



*OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL, INC*

# Professional Ethics

## Introduction

It is the duty of all persons providing services to be the model of professional ethics and integrity. The persons we are charged with caring for are typically in great need, and are often vulnerable to harm and abuse. It is, therefore, our highest priority that we safeguard the dignity, well being, and safety of those we serve, and protect them from harm, injury, and being taken advantage of. To this end, all staff members must conform to a set of professional standards for behavior.

Just as ethics and integrity are a professional requirement, they are also important to be an effective practitioner. The ethical choices you make impact the care that clients receive at all levels. Without trust and a strong therapeutic relationship, a counselor has nothing. As a provider of care, you must demonstrate your professionalism, compassion, and trustworthiness at all times through your words and actions.

This being said, at times the intent and desire to behave ethically is insufficient to ensure that situations will be handled properly. There are grey areas. Situations can and do arise that we are not prepared for, or for which there is no obvious solution. At these times, it is the duty of all care providers to keep the best interests of the client they are serving in mind and seek guidance from their supervisors. Any time a staff member has questions or concerns regarding ethical behavior, conflicts of interest, or other dilemmas, they must discuss them with the agency Clinical Supervisor or Administrator as quickly as possible to resolve those issues.

## CODE OF ETHICS

### **1. Client Welfare**

Primary Responsibility. The primary responsibility of the agency is to respect the dignity and to promote the welfare of clients.

Positive Growth and Development. The agency encourages client growth and development in ways that foster the clients' interest and welfare; the agency avoids fostering dependent client relationships.



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Treatment Plans. The agency staff and their clients work jointly in devising integrated, individual treatment plans that offer reasonable promise of success and are consistent with abilities and circumstances of clients. The agency staff and clients regularly review treatment plans to ensure their continued viability and effectiveness, respecting clients' freedom of choice.

Family Involvement. The agency recognizes that families are usually important in clients' lives and strive to enlist family understanding and involvement as a positive resource, when appropriate.

Career and Employment Needs. The agency works with their clients in considering employment in jobs and circumstances that are consistent with the clients' overall abilities, vocational limitations, physical restrictions, general temperament, interest and aptitude patterns, social skills, education, general qualifications, and other relevant characteristics and needs. The agency neither places nor participates in placing clients in positions that will result in damaging the interest and the welfare of clients, employers, or the public.

## **2. Respecting Diversity**

Nondiscrimination. The agency does not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or socioeconomic status.

Respecting Differences. The agency will actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients with whom they work. This includes, but is not limited to, learning how the agencies own cultural/ethnic/racial identity impacts the values and beliefs about the therapeutic process.

## **3. Client Rights**

Disclosure to Clients. When treatment is initiated, and throughout the treatment process as necessary, the agency staff informs clients of the purposes, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks, and benefits of services to be performed, and other pertinent information. The agency staff takes steps to ensure that clients understand the implications of diagnosis, the intended use of tests and reports, fees, and billing arrangements. Clients have the right to expect confidentiality and to be provided with an explanation of its limitations, including supervision and/or treatment team professionals; to obtain clear information about their case records; to participate in the ongoing treatment plans; and to refuse any recommended services and be advised of the consequences of such refusal.



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Freedom of Choice. The agency offers clients the freedom to choose whether to enter into a therapeutic relationship and to determine which professional(s) will provide treatment. Restrictions that limit choices of clients are fully explained.

Inability to Give Consent. When treating minors or persons unable to give voluntary informed consent, the agency staff acts in these clients' best interests.

#### **4. Clients Served by Others**

If a client is receiving services from another health care professional, the agency, with client consent, informs the professional persons already involved and develops clear agreements to avoid confusion and conflict for the client.

#### **5. Personal Needs and Values**

Personal Needs. In the therapeutic relationship, the agency is aware of the intimacy and responsibilities inherent in the therapeutic relationship, maintain respect for clients, and avoid actions that seek to meet their personal needs at the expense of clients.

Personal Values. The agency is aware of their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and how these apply in a diverse society, and avoid imposing their values on clients.

#### **6. Dual Relationships**

Avoid When Possible. The agency is aware of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. The agency makes every effort to avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm to clients. (Examples of such relationships include, but are not limited to, familial, social, financial, business, or close personal relationships with clients.) When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, the agency takes appropriate professional precautions such as informed consent, consultation, supervision, and documentation to ensure that judgment is not impaired and no exploitation occurs.

Superior/Subordinate Relationships. The agency does not accept as client's superiors or subordinates with whom they have administrative, supervisory, or evaluative relationships.



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## **7. Sexual Intimacies With Clients**

Current Clients. The agency does not have any type of sexual intimacies with clients and do not counsel persons with whom they have had a sexual relationship.

Former Clients. The agency employees do not engage in sexual intimacies with former clients within a minimum of 2 years after terminating the therapeutic relationship. The agency employees who engage in such relationship after 2 years following termination have the responsibility to examine and document thoroughly that such relations did not have an exploitative nature, based on factors such as duration of treatment, amount of time since treatment, termination circumstances, client's personal history and mental status, adverse impact on the client, and actions by the employee suggesting a plan to initiate a sexual relationship with the client after termination.

## **8. Multiple Clients**

When the agency agrees to provide therapeutic services to two or more persons who have a relationship (such as husband and wife, or parents), the agency staff clarify at the outset, which person or persons are clients and the nature of the relationships they will have with each involved person. If it becomes apparent that the agency staff may be called upon to perform potentially conflicting roles, they clarify, adjust, or withdraw from roles appropriately.

## **9. Group Work**

Screening. The agency screens prospective group counseling/therapy participants. To the extent possible, the agency staff selects members whose needs and goals are compatible with goals of the group, who will not impede the group process, and whose well being will not be jeopardized by the group experience.

Protecting Clients. In a group setting, the agency staff takes reasonable precautions to protect clients from physical or psychological trauma.

## **10. Fees and Bartering**

Advance Understanding. The agency staff clearly explains to clients, prior to entering the therapeutic relationship, all financial arrangements related to professional services.

Bartering Discouraged. The agency refrains from accepting goods or services from clients in return for therapeutic services because such arrangements create inherent potential for conflicts, exploitation, and distortion of the professional relationship.



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## **11. Termination and Referral**

Abandonment Prohibited. The agency does not abandon or neglect clients in treatment. The agency assists in making appropriate arrangements for the continuation of treatment, when necessary, during interruptions such as vacations, and following termination.

Inability to Assist Clients. If the agency determines an inability to be of professional assistance to clients, they avoid entering or immediately terminate a therapeutic relationship. The agency is knowledgeable about referral resources and suggests appropriate alternatives. If clients decline the suggested referral, the agency should discontinue the relationship.

Appropriate Termination. The agency terminates a therapeutic relationship, securing client agreement when possible, when it is reasonably clear that the client is no longer benefiting, when services are no longer required, when treatment no longer serves the client's needs or interests or when agency or institution limits do not allow provision of further therapeutic services.

Source: [http://www.counseling.org/resources/ACA\\_Ethics.pdf](http://www.counseling.org/resources/ACA_Ethics.pdf)