Division of Counselling Psychology

Professional Practice Guidelines
Introduction

These Guidelines for Professional Practice in Counselling Psychology are supplementary to the Society’s Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines, which sets a minimum standard below which behaviour should not fall. Breaches of the Society’s Code, when identified, may be subject to disciplinary procedures. The Guidelines set out below, in contrast, seek to identify what counselling psychologists are expected to do in pursuit of best practice.

The Guidelines offer general principles; their implementation is intended to assist and clarify the judgements of individual practitioners subject to their particular circumstances. Actions and practices which are contrary to the recommendations warrant serious and careful consideration in consultation with supervisors. Mention or lack of mention in the guidelines of a particular act or omission shall not be taken as conclusive on any question of professional conduct. It is the responsibility of Counselling Psychologists to be familiar with Society publications on matters of ethics and conduct.

These Guidelines are the result of consulting many practitioners, the Guidelines of other divisions, particularly those of the Division of Clinical Psychology and the codes of Ethics and Practice of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. They are to be considered as part of an evolutionary process which constitutes the continuing professional development of the Division. They constitute a working document that is subject to review and up-date in the light of experience and change, from within the discipline and the context of current practice. Suggestions and comments from members are warmly welcomed. These should be directed to: The Division Committee, Division of Counselling Psychology.

These guidelines should be read alongside other guidelines and documents issued by the Division of Counselling Psychology, such as its Guidelines on Confidentiality and Record Keeping.

Counselling psychology: A definition

Counselling psychology has developed as a branch of professional psychological practice strongly influenced by human science research as well as the principal psychotherapeutic traditions. Counselling psychology draws upon and seeks to develop phenomenological models of practice and enquiry in addition to that of traditional scientific psychology. It continues to develop models of practice and research which marry the scientific demand for rigorous empirical enquiry with a firm value base grounded in the primacy of the counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship. These models seek:

1. to engage with subjectivity and intersubjectivity, values and beliefs;
2. to know empathically and to respect first person accounts as valid in their own terms; to elucidate, interpret and negotiate between perceptions and
world views but not to assume the automatic superiority of any one way of experiencing, feeling, valuing and knowing;
3. to be practice led, with a research base grounded in professional practice values as well as professional artistry;
4. to recognise social contexts and discrimination and to work always in ways that empower rather than control and also demonstrate the high standards of anti-discriminatory practice appropriate to the pluralistic nature of society today.

Structure and applicability of the guidelines
The Guidelines for Professional Practice in Counselling Psychology are set out as follows:

The practitioner’s responsibilities and obligations:
1. to self and to clients;
2. to self and to colleagues;
3. to self and to society.

In the context of these guidelines, ‘practitioner’ means all members of the Division of Counselling Psychology engaged in the practice of counselling psychology in any of its forms.

It is the responsibility of all Counselling Psychologists to encourage and develop the philosophy of Counselling Psychology.
1. Practitioners' obligations and responsibilities to self and to clients

1.1 Competence
Following section 2 of the Society's Code, practitioners will offer their best practice while recognising their current limitations in terms of training and ability and not practise beyond them. They will continue throughout their careers to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills by undertaking and recording continuing professional development, including keeping abreast of the literature, broadening professional and personal experience, consulting with colleagues, participating in workshops, courses and conferences as well as regularly reviewing their own needs and performance. The supervision relationship (see Section 2.1 below) is a key element in this process.

Accredited (chartered) practitioners will ensure that they are in possession of a current practising certificate irrespective of the amount or context of their practice.

Practitioners will ensure that they accurately represent their current level of training and competence.

1.2 Fitness to practise
Practitioners will:

- continually monitor and maintain an effective level of personal functioning; i.e. should a practitioner feel unable to work effectively, he or she will seek advice from the supervisor or professional consultant. If necessary, the practitioner will withdraw for a time period considered appropriate;
- respond to concerns about the fitness of a colleague to practise safely. In order to safeguard both the client and the profession, they have a duty to discuss their concerns with their colleague or to share their concern with a senior colleague so that safe practice is maintained. The safety of the client is paramount;
- ensure that they hold adequate, professional indemnity insurance and maintain their personal safety;
- always seek to support clients' control over their lives and their ability to make appropriate decisions;
- be mindful of the power dynamics of the professional/client relationship;
- respect the diversity of beliefs and values held within society and will continually review their practice with due regard to changing societal norms;
- respect clients' autonomy.

