



THE ASSOCIATION OF
COUNSELLING THERAPY
OF ALBERTA

CODE OF ETHICS DRAFT

College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta

November 7, 2019

Please Note: This is an ACTA draft document, and is endorsed by ACTA. This document does not have regulatory force at this time. While this document will be similar to the COE guidelines ultimately adopted by the College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta (CCTA), there may be some changes to the final document.

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Table of Contents

Preamble.....	3
Ethical Principles.....	4
Ethical Decision-Making Process.....	5
Responsibilities To Clients.....	7
Responsibilities to Public.....	9
Responsibilities to Profession.....	9
Responsibilities to Self.....	10

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Preamble

The Code of Ethics expresses the ethical principles and values of the College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta and serves as a guide to the professional conduct of all its registered members. It also informs the public of the standards of ethical conduct for which members are to be responsible and accountable.

Registered members of the College of Counselling Therapy, including Counselling Therapists (CT), Addiction Counsellors (AC), and Child and Youth Care Counsellors (CYCC), together hereinafter referred to as “Members”, are held to standards of this Code of Ethics. Members of the College have a responsibility to ensure that they are familiar with this Code of Ethics, to understand its application to their professional conduct, and to adhere to it at all times. The principles and responsibilities laid out in the Code of Ethics are not hierarchical and should not be considered in isolation from one another. Members of the College represent counselling professionals with diverse training, designations, certifications, and areas of practice. Members must abide by the College’s Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice; Any other guiding principles pertaining to their training, place of employment, and/or area of practice may assist them in making informed professional decisions.

The College of Counselling Therapy and its members respect the dignity and worth of the individual, and strive to protect, respect, and promote the rights and welfare of all those who receive services from members of the College. The Code of Ethics reflects such values as integrity, competence, responsibility and an understanding of and respect for the cultural diversity of society. Members see the client as the expert in their own experience, and provide client-centered care aimed at addressing the relevant psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, biological, and developmental needs of the clients and families they serve.

This Code of Ethics represents the commitment of Members to act ethically in the provision of professional services. Members are responsible to act in accordance with Common Law, Federal and Provincial Human Rights Legislation, the Alberta Mental Health Act, and the laws, regulations, and policies which are professionally relevant to their working environment. Members are accountable to both the public and their peers and are therefore subject to the complaints and disciplinary procedures of the College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta.

A Code of Ethics is a foundation of ethical practice, and an active process of ethical decision making is beneficial. Members are encouraged to maintain awareness of their own values and their implications for practice, and to see themselves as a growing, learning, and strengthening professionals with the capacity to make complex ethical decisions. Members are encouraged to use the section on ethical decision-making for guidance in resolving ethical dilemmas.

This Code of Ethics is a living document, which will be revised over time. College members and members of the public are invited to submit comments and suggestions at any time to the College.

Ethical Principles

Adapted from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) Draft Code of Ethics, September 2019

The expectations for ethical conduct as expressed in this Code are based on the following fundamental principles:

- a) Beneficence** - being proactive in promoting the client's best interests
- b) Fidelity** - honouring commitments to clients and maintaining integrity in counselling relationship
- c) Nonmaleficence** - not willfully harming clients and refraining from actions that risk harm
- d) Autonomy** - respecting the rights of clients to self-determination
- e) Justice** - respecting the dignity and just treatment of all persons
- f) Societal Interest** - respecting the need to be responsible to society

Ethical Decision-Making Process

Adapted from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) Draft Code of Ethics, September 2019.

This brief overview of approaches to the process of ethical decision-making provides counselling therapists with some direction when engaging in ethical discernment and making ethical decisions. Members are advised to consult the Ethics Committee, knowledgeable colleagues, or other ethics resources as needed.

