

BC ASSOCIATION



**of CLINICAL
COUNSELLORS**

CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

Effective November 1, 2023





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Commitment to Ethical Conduct Page 3

Using the Code of Ethical Conduct Page 4

Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of all Persons Page 6

Principle II: Respect for the Dignity of all Peoples Page 8

Principle III: Responsible Caring Page 10

Principle IV: Integrity in Relationships Page 11

Principle V: Responsibility to Society Page 12

Commitment to Ethical Conduct

As members of the BCACC, Registered Clinical Counsellors (RCCs) commit that they:

1. Adhere to the Code of Ethical Conduct, Standards of Clinical Practice, and appropriate application of guidelines.
2. Assess the ethical aspects of their practices on an on-going basis.
3. Discuss ethical issues with supervisors and colleagues.
4. Bring new ethical issues and questions to the attention of the BCACC.
5. Address perceived unethical behaviour of colleagues in an appropriate manner, which, where appropriate, emphasizes remedial clarification and education.
6. Accept and consider feedback with respect to their own actions and perceived unethical behaviour, taking steps to resolve the situation.
7. Cooperate with duly constituted BCACC committees that are concerned with ethics or ethical conduct.
8. Uphold the dignity and reputation of clinical counselling and psychotherapy.

USING THE CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

In navigating difficult ethical issues, going through a careful process such as the one contained in the *Guideline for Ethical Decision Making* is normally appropriate.

Explanation of Principles

The Code of Ethical Conduct is based upon five fundamental ethical principles.

- **Principle I:** Respect for the Dignity of All Persons
- **Principle II:** Respect for the Dignity of all Peoples
- **Principle III:** Responsible Caring
- **Principle IV:** Integrity in Relationships
- **Principle V:** Responsibility to Society

These principles are intended to reflect a general, commonly understood, and universal moral framework. They are expected practice for all Registered Clinical Counsellors (RCC) and Approved Clinical Supervisors (RCC-ACS), though the behavioural applications of these principles may vary somewhat in the context of different individual, relational, familial, and cultural beliefs and expectations. Regardless of context, practices that cause harm to persons and peoples are unacceptable.

When Principles Conflict

The five fundamental principles should always be considered in consistent ethical decision making. However, occasions will arise where the principles conflict. A mandated order of importance is impossible given the complex nature of most ethical issues. As a general guide:

Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of All Persons should be given the highest weight unless there is a clear and imminent danger to the physical safety of any person. Clients or patients are to have access to unencumbered respect for their dignity as a person served in clinical counselling.

Principle II: Respect for the Dignity of All Peoples should be given the second highest weight so as not to obstruct or contravene the dignity of the individual, relationship, family or group being served.

Principle III: Responsible Caring generally has the third highest weight and should be carried out in ways that respect the dignity of persons and peoples.

Principle IV: Integrity in Relationships will be of fourth priority if it clearly conflicts with the first three principles.

Principle V: Responsibility to Society should, if it conflicts with the other principles, generally be given the lowest priority. Placing Responsibility to Society as less important in priority than the respect for the individual and individual rights reflects a Euro-North American entrenched value that is not universally held by all societies. Normally communities and societies in British Columbia will hold similar values to Principles I to IV, and consequently, ways may be respectfully negotiated that do not place the collective good of the society in conflict with respect and caring for individuals. In respecting a diversity of cultural beliefs, it is important not to endorse practices that clearly harm individuals in those cultures, or that violate Canadian law.

PRINCIPLE I RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF ALL PERSONS

Respect for the dignity of persons provides a foundation for many other ethical principles. It recognizes the unique worth of all individual human beings. It also recognizes that, though factors of experience may be shared, individual human beings experience those distinctly and likewise respond uniquely and distinctly. Respect for the individual's unique experience of their world underpins all psychotherapeutic approaches and practices. From this emerges the client's unique growth and development.

A. Commitment

- 1) RCCs uphold individual human rights and the inherent dignity of all human beings by practicing:
 - a) a psychotherapeutic approach to informed consent, and
 - b) respect for individual clients and their experiences.
- 2) RCCs deliver safe psychotherapeutic care and knowledge that supports the individual's unique psychological growth.

