband without a breach of privacy?

## **4.2 Duty of care**

Clients should also be aware of circumstances whereby confidential information will need to be shared by duty of care. In the instance where a client is judged by the professional to be dangerous to self or others, then a decision must be made about whether duty of care takes precedence over the privacy rights of the client. For example, if a client is at risk of suicide or harming someone else, then the professional has a duty of care (and legal obligation) to take necessary steps to protect the clients' welfare and those potentially at harm. This may involve mandatory mental health interventions or police involvement.

### Thinking Points

- Who are your service contacts if a client is in need of an emergency mental health intervention?
- What are your service suicide risk assessment policies?

### Ethical Dilemma

1. Naomi presents to one of her weekly sessions with her mental health professional Todd. Naomi is severely depressed and states that she not only has thoughts of suicide, but has a plan to follow through with the intent on killing herself. Naomi does not want Todd to tell anyone. When considering Naomi's right to confidentiality, what are Todd's options in this scenario which will protect Naomi from hurting herself?

## **4.2 Client records**

The place of practice should provide procedures that encourage confidentiality protection of clients. This includes adequate storage and security of their records whether it is paper or computerized.

Professionals must ensure that client records are not accessible to people who are not authorized to view them, this includes colleagues. Paper files should be stored in a filing cabinet or room which is kept locked and secured and where files can be accessed only by the professional. In most circumstances a team will share storage facilities which are acceptable, as long as other departments do not have access.

Electronic databases storing client information must have restricted access only to the relevant helping professional. This may involve the use of a password to access files that only the professional and their supervisor can access.

Helping professionals must take careful measures to ensure confidentiality when transmitting information to other parties through the use of electronic mail, facsimile, telephone and answering machines. Whenever possible, avoid disclosing identifying information of the client. Clients also have a right to view their records and will probably require a professional's support to aid understanding of the recorded information.

#### Thinking Points

- Think about where your client records are stored in your workplace, are they safe and secure?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Maureen works in a large mental health service and has a full clinical caseload. The filing cabinets in her department are full and no arrangements have been made to access further storage for client files. Maureen keeps her files on her desk, which is situated at an open workstation. Are Maureen's files being stored in a way that protects her clients' confidentiality? Who may be at risk of accessing these files without consent?
2. Ray and Jodie work within the same mental health team. Jodie receives an email from a doctor about a client which was meant to be sent to Ray. What should Jodie do in this situation? What is Ray's and the doctor's confidentiality responsibilities and how could they have avoided this privacy mishap?

## 5. Assessment and Measurement

Helping professionals who use psychometric testing or other assessments with clients must ensure the validity and confidentiality of the results. The selection of tests and interpretation of test results must be considered with caution.

### 5.1 Test Selection

Helping professionals must ensure that each test selected is appropriate for the purpose it is being used for and likely to generate valid results and statistically reliable findings.

Professionals must consider the theoretical bases and supporting research for the test and determine whether this will be useful in assessing and treating your client. It is crucial to select a test that is appropriate to the individual's language preference as confusion about the test will influence the validity of the data.

Professionals must recognize the limits of their competence to administer and interpret the various assessment techniques available. It is important that professionals only administer and interpret those assessment methods that they have received satisfactory training and supervision for. If the purpose of the assessment is to assist in clinical diagnosis of the client, then only a professional trained in psychometric testing and clinical formulation should administer the test.

The professional who administers the test has an ethical obligation to inform the client what the purpose is and provide them with an opportunity to make an informed decision about whether they want to participate. The client needs to be fully aware of how the results will be used before the test is given and they should have an opportunity to refuse to take the test after they have been told the purpose. Clients should be explained how to complete the test in line with the test instructions.

It is unethical to duplicate or modify a copyrighted test without prior approval of the owner. Professionals should not use or base their assessment or recommendations on the results from testing measures that are outdated or obsolete. Tests must be kept securely by the professional who is licensed to use them.

Thinking Points:

- Think about the tests that your workplace utilizes. Have you been trained in administering and interpreting them? Where are they stored?

Ethical Dilemma

1. Jessica is told by her supervisor to start using a complicated psychometric tool with clients that she has no formal training or skills to administer. What steps need to be taken for Jessica to engage in ethical behavior regarding test administration?
2. Lily has administered a test to a client where English is their second language. The client continues to ask Lily to explain some of the questions asked in the test.

