



Code of Ethics

PREAMBLE:

This Code of Ethics (“Code”) outlines the ethical principles and values that guide all members of the Global Association of Certified Pastoral Counselors (“GACPC”), and which informs the public of the standards of ethical conduct for which GACPC members are to be responsible and accountable. It supports the goals and mission of GACPC and its members.

This Code reflects such values as Godliness, integrity, competence, responsibility, and an understanding of and respect for the cultural diversity of society. It is part of a social contract, based on attitudes of mutual respect and trust by which the public supports the autonomy of the profession, and in response, is assured of the commitment of GACPC members to act ethically in the provision of professional services.

This Code is based upon 6 key ethical foundations:

1. **Nonmaleficence – do no harm** (intentional/unintentional; psychological/physical)
2. **Beneficence – act to benefit others** (obligation to make a positive contribution to another’s welfare)
3. **Autonomy – respect choice** (freedom to choose; right to privacy/confidentiality/informed consent)
4. **Justice – promote the fair treatment of all persons**
5. **Fidelity – faithfulness** (keep promises; be loyal and truthful)
6. **Societal Interest – respecting the need to be responsible to society**

These six key ethical foundations are reflected in the following five principles.

Principle 1: Respectful Relationships

Principle 2: Professional Practice

Principle 3: Excellence in Supervisory Relationships & Counseling Education

Principle 4: Integrity in Research

Principle 5: Responsibility to the Public and to Society

All GACPC members are responsible to be familiar with this Code and its application to everyday conduct, counseling practice, and in the resolution of ethical dilemmas. Members should endeavour to adhere to the underlying principles and values of this Code, as well as to the relevant laws, regulations, and policies which are applicable to the Christian Counseling profession.

Ethical dilemmas may arise in Counseling practice. The Christian Counselor is responsible to correctly apply the pertinent Code item as a guiding principle for decision-making. In such matters, the Christian Counselor should prayerfully utilize an accepted Ethical Decision-making Model approach.



The following basic steps aid in the approaches to Ethical Decision-making:

1. Identification of ethically relevant issues and facts, including pertinent items from this Code.
2. Identification of which of the six ethical foundations (above) are applicable in the given situation.
3. Development of various courses of action. Analyses of likely short-term, ongoing, and long-term risks and benefits of each course of action on the individual(s) / group(s) involved or likely to be affected (e.g. client, client's family, employees, employing institution, students, research participants, colleagues, the profession, society, self).
4. Choice of course of action after conscientious application of existing principles, values and standards. (This may involve consultation with colleagues, Ethics Committee, etc)
5. Action, with a commitment to assume responsibility for the consequences of the action.
6. Evaluation of the results of the course of action.
7. Assuming responsibility for the consequences of the action includes correction of negative consequences, if any, or re-engagement in the decision-making process if the ethical issue is not resolved.

This Code is not a static document but will need revisions over time because of the continuing development of ethical knowledge and the emergence of consensus on challenging ethical issues.



Principle 1: Respectful Relationships

1.1 Counselors seek to maintain high standards of competence and ethical behaviour, continuing education, and Godly self-care.

1.1.1 Counselors comply with the relevant laws, regulations, and policies which are applicable to the Counseling profession.

1.2 **Integrity:** Counselors seek to represent the profession in a respectful manner with integrity, accepting responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

1.2.1 Counselors participate in only those practices which are respectful of the legal, civic, and moral rights of others, and act to safeguard the dignity and rights of their clients, students, employees, and research participants.

1.3 Counselors accurately represent qualifications, education, experience, competence, and affiliations, in all forms of communication including advertising. If the Counselor becomes aware of misinterpretation of the above, the Counselor shall immediately clarify any misunderstanding, and shall correct any inaccuracies in all forms of communications.

1.3.1 Counselors demonstrate academic integrity related to documents, writings, and other works, including adhering to all applicable copyright laws.

1.4 **Relationships with clients:** Counselors promote the welfare of the client by respecting the client's God-given dignity, knowledge, insight, and experience.

1.5 Counselors abstain from all forms of harassment.

1.6 Counselors abstain from forming romantic relationships and from all sexual intimacy with current clients, spouses and/or partners, or family of these clients.

1.7 Counselors refrain from beginning any type of romantic and/or sexual relationship with former clients, spouses and/or partners, or family of these clients for a minimum of 3 years following termination of the Counseling relationship or last professional contact.

