



Meta-Code of Ethics

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1. Preamble

Psychologists develop a valid and reliable body of knowledge based on research and apply that knowledge to psychological processes and human behaviour in a variety of contexts. In doing so they perform many roles, within such fields as research, education, assessment, therapy, consultancy, and as expert witness to name a few.

They also strive to help the public in developing informed judgements and choices regarding human behaviour, and aspire to use their privileged knowledge to improve the condition of both the individual and society.

The European Federation of Psychologists Associations has a responsibility to ensure that the ethical codes of its member associations are in accord with the following fundamental principles which are intended to provide a general philosophy and guidance to cover all situations encountered by professional psychologists.

National Associations should require their members to continue to develop their awareness of ethical issues, and promote training to ensure this occurs. National Associations should provide consultation and support to members on ethical issues.

The EFPA provides the following guidance for the content of the Ethical Codes of its member Associations. An Association's ethical code should cover all aspects of the professional behaviour of its members. The guidance on Content of Ethical Codes should be read in conjunction with the Ethical Principles.

The Ethical Codes of member Associations should be based upon - and certainly not in conflict with - the Ethical Principles specified below.

National Associations should have procedures to investigate and decide upon complaints against members, and mediation, corrective and disciplinary procedures to determine the action necessary taking into account the nature and seriousness of the complaint.

2. Ethical Principles

2.1 Respect for a Person's Rights and Dignity

Psychologists accord appropriate respect to and promote the development of the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people. They respect the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy, consistent with the psychologist's other professional obligations and with the law.

2.2 Competence

Psychologists strive to ensure and maintain high standards of competence in their work. They recognise the boundaries of their particular competencies and the limitations of their expertise. They provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by education, training or experience.

2.3 Responsibility

Psychologists are aware of the professional and scientific responsibilities to their clients, to the community, and to the society in which they work and live. Psychologists avoid doing harm and are responsible for their own actions, and assure themselves, as far as possible, that their services are not misused.

2.4 Integrity

Psychologists seek to promote integrity in the science, teaching and practice of psychology. In these activities psychologists are honest, fair and respectful of others. They attempt to clarify for relevant parties the roles they are performing and to function appropriately in accordance with those roles.

3. Content of Ethical Codes of Member Associations

In the following Meta-Code the term 'client' refers to any person, patients, persons in interdependence or organisations with whom psychologists have a professional relationship, including indirect relationships.

Professional psychologists' ethical codes must take the following into account:

- Psychologists' professional behaviour must be considered within a professional role, characterised by the professional relationship.
- Inequalities of knowledge and power always influence psychologists' professional relationships with clients and colleagues.
- The larger the inequality in the professional relationship and the greater the dependency of clients, the heavier is the responsibility of the professional psychologist.
- The responsibilities of psychologists must be considered within the context of the stage of the professional relationship.

Interdependence of the Four Principles

It should be recognised that there will always be strong interdependencies between the four main ethical principles with their specifications.

This means for psychologists that resolving an ethical question or dilemma will require reflection and often dialogue with clients and colleagues, weighing different ethical principles. Making decisions and taking actions are necessary even if there are still conflicting issues.

3.1 Respect for Person's Rights and Dignity

3.1.1 General Respect

- i) Awareness of and respect for the knowledge, insight, experience and areas of expertise of clients, relevant third parties, colleagues, students and the general public.
- ii) Awareness of individual, cultural and role differences including those due to disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion, language and socio-economic status.
- iii) Avoidance of practices which are the result of unfair bias and may lead to unjust discrimination.

3.1.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

- i) Restriction of seeking and giving out information to only that required for the professional purpose.
- ii) Adequate storage and handling of information and records, in any form, to ensure confidentiality, including taking reasonable safeguards to make data anonymous when appropriate, and restricting access to reports and records to those who have a legitimate need to know.
- iii) Obligation that clients and others that have a professional relationship are aware of the limitations under the law of the maintenance of confidentiality.
- iv) Obligation when the legal system requires disclosure to provide only that information relevant to the issue in question, and otherwise to maintain confidentiality.
- v) Recognition of the tension that can arise between confidentiality and the protection of a client or other significant third parties.
- vi) Recognition of the rights of clients to have access to records and reports about themselves, and to get necessary assistance and consultation, thus providing adequate and comprehensive information and serving their best interests and that this right to appropriate information be extended to those engaged in other professional relationships e.g. research participants.

- vii) Maintenance of records, and writing of reports, to enable access by a client which safeguards the confidentiality of information relating to others.

