

# ACCT CODE OF ETHICS

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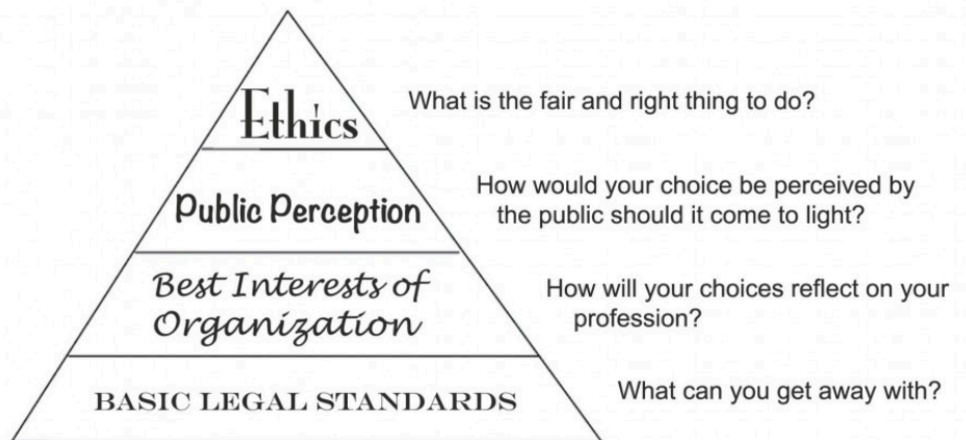
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Association of Cooperative Counselling Therapists of Canada (ACCT) is dedicated to providing the highest standards of professional counselling and consulting services. The *ACCT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for ACCT* provide guidelines and standards for Registered Therapeutic Counsellors (RTCs)—hereafter considered to include Accredited Counsellors (ACs), Master Therapeutic Counsellors (MTCs), Registered Counselling Supervisors (RCSs), and Registered Therapeutic Counsellor Candidates (RTCc's)—to pursue excellence in providing their professional services.
- 1.2. The *ACCT Code of Ethics* provides a moral framework for making decisions when ethical dilemmas arise. It is not possible to anticipate or regulate every ethical dilemma, and reasonable differences of opinion can and do exist in regard to ethical decisions. Therefore, these guidelines are intended to be used as part of an ethical decision-making process, including consulting with knowledgeable resources such as the ACCT Ethics committee, trusted colleagues, research, or other reliable sources. These guidelines and standards do not take the place of legal advice, which must be obtained from a lawyer.
- 1.3. It is also important to consider personal values and whether they may in any way unfairly bias one's perceptions and decision-making. To this end, as professionals, counsellors and therapists hold a responsibility to provide ethical and effective services to all clients, understanding that cultural diversity plays a crucial role in the therapeutic process. This Code of Ethics outlines the ethical standards for practice, while emphasizing the importance of cultural competence, sensitivity, and awareness in our work. Counsellors are expected to respect, acknowledge, and incorporate the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of all individuals,

recognizing that these factors significantly influence mental health and well-being.

- 1.4. Members of ACCT have a responsibility to ensure that they are familiar with the *ACCT Code of Ethics* and strive to adhere to its principles and values. In addition, the *ACCT Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice for ACCT* provide enforceable rules and behavioural expectations with which RTCs must comply, and for which sanctions may be applied for non-compliance. These standards address the application of ethical principles to specific areas of practice.
- 1.5. Members are accountable to the public as well as their peers and may, therefore, be subject to the complaints and disciplinary procedures of the ACCT. Violations of the *ACCT Code of Ethics* or *Standards of Practice for ACCT*, however, do not automatically imply legal liability. Such a determination can only be made by legal and judicial proceedings. This peer review process is intended to enable ACCT to advise and to discipline its members in response to substantiated complaints originating either with peers or the public.
- 1.6. The law and professional standards usually complement each other. However, the law generally is considered to take precedence over professionally defined standards should they conflict, and should one choose to disobey the law on grounds of conscience, personal choice and risk are involved. ACCT encourages its members to carefully consider the implications of any such decisions and consult as widely as the situation demands.
- 1.7. The *ACCT Code of Ethics* may require a higher standard of behaviour than required by the law. Practice guidelines, position statements, special guidelines, etc., support counsellors in providing competent and ethical practice in specific areas of practice, and while they may help to define competency they are not binding or enforceable by themselves.