Lily tries to explain the questions in simple terms for the client to understand. Consider the ethical problems with this scenario. How will the interpretation of results be effected?

## **5.2 Test Result Interpretation**

Helping professionals should be aware of the factors that can influence test results. Tests must be scored in strict compliance with the enclosed instructions in order to produce significant results for the client.

Professionals must be cautious when interpreting the results of tests that possess insufficient data or when the client cannot be appropriately compared to the norms profiled for the test.

Test results must be shared with clients in a sensitive manner to ensure the client does not misinterpret them.

Thinking Points:

- Are the interpretation manuals for the tests you use easily accessible in your workplace? Is training provided for the use of tests?

Ethical Dilemma

1. Tania has administered a cognitive test to a client. The results indicate that her client has a low IQ. How might Tania explain these results in a sensitive and ethical manner to the client?
2. Joseph administers a personality test to a client who makes several comments about having to leave early and finish the test. Joseph is lead to believe that the client has rushed the test and it may not be a true reflection of her personality profile. How might Joseph interpret the results?

## **6. Research and Publication**

Helping professionals who conduct research and/ or publish the results must be aware of the ethical requirements involved including the institutional approval process and client rights to confidentiality and informed consent

### **6.1 Institutional Approval**

Helping professionals who are designing and planning a research project must consult and seek approval from their institution. Accurate information about their research project purpose must be communicated during this process.

Ultimately, responsibility lies with the principal researcher of the project; however others involved in the research project have ethical obligations and responsibilities for their own actions.

Helping professionals should try to avoid offering potential research participants excessive financial incentives or other inappropriate inducements that is likely to result in coerced participation.

#### Reflective Activity

- Who would you seek approval from when planning a research project in your workplace? Is there an ethics or research board that you have access to?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Simon works within a mental health service and is interested in conducting a small scale research project to evaluate the clients' experience of the service. What information should Simon include in his research proposal to the ethics board?

### **6.2 Informed Consent**

Clients must be aware that their participation in a research project is voluntary. Researchers must seek written informed consent from participants.

Informed consent in a research project involves an explanation of the following to participants:

- Their participation is voluntary
- They can withdraw from the research project at any time without penalty
- All implications of the project and their participation, outlining potential risks and benefits of the study
- The purpose of the study
- Extent and duration of participation required
- Clear explanation of the procedures to follow
- Description of any anticipated discomforts during the project
- An offer to answer any questions the participants may have about the procedures

Researchers should never design or conduct research that does not use consent procedures and where participants are unaware of the research project being conducted.

In some cases, participant knowledge about the purpose of the research project may influence the results. In these circumstances this ethical rule may be waived only when there is a guarantee that there will be no harmful effects for the participants.

#### Reflective Activity

- How might informed consent be sought by participants in a research project? How can you be certain that they understand the risks and benefits of the study?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Jackie has gathered participants together to conduct a research project. She advises them that although they don't have to participate if they don't want to, it is highly recommended that they do as it will reflect positively on them with the service. Jackie advises that once they agree to the project they cannot change their mind. Has Jackie breached an ethical standard in research? How might Jackie have behaved more ethically in this situation?

### **6.3 Confidentiality**

The limits of confidentiality must be explained to participants in research. When reporting or publishing results, it is important that participant identifying information has been omitted to protect their privacy.

Data collected must be stored in a safe and secure place which promotes confidentiality for clients. In cases where participation in research is anonymous, data must be stored separately to the written consent forms which list identifying information. However, there must be a way to track back a participant's data if they withdraw consent from the study. This may involve coding data to be matched with consent forms at a later date if required.

#### Reflective Activity

- Where would you store research data in your workplace? Is confidentiality of participation prioritized?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Victoria has collected 200 anonymous surveys with each stapled to the consent form that it was returned with. Victoria wants to comply with ethical standards to ensure client confidentiality. How might she store the data in an ethically responsible way?

## 6.4 Client welfare

Research professionals are responsible for the welfare of their participants throughout the project and must take all reasonable steps to avoid causing psychological, physical or social injury.

It is ethical to provide participants with information about support services available following a research study if they are feeling emotionally vulnerable.

Ethical research involves providing a forum for participants to debrief or providing contact details of the principal researcher so they can discuss their involvement if they wish.