1.8 **Dual relationships:** Counselors avoid Dual Relationships (e.g., with students, supervisees, or clients) which could present a conflict of interest or which might impair the Counselor's professional ability to be objective and unbiased in the Counseling relationship.



- 1.8.1 Should actual or potential conflicts of interest arise, the Counselor shall inform all parties of the need to resolve the situation in a manner that is consistent with Principle 1 and Principle 2. The Counselor should take all reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a timely manner.
- 1.9 Counselors participate in only those practices which are respectful of the legal and Scripturally- focused rights of others, and act to safeguard the dignity and rights of their clients, students, and research participants.
- 1.10 Counselors do not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination
- 1.11 **Informed Consent:** Counselors obtain written Informed Consent from all independent and partially dependent persons [age & mental status] for any Counseling services provided to them except in circumstances of urgent need (e.g., suicidal gesture). In such circumstances, Counselors would proceed with the individual's verbal agreement, but fully informed consent would be obtained as soon as possible.
- 1.11.1 Counselors take all reasonable steps to ensure that consent is not sought or given under conditions of coercion or undue pressure.
- 1.11.2 Counselors act upon Informed Consent from those persons who are legally responsible or appointed to give informed consent on behalf of individuals who are not competent to consent on their own behalf.
- 1.11.3 Counselors seek willing and adequately informed participation from any person of diminished capacity to give informed consent, and proceed without the assent only if the service is considered to be of direct benefit to that person.
- 1.11.4 Counselors clearly describe their policies concerning the Counseling relationship (for example confidentiality, missed sessions, fee structure) as part of the process of obtaining Informed Consent.
- 1.12 **Termination of Counseling Relationship:** Counselors respect the right of individuals to terminate the Counseling relationship at any time.
- 1.12.1 Counselors will thoughtfully determine when to discontinue therapeutic relationships, and will discuss this with the client, and provide appropriate referrals.
- 1.13 Counselors abide by principles of procedural fairness for employment, evaluation, adjudications, editorial, and peer review activities.



- 1.14 **Collection & Storage of Information:** Counselors collect and record only information that is germane to the purpose(s) for which consent has been obtained.
- 1.14.1 Counselors store, handle, transfer, and dispose of all records, both written and electronic media, in a secure and reasonable manner. This includes reasonable use of password protection for individual files and the physical security of computers and portable electronic devices.
 - 1.14.2 Records shall be stored in compliance with applicable legal requirements of each jurisdiction, with Counselors being responsible for familiarizing themselves with such applicable legal requirements.
- 1.15 **Confidentiality:** Counselors respect the right of employees, supervisees, students, or Counselor interns to reasonable personal privacy.
- 1.16 Counselors clarify with clients what measures will be taken to protect confidentiality, and clarify the limits to confidentiality.
- 1.17 Counselors share confidential information with others only with the informed consent of the client(s), or in a manner whereby the individuals involved cannot be identified, except as required or justified by law, or in circumstances of preventing actual or possible serious physical harm or death.
- 1.18 Counselors exercise discretion in their use of social media forums, respecting professional boundaries and avoiding harmful dual relationship, respecting issues of safety and confidentiality.



Principle 2: Professional Practice

- 2.1 Counselors make every reasonable effort to ensure that they do not engage in the exploitation of clients, supervisees, students, employees, colleagues, or research participants.
- 2.2 **Professional Competence:** Counselors limit their Counseling services and practices to those which are within their professional competence by virtue of their education and professional experience, and consistent with any requirements for international, provincial and national credentials.
 - 2.2.1 If it becomes apparent that the client's problems are beyond the Counselor's competence, Counselors take immediate steps to obtain consultation or to refer the client to an appropriate professional, whichever is more likely to result in providing the client with competent service. Counselors continue to provide care until the referral process is complete.
- 2.3 Counselors may, at times, collaborate with other service partners in providing care to clients. Written authorization should be obtained from the client prior to releasing any information to the other service partners.
- 2.4 Counselors participate in lifelong learning, through continuing education, reading, peer consultation, etc. to maintain and enhance competence in Counseling Practice.
- 2.5 Counselors regularly evaluate their own Counseling knowledge, skills and abilities, to assess their fitness to practice and determine their learning needs. As needed, the Counselor will seek appropriate assistance for personal issues that could impair practice.
- 2.6 Counselors engage in self-care activities that will maintain and enhance Counseling competence.
- 2.7 Counselors utilize effective ongoing assessment skills to provide a therapeutic basis for care.
- 2.8 **Duty to Warn/Protect:** Counselors have a duty to warn and duty to protect potential victims of bodily harm when they have been advised of this potential by clients.
- 2.9 **Unethical Conduct:** Counselors have a responsibility to address alleged unethical conduct of another GACPC member with that member. If unresolved, the Counselor has a duty to report to GACPC and the appropriate professional regulatory body (if applicable) any alleged unethical conduct of a member of that body. Counselors must adhere to the relevant laws, regulations, and policies which are applicable to the Counseling profession.