1.8.

## 2. Ethical Principles

The *ACCT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for ACCT* are grounded in the following fundamental principles, which are of equal importance. These principles emphasize both ethical practice and cultural competency in counselling.

### 2.1. Responsible Caring

Actively promoting the well-being of the client. Counsellors should approach each client's needs with sensitivity and respect for their unique background. Counsellors are expected to demonstrate a deep respect for the cultural, ethnic, religious, and spiritual backgrounds of all clients, recognizing that cultural identity significantly influences an individual's values, experiences, and worldview.

### 2.2. Integrity

Honouring commitments to clients while maintaining authenticity and transparency in the counselling relationship. Counsellors are encouraged to be honest about their own cultural biases and engage in self-reflection.

### 2.3. Do No Harm

Avoiding actions or behaviours that may cause harm, including cultural insensitivity or unintentional discrimination. Counsellors should create a safe, inclusive space where clients feel respected, valued, and free from biases, cultural prejudice, or microaggressions. Counsellors must remain aware of the limits of their own cultural competence. When unfamiliar with

a client's background or beliefs, they are encouraged to engage in supervision or consultation, and when appropriate, refer the client to a more culturally appropriate provider. Counsellors must also avoid cultural imposition by not projecting their own values onto clients. Instead, they strive to understand and honour each client's unique worldview without judgment.

#### **2.4. Independence**

Respecting the rights of clients to self-determination, recognizing that each client's cultural context may influence their choices. Counsellors should support clients' autonomy while being aware of the cultural factors that may inform their clients' decision-making processes.

#### **2.5. Fairness**

Upholding the dignity, equity, and just treatment of all persons, ensuring that cultural differences are respected and that all clients receive equal treatment regardless of their background. Counsellors should actively challenge biases and stereotypes that may affect the fairness of their practice.

#### **2.6. Social Responsibility**

Actively supporting policies and measures that ensure fair and equitable access to mental health care. In addition, social responsibility entails supporting the rights and needs of diverse individuals and communities, paying particular attention to those who are vulnerable, underrepresented, racialized, and marginalized. This involves leveraging personal time, skills, and resources to further societal well-being and the integrity of our profession. Counsellors should stay informed about the impact of historical and cultural factors on historically and currently marginalized individuals and communities.

### **3. Ethical Decision-Making**

This summary of ethical decision-making is intended to offer counsellors direction when making ethical decisions and resolving ethical dilemmas.

#### **3.1. Quick Decision-Making**

- 3.1.1. The following questions may help the counsellor in the process of quick decision-making:

- 3.1.1.1. Public Knowledge: Would you feel comfortable with this decision if it were to become public knowledge?
- 3.1.1.2. Justice: Is this decision fair and reasonable for all who are involved?
- 3.1.1.3. Universality: Would other counsellors make this same decision? If they did, would that be a good thing? Would you make this same decision for any of your clients?

### **3.2. Principle-Based Ethical Decision-Making**

- 3.2.1. The following considerations and actions may help the counsellor in the process of principle-based ethical decision-making:
- 3.2.2. Consider the individuals and groups affected by the decision, the rights and interests of these individuals and groups, and any relevant characteristics of these individuals and groups.
- 3.2.3. Consider the key ethical issues in the situation.
- 3.2.4. Consider the *ACCT Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for ACCT*, and how those standards are relevant to this situation.
- 3.2.5. Consider which of the six ethical principles are of major importance in this situation. Also, secure additional information, consult with knowledgeable colleagues or the ACCT Ethics committee, and consider the probable outcomes of various courses of action.
- 3.2.6. Consider how the relevant ethical principles can be applied in this circumstance and how any conflict between principles could be resolved, and what might be the potential risks and benefits of this application and resolution.
- 3.2.7. Identify your own personal biases such as life stressors and personal interests that could affect the decision-making process.
- 3.2.8. Consider what your feelings and intuitions are telling you to do in this situation.
- 3.2.9. Develop alternative courses of action. Consult with others as appropriate, remembering that sometimes this may include the

parties directly involved. It may also include interdisciplinary team members.