### Reflective Activity

- What support services in your local working area would you list for participants in a research study?

### Ethical Dilemma

1. Tim has designed a research project which involves conducting a focus group among mental health service consumers with the purpose of seeking personal experiences about the strengths and weaknesses of the service. The focus group has the potential for participants to bring up sensitive issues about their mental health status and Tim worries that this could cause some distress. What structures can Tim put in place to minimize psychological distress to clients and provide them with support when their participation has concluded?
2. Laura has been interviewing clients of a mental health service and is under the guidance of the principal researcher. Laura has just interviewed a client who has become extremely distressed and disclosed a significant psychological problem. What are Laura's ethical responsibilities under these circumstances? What should she do to ensure the participants emotional welfare?

## 6.5 Reporting Results

Professionals, who report results of a research project for publication, must ensure that it accurately reflects the results and minimizes the possibility that they will be misinterpreted or misleading to readers.

Results must be reported clearly, carefully edited and peer reviewed. The report also needs to reflect the variables and conditions that may influence the data obtained or its interpretation.

Specific information about the population that was studied needs to be reported to avoid misinterpreted data. Professionals are ethically obligated to make available to qualified others who may want to replicate their study, enough original research data for them to do so.

Professionals must become familiar with previous studies in their area of interest and give recognition in research publications where appropriate. It is important to be familiar with all copyright laws and to give due credit to those involved in the study. Professionals must not use another's work or data and present them as their own. Accurate citations to prior work must be incorporated into the body of work reported.

#### Reflective Activity

- What variables may influence the results of a research project?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Donna has conducted a research project with her colleague Ben. They intend to submit the results to a highly respected journal and want to ensure that the data is presented accurately and ethically. What steps should they take to ensure the published results are an accurate reflection of their project?

## **7. Teaching and Training**

Educators and trainers must offer instruction only in areas in which they have professional expertise and encourage professional advancement only to those who are competent

### **7.1 Responsibility to the Public**

Helping professionals can use their experience and knowledge to inform the public about problems and prospects that affect their area of expertise or their client populations. It is important for professionals to increase public support and understanding of their work.

Professionals are encouraged to take a public position on issues that are within their expertise, however it needs to be made clear whether they are speaking as a representative on behalf of an organization or as an individual.

#### Reflective Activity

- Has your organization been involved in any recent media releases?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Tom has been working for a mental health service for over twenty years. During this time the media have often made derogatory comments about the competence of the service based on client complaints. The service has a media department that deals with these complaints and releases public statements in response. Tom doesn't feel that the organization is being done justice by these responses and wants to speak with the media himself. What are Tom's ethical responsibilities in this situation?

### **7.2 Responsibility to the Profession**

Helping professionals who teach are responsible for designing education programs that provide the appropriate knowledge and experience to students who seek to meet requirements for licensure or certification.

Education programs must have a current and correct description of the program which includes participation requirements, program objectives and goals, benefits of the program and requirements that students must meet to satisfactorily complete the program.

Programs for helping professionals should not require students to disclose personal information within the course unless it is clearly identified as a requirement and necessary to evaluate the students' skills. If personal disclosure is required for the program, then support services must be available for students to protect their emotional welfare.

Educators must establish a timely process for feedback provision to students and evaluate the students based on their performance on specific program requirements.

Helping professionals who teach must not engage in sexual relationships with students in their program that they have an evaluative authority over.

Educators have an ethical responsibility with students to encourage those they believe will become competent practitioners and to discourage those who will not. Ethically compliant educators would not allow their subjective opinion of a student's overall competence to influence evaluations and grades given to the student in specific subjects. The professional's role involves guiding students to other areas of practice that is better suited to their skills.

#### Reflective Activity

- Have there been occasions during your professional career where you have felt a colleague is incompetent of their assigned role? How do you feel about this?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Dianne is preparing a course to teach a specialized treatment approach for depression to helping professionals. She has no formalized training in skill development or teaching in this area. Dianne has read about this approach in several textbooks and feels she knows enough to teach a class about the approach. Is there an ethical problem here?

## **8. Private Practice**

Helping professionals are required to adhere to ethical standards in private practice and there are a number of specific requirements that are targeted to private practitioners which focus on professional competency and client relationships.

### **8.1 Fees**

Helping professionals in private practice should establish and continue to implement billing procedures that accurately reflect the type of service provided and by whom.

