

The Layperson's Guide to Counselor Ethics:

What You Should Know About the Ethical Practice of Professional Counselors

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As clients make decisions concerning the professional counselor from whom they will seek services, they should realize that there are standard practices and procedures that they can expect. Many of these practices and procedures are driven by the code of ethics that your professional counselor is bound to follow, the American Counseling Association's (ACA's) 2005 Code of Ethics. This document offers some highlights specifically relevant to you as consumer. You have the right to ask your professional counselor for a complete copy of the ACA 2005 Code of Ethics. The following will highlight some of these practices and procedures that you should expect from your professional counselor.

What to Expect

- Your professional counselor will describe her or his qualifications and areas of expertise.
- Your professional counselor will treat you with respect and dignity, especially in regard to age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or socioeconomic status.
- Your professional counselor will inform you of the purposes, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks, and benefits of all counseling services that you will receive. You may request this information in writing.
- Your professional counselor will inform you of and give you the opportunity to discuss matters of confidentiality, privacy, and disclosure of information. She or he will also inform you of the limitations to confidentiality.
- Your professional counselor will inform you of all financial arrangements related to service prior to entering the counseling relationship. You may request this information in writing.
- Your professional counselor will, when necessary, assist in making appropriate alternative service arrangements. Such arrangements may be necessary following termination, at follow-up, and for referral.
- When questions or concerns arise regarding services requested or services received, please discuss them immediately with your professional counselor. If such questions cannot be answered or a resolution reached, please call or contact ACA for advice and/or counsel at 1-800-347-6647, X314, or at ethics@counseling.org.

How to File an Ethics Complaint with the American Counseling Association's ACA Ethics Committee

ACA has jurisdiction only over professional counselors who are ACA members, or who were members during the time of the alleged behavior. The first step in the process is to email, FAX, or mail a request for verification of membership (membership verifications cannot be done by phone). This can be a one- or two-sentence request, such as, "I would like to verify if [professional counselor] of [city, state], was an ACA member during [month/year]." Your signature, as well as a return address, must be included. If it is determined that ACA does have jurisdiction, a standard ethics complaint form will be sent to you.

Membership verification requests are sent to the following points of contact:

American Counseling Association
ACA Ethics
5999 Stevenson Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22304
Attn: ACA Ethics Committee Liáison (CONFIDENTIAL)

(703) 823-3760 (FAX)
Attn: ACA Ethics Committee Liáison (CONFIDENTIAL)
Please remember to include a return fax number when sending a fax.

ethics@counseling.org

Subject: ACA Ethics Committee Liáison / Membership Verification

The standard ethics complaint form will ask you to include the following:

- a) your name, address, phone number, and e-mail address
- b) the name, address, and phone number of the professional counselor about whom you are filing the complaint, and
- c) a brief description of the reason why the complaint is being filed.

You will also receive a copy of the ACA 2005 Code of Ethics. The ACA Ethics Committee liaison will send you a letter acknowledging the receipt of your complaint and asking for any other information the committee might need at that time. If the professional counselor is (or was) an ACA member, the committee liaison will then guide you through ACA's process of determining whether an ethics violation has taken place. If he or she is not a member, the liaison will describe other options you may have. For additional information, please call the ACA at 1-800-347-6647, X314, or e-mail at ethics@counseling.org.