

# Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions: Glossary

**bacp**

British Association for  
**Counselling & Psychotherapy**

## Glossary

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## About

All registrants and members of BACP are committed to complying with the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*, in accordance with the terms and conditions of their membership. This glossary is designed to help them fulfil this commitment.

The definitions explain the meaning of words used within the Ethical Framework. Many of the words may be defined differently in other contexts. These definitions are provided as supplementary information and should be understood as non-binding good practice guidance, which do not override or weaken the commitments contained in the *Ethical Framework*. Definitions in this *Glossary* may be adapted or refined to suit particular services or settings, where any changes are consistent with the *Ethical Framework*.

This glossary also serves as an index for finding some key words in the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. The code after each term indicates the relevant section (C = Our commitment to clients; E = Ethics; GP = Good practice) and point number; so, for example, C2e can be found in the section Our commitment to clients, point 2, subpoint e.

# Glossary

**Abuse:** Violation of another person's rights, for example by physical force, psychological manipulation or deception [GP36].

**Accountability:** Taking responsibility for one's work and being willing to give an accurate account of events to anyone to whom this responsibility is owed, for example clients, employers and professional colleagues [C6; GP45–49].

**Accurate:** All due care has been taken about the truthfulness, completeness and exactness of what is being communicated [C2e, 5b, 12; GP15, 41, 63]. See also **Accurate records**.

**Accurate records:** Records that are factually correct and complete in which care has been taken to distinguish fact from opinion or interpretation [C2e; GP15].

**Adjustments:** Changes to the physical circumstances of a service or the way that a service is delivered in order to make it accessible to someone, particularly someone with a disability [GP22e].

**Agency (1):** Any organisation that provides the services to clients [GP54].

**Agency (2):** The right to use one's own power and authority to act for oneself [E12].

**Agreement:** A shared understanding between two or more people about terms or conditions that have been mutually accepted. Agreement is an essential requirement for a legally enforceable contract [GP27, 32, 32a, 32b, 54].

**Appropriate:** Fitting and ethically right for its purpose. The term is used widely throughout the Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions. See also **Appropriate records**.

**Appropriate records:** Records that are sufficient, but not excessive, for achieving the purpose for which they are being made. The decision about what is appropriate will take into account the ethical and legal requirements for keeping records containing personally sensitive information about identifiable living people, particularly the adequacy of the security available for keeping records and whether or not clients have consented to records being kept about them [C2e; GP15].

**Association:** The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [GP14f, 43].

**Attitude:** A persistent way of feeling, behaving or holding an opinion about someone or something [GP62].

**Autonomy:** The right to be self-governing [E5; GP22d]. See also **Individual autonomy** and **Relational autonomy**.

**Bankrupt:** Legally recognised as having insufficient funds to pay debts [GP43].

**Boundaries:** The limits in relationships between practitioners and their clients that, if crossed, could cause harm to the client or contravene professional standards and ethics [C4c; GP33, 33a, 53, 67].

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**Breaching confidentiality:** Disclosing something that has been communicated in confidence or with the expectation that it will be kept secret. Confidentiality is breached when any disclosure is made without legal authorisation or justification. It is not a breach of confidence when disclosures are authorised with the consent of the person who made the confidential disclosure although one should be aware of the possible rights to confidentiality of any third persons about whom the disclosure is made [GP9].

**Candour:** A commitment by practitioners to inform clients promptly if anything has gone wrong that could harm their wellbeing or safety, even if the client is unaware of what has occurred [C6, 6b; GP47, 47a–e].

**Capability:** The capacity to be able to do something [GP30].

**Children and young people:** Anyone under the age of 18 years in the UK [GP28]. See also **Safeguarding**.

**Civil claims:** Claims against another person that can be heard in the civil courts, for example for damages or a court order [GP43].

**Client:** Anyone who receives a service from a practitioner who is registered by or is a member of BACP. The term is used widely throughout the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*.

**Coaching:** A way of helping people, building on their existing strengths and developing their potential by enhancing their understanding of themselves, beliefs, behaviours or actions [GP3].