3.1.3 *Informed Consent and Freedom of Consent*

- i) Clarification and continued discussion of the professional actions, procedures and probable consequences of the psychologist's actions to ensure that a client provides informed consent before and during psychological intervention.
- ii) Clarification for clients of procedures on record-keeping and reporting.
- iii) Recognition that there may be more than one client, and that these may be first and second order clients having differing professional relationships with the psychologist, who consequently has a range of responsibilities.

3.1.4 *Self-determination*

- i) Maximisation of the autonomy of and self-determination by a client, including the general right to engage in, and to end the professional relationship with a psychologist while recognising the need to balance autonomy with dependency and collective actions.
- ii) Specification of the limits of such self-determination taking into account such factors as the client's developmental age, mental health and restrictions set by the legal process.

3.2 *Competence*

3.2.1 *Ethical Awareness*

Obligation to have a good knowledge of ethics, including the Ethical Code, and the integration of ethical issues with professional practice.

3.2.2 *Limits of Competence*

Obligation to practise within the limits of competence derived from education, training and experience.

3.2.3 *Limits of Procedures*

- i) Obligation to be aware of the limits of procedures for particular tasks, and the limits of conclusions that can be derived in different circumstances and for different purposes.
- ii) Obligation to practise within, and to be aware of the psychological community's critical development of theories and methods.
- iii) Obligation to balance the need for caution when using new methods with a recognition that new areas of practice and methods will continue to emerge and that this is a positive development.

3.2.4 *Continuing Development*

Obligation to continue professional development.

3.2.5 *Incapability*

Obligation not to practise when ability or judgement is adversely affected, including temporary problems.

3.3 *Responsibility*

3.3.1 *General Responsibility*

- i) For the quality and consequences of the psychologist's professional actions.
- ii) Not to bring the profession into disrepute.

3.3.2 *Promotion of High Standards*

Promotion and maintenance of high standards of scientific and professional activity, and requirement on psychologists to organise their activities in accord with the Ethical Code.

3.3.3 *Avoidance of Harm*

- i) Avoidance of the misuse of psychological knowledge or practice, and the minimisation of harm which is foreseeable and unavoidable.
- ii) Recognition of the need for particular care to be taken when undertaking research or making professional judgements of persons who have not given consent.

3.3.4 *Continuity of Care*

- i) Responsibility for the necessary continuity of professional care of clients, including collaboration with other professionals and appropriate action when a psychologist must suspend or terminate involvement.
- ii) Responsibility towards a client which exists after the formal termination of the professional relationship.

3.3.5 *Extended Responsibility*

Assumption of general responsibility for the scientific and professional activities, including ethical standards, of employees, assistants, supervisees and students.

3.3.6 *Resolving Dilemmas*

Recognition that ethical dilemmas occur and responsibility is placed upon the psychologist to clarify such dilemmas and consult colleagues and/or the national Association, and inform relevant others of the demands of the Ethical Code.

3.4 Integrity

3.4.1 Recognition of Professional Limitations

Obligation to be self-reflective and open about personal and professional limitations and a recommendation to seek professional advice and support in difficult situations.

3.4.2 Honesty and Accuracy

- i) Accuracy in representing relevant qualifications, education, experience, competence and affiliations.
- ii) Accuracy in representing information, and responsibility to acknowledge and not to suppress alternative hypotheses, evidence or explanations.
- iii) Honesty and accuracy with regard to any financial implications of the professional relationship.
- iv) Recognition of the need for accuracy and the limitations of conclusions and opinions expressed in professional reports and statements.

3.4.3 Straightforwardness and Openness

- i) General obligation to provide information and avoid deception in research and professional practice.
- ii) Obligation not to withhold information or to engage in temporary deception if there are alternative procedures available. If deception has occurred, there is an obligation to inform and re-establish trust.

3.4.4 Conflict of Interests and Exploitation

- i) Awareness of the problems which may result from dual relationships and an obligation to avoid such dual relationships which reduce the necessary professional distance or may lead to conflict of interests, or exploitation of a client.
- ii) Obligation not to exploit a professional relationship to further personal, religious, political or other ideological interests.
- iii) Awareness that conflict of interest and inequality of power in a relationship may still reside after the professional relationship is formally terminated, and that professional responsibilities may still apply.

3.4.5 Actions of Colleagues

Obligation to give a reasonable critique of the professional actions of colleagues, and to take action to inform colleagues and, if appropriate, the relevant professional associations and authorities, if there is a question of unethical action.