

# Providing a good standard of practice and care

All clients are entitled to good standards of practice and care from their practitioners in counselling and psychotherapy. Good standards of practice and care require professional competence; good relationships with clients and colleagues; and commitment to and observance of professional ethics.

## Good quality of care

- Good quality of care requires competently delivered services that meet the client's needs by practitioners who are appropriately supported and accountable. - Practitioners should give careful consideration to the limitations of their training and experience and work within these limits, taking advantage of available professional support. If work with clients requires the provision of additional services operating in parallel with counselling or psychotherapy, the availability of such services ought to be taken into account, as their absence may constitute a significant limitation. - Good practice involves clarifying and agreeing the rights and responsibilities of both the practitioner and client at appropriate points in their working relationship. - Dual relationships arise when the practitioner has two or more kinds of relationship concurrently with a client, for example client and trainee, acquaintance and client, colleague and supervisee. The existence of a dual relationship with a client is seldom neutral and can have a powerful beneficial or detrimental impact that may not always be easily foreseeable. For these reasons practitioners are required to consider the implications of entering into dual relationships with clients, to avoid entering into relationships that are likely to be detrimental to clients, and to be readily accountable to clients and colleagues for any dual relationships that occur. - Practitioners are encouraged to keep appropriate records of their work with clients unless there are adequate reasons for not keeping any records. All records should be accurate, respectful of clients and colleagues and protected from unauthorised disclosure. Practitioners should take into account their responsibilities and their clients' rights under data protection legislation and any other legal requirements. - Clients are entitled to competently delivered services that are periodically reviewed by the practitioner. These reviews may be conducted, when appropriate, in consultation with clients, supervisors, managers or other practitioners with relevant expertise.

## Maintaining competent practice

- All counsellors, psychotherapists, trainers and supervisors are required to have regular and on-going formal supervision/consultative support for their work in accordance with professional requirements. Managers, researchers and providers of counselling skills are strongly encouraged to review their need for professional and personal support and to obtain appropriate services for themselves. - Regularly monitoring and reviewing one's work is essential to maintaining good practice. It is important to be open to, and conscientious in considering, feedback from colleagues, appraisals and assessments. Responding constructively to feedback helps to advance practice. - A commitment to good practice requires practitioners to keep up to date with the latest knowledge and respond to changing circumstances. They should consider carefully their own need for continuing professional development and engage in appropriate educational activities. - Practitioners should be aware of and understand any legal requirements concerning their work, consider these conscientiously and be legally accountable for their practice.

## Keeping trust

- The practice of counselling and psychotherapy depends on gaining and honouring the trust of clients. Keeping trust requires:

- attentiveness to the quality of listening and respect offered to clients
- culturally appropriate ways of communicating that are courteous and clear
- respect for privacy and dignity
- careful attention to client consent and confidentiality