**Colleagues:** Practitioners and people in closely associated roles who collaborate to deliver services to clients. A colleague is expected to be bound by similar or equivalent **Professional standards** [C2c; E10; GP8, 14c, 16, 17, 22b, 24, 33d, 40].

**Competent:** Working with sufficient knowledge and skills to satisfy the fundamental standards for the service being provided [E12; GP13, 62]. See also **Professional standards**.

**Confidentiality:** The protection of information that has been communicated in the expectation that it will not be disclosed to others [C3b; GP9, 10, 25, 25b, 32c, 40, 54]. See also **Reasonably foreseeable limitations to confidentiality**.

**Consent:** An agreement to a course of action based on a shared understanding of what will be involved [GP16, 27, 28a, 29, 72]. See also **Informed consent**.

**Continuing professional development:** Ongoing training and opportunities for professional learning and experience after completing initial training or having been placed on the BACP Register as a practitioner [GP14e].

**Contract:** An agreement, written or oral, between the people involved about the terms on which goods or services will be provided. Any business and therapeutic terms and conditions that are agreed between counselling professionals and their clients will usually form part of the legal contract between them. Contracts are useful for reinforcing and clarifying practitioners' ethical commitments to their clients and can help to reduce uncertainty or disagreement, especially when recorded in writing [GP32, 32a, 32b].

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**Counselling professions:** Providers of services informed by therapeutic theory and practice that are delivered with sufficient expertise to satisfy professional standards and ethics. These professions include coaching, counselling, pastoral care and psychotherapy. [C Introduction,]

**Criminal charges:** A formal statement of the offence(s) that someone is alleged to have committed, which is used as the basis for criminal proceedings or trial [GP43].

**Debt relief or insolvency arrangements:** Formal arrangements between a debtor and those to whom money is owed about how the debt will be repaid [GP43].

**Dignity:** The quality of being worthy of respect and esteem from self and others [E3; GP21].

**Dilemma:** A choice between two or more possible courses of action, where it is unclear which of them to choose for the best [E13; GP76].

**Disciplinary procedures:** Investigation and adjudication of allegations concerning bad practice or misconduct by an employee or a member of a professional body [GP43].

**Disrepute:** To bring a person or group of people (such as a profession) into disrepute is to damage their good name or reputation [GP44].

**Diversity:** Variations and differences between people [GP22a, 23].

**Dual relationship:** Having two kinds of relationship concurrently with the same person; for example, client and neighbour, colleague and trainee or supervisee and employee [GP33b, 33c, 33d, 53, 67].

**Education:** Systematic instruction in theory and practice [GP3, 63, 67].

**Effectiveness:** A measure of what has been accomplished or achieved [E3; see also C6d; GP18, 49].

**Equality:** Treating all people with equal fairness and impartiality, regardless of their differences. The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to protect people from discrimination and harassment because of: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The precise legal requirements vary between the different nations in the UK. Nonetheless, all practitioners in all nations and settings are ethically committed to respecting these characteristics [GP22a, 23].

**Ethical problem-solving:** A systematic approach to responding to and resolving ethical challenges and dilemmas [E13; GP76, 77].

**Evidence base:** Evidence that is informed by systematic research, particularly into effectiveness and safety [GP14b, 68].

**Explicit:** Something that is clearly communicated, in words or by other methods, for example sign language or images [GP9, 72].

**Exploit:** Take advantage of someone for one's own benefit, typically emotional, sexual or financial benefit [C4d; GP11, 36, 53, 67].

**Face-to-face:** In the physical presence of the other person; not at a distance from each other, and not communicating through technological devices such as telephones or video links [GP20].

**Harm:** Emotional, psychological, social or physical damage, especially when caused to a client [E6b, 5; GP9, 10, 11, 33b, 33c, 47a, 47b].

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**Identity:** Sense of self and how one relates to others, especially what makes one distinctive or influences a personal sense of resilience [E12; GP22d, 22f].

**Inclusion:** Being welcomed and drawn into an activity or service on an equal basis to others [GP22a, 23].

**Individual autonomy:** The right to self-government where the people concerned view themselves as individuals who live and act independently of others [GP22d].

**Informed consent:** Where the person giving consent is informed about the reasonably foreseeable positive and negative implications for them [GP27, 28, 28a, 66, 72].