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- 2.10 Counselors shall not condone, and shall not participate in, misleading, illegal, or dangerous behaviour by others.
- 2.11 Counselors acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the various Counseling theories and treatment options, and communicate these to clients as needed.
- 2.12 Counselors clearly communicate results of assessments, evaluations, etc. to clients, as needed, and provide answers to their questions.
- 2.13 Counselors honor all commitments to clients, unless unexpected circumstances (e.g., illness) occur. If these do occur, the Counselor will make a full explanation to the client.
- 2.14 **Financial Integrity:** Counselors practice financial integrity in all matters pertaining to their practice, including accurate record-keeping, billing procedures, missed appointment protocols, provision of resources for purchase, etc.
- 2.15 **Therapy via Electronic Means:** Counselors follow all ethical guidelines when providing therapy via electronic means including, but not limited to using the telephone and internet. Counselors comply with the requirements to provide such services within regulatory jurisdictions and liability insurance coverage.
- 2.15.1 Before therapy is provided via electronic means, Counselors ensure that: (a) client and Counselor identities are verified; (b) the client is capable of using the computer application; (c) the computer application is appropriate to the needs of the client; (d) the client understands the purpose and operation of client-assisted and/or self-help computer applications; and (e) reasonable best efforts have been taken to insure that the particular electronic means utilized are secure so as to at all times maintain the confidentiality of all communications between the client and the Counselor.
- 2.16 **Gifts:** The exchange of gifts between Counselors and their clients are discouraged. However, if gifts are exchanged, they should not be anything beyond a token value or which could be seen as impairing the integrity or efficacy of the therapeutic relationship.
- 2.17 Counselors refrain from engaging in a bartering relationship with clients (i.e. exchanging Counseling services in exchange for plumbing repairs), especially where this could impair the efficacy of the therapeutic relationship or create harmful dual relationship.



Principle 3: Excellence in Supervisory Relationships & Counseling Education

- 3.1 Counselors avoid exploitation of any individual who is in a dependent relationship to the Counselor (e.g., student, employee, supervisee).
- 3.2 **Relational Boundaries:** Counselors who work with students and/or supervisees establish clearly defined relationships such that appropriate relational boundaries are clarified and maintained, and dual relationships are avoided.
- 3.3 Counselors who are in a supervisory position (e.g. with students, supervisees, employees, etc) maintain confidentiality of those individuals, except as required or justified by law.
- 3.4 Counselors assume overall responsibility for the professional activities of their assistants, students, supervisees, and employees.
 - 3.4.1 Counselors facilitate the professional development of their students, trainees, employees, and supervisees.
 - 3.4.2 Counselors provide for supportive working conditions, timely evaluations, collaborative consultation, and optimal learning opportunities.
 - 3.4.3 Counselors discuss and reinforce ethical responsibilities and confidentiality obligations with assistants, students, etc.
- 3.5 Counselors perform their teaching duties with careful preparation, so that the instruction is current, Biblically sound, and scholarly.
- 3.6 Counselors make no attempt to conceal the status of a student and/or supervisee.
- 3.7 Counselors exercise discretion in their use of social media forums, respecting professional boundaries and avoiding harmful dual relationship.
- 3.8 Counselors abstain from forming romantic relationships and from all sexual intimacy with current students and/or supervisees.
- 3.9 Counselors refrain from beginning any type of romantic and/or sexual relationship with former students and/or supervisees for a minimum of 3 years following termination of the professional relationship.
- 3.10 Counselors who are responsible for Counselor education, training, and supervision refer to other professionals when necessary to avoid Counseling those for whom they exercise administrative or evaluative responsibility.