1. Principle-Based Ethical Decision-Making

- Step One** — **What are the key ethical issues in this situation?**
- Step Two** — **What ethical articles from the College Code of Ethics are relevant to this situation? Which other regulations, standards or laws are applicable?**
- Step Three** — **Which of the six ethical principles are of major importance in this situation?** (This step also involves securing additional information, consulting with knowledgeable colleagues or the College Ethics Committee, and examining the probable outcomes of various courses of action.)
- Step Four** — **How can the relevant ethical articles be applied in this circumstance and any conflict between principles be resolved and what are the potential risks and benefits of this application and resolution?**
- Step Five** — **What do my feelings and intuitions tell me to do in this situation?** (Members may consider “**2. Virtue-Based Ethical Decision-Making**” at this point).
- Step Six** — **What plan of action will be most helpful to health and wellbeing of the client in this situation?**
- Step Seven** — **Apply ethical decision.**
- Step Eight** — **Evaluate the impact of the plan of action and identify necessary adjustments/address lingering effects.** This may include a review with Ethical Consultation (of the College/workplace) supervisors, and colleagues or other professionals such as lawyers.

Virtue-Based Ethical Decision-Making

The virtue ethics approach is based on the belief that Members are motivated to be virtuous and caring because they believe it is the right thing to do. Virtue ethics focuses on the Counselling Therapist, Addictions Counsellor, or Child and Youth Care Counsellor as an ethical agent with the capacity to make complex ethical decisions. Although there is no step-by-step methodology for virtue ethics, the following questions may help the professional in the process of virtue-based ethical decision-making:

1. What emotions and intuition am I aware of as I consider this ethical dilemma and what are these telling me to do?
2. How can my values best show caring for the client in this situation?
3. How will my decision affect other relevant individuals in this ethical dilemma?
4. What decision would I feel best about publicizing?
5. What decision would best define who I am as a person?

3. Quick Check

1. **Publicity** - Would I want this ethical decision announced on the front page of a major newspaper?
2. **Universality** - Would I make the same decision for everyone? If every Counselling Therapist, Addiction Counsellor, or Child and Youth Care Counsellor made this decision, would it be a good thing?
3. **Justice** - Is everyone being treated fairly by my decision?

A. Responsibility To Clients

- 1) Respect the worth and dignity of all clients.
- 2) Use language that conveys respect for the dignity of persons and peoples as much as possible in all spoken, written, electronic, or printed communication.
- 3) Respect the rights of all clients and do not refuse care or treatment to any client on the prohibited grounds of discrimination as specified in the Canadian Human Rights Act as well as on the grounds of social or health status.
- 4) Develop and maintain a therapeutic relationship with clients, respecting the boundaries and limits of such relationship.
- 5) Provide client-centered care aimed at addressing the relevant needs of the clients while considering the client's goals, abilities, health, development, culture, beliefs, values, preferences, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, environmental, and social context.
- 6) When delivering electronic services (telephone, teleconferencing, internet), members take adequate precautions to address confidentiality, security, informed consent, records and counselling plans.
- 7) Maintain records of professional services in sufficient detail to track the sequence and nature of professional services rendered and consistent with any legal, regulatory, agency, or institutional requirement.
- 8) Secure the safety of all records and create, maintain, transfer, and dispose of them in a manner compliant with the requirements of confidentiality, the Standards of Practice, and the Code of Ethics.
- 9) Respect the clients' right to access their counselling records.
- 10) Avoid dual relationships that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients.
- 11) Acknowledge and respect the power imbalance inherent in the therapeutic relationship and take necessary measures and care to keep clients free from undue influence or harm.
- 12) Honour clients' rights to self determination and collaborate with clients to improve, support, or maintain the client's health and wellbeing.

- 13) Act in the best interest of the client at all times. Take all reasonable steps to reduce harm within therapeutic environments and relationships including interactions between clients, group settings, and within client-counsellor relationships.
- 14) Protect the confidentiality of clients, their personal and health information, in all records, clinical, research, educational.
- 15) Communicate openly, honestly, clearly, and respectfully with clients at all times.
- 16) Maintain cultural and social sensitivity in the administration of evaluation and assessment instruments and procedures as well as the interpretation of data gathered during these processes.
- 17) Provide only therapeutic interventions and services that aim to benefit the client and are consistent with the client's abilities and circumstances.
- 18) Take reasonable steps to prevent harm to clients, and if harm is caused disclose this to the client and others as required.
- 19) Never abuse, coerce, or harass clients in any way, including sexual abuse or sexual harassment.
- 20) Refuse to perform any intervention or services which may cause harm to the client.
- 21) Practice the profession according to their own competency, limitations and fitness to practice referring clients to other professionals as necessary.
- 22) Practice collaboratively with colleagues, other health professionals, and agencies for the benefit of the client.
- 23) Respect the principles of ongoing informed consent, and provide accurate information including but not limited to, informing clients of the purposes, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks and benefits of services to be performed, in order for clients to make informed decision to consent or assent prior to initiation of a service/intervention.
- 24) Ensure that clients understand the service agreement, including the therapeutic interventions, fees and fee collection arrangements, record-keeping, and limits of confidentiality.
- 25) Respect and support clients' autonomy and right to decision-making relating to their health and wellness. Inform the client's decision to participate in services, or to refuse any recommended services along with the consequences or potential impacts of such participation and/or refusal.
- 26) Provide services in an ethical and accountable manner.