B. Respect for Clients

- 1) RCCs provide psychotherapy to clients as individuals, relationships, families and groups. They adhere to a deep respect for the dignity, expression and rights of each of those client subtypes.
- 2) RCCs demonstrate respect for clients through:
 - a) the assumption of responsibility for professional activities,
 - b) attention to client best interests promoting the greatest degree of self-realization,
 - c) the protection of client privacy and confidentiality, and
 - d) respect for chosen customs and beliefs.

3) RCCs practice with:

a) ongoing informed consent for services and actions affecting a client,

b) respect for their wishes to involve others in the client's decision-making, and

c) the utmost integrity in conducting assessments and rendering professional opinions that may affect their legal or civil rights.

4) RCCs take appropriate action to address differences in values and beliefs with client(s) that impact the RCC's ability to be unbiased and/or the client(s)' therapeutic outcomes through truthful communication and referral.

5) RCCs orient their course of care around the client's emerging choices and reflections during the course of care.

6) RCCs harmonize their professional insight with the client's self-determination and chosen areas of growth to demonstrate this respect for persons.

C. Respect for Others

1) RCCs demonstrate respect for others connected to the client through respectful, honest, and fair treatment that safeguards the client(s)' and the RCC's dignity and privacy.

2) RCCs:

a) recognize that client connections to others can be adaptive or maladaptive, and

b) collaborate with the client to support their autonomy in choosing the nature of their connections.

3) RCCs exhibit high integrity and engage in respectful research and professional activities that are not harmful or exploitative to clients or others, in compliance with ethical and legal requirements.

D. Respect for Self

1) RCCs demonstrate respect for self through:

- a) self-reflective practice and learning,
- b) self-care, and
- c) protection of one's own privacy and rights in the course of professional work.

PRINCIPLE II RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF ALL PEOPLES

Respect for the dignity of all peoples is the extension of the principles of respect upheld in principle I. Though psychotherapy supports the client, the RCC recognizes that the client is situated in a larger relational, sociologic, cultural and environmental context. These contexts are interactive and may be determinative in the client(s)' lives.

A. Commitment

1) RCCs commit to working with individuals who also have relationships with their groups, communities, ethnicity, and prioritize but do not determine for them:

- a) a person's autonomy and agency regarding the nature of those relationships,
- b) how they relate to those groups,
- c) how their identity is influenced or not by these groups, and
- d) cultural contexts.

2) RCCs allow persons that choice of how and when this may be introduced to therapeutic conversations and support the individual within/ or outside their chosen context, while maintaining cultural sensitivity to groups, culture or peoples.

B. Respect for Peoples

1) RCCs demonstrate respect for peoples and cultures through:

- a) cultural competence,
- b) humility,

c) respect for human and cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion, and

d) the provision of safe environments in which the therapeutic relationship is one of growth and not harm.

2) RCCs practice awareness of their own social, cultural, emotional, spiritual, physical, and financial condition or status, recognizing where these characteristics are empowering and/or divergent from those of a client, and protect against the potential for harm that may arise from these differences.

3) RCCs impose no stereotyping or bias regarding gender, culture, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or ability that interrupts the individual's expression of self. A client's relational, sociologic and cultural context is defined and contextualized by them first and foremost as individuals, then explored with the RCC as an element of their lived experience and outer world.

4) RCCs commit to the respect and dignity of peoples as a fundamental principle of the promotion of all humans' adaptive functioning.

5) RCCs ensure that peoples, whether represented in the course of care or not, are free from prejudice, bias, or racializing harm.

PRINCIPLE III RESPONSIBLE CARING

Responsible caring means that all interactions involving clients are made for the client's benefit and for the protection of the public. This includes thorough assessment and possessing/demonstrating competence appropriate to the situation, the client, and the socio-cultural context.

A. Commitment

1) RCCs engage in self-reflection and strive to embody responsible caring through:

- a) client-centered practice,
- b) professional integrity,
- c) competence, and
- d) quality improvement.

