

Guidelines to Ethical Principles
Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists
Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE A: COMPETENCE

Psychologists endeavour to maintain high standards of competence and responsibility in their work. They may use scientific, professional, technical and administrative resources in the interest of continuing professional education. By this means they are also more appreciative of their limitations in expertise and of the need to protect those whom they serve.

PRINCIPLE B: INTEGRITY

Psychologists, while promoting integrity in the professional practice of psychology, in the teaching of and research in psychology, as well as other areas where psychologists find themselves occupationally and socially, seek to deal fairly and honestly without misrepresentation of any kind.

PRINCIPLE C: PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists do everything in their power to serve the best interests of their patients, clients or other recipients of their services. In this regard, psychologists consult with and refer to other professionals and institutions to the extent that their clients' needs are best served.

Psychologists concern themselves with the ethical compliance of their colleagues' scientific and professional conduct. They are obliged to consult with colleagues in order to prevent or avoid unethical conduct. Research - ethical standards in human and animal subjects.

Psychologists undertake projects to advance knowledge.

PRINCIPLE D: SOCIAL WELFARE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists accord appropriate respect to the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people. They seek to contribute to the welfare of those with whom they interact professionally.

Sensitivity to real and ascribed differences in power between themselves and others characterize the relationship between psychologists and recipients of service. Such others are not exploited or misled during or after professional relationships.

The knowledge of psychology is used to contribute to human welfare and to alleviate the cause of human suffering. In so doing psychologists are encouraged to contribute a portion of their professional time for little or non personal advantage.

GENERAL STANDARDS

APPLICABILITY OF THE ETHICS CODE

This Ethics Code applies to psychologists only in their work-related activities as psychologists. It does not apply to their private or personal lives that have no bearing on their professional roles. However, psychologists should be aware of prevailing community standards of good behaviour (moral or

otherwise) and of the impact on clients, patients, other recipients of psychological services, and the profession in general if such standards are conformed to or deviated from.

BOUNDARIES OF COMPETENCE

Psychologists provide services, teach and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence based on their education, training, supervised experience, or appropriate professional experience.

In new areas, psychologists provide services, teach and conduct research only after they have received appropriate education and training, supervision and/or consultation from persons who are competent in the new area of psychology.

In emerging areas of psychology for which there do not yet exist recognised standards, psychologists take steps to ensure the competence of their work and that their clients, patients and other recipients of service are protected from harm.

MAINTAINING EXPERTISE

Psychologists maintain a reasonable level of awareness of current scientific and professional information that impacts on their field of activity, and they take steps to maintain competence in the skills that they use.

BASIS FOR SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENTS

Psychologists rely on scientific and professionally derived knowledge when making scientific or professional judgements or when participating in academic or professional endeavours.

DESCRIBING THE NATURE AND RESULTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

When psychologists provide services as clinicians, counselors, therapists, consultants, teachers, etc., they provide information beforehand about the nature of the services and appropriate information afterwards about results and conclusions, using language that is understandable to the recipients of those services. If such information cannot be provided, psychologists inform the recipients of their services of the fact at the outset of the service.

HUMAN DIFFERENCES

Where differences of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status significantly affect a psychologist's work with individuals or groups, the psychologist gets training, experience, supervision or consultation to ensure the competence of her/his services, or makes appropriate referrals.

RESPECTING OTHERS

In their work-related activities, psychologists respect the rights of others to hold different beliefs, values, attitudes and opinions from their own.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

In their work-related activities, psychologists do not engage in unfair discrimination against others on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status or any other basis prescribed by law.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Psychologists do not engage in sexual harassment. Sexual harassment refers to sexual solicitation, physical advances and verbal or non-verbal behaviour which is sexual in nature, which occurs in a psychologist's work environment and that either: is unwelcome or offensive or creates a hostile working environment and the psychologist knows or is told this; or is severe or intense enough to be considered abusive by a reasonable person in that same context.

Sexual harassment can consist of a single act or repeated acts. Psychologists treat sexual harassment complaints with dignity and respect.

OTHER HARASSMENT

In their work-related activities, psychologists do not engage in harassing or demeaning behaviour towards others based on factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status.

PERSONAL PROBLEMS AND CONFLICTS

Psychologists are aware that their personal problems and conflicts can have an impact on the effectiveness of their performance in work-related activities. They avoid entering into activities when they know or should know that their personal problems and conflicts can cause harm to the recipients of their psychological services.

Psychologists have an obligation to be alert to and to get assistance for personal problems at an early stage, in order to avoid impaired performance. When psychologists become aware that their personal problems may interfere with their work-related activities, they take appropriate steps such as getting professional assistance or consultation and determine whether to shorten, suspend or terminate their work-related activities.

AVOIDING HARM

Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming those that they work with or to minimize the harm if it is foreseeable and unavoidable. This especially refers to research involving experimentation on human or animal subjects.

MISUSE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS' INFLUENCE

Psychologists are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organisational or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence.

MISUSE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS' WORK

Psychologists do not engage in activities in which it seems as though their skills or data will be misused by others, unless corrective steps can be taken to prevent such misuse. If psychologists learn that their work has been misused or misrepresented, they take steps to minimise or correct the misuse or misrepresentation.

MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

In many communities and situations, it might not be possible for psychologists to avoid social or non-professional contacts with clients, patients, students, research participants and other recipients of their services. Psychologist must be sensitive to the potential harmful effects of these other contacts on their work and on the persons involved. They should avoid entering into these social or non-professional relationships if it will impair their objectivity in their work or if there is the danger of harm or exploitation of the persons involved. Similarly, psychologists do not engage in a professional relationship with someone when a pre-existing relationship with that person could be harmful to the parties involved. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, a potentially harmful multiple relationship has arisen, the psychologist attempts to resolve it with maximum concern for the other person(s) and compliance with the Ethics Code.

BARTER WITH PATIENTS OR CLIENTS

Psychologists usually avoid receiving goods, services, or other non-monetary compensation from patients or clients in exchange for psychological services offered. A psychologist may not engage in bartering, save where it is recognised as an appropriate cultural expression and will not affect the clinical relationship. Psychologists may not initiate such practices.

EXPLOITATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Psychologists do not exploit persons with whom they are involved in work-related activities. Psychologists do not engage in sexual relationships with students or supervisees in training.

CONSULTATIONS AND REFERRALS

When making consultations and referrals, psychologists do so with the best interests of their clients or patients in mind, and with appropriate consent. When indicated and professionally appropriate, psychologists cooperate with other professionals in order to serve their clients or patients effectively and appropriately.

THIRD PARTY REQUESTS FOR SERVICES

When a psychologist agrees to provide psychological services for someone at the request of a third party, the psychologist attempts to clarify at the outset the role of the psychologist, the uses of the services provided or the information obtained, and the limits of confidentiality. If there is a foreseeable risk of the psychologist being asked to perform conflicting roles as a result of a third party request for services, the psychologist makes clear the nature and direction of his or her responsibilities, keeps all parties informed as matters develop, and resolves the situation in accordance with the Ethics Code.

DELEGATION TO AND SUPERVISION OF SUBORDINATES

Psychologists delegate to their employees, supervisees, and research assistants only those responsibilities that are appropriate for those persons based on their level of education, training and experience.

Psychologists provide proper training and supervision for their employees, supervisees and research assistants to ensure that such persons perform their work effectively, responsibly and ethically.

DOCUMENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORK

Psychologists document their professional and scientific work appropriately in order to facilitate provision of services later by them or other professionals, to ensure accountability, and meet other requirements of institutions.

When psychologists believe that their records will be used in legal proceedings involving recipients of their services, they document their work in sufficient detail and quality so as to withstand reasonable scrutiny.

RECORDS AND DATA

Psychologists create, maintain, disseminate, store and dispose of records and data related to their professional and scientific work, in a manner that allows adherence to the Ethics Code.

FEES AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

As soon as is possible in a professional or scientific relationship, psychologists clarify compensation and billing arrangements with the recipients of their services.

Psychologists do not exploit recipients or payers of their services with regards to their fees.

Psychologists do not misrepresent their fees.

If limitations to services can be foreseen from limitations in financing, psychologists discuss this as early as possible with the recipients of their services.

REFERRALS AND FEES

When a psychologist pays, receives payment from, or divides fees with another professional other than in an employer-employee relationship, the payment to each is based on the services provided (e.g. clinical, consultative, administrative, etc.) and is not based on the referral itself.

RESPONSIBILITIES

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Psychologists are responsible for maintaining professional standards of conduct in the many roles that they perform such as researcher, educator, therapist, diagnostician, supervisor, consultant, administrator, social interventionist, and expert witness.

CONSEQUENCES OF WORK

Psychologists accept responsibility for the consequences of their work and make every effort to ensure that their services are used appropriately. Psychologists' take credit only for work they have actually done. Psychologists retain full professional liability to persons who, in the course of a professional relationship, suffer personal injury by reason of the psychologists actions or omissions.

LIMITS OF OBJECTIVITY

Psychologists have a responsibility to avoid relationships that may limit their objectivity or create a conflict of interest.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Psychologists have a responsibility to consult with or cooperate with other professionals and institutions to the extent that allows them to serve the best interest of their clients, patients, or other recipients of their services.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists are aware that they bear a heavy social responsibility because their recommendations and professional actions may alter the lives of others. They are alert to personal, social, organizational, financial or political situations and pressures that might lead to misuse of their influence.

STRUCTURING THE RELATIONSHIP

Psychologists discuss with clients or patients as early as is feasible in the therapeutic relationship, appropriate issues such as the nature and anticipated course of therapy, fees and confidentiality.

When a psychologist's work with clients or patients will be supervised, the above discussion includes that fact, and the name of the supervisor when the supervisor has legal responsibility for the case.

When the therapist is a student intern, the client, or patient is informed of that fact.

Psychologists make reasonable efforts to answer patients' questions and to avoid apparent misunderstandings about therapy. Whenever possible, psychologists provide oral and/or written information, using language that is reasonably understandable to the patient or client.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

SUPPORT FOR EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENTS

Psychologists base their diagnostic statements, recommendