

## **ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING**

*The following are the guidelines and practices by which all pastoral counseling services are offered.*

### **General Practices:**

1. As a Pastor, I understand and embrace the importance of remaining spiritually grounded. Therefore, I personally will remain in an accountability relationship with other pastors and/or church elders.
  - A. I will seek to manage my personal life in a healthy fashion.
  - B. I will seek appropriate assistance for my own personal problems and/or conflicts.
2. As a Counselor, I understand and embrace the importance of remaining current with new research that affects my knowledge of clinical and psychological issues. Therefore, I will maintain membership in professional pastoral counseling organizations as well as maintaining relationships with colleagues for the purpose of professional growth and development.
3. As a Practitioner, I will seek to...
  - A. Undertake a professional relationship only with those individuals whose problems or issues are within the reasonable boundaries of my competence.
  - B. Remain abreast of and comply with all appropriate regulatory statutes that govern my pastoral counseling activities.

### **Professional & Financial Guidelines:**

1. I will use my knowledge and professional associations for the benefit of those I serve and not as a means to secure unfair personal advantage.
2. I am careful to represent facts truthfully to clients, referral sources, and any related third party individuals regarding my credentials and services rendered. I shall correct any misrepresentation of my professional qualifications or affiliations.
3. If any fees or financial arrangements for services are to be rendered, such fees are fully discussed and completely disclosed before the beginning of the first counseling session.
4. I am prepared to render services for those in crisis without regard to financial remuneration as necessary.
5. I neither receive, nor pay fees or commissions for referral of a client.

### **Client Relationships:**

1. I will not abandon or neglect clients. I make every reasonable effort to ensure continuity of services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as unavailability, relocation, illness, or disability. If I am unwilling for appropriate reasons, to provide

professional help or continue a professional relationship, every reasonable effort will be made to arrange for continuation of treatment with another professional.

2. I will be sensitive regarding the moral, social, and religious values and beliefs of all clients. I will avoid imposing my beliefs on others, although I may express them when appropriate in the pastoral counseling process.
3. Counseling relationships are continued only as long as it is reasonably clear that the clients are benefiting from the counseling relationship.
4. I recognize the trust and unique nature of the therapeutic relationship. While acknowledging the complexity of some pastoral relationships, I avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. Where possible, I avoid dual or multiple relationships with clients which could impair my professional judgment. Multiple relationships occur when a pastoral counselor is in a professional role with a person and ...
  - A. At the same time is in another role with the same person.
  - B. At the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the pastoral counselor has a professional relationship.
  - C. Promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person.
5. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, particularly within church congregations, or regarding couples or family counseling, I take reasonable steps to protect the clients and am responsible for setting clear and appropriate boundaries.
6. I will not engage in harassment, abusive words or actions, or exploitative coercion of clients or former clients.
7. Any and all forms of sexual behavior or harassment are unethical, even if a client invites or consents to such behavior or involvement. Sexual behavior is defined as, but not limited to, all forms of overt and covert seductive speech, gestures, written communication, and behavior as well as physical contact of a sexual nature; harassment is defined as, but not limited to, repeated comments, gestures written communication, or physical contact of a sexual nature.
8. I recognize that the therapist/client relationship involves a power imbalance, the residual effects of which are operative following the termination of the therapy relationship. Therefore, all sexual behavior or harassment as defined above, with former clients, is also unethical.

### **Client Confidentiality:**

1. All client records are securely stored under lock and key and are disposed of in a manner that assures security and confidentiality. Records are maintained for the number of years required by appropriate government regulatory statutes.
2. Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that documentation in records is accurate and reflects the services provided. Such documentation is intended to facilitate provisions of

- services later by other professionals, meet institutional requirements, ensure accuracy of billing and payments, and ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.
3. I recognize that confidentiality belongs to the client. I treat all communication from clients with professional confidence and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium. These precautions include awareness of the limited confidentiality guarantees of electronic communication.
  4. Accept in those situations where the identity of the client is necessary to the understanding of the case, I use only first names of our clients when engaged in supervision or consultation. It is my responsibility to convey the importance of confidentiality to the supervisor/consultant; this is particularly important when the supervision is shared by other professionals, as in a supervisory group.
  5. I do not disclose client confidences to anyone, except;
    - A. As mandated by law; to prevent a clear and immediate danger to someone.
    - B. In the course of a civil, criminal, or disciplinary action arising from the counseling where the pastoral counselor is the defendant.
    - C. For purposes of supervision or consultation.
    - D. By previously obtained written permission. In cases involving more than one person (as client), written permission must be obtained from all legally accountable persons who have been present during the counseling before any disclosure can be made.
  6. I disclose confidential information for appropriate reason only with valid written consent from the client or a person legally authorized to consent on behalf of a client. I obtain informed written consent of clients before audio and/or video tape recording or permitting third party observation of their session.
  7. I do not use these standards of confidentiality to avoid intervention when it is necessary, (e.g., when there is evidence of abuse of minors, the elderly, the disabled, and the physically or mentally incompetent).
  8. When current or former clients are referred to in publications or while teaching in a public presentation, their identity is thoroughly disguised.

### **Inter-Professional Relationships:**

1. I will not offer ongoing services to persons currently receiving treatment from another professional without prior knowledge of and in consultation with the other professional, with the clients' informed consent. Soliciting such clients is unethical.
2. I exercise care and inter-professional courtesy when approached for service by persons who claim or appear to have inappropriately terminated treatment with another professional.