- 3.2.10. Consider the risks and benefits of each alternative on the individuals and groups involved in the short and long terms and on an ongoing basis, and the values underlying each alternative.
- 3.2.11. Choose the plan of action that would be most helpful in this situation.
- 3.2.12. Commit and take action:
  - 3.2.12.1. Individually - take all appropriate and necessary steps to ensure that the ethical issue is dealt with to the best of your ability.
  - 3.2.12.2. As a group or organization - where the issue is a collective one, the course of action chosen will often also require collective action. In this case, one person should be given the overall responsibility for implementation.
- 3.2.13. Evaluate the results.
- 3.2.14. Take responsibility for the consequences of the action: Correct so far as possible any negative consequences of the action and re-engage in the decision-making process if the issue remains unresolved.
- 3.2.15. Work to prevent future occurrences: Evaluate the organizational systems in which the issue arose to identify, and remedy, if possible, the circumstances that may facilitate and reward unethical practices (e.g., poor communications, inadequate resources, restrictive policies, and arbitrary procedures). Evaluate which, if any, of your own behaviours or circumstances may have contributed to the development of the ethical issue and take appropriate steps to address these.

#### **4. Virtue-Based Ethical Decision-Making**

- 4.1. Based on the belief that counsellors are motivated to be virtuous and caring. There is no step-by-step methodology for virtue ethics. The following questions may help the counsellor in the process of virtue-based ethical decision-making:

- 4.2. As you consider this ethical dilemma, what are your emotions and intuitions telling you to do?
- 4.3. How can you use your values to best show caring for the client in this situation?
- 4.4. How will your choice and decision affect other individuals involved in this ethical dilemma?
- 4.5. If you had to publicize your decision, what decision would you make?
- 4.6. What decision would your best self make?

## **5. Code of Ethics**

As a Registered Therapeutic Counsellor and member of ACCT, I commit:

- 5.1. To protect the welfare of my clients and make reasonable efforts to ensure my services are used appropriately.
- 5.2. To treat all clients with respect and unconditional acceptance.
- 5.3. To approach each client with cultural humility, actively seeking to understand and respect their unique cultural perspectives, values, and experiences, and to adapt therapeutic approaches accordingly to ensure culturally competent and inclusive care. This includes being mindful of specific cultural and religious boundaries—such as gender roles, communication styles, spiritual customs, and family expectations—that may impact the therapeutic process.
- 5.4. To engage in ongoing professional development and seek regular supervision to enhance clinical skills, cultural competence, and ethical practice, ensuring the provision of high-quality, evidence-based counselling services.
- 5.5. To engage in continuous education in cultural competence, anti-oppression practice, and inclusivity to ensure the evolving needs of the diverse populations served are met.
- 5.6. To consistently complete a comprehensive assessment at the beginning of the counselling relationship.

- 5.7. To never exploit a client's trust and to avoid dual relationships.
- 5.8. To report the sexual or physical abuse of a child to the authorities.
- 5.9. To avoid overt or suggested sexual contact with clients and former clients.
- 5.10. To terminate counselling services when appropriate or requested by the client(s).
- 5.11. To respect the right of clients to autonomy.
- 5.12. To provide a private and safe setting for counselling.
- 5.13. To request payment for service, only after consent for service has been given.
- 5.14. To ensure proper self-care.
- 5.15. To maintain healthy boundaries with clients.
- 5.16. To obtain assistance and refer clients when appropriate.
- 5.17. To clearly disclose confidentiality limitations, facts about services offered, and financial policies.
- 5.18. To be aware of and comply with all laws and legislation within the counsellor's relevant jurisdiction for the delivery of counselling services, including but not limited to the Provincial Health Act, Privacy Information Protection Act, and laws applicable to providing electronic services.
- 5.19. To maintain client confidentiality, except where there is written consent, danger to self or others, or as required by law.
- 5.20. To carefully assess, develop a safety plan, and document the potential suicidal or homicidal behaviour of a client.
- 5.21. To maintain accurate and adequate session and financial records.
- 5.22. To continue to grow and develop as a professional counsellor.
- 5.23. To avoid conflicts of interest.
- 5.24. To avoid giving or receiving gifts of substantial value.
- 5.25. To be aware of the influence my public statements may have.
- 5.26. To deal appropriately with the unethical behaviour of another counsellor.



- 5.27. To accept that I cannot realistically expect to succeed with every client.
- 5.28. To promote my services professionally and accurately.