It is unethical to change fees during the course of treatment unless it had been made clear to the client at the outset that fees may be raised and they have been given sufficient notice before the impending change. A significant change in fees could impact on a clients accessibility to the service and be detrimental to their welfare.

Most professional licensing bodies provide a recommended list of fees that professionals may charge for their services.

#### Reflective Exercise

- How would you establish fees in a private practice based on the various services that may be on offer?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Maria has just accepted a new referral for a client. Following the initial assessment session, Maria informs the client that fees will be increased as of the following week. Is this ethical behavior? What could Maria have done differently to ensure that her client was well informed of fee changes?

### **8.2 Professional Competency**

Helping professionals must abide by ethical standards when advertising or marketing their private practice services. Professionals must advertise in a manner that accurately informs the public of the professional services, expertise and types of services available.

Professionals must make available their highest degree by discipline and level of certification or licensure. Other important information the public require include: address, telephone number, office opening hours and type of services.

Helping professionals who see clients privately must practice within their area of expertise should not advertise their service with claims to guarantee positive outcomes for clients.

Helping professionals should take caution when requesting client testimonials for the purpose of practice marketing. Current clients may be vulnerable to unwarranted influence due to their particular circumstances.

Helping professionals engaging in private work who also work for an organization must recognize that their first responsibility is to the organization and clients in the position that they hold. Sick time should not be used to compensate for private work.

Those who are employed with an organization and also work privately must acknowledge their own possible energy and attention limitations to effective service provision as a result of overextension. When workloads are overextended, the quality of a professional's work may decline and clients will suffer. It is important for helping professionals to lead a balanced lifestyle between work and their private lives to provide an effective service.

Helping professionals in private practice have an ethical obligation to engage in professional development activities and supervision with an external professional to promote self-awareness and self-reflection in the role of helping professional.

#### Reflective Exercise

- Consider your current mental health workload and whether you feel you are providing an effective service to clients based on the number and intensity of services provided.
- What signs would you see in yourself and your professional practice that would indicate you are overextending your service?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Kathy works full time in a mental health service and has a full workload of clients, whilst working some evenings and one day each weekend in private practice. Kathy often feels overwhelmed with the number of clients she sees on a weekly basis and sometimes wonders if she is giving each client her full time and attention as required. Where do you think Kathy's professional responsibilities lie? Is she engaging in ethical practice?
2. Luke has worked in the drug and alcohol field for a long time and now wishes to branch out to work with clients privately in the area of serious mental health issues. Although Luke has some experience working with clients with severe mental illnesses, this is not his area of expertise. Luke has advertised his practice publicly, stating that he is a highly experienced helping professional who provides counseling to adults with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders. Has Luke marketed his practice and skills in an unethical manner? How might Luke begin working with mentally ill clients and market his practice in a way that accurately reflects his skills and professional experience?

### 8.3 Client Relationships

Helping professionals who see clients privately have a responsibility to have clear boundaries and processes with clients due to lack of pre-defined structures that organizations usually have in place.

Ethical practice involves setting clearly defined and understood goals with clients so that success can be assessed objectively and client progress is without ambiguity. This involves setting clear time limits for the relationship so that a client can be fully informed about the level of financial commitment required for the service. A goal of the service should be client self-direction which means they should be encouraged towards independence to minimize future dependency on the professional.

#### Reflective Exercise

- How would you provide a client with clear boundaries in your private practice?
- What do clients need to know when they are considering seeking support from your service?

#### Ethical Dilemma

1. Larry is a mental health professional who works solely in private practice. He has many long term clients who he provides a valuable service for and in turn they provide him with ongoing financial security. One of Larry's long term clients who has significantly improved throughout therapy and has now voiced that they would like to cease therapy. Larry agrees that the client has made huge improvements but worries about his finances and how long it will take to attain a new referral if this client leaves. What are Larry's ethical responsibilities? If Larry was to breach an ethical standard, what might he have said to his client in this situation? How could this situation become a detriment to the client?

## 9. Ethical Supervision

Supervisors in the helping profession have various responsibilities to their supervisees and also require an understanding of what they should expect from those who they supervise. Professional supervision involves the provision of knowledge and training to a less experienced professional with the aim of facilitating practice reflection and skill development.