B. Competent Caring

1) RCCs demonstrate competent caring through the commitment to various actions, including:

- a) acknowledging and integrating the client's input into all aspects of care,
- b) applying evidence-informed practice,
- c) continuously developing and maintaining competence,
- d) engaging in ongoing consultation or supervision, and
- e) ensuring continuity of care to best serve clients and protect the public.

2) RCCs communicate truthfully, accurately, and clearly in all communications promoting client understanding and informed choice.

C. Carefully Managing Risk

1) RCCs carefully manage risk by seeking to maximize benefits and minimize potential harm to individuals, relationships, families and groups, by stopping or mitigating the consequences of harmful, unethical, unsafe, or incompetent activities.

2) RCCs meet the ethical and legal requirements of professional practice by engaging in quality improvement and risk management and maintaining high standards for documentation and record keeping as an integral component of client-centered practice.

PRINCIPLE IV INTEGRITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Ethics and values are largely expressed in the relationships that RCCs have with self and with others. To have ethical integrity, they remain aware of their values and the values of their communities. They are honest and straightforward in their communications, honestly assess and seek feedback on their performance, and avoid conflicts of interest that may compromise their professional activities.

A. Commitment

1) RCCs will strive to embody integrity in relationships through various actions, including:

- a)** managing relationships intentionally,
- b)** maintaining respectful professional boundaries,
- c)** actively addressing actual and/or potential conflicts of interest as they arise,
- d)** accepting responsibility for consequences of their actions, and
- e)** upholding impartiality in relationships and professional endeavours.

B. Communicating with Integrity

1) RCCs communicate with integrity, truthfulness, and accuracy in order to safeguard counselling and therapeutic relationships against misuse, abuse, misconduct, and/or conflict of interest.

2) RCCs disclose and manage information and actions that have potential to cause harm and may be perceived to affect client care, professional judgment, and/or trust in the profession.

C. Connecting with Clients

1) RCCs demonstrate the ability to connect with clients by:

- a)** maintaining respectful professional boundaries and providing a counselling and therapeutic environment based on trust, and
- b)** demonstrating respect for individual dignity, and the client's best interest.

2) RCCs:

- a)** recognize the power differentials that exist in counselling relationships,
- b)** actively comply with client requests for referral,
- c)** offer appropriate client referral upon limitation, suspension, or termination of treatment, and
- d)** obtain professional guidance, supervision, and assistance to manage increased risk of boundary crossing/ violations and multiple relationships.

PRINCIPLE V RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

RCCs have a responsibility to the society in which they live and work and have dedicated themselves to the wellbeing of human beings in that society.

A. Commitment

1) RCCs strive to embody responsibility to society through:

- a)** accountability to values and ethical principles of the profession, and
- b)** contribution to equitable and fair access to quality counselling care.

B. Ethical Knowledge

1) RCCs demonstrate ethical knowledge and awareness by understanding the statutory, regulatory, and common law frameworks of the profession.

2) RCCs:

- a)** develop and maintain awareness of their ethical responsibilities and individual competence, and
- b)** evaluate their professional practice activities and those of their colleagues, students, interns and supervisees as appropriate.

C. Holistic Approach

1) RCCs exhibit/demonstrate a holistic approach to their profession by:

- a)** recognizing and taking action to enhance effective collaboration, and
- b)** taking steps to ensure continuity of care to best serve clients and protect the public.

D. Body of Knowledge

1) RCCs demonstrate a clinical and professional body of knowledge by:

- a)** taking responsibility for professional competence, and
- b)** promoting and advancing ethical principles in research, professional, clinical, administrative, and educational activities.

E. Establishing Fees

1) RCCs demonstrate transparency and integrity in all communications, client interactions, and procedures related to management of fees for service.

F. Social Responsibility

1) RCCs demonstrate social responsibility by engaging in action that promotes equitable access to care, and the rights and needs of diverse individuals, relationships, families and groups, including those who are vulnerable, underrepresented, racialized and/or marginalized.

2) RCCs leverage their personal time and talents to help meet the profession's (discipline's) collective responsibility to society.

Copyright © BCACC/June 2023

Effective date: November 1, 2023

109-1034 Johnson St

Victoria, BC V8V 3N7

Canada www.bcacc.ca