Principle 4: Integrity in Research

- 4.1 Counselors only participate in those research projects that meet relevant ethical principles and standards of professional practice. Such research must comply with federal and provincial laws, institutional regulations, and standards governing the conduct of research with human participants.
 - 4.1.1 Counselors who are conducting research seek to meet the requirements of institutional ethical review board standards.
- 4.2 Counselors conduct research with honest, open inquiry. Research aims; sponsorship, or financial interests that may affect or appear to affect the research are clearly identified and communicated.
 - 4.2.1 Counselors follow accepted guidelines for research methodology.
- 4.3 Counselors will protect the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of participants during the conducting of the research study.
- 4.4 **Informed Consent:** Counselors ensure that all research participants are provided with clear descriptions about the research project, and are required to give informed consent.
 - 4.4.1 Counselors ensure that research participants are informed that they may ask questions and/or discontinue participation at any time.
 - 4.4.2 Counselors do not proceed with any research activity, if consent is given under any condition of coercion or undue pressure.
 - 4.4.3 Counselors seek an independent and full ethical review of human rights issues and protections for any research involving vulnerable groups and/or persons of diminished capacity to give consent, before making a decision to proceed.
- 4.5 Counselors do not engage in deception in research or the use of techniques which might be interpreted as deception in research or service activities.



Principle 5: Responsibility to the Public and to Society

- 5.1 When making statements which could be considered Counseling therapy or when involved in public activities, Counselors make clear whether they are acting as private citizens, as members of specific organizations or groups, or as representatives of the profession of Christian Counseling.
- 5.2 Counselors seek to contribute to the profession of Christian Counseling and to society's understanding of itself and human beings generally, through a free pursuit and sharing of knowledge, unless such activity conflicts with other basic ethical or biblical principles.
 - 5.2.1 Counselors participate in the process of critical assessment of the profession's place in society and contribute to the development of procedures which help the discipline to contribute to beneficial societal functioning.
- 5.3 **Continued Professional Growth:** Counselors strive to keep informed of progress in their area(s) of Counseling activity, take this progress into account in their work, and try to make their own contributions to this progress.
 - 5.3.1 Counselors seek to keep well-informed, through relevant reading, peer consultation and continuing education.
- 5.4 Counselors participate and contribute to continuing education and the professional and scientific growth of self and colleagues.
 - 5.4.1 Counselors assist in the development of those who enter the profession of Christian Counseling by helping them to acquire a full understanding of the ethics, responsibilities, and needed competencies of their chosen area(s), including an understanding of critical analysis and of the variations, uses, and possible misuses of the discipline.
 - 5.4.2 Counselors engage in regular monitoring, assessment, and reporting (e.g. through peer review, and in program reviews, case management reviews, and reports of one's own research) of their ethical practices and safeguards.
 - 5.4.3 Counselors promote Counseling practice accountability for self and others.
- 5.5 Counselors uphold the profession's responsibility to the public and to society at large by promoting and maintaining the highest standards of the profession.
- 5.6 Counselors, when able, contribute to the general welfare of society (e.g., improving accessibility of services) and/or the general welfare of their profession by offering a portion of their time to work for which they receive little or no financial return.



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- 5.7 Counselors only enter into agreements or contracts which allow them to act in accordance with the ethical principles and standards of this Code.
- 5.8 **Cultural Diversity:** Counselors acquire an informed knowledge of the culture, social structure, and customs of a community before beginning Counseling work there.
- 5.8.1 Counselors convey respect for prevailing community mores, social customs, and cultural expectations in all professional activities, provided that this does not contravene respect for the dignity of persons, responsible caring, integrity in relationships, and biblical guidelines and this Code.
- 5.8.2 Counselors abide by the laws of the jurisdiction in which they work. If those laws conflict with the ethical and biblical principles, Christian Counselors would do whatever they could to uphold the ethical and biblical principles. If upholding the ethical and biblical principles could result in serious personal consequences, a decision for final action would be considered a matter of personal conscience within the boundaries of this Code of Ethics.
- 5.9 If faced with an apparent conflict between keeping a law and following an ethical and/or biblical principle, Counselors should consult with colleagues, and seek guidance as to the most ethical and responsible course of action.
- 5.10 Counselors exercise particular care when reporting the results of any work regarding vulnerable individuals and/or groups.
- 5.11 Counselors assume overall responsibility for the professional activities of their assistants, students, supervisees, and employees with regard to the Principle of Responsibility to Society, all of whom incur similar obligations.