**Insolvency:** Being unable to pay debts owed, which may include being in the legal process of applying to be, or having been declared, bankrupt [GP43].

**Insurance:** A premium paid for protection from financial or other types of loss. Adequate professional practice and public indemnity insurance cover means having a sufficient amount of cover to protect clients from any loss or harm arising from the practitioner's liability, both as a professional and as the occupier of a the premises being used [GP19].

**Integrity:** Being moral in dealing with others, including personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence [C5; E3, 5, 11, 12; GP33d, 39–44, 70].

**Knowledge:** A practitioner has knowledge when they are aware of and understand something both theoretically and practically [C2b; E3, 5, 12; GP14, 14d, 14e, 20, 22f, 28b, 52, 62, 68, 70].

**Law:** A system of public morals that is enforceable in the courts. The main sources of law are statutes, subsidiary legislation and decisions made in courts (also known as case law). The commitment to giving the law 'careful and conscientious consideration' requires practitioners to know the law relevant to their practice and to carefully consider how it ought to be applied to the circumstances under consideration. Careful or conscientious consideration may require practitioners to consult legal or expert advice when appropriate. Ideally law and ethics match each other but this is not always so. When a conflict between ethics and the law arises, it may be appropriate to campaign for changes to the law whilst observing the applicable law. Conscientious objection to a legal requirement that leads to defying the applicable law is not something to be undertaken lightly as it requires a willingness to be openly accountable for resisting or breaking the law, and an acceptance of the risk that legal penalties may be imposed, and could require consideration under the Professional Conduct Procedure [C5c; GP9, 14f, 23, 42, 60].

**Monitor:** To observe or keep under review at regular intervals [C6d; GP49, 75b].

**Multiple relationships:** Involved in three or more types of relationship at the same time with someone; for example, friend, trainee and colleague [GP33b, 33d].

**Online:** Connected by computer or other digital technologies in order to communicate with other people [GP20].

**Pastoral care:** Care that advances someone's personal and spiritual development in a variety of ways, including the use of therapeutic theory and skills [GP3].

**Performance:** The accomplishment of actions at an appropriate level [GP30].

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**Practitioner:** Anyone registered with BACP as a counsellor or psychotherapist or members of BACP providing therapeutically-based services to clients, including coaching or pastoral care. Includes associated roles of trainer, educator, supervisor, researcher or manager of any of the services [C Introduction; E3, 5, 7, 10, 13; GP3, 11, 14d, 50, 51, 57, 68, 75].

**Privacy:** Freedom from disturbance or intrusion by other people [C3; GP21, 25, 25b, 32c, 51].

**Probity:** Working with integrity and conscientiousness [GP39].

**Professional standards:** Working to a recognised level or quality of performance, which applies to all services of that type. A *fundamental* professional standard sets the baseline for quality and safety below which a service ought not to be provided. Achieving the fundamental standard requires adequate resources for the type of work being undertaken, combined with reasonable care and skill in how the work is delivered. An *enhanced quality* standard sets the level above the fundamental standard that is achievable through good use of existing resources. *Developmental standards* are ones that practitioners or the agency are aiming to achieve in the future [C2; GP13–20, 39, 56, 57, 74].

**Reasonably foreseeable limitations to confidentiality:** Any limitations that a reasonably competent practitioner ought to be able to anticipate as causing difficulties in protecting clients' confidences; for example, those arising from legal or contractual obligations to disclose confidential information or protect people from serious harm. Some situations that arise in practice may be so unexpected or exceptional that they are not considered to be reasonably foreseeable [GP25b, 32c].

**Records:** A catch-all word that includes all notes, records, memoranda, appointments, communications, correspondence, photographs, artefacts, videos or audio recordings about an identifiable client. Records may exist in any format, typically but not exclusively on paper or electronically. There is no distinction between factual and process notes in what the law regards as a record [C2e; GP15, 32d, 32e].

**Regulations:** Authoritative rules or instructions, usually from local, national or regional government [GP14f].

**Relational autonomy:** The right to self-government where the people concerned view themselves as inextricably linked with other people, for example as a member of a family, social group or tribe with the associated power relationships, dependencies, responsibilities and opportunities. [GP22d].