In view of the personal and often intense nature of the therapeutic relationship, practitioners must actively avoid any exploitation of their clients financially, sexually, emotionally or in any other way.
Special regard will be paid to the Society’s statement (in the *Code of Conduct*) on Sexual Harassment and Dual Relationships. With respect to the latter, therapeutic relationships expressly preclude sexual relationships and all boundary issues will be carefully considered. Any concerns must be discussed with the supervisor as a matter of urgency. It is the practitioner’s responsibility to define and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries.

Regardless of the theoretical orientation or approach adopted, practitioners will always endeavour to gain clients’ agreement to engage in their counselling psychology practice. (See also the discussion of informed consent in the Division of Counselling Psychology’s *Guidelines on Confidentiality and Record Keeping*).

### 1.3 Contracting

Practitioners will:

- be responsible for making clear and explicit contracts;
- inform clients of any financial liabilities before they are incurred;
- inform clients of issues of confidentiality, including those pertaining to record keeping, supervision, research and continuing professional development, during the contracting process.

Contracts must be subject to regular review.

### 1.4 Confidentiality

*For further detailed information refer to the Division of Counselling Psychology’s Guidelines on Confidentiality and Record Keeping.*

Rigorous respect for issues of confidentiality is fundamental to the ethical practice of counselling psychology. Practitioners will clarify and explain the nature and extent of confidentiality from the start of the contract. All circumstances in which confidentiality may be breached will be identified.

Client records must be held securely at all times. The nature and purpose of records kept and the client’s rights of access will be made clear at the outset of the contract. Practitioners will make provision for appropriate access to records and appropriate notification of clients in the event of their own death or incapacity.

Agreements about confidentiality will continue after a client’s death unless legal or ethical considerations demand otherwise.

### 1.5 Confidentiality in the legal process

It is a fundamental responsibility of the practitioner to be aware of the specific legal implications of their work, including the general legal requirements concerning the giving and withholding of information, and the obligation to seek professional support and guidance when necessary.

The practitioner will establish channels for discussing legal issues with appropriately qualified people, in advance of the specific need.
2. Practitioners' responsibilities and obligations to self and to colleagues

2.1 Supervision and consultative support
Supervision support is a contractually negotiated relationship between practitioners for the purpose of supporting, evaluating and developing professional practice.

Supervision is designed to offer multi-level support in an atmosphere of integrity and openness for the purpose of enhancing reflective skills, maximising the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions, informing ethical decisions and facilitating an understanding of the use of self.

Additional consultative support must be sought when the counselling psychologist has concerns about professional practice. This will be in addition to, but not in place of, regular supervisory support. Consultation may be used to enhance or improve the work of the practitioner with clients or colleagues.

There is an ethical requirement for every practitioner to have regular supervision support from a chartered counselling psychologist, or where more appropriate, from another suitably accredited or experienced supervisor.

The supervisory contract will be clearly defined, confidential and proportional to the volume of work and the experience of the supervisee. The basic requirement for individual supervision is 1.5 hours per month for a minimal caseload, increasing proportionally with the case load.

It is of paramount importance that the supervisory relationship is clearly distinguished and kept separate from any line-management or other responsibilities, duties, or tasks.

The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee will be characterised by mutual respect for competence and differing values, non-exploitation and good modelling.

The supervisee’s rights and responsibilities in relation to the supervisor will be similarly negotiated and defined.

Whenever a conflict of interest, a question of ethical priority or a legal issue arises, supervisees will consult with supervisors.

The responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee to the client is paramount. However, responsibilities to others, for example managers, colleagues and trainers, are also to be carefully considered in any decision process.

2.2 Roles, responsibilities and competence of supervision
The supervisor must ensure he or she is sufficiently experienced, competent and appropriately trained to provide supervision.

The supervisor’s role and responsibilities to the supervisee will be clearly negotiated and defined, particularly with respect to monitoring, maintaining and extending levels of effectiveness.
2.3 The practitioner as trainer

*For more detailed information on the responsibilities of practitioners who act as trainers on British Psychological Society accredited courses or as coordinators of training, refer to current documentation from the Society’s Board of Examiners, Training Committee for Counselling Psychology and Membership and Professional Training Board.*

The trainer is responsible for the maintenance of adequate standards in the application of psychological principles and ethics, especially in promoting the welfare and rights of clients and in preserving the confidentiality of their case material.