### 9.1. Supervisory Relationship

#### *Supervisor Rights*

As a supervisor you have a right to be treated with respect, challenge the supervisee's practice appropriately and refuse inappropriate requests from interested parties about the content of the supervision being discussed. Supervisor's should also have a say in who they supervise, have the choice to withdraw from the supervision agreement if you cannot commit to it or feel it is unproductive and set boundaries on areas that you do not wish to discuss such as areas outside of your expertise.

#### *Supervisor Responsibilities*

It is beneficial for a supervisor to have the following attributes:

- Suitable training and experience to supervise other professionals in the field
- Awareness of current ethical standards
- Advise supervisees of their credentials and professional experience
- Ability to engage and develop rapport with the supervisee
- Communication skills
- Non-judgmental approach
- Encouraging attitude

As a supervisor you have a range of responsibilities that are inherent in the role including:

- Accessibility and scheduled time for supervision
- Inform the supervisee of the process of supervision
- Refrain from managerial issues dominating the supervision process
- Maintain confidentiality
- Prepare for supervision sessions
- Ensure your own personal support is addressed, including your own supervision
- Share experience, skills and information with the supervisee
- Facilitate the supervisee's professional development
- Model ethical behavior and adhere to relevant ethical standards
- Establish procedures for handling crisis situations
- Provide supervisees with feedback

- Intervene in any situations where a client is at risk due to supervisee impairment

Effective supervision stems from a good relationship between the supervisor and supervisee which considers factors such as communication, feedback and self-reflection. The essentials of a supervisory relationship include: warmth, trust, authenticity, respect, confidentiality and ethical boundaries.

### *Boundaries*

Professional boundaries can be difficult to establish within the supervisory relationship, particularly when the professional and social roles in the workplace become blurred. Supervisors may hold dual roles with supervisees such as line manager and colleague. It is important that these roles are defined within the supervision relationship.

Given the supervisor's authority, level of knowledge and professional experience, this can create an unequal power relationship with the supervisee. This can make it difficult for supervisees to express opinions or disagreement to the supervisor's view. The supervisor can facilitate the supervisees learning by creating an environment at the outset of the professional relationship where they feel comfortable discussing their feelings openly.

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality is essential with all therapeutic issues discussed in supervision as client information is of a sensitive nature. However, it is necessary that the limits to confidentiality are clearly defined. There are some legal and professional requirements such as mandatory reporting which override the supervisee's right to confidentiality. The supervisor may report situations which involve unethical behavior or where a client is at imminent risk. The supervisor may also be required to break confidentiality due to some legislative obligations.

### Reflective Exercise

- What attributes would you find important in a supervisor?
- What training and skills would be required for a supervisor in your professional role?
- As a supervisor would you give your supervisee your personal phone number or email address?
- Would you invite your supervisee out on a social gathering with other colleagues?

### Ethical Dilemma

1. Donna supervises several other professionals in her workplace. She often shares the content of supervision sessions with another senior professional who is in the supervisory role. Has Donna breached an ethical obligation to her supervisees?
2. Liam is a junior mental health professional and has recently been assigned a senior supervisor in his workplace. Liam feels that his supervisor is unapproachable and he often feels intimidated during the supervision process and

leaves feeling demeaned and useless. Is Liam having valuable supervision sessions? How might his supervisor be acting unethically?

## **9.2 Supervisory Process**

The purpose of professional supervision is to enhance service delivery to clients and provide support to the professional. This is achieved by reflecting on the supervisee's achievements and successes and providing recognition. It also involves discussion about improving work practices and the workplace environment. Of much importance is the opportunity for supervisees to reflect on how they are coping with workplace demands and client issues.

### *Record Keeping*

In general, only brief notations should be kept of supervision sessions. In particular, topics discussed and the outcome should be recorded for reference. As with all client correspondence, it is important that the supervisor is careful about forwarding supervision information via email and other communication devices.

### *Evaluation*

Supervision should be regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that it is providing value to the supervisee. The supervisor and supervisee should agree upon scheduled feedback and appropriate timeframes. This gives the supervisee an opportunity to reflect on what they have found helpful during the process and what they would like to focus on in the future. Reviews are also an opportunity to provide the supervisee with feedback that assists them to evaluate their own behavior and explore alternative behaviors to improve practice.