- Clients should be adequately informed about the nature of the services being offered. Practitioners should obtain adequately informed consent from their clients and respect a client's right to choose whether to continue or withdraw. - Practitioners should ensure that services are normally delivered on the basis of the client's explicit consent. Reliance on implicit consent is more vulnerable to misunderstandings and is best avoided unless there are sound reasons for doing so. Overriding a client's known wishes or consent is a serious matter that requires commensurate justification. Practitioners should be prepared to be readily accountable to clients, colleagues and professional body if they override a client's known wishes. - Situations in which clients pose a risk of causing serious harm to themselves or others are particularly challenging for the practitioner. These are situations in which the practitioner should be alert to the possibility of conflicting responsibilities between those concerning their client, other people who may be significantly affected, and society generally. Resolving conflicting responsibilities may require due consideration of the context in which the service is being provided. Consultation with a supervisor or experienced practitioner is strongly recommended, whenever this would not cause undue delay. In all cases, the aim should be to ensure for the client a good quality of care that is as respectful of the client's capacity for self-determination and their trust as circumstances permit. - Working with young people requires specific ethical awareness and competence. The practitioner is required to consider and assess the balance between young people's dependence on adults and carers and their progressive development towards acting independently. Working with children and young people requires careful consideration of issues concerning their capacity to give consent to receiving any service independently of someone with parental responsibilities and the management of confidences disclosed by clients. - Respecting client confidentiality is a fundamental requirement for keeping trust. The professional management of confidentiality concerns the protection of personally identifiable and sensitive information from unauthorised disclosure. Disclosure may be authorised by client consent or the law. Any disclosures should be undertaken in ways that best protect the client's trust. Practitioners should be willing to be accountable to their clients and to their profession for their management of confidentiality in general and particularly for any disclosures made without their client's consent. - Practitioners should normally be willing to respond to their client's requests for information about the way that they are working and any assessment that they may have made. This professional requirement does not apply if it is considered that imparting this information would be detrimental to the client or inconsistent with the counselling or psychotherapeutic approach previously agreed with the client. Clients may have legal rights to this information and these need to be taken into account. - Practitioners must not abuse their client's trust in order to gain sexual, emotional, financial or any other kind of personal advantage. Sexual relations with clients are prohibited. 'Sexual relations' include intercourse, any other type of sexual activity or sexualised behaviour. Practitioners should think carefully about, and exercise considerable caution before, entering into personal or business relationships with former clients and should expect to be professionally accountable if the relationship becomes detrimental to the client or the standing of the profession. - Practitioners should not allow their professional relationships with clients to be prejudiced by any personal views they may hold about lifestyle, age, gender, disability, gender reassignment, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership. - Practitioners should be clear about any commitment to be available to clients and colleagues and honour these commitments.

### Teaching and training

- All practitioners are encouraged to share their professional knowledge and practice in order to benefit their clients and the public. - Practitioners who provide education and training should acquire the skills, attitudes and knowledge required to be competent teachers and facilitators of learning. - Practitioners are required to be fair, accurate and honest in their assessments of their students. - Prior consent is required from clients if they are to be observed, recorded or if their personally identifiable disclosures are to be used for training purposes.

### Supervising and managing

- Practitioners are responsible for clarifying who holds responsibility for the work with the client. - There is a general obligation for all counsellors, psychotherapists, supervisors and trainers to

receive supervision/consultative support independently of any managerial relationships. - Supervisors and managers have a responsibility to maintain and enhance good practice by practitioners, to protect clients from poor practice and to acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge required by their role.

## Researching

- The Association is committed to fostering research that will inform and develop practice. All practitioners are encouraged to support research undertaken on behalf of the profession and to participate actively in research work. - All research should be undertaken with rigorous attentiveness to the quality and integrity both of the research itself and of the dissemination of the results of the research. - The rights of all research participants should be carefully considered and protected. The minimum rights include the right to freely given and informed consent, and the right to withdraw at any point. - The research methods used should comply with the standards of good practice in counselling and psychotherapy and must not adversely affect clients.

## Fitness to practise

Practitioners have a responsibility to monitor and maintain their fitness to practise at a level that enables them to provide an effective service. If their effectiveness becomes impaired for any reason, including health or personal circumstances, they should seek the advice of their supervisor, experienced colleagues or line manager and, if necessary, withdraw from practice until their fitness to practise returns. Suitable arrangements should be made for clients who are adversely affected.

## If things go wrong with own clients

- Practitioners should respond promptly and appropriately to any complaint received from their clients. An appropriate response in agency-based services would take account of any agency policy and procedures. - Practitioners should endeavour to remedy any harm they may have caused to their clients and to prevent any further harm. An apology may be the appropriate response. - Practitioners should discuss, with their supervisor, manager or other experienced practitioner(s), the circumstances in which they may have harmed a client in order to ensure that the appropriate steps have been taken to mitigate any harm and to prevent any repetition. - Practitioners are strongly encouraged to ensure that their work is adequately covered by insurance for professional indemnity and liability. - If practitioners consider that they have acted in accordance with good practice but their client is not satisfied that this is the case, they may wish to use independent dispute resolution, for example: seeking a second professional opinion, mediation, or conciliation where this is both appropriate and practical. - Clients should be informed about the existence of the Professional Conduct Procedure of this Association and any other applicable complaints or disciplinary procedures. If requested to do so, practitioners should inform their clients about how they may obtain further information concerning these procedures.