The trainer is responsible for accurately representing levels of training offered and for maintaining standards.

Levels of authority and legal responsibility will be clearly communicated by the trainer. Complaints and disciplinary procedures will be made available to trainees.

2.4 Boundaries and dual relationships in supervision and training

As in therapeutic relationships, the personal and often intense nature of the supervision and training relationship requires practitioners to be especially sensitive to boundary issues and particularly careful in the area of dual relationships. Sexual relationships are precluded. Trainers and supervisors will not enter into therapeutic contracts with current and former trainees and supervisees. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries and to make complaints procedures available to trainees and supervisees.

2.5 The practitioner as researcher

It is expected that there will be congruence between the model of research chosen and the values expressed in counselling psychology. Research will be designed and conducted in the spirit of the ways of working emphasised in counselling psychology.

The individual’s right to full information about the nature and value of research will be respected. Participants must be able to give free, informed consent and to withdraw or withhold data without prejudice to their care.

When personally sensitive information is disclosed, the practitioner has a responsibility to ensure that support and aftercare be made available to the participants. Similarly, debriefing and support should be provided for all participants when the research topic is of a potentially distressing nature.

Practitioners have a responsibility to make their research available to other professionals and the wider world.
3. Practitioners' responsibilities and obligations to self and society

Practitioners must consider:
- the context in which they work and the impact such a context is likely to have on the client's therapeutic experience;
- all contexts that might affect a client's experience and incorporate it into the assessment process, formulation and planned intervention.

Practitioners will:
- be reflective about their practice and that of Counselling Psychology as a profession.
- make themselves knowledgeable about the diverse life experiences of the clients they work with.
- challenge the views of people who pathologise on the basis of such aspects as sexual orientation, disability, class origin or racial identity and religious and spiritual views.

Counselling psychologists will consider at all times their responsibilities to the wider world. They will be attentive to life experience, modes of inquiry and areas of knowledge beyond the immediate environs of counselling psychology and seek to draw on this knowledge to aid communication or understanding within and outside of their work.
4. Further reading


(All British Psychological Society documents are available via the Society’s office or its website: www.bps.org.uk)

*Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2002). Rugby: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

(Also available on the BACP website: www.bacp.co.uk)

These Guidelines

In recognising the development of the Division of Counselling Psychology and changes in legislation, the guidelines contained in this document will be subject to a process of regular amendment and updating.

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The British Psychological Society was founded in 1901 and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1965. Its principle object is to promote the advancement and diffusion of a knowledge of psychology pure and applied and especially to promote the efficiency and usefulness of Members of the Society by setting up a high standard of professional education and knowledge.

The Society has more than 42,000 members and:

- has branches in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- accredits around 800 undergraduate degrees;
- accredits over 150 postgraduate professional training courses;
- confers Fellowships for distinguished achievements;
- confers Chartered status for professionally qualified psychologists;
- awards grants to support research and scholarship;
- publishes 10 scientific journals and also jointly publishes Evidence Based Mental Health with the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Psychiatrists;
- publishes books in partnership with Blackwells;
- publishes The Psychologist each month;
- supports the recruitment of psychologists through the Appointments Memorandum and www.appmemo.co.uk;
- provides a free ‘Research Digest’ by e-mail;
- publishes newsletters for its constituent groups;
- maintains a website (www.bps.org.uk);
- has international links with psychological societies and associations throughout the world;
- provides a service for the news media and the public;
- has an Ethics Committee and provides service to the Professional Conduct Board;
- maintains a Register of more than 12,000 Chartered Psychologists;
- prepares policy statements and responses to government consultations;
- holds conferences, workshops, continuing professional development and training events;
- recognises distinguished contributions to psychological science and practice through individual awards and honours.

The Society continues to work to enhance:

- recruitment – the target is 50,000 members by 2006;
- services – the Society has offices in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- public understanding of psychology – addressed by regular media activity and outreach events;
- influence on public policy – through the work of its Boards and Parliamentary Officer;
- membership activities – to fully utilise the strengths and diversity of the Society membership.

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