### *Supervision Format*

The type of supervision (one-to-one or group supervision) needs to be agreed upon between the supervisor and supervisee. After consideration of organizational obligations, the supervision agreement needs to include the frequency, timing and venue of where it will take place. Each party must be responsible for advising the other with adequate notice for cancelled sessions.

### Reflection Exercise

- As a supervisor, do you have a structured process for providing feedback to your supervisees?
- How do you ensure that the evaluation process is constructive and helpful for your supervisee?

## Ethical Dilemma

1. Lara has been receiving supervision by an assigned supervisor who often cancels sessions at the last minute and does not reschedule. Lara sometimes goes months without supervision and when it does occur it is usually led by the supervisor's agenda to address managerial issues in the workplace. Is Lara's supervisor fulfilling their responsibilities as a professional supervisor? What should Lara expect from the supervision process?
2. Mark has receiving supervision on a regular basis with his assigned supervisor. Although he finds it valuable to reflect on his practice, he doesn't feel very reassured about his skills and doesn't receive much feedback from his supervisor. Is Mark receiving adequate supervision? How might the supervision process be improved?

## 10. Summary

In summary, professional ethics play an important role in the practice of helping professionals. It guides professionals to ensure the welfare of clients who seek help and protect the health and safety of the public. Ethical standards encourage professionals to strive to meet these expectations within their specialty.

Ethical standards serve the profession and the greater public. If an ethical problem is identified then it is important to utilize the ethical decision making process discussed in the first module. The steps involved in resolving an ethical dilemma are: recognition of the problem, consultation, exploring consequences, taking action and evaluating the outcome.

It is important for helping professionals, whether new or experienced in the area of mental health to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients and to engage in supervision with an experienced and qualified authority for self reflective and professional development purposes.

A summary of each of the key messages within the eight ethical standards discussed are provided:

- Colleagues should be treated with respect and not demeaned in the workplace
- You are responsible for reporting unethical behavior by colleagues
- You have an ethical responsibility to continue education and learning in your field
- You have a responsibility to practice only in your area of competency
- The cultural needs of clients need to be considered and respected
- A client's emotional safety must be preserved in the therapeutic relationship
- Try to safeguard the welfare of clients during the termination phase
- In general, gifts from clients should not be accepted
- Clients must be fully informed of the service they are engaged in
- Sexual relationships with clients or their relatives is prohibited
- Dual relationships should be avoided where possible
- A clients privacy needs to be protected
- Confidentiality breaches may be necessary to maintain duty of care to the client
- Client records must be stored safely and securely
- Tests and assessment tools must be selected with careful consideration of the desired purpose
- Test results must be interpreted with caution
- Institutional approval is required to carry out research activities
- Research participants must be fully informed of what their participation requires
- Identifying information for research participants must be kept confidential
- Research activities should not cause client harm or distress
- Research results must not be presented in a way that may be misinterpreted
- Teachers should only teach within the realms of their professional competency
- Teachers are responsible for guiding students towards a role that suits their skills

- Private practitioners must market their services accurately
- It is important that private practitioners acknowledge their attention limitations
- Supervisors should maintain professional boundaries with students
- Supervisors are required to ensure their supervisee's confidentiality rights
- The supervision format and an evaluation process must be agreed considered

Ethical standards govern the helping profession to ensure the welfare of clients and quality service provision by professionals. If at any time you are unsure about the ethics of a professional situation refer to the ethical standards of your profession and consult with a supervisor or other experienced professional.

## **>>> READ YOUR CODE OF ETHICS <<<**

Each professional association has published a Code of Ethics. The National Association of Social Workers, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, The American Psychological Association, The National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors and the American Counseling Association have all published Codes of Ethics unique to the professions that they serve. In addition, various state boards have published their own Codes of Ethics, applicable to licensed individuals in their state.

**As part of this course, you are required to read your respective professional association's Code of Ethics.** Most professionals will find a copy of the Code in their membership information packets.

For professionals who are licensed but not dues paying members of any professional association, please know that each professional association's website has their Code of Ethics published on the Internet, available for all to read.

From a liability perspective, it is important to note that whether we are a dues paying member or not of our respective professional association, **in civil court we will be held to our professional association's ethical standards.**

For example, if you are a Marriage and Family Therapist licensed by the state but not a member of the AAMFT, you will still be held to the ethical standards of the AAMFT for the services that you provide. If you are a Psychologist and not a dues paying member of the American Psychological Association, in civil court you will still be held to the ethical standards of your respective professional association's Code of Ethics.