## Responsibilities to all clients

- Practitioners have a responsibility to protect clients when they have good reason for believing that other practitioners are placing them at risk of harm. - They should raise their concerns with the practitioner concerned in the first instance, unless it is inappropriate to do so. If the matter cannot be resolved, they should review the grounds for their concern and the evidence available to them and, when appropriate, raise their concerns with the practitioner's manager, agency or professional body. - If they are uncertain what to do, their concerns should be discussed with an experienced colleague, a supervisor or raised with this Association. - All members of this Association share a responsibility to take part in its professional conduct procedures whether as the person complained against or as the provider of relevant information.

## Working with colleagues

The increasing availability of counselling and psychotherapy means that most practitioners have

other practitioners working in their locality, or may be working closely with colleagues within specialised or multidisciplinary teams. The quality of the interactions between practitioners can enhance or undermine the claim that counselling and psychotherapy enable clients to increase their insight and expertise in personal relationships. This is particularly true for practitioners who work in agencies or teams.

### Working in teams

- Professional relationships should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect. Practitioners should endeavour to attain good working relationships and systems of communication that enhance services to clients at all times. - Practitioners should treat all colleagues fairly and foster equality opportunity. - They should not allow their professional relationships with colleagues to be prejudiced by their own personal views about a colleague's lifestyle, age, gender, disability, gender reassignment, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership. It is unacceptable and unethical to discriminate against colleagues on any of these grounds. - Practitioners must not undermine a colleague's relationships with clients by making unjustified or unsustainable comments. - All communications between colleagues about clients should be on a professional basis and thus purposeful, respectful and consistent with the management of confidences as declared to clients.

### Awareness of context

The practitioner is responsible for learning about and taking account of the different protocols, conventions and customs that can pertain to different working contexts and cultures.

### Making and receiving referrals

All routine referrals to colleagues and other services should be discussed with the client in advance and the client's consent obtained both to making the referral and also to disclosing information to accompany the referral. Reasonable care should be taken to ensure that:

- the recipient of the referral is able to provide the required service; - any confidential information disclosed during the referral process will be adequately protected; - the referral will be likely to benefit the client.

Prior to accepting a referral the practitioner should give careful consideration to:

- the appropriateness of the referral; - the likelihood that the referral will be beneficial to the client; - the adequacy of the client's consent for the referral.

If the referrer is professionally required to retain overall responsibility for the work with the client, it is considered to be professionally appropriate to provide the referrer with brief progress reports. Such reports should be made in consultation with clients and not normally against their explicit wishes.

### Probity in professional practice

Ensuring the probity of practice is important both to those who are directly affected but also to the standing of the profession as a whole.

### Providing clients with adequate information

- Practitioners are responsible for clarifying the terms on which their services are being offered in advance of the client incurring any financial obligation or other reasonably foreseeable costs or liabilities. - All information about services should be honest, accurate, avoid unjustifiable claims, and be consistent with maintaining the good standing of the profession. - Particular care should be taken over the integrity of presenting qualifications, accreditation and professional standing.

## Financial arrangements

Practitioners are required to be honest, straightforward and accountable in all financial matters concerning their clients and other professional relationships.

## Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest are best avoided, provided they can be reasonably foreseen in the first instance and prevented from arising. In deciding how to respond to conflicts of interest, the protection of the client's interests and maintaining trust in the practitioner should be paramount.

## Care of self as a practitioner

- Attending to the practitioner's well-being is essential to sustaining good practice. - Practitioners have a responsibility to themselves to ensure that their work does not become detrimental to their health or well-being by ensuring that the way that they undertake their work is as safe as possible and that they seek appropriate professional support and services as the need arises. - Practitioners are entitled to be treated with proper consideration and respect that is consistent with this Guidance.