**Reliable electronic resources:** Information and resources accessed by electronic means that have been subjected to good quality controls before the item was posted, and/or have come from people or bodies who are respected for the accuracy and soundness of their output [GP14a].

**Research:** A systematic enquiry or experiment to advance knowledge [GP3, 14b, 68–74].

**Resilience:** The ability to overcome or recover from challenging situations [E3, 10, 11, 12].

**Review:** Carefully reconsider, examine or inspect [C6c; GP14d, 33d, 38, 48, 55, 58, 59, 73].

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**Safeguard:** Protect people's health, safety, wellbeing and human rights in order to enable them to live free from harm, abuse or neglect [GP10].

**Sense of self:** An awareness or understanding of oneself and one's relationships with other people and the environment [E3, 12].

**Services:** Professional assistance provided by practitioners to their clients, or provided indirectly through services designed to enhance the work of practitioners working on the frontline, for example through supervision, training or research. The term is used widely throughout the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*.

**Sexual relationships:** Any action or communication that involves two or more people in acts, words or behaviour designed or intended to arouse or gratify sexual impulses or desires. Behaving sexually can arise from the acts, words or behaviour of one person without the participation or encouragement of any others who may be present. [GP34, 35, 36].

**Skill:** The ability to perform a task well and with expertise [C2b; E12; GP14, 14d, 14e, 28b, 52, 62].

**Social media:** Websites and electronic applications (apps) that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking [GP33c].

**Standards:** See **Professional standards**

**Student:** A person following a course of study at a university, college, institute or other educational establishment [GP63, 64, 65].

**Supervision:** A specialised form of professional mentoring provided for practitioners responsible for undertaking challenging work with people. Supervision is provided to ensure standards, enhance quality, advance learning, stimulate creativity, and support the sustainability and resilience of the work being undertaken [C6c; GP3, 14d, 33d, 48, 50–61, 77].

**Supervisor:** Someone who provides supervision [GP8, 47d, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 60].

**Therapeutically-based services:** Services developed from and informed by the theory and practices used in talking and listening therapies, typically coaching, counselling, pastoral care and psychotherapy. Such theories and practices may be drawn from a wider academic and professional base, including neurology, psychoanalysis, psychology, social sciences and other disciplines [GP3, 61].

**Trainee:** Someone working under the guidance or instruction of a trainer in order to develop their expertise [GP34, 37, 56, 66].

**Training:** Guidance or instruction, usually within a structured program or course [GP52, 62–67].

**Unauthorised access or disclosure:** This involves acting without legal authority or client consent to obtain or release confidential information in ways that are contrary to professional standards and ethics, and that violate the privacy of the people affected [GP25a].

## Glossary

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**Unfairly discriminating:** Treating people in a prejudiced or unfavourable way in comparison to others. Unfair discrimination includes anything that diminishes how we relate to and work with others because of a failure to respect someone's characteristics that are significant to their way of being and relating. Unfair discrimination usually arises from prejudices against another person or group of people. Prejudices may operate at conscious or unconscious levels in individuals, groups or organisations. They include reacting against or being insensitive towards someone's cultural values and beliefs, lifestyle, parental responsibilities, consensual sexual activities between adults, education, social and economic status, or party politics. These characteristics are in addition to those protected by law [GP22b, 24]. See also **Equality**.

**Valid interest in our work:** This may arise from someone's formal responsibility to oversee our work, or other contractual arrangements concerning the practitioner and client. It may be authorised by a legal authority, or with client consent when the practitioner considers this appropriate [GP6].

**Voluntary:** An action is voluntary when it is undertaken of one's own free will or choice, and one is not coerced or constrained to do it by another person [GP26].

**Vulnerable adult:** The meaning of this term varies across different contexts but is widely used to refer to people over 18 years old who are regarded as vulnerable because they are unable to protect themselves against significant harm and exploitation or are unable to take care of themselves without assistance. In social policy, a vulnerable adult is typically someone aged 18 years or older, who is receiving or may need community care services due to mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself without assistance, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation [GP29].

**Wellbeing:** Living in a good state of emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual health [C introduction, 2d; E3, 5, 12; GP11, 30, 75].