**When we face ethical dilemmas in our clinical practice, the answers to those dilemmas are often found in the basic principles of professional ethics provided by our professional associations.**

- **The Codes of Ethics links below are provided for your convenience.**

**Before or after** you read the remaining course materials, please select the link for the association that corresponds to your professional licensure, and read their Code of Ethics.

When you take the link - **you will leave this document** - you can use your browser's < back arrow to return, or you may wish to save this file in your Favorite Places/Bookmarks. For most professions, the Code reading will be approximately 10-20 pages.

***Sometimes the Boards will move or change their links.*** If this happens, you can find the new link to your Code by using an Internet Search Engine, like [www.google.com](http://www.google.com).

**NAADAC - National Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors**  
<http://naadac.org/documents/index.php?CategoryID=23>

**NBCC - National Board of Certified Counselors**  
<http://www.nbcc.org/ethics2>

**APA - American Psychological Association**  
<http://www.apa.org/ethics/>

**ACA - American Counseling Association**  
<http://www.counseling.org/Resources/CodeOfEthics/TP/Home/CT2.aspx>

**AAMFT - American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists**  
<http://www.aamft.org/resources/LRMPlan/Ethics/ethicscode2001.asp>

**NASW - National Association of Social Workers**  
<https://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS COURSE

To receive continuing education credit for this course, you must have read this entire text file – and your respective professional association’s Code of Ethics.

You must also complete and return the Evaluation of Learning Quiz and pay the CEU fee. (Instructions are on the next page.)



We always appreciate constructive input from our customers – even when it’s ‘negative’, so please feel free to fill in the “Additional Comments” section of the Grade This Course evaluation when you submit your quiz and payment.

Richard K. Nongard, LMFT, CCH, CPFT  
Executive Director

# "ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES"

## 3 Continuing Education Clock Hours

### Procedures to Receive CEU Credit:

- This document contains all of the course materials you needed to read, plus links to read the Professional Ethics Code related to your discipline.
- Now you must complete the required True/False Evaluation of Learning Quiz and submit it to our office along with your payment, in order to obtain your CEU certificate.

### FOR ONLINE SUBMISSION:

Go back to [www.FastCEUs.com](http://www.FastCEUs.com) and click the "QUIZ & PAY" button for this course.

On the page that opens, enter your information and take the T/F Quiz. When you click SUBMIT, the program will instantly grade your quiz, and provided you pass by at least 80%, it will then charge your credit or debit card.

Immediately, a new web page will open containing your Receipt and Certificate info, and a Link will be provided to access a fancy Certificate for you to Print and/or Save to your computer.

You will also receive an Email containing this same information and the link. *You will **NOT** receive a paper certificate in the mail - This electronic system provides numerous options for you to print and save your CEUs.*

### FOR FAX OR MAIL SUBMISSION:

Print the Quiz and Payment forms on the next few pages of this document, and complete the requested information.

Our 24-hour secure Fax number is **(888)-877-6020**.

If you fax your quiz and payment to us, please do NOT also mail it.

We process faxes within approximately 4 business hours after receiving them. Faxes submitted late in the day or after hours will be processed the next business morning. However, all certificates are dated the date we receive your course quiz and payment.

*You will **NOT** receive a paper copy of your Certificate in the mail.*

Enter either your fax number or an Email address and we will send your CEU Certificate to the contact info you provide.

If you prefer to use a check or money order, please Mail the quiz and payment to:

**PeachTree Professional Education, Inc.**  
**15560 N. Frank L. Wright Blvd, #B4-118, Scottsdale, AZ 85260**

# EVALUATION OF LEARNING QUIZ - PAGE 1 of 4

PRINT & FAX or MAIL THIS PAGE AND THE ANSWERS PAGES TO OUR OFFICE

**\* \* \* \* OR \* \* \* \***

You may complete and submit this information **ONLINE** by following this link:

<https://www.fastceus.org/index.php?extension=ethics-10>

## **PLEASE NEATLY PRINT THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:**

NAME as you want it on your CEU Certificate: \_\_\_\_\_

Your professional cert/license with numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS for record keeping: Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

DAYTIME TELEPHONE Number: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

- We will FAX or EMAIL your CEU Certificate (no copy will be mailed).
- **CLEARLY PRINT** YOUR FAX # or EMAIL ADDRESS:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(IF you FAX us your Evaluations do NOT mail them. WRITE NEATLY so you get your CEUs.)