- 27) When supervising students or trainees, take responsibility for clarifying their respective roles, responsibilities, boundaries, and parameters of the supervision agreement.
- 28) When supervising students or trainees, ensure all professional responsibilities to the client are being met during the supervised practice period, and intervene, when necessary, to ensure that this obligation is met protecting the best interest of the client at all times.

B. Responsibility To The Public

- 1) Act transparently and with integrity in all professional and business practices maintaining public confidence in the profession.
- 2) Advocate within their capacity and context to address the broad determinants of health, improve standards of care, and reduce barriers to service access.
- 3) Promote ethical and fair access to resources and services.
- 4) Respect diversity and provide care and service that is both culturally sensitive and appropriate.
- 5) Assess the quality and impact of their services regularly.
- 6) Address incompetent, unsafe, illegal, or unethical practice of any professional service provider and report conduct that puts the client at risk to the appropriate authority/ies.
- 7) Accept responsibility for understanding and acting consistently to comply with the principles, practice standards, laws, and regulations for which they are accountable.
- 8) Clearly and accurately depict their experience, training, credentials, and clinical specializations and avoid any wording or phrasing that could be misleading to the public regarding their experience, training, credentials and clinical specializations.

C. Responsibility To The Profession

- 1) Commit to enhancing the reputation and standing of the profession.
- 2) Respect the worth and dignity of other professionals and members of the public, valuing their opinions, diversity, and perspectives.

- 3) Never harass, abuse or discriminate against colleagues, employees, students, research participants, and members of the public.
- 4) Provide feedback and constructive learning opportunities in a respectful and collaborative manner.
- 5) Maintain and utilize current evidence-informed and best practices in the delivery of professional services, research, teaching, and supervision.
- 6) Contribute to the development of the profession through support of research, mentoring, student supervision, and sharing diverse practices with other professionals.
- 7) When being educators, trainers and/or supervisors of the profession, adhere to current College guidelines and standards with respect to such activities and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- 8) When conducting research, follow ethical practices in conducting research, including obtaining approval from the appropriate ethics boards.
- 9) When conducting research, protect the confidentiality of persons who participate in their research activities, and maintain their privacy and confidentiality, unless the participant provides permission to use their name or identity in compliance with confidentiality agreements.
- 10) Communicate research findings with unbiased, accurate information and transparency of the research process including any variables and conditions that might affect the outcome of the research or the interpretation of the results with enough information provided sufficient for others who might wish to replicate the research.
- 11) Engage in ongoing development and maintenance of their ethical sensitivity and commitment, ethical knowledge, and ethical decision-making skills.
- 12) Assess and discuss ethical issues and practices with colleagues and appropriate others on a regular basis.

D. Responsibility To Self

- 1) Recognize limitations, assess learning needs, and pursue life-long continuing education, supervision, or consultation to maintain current knowledge and enhance professional competencies.

- 2) Recognize the potential risks of the profession on their own emotional, mental, spiritual, physical well-being and engage in practices of self-care, counselling and/or personal wellness to mitigate these risks.
- 3) Take responsibility for their own physical and mental health maintaining their fitness to practice.
- 4) Inform the appropriate authority and seek support in the event of becoming unable to practice safely, competently and/or ethically.
- 5) Receive feedback openly, engage in constructive learning opportunities, and reflect honestly.
- 6) Take responsibility for their actions.
- 7) Act with humility and seek to promote dignity in their interactions.

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