## **"ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES"**

This **3** Hour CEU Course is **\$49.00**

CIRCLE: Master Card    Visa    Discover Card    American Express    Check Enclosed

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Card Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code: \_\_\_\_\_

(Security Code = last 3 digits on back of card for MC, Visa, Discover - or 4 digits on front for Amex)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail:** PeachTree Professional Education, Inc.  
15560 N. Frank L. Wright Blvd, #B4-118, Scottsdale, AZ 85260  
**Phone:** (800) 390-9536    **Fax:** (888) 877-6020

# **EVALUATION OF LEARNING PAGE 2 of 4**

## **"ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES"**

### **3 Hours of Approved Continuing Education Credit**

*The purpose of the following Evaluation of Learning questions is to:*

- A.) Verify that you have read the required course materials
- B.) Demonstrate an understanding of the practical application of the course materials
- C.) Officially document your participation and completion of this course

### **➔ ANSWER THESE 20 T/F EVALUATION OF LEARNING QUESTIONS**

- T F 1. I have read the entire required .pdf text file for this course.
- T F 2. I have read my respective Professional Association's Code of Ethics.
- T F 3. In the context of professional practice, ethics refers to appropriate moral boundaries acceptable to the therapist that the client must learn to act within.
- T F 4. Ethical standards are developed to provide the state with a means to punish offending therapists.
- T F 5. It doesn't matter how experienced or responsible a professional you are, you are not impervious to the potential of unethical behavior.
- T F 6. Professionals must not report ethical complaints while knowingly having incorrect facts.
- T F 7. Limiting personal information shared by the therapist is not an example of a professional boundary.
- T F 8. Supervision is an important part of the helping professional's practice by promoting self-awareness, self-reflection and skill development.
- T F 9. One of the primary benefits of supervision is that it give financial opportunity to older therapists who no longer wish to see patients.
- T F 10. Supervision helps the professional in the areas of professional development, maintaining ethical standards, personal support and systemic practice.
- T F 11. Continuing professional development aims to maintain and learn new insights, techniques and integrate current research into everyday practice.
- T F 12. As helping professionals, never responsible for reporting unethical behavior by colleagues or the organizations that you work with.

**CONTINUED ➔**

## EVALUATION OF LEARNING (CONTINUED) PAGE 3 of 4

### "ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES"

- T F 13. Group therapy can be highly beneficial for clients, but they do need to be informed of the potential for vulnerability and exposure in such an intimate setting.
- T F 14. It is also deemed inappropriate to initiate sexual conduct with a former client even after two years have passed as it can still be harmful.
- T F 15. Helping professionals must ensure that each test selected is appropriate for the purpose it is being used for and likely to generate valid results and statistically reliable findings.
- T F 16. Clients should be informed of the purpose, risks and limits of the service.
- T F 17. There are never ever legal and professional requirements which override the supervisee's right to confidentiality.
- T F 18. Helping professionals should be aware of the factors that can influence test results.
- T F 19. Helping professionals who see clients privately must practice within their area of expertise should not advertise their service with claims to guarantee positive outcomes for clients.
- T F 20. It is ethical to provide participants with information about support services available following a research study if they are feeling emotionally vulnerable

## **GRADE THIS ONLINE COURSE! – Page 4**

*It is helpful to us if you return this form via snail mail or fax,  
along with your Quiz and Payment. Thank-you!*

### **Participant Assessment of Home Study CEU Course**

## **“ETHICS #11 – ETHICAL GUIDELINES”**

### **3 Credit Hours**

**Please Rate the Following Statements from 1-5**

**(1 being the Lowest, 5 being the Highest.)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I found the PeachTree Online Home Study Course Instructions simple to follow.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I found the PeachTree Online Home Study Course materials to be of professional quality, and easy to read.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I found the PeachTree Online Home Study Course materials to be of educational value, relative, and useful to my counseling practice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I completed the 3 Hour PeachTree Online Home Study Course in approximately 3 hours.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I would take another PeachTree Online Home Study Course, and/or recommend them to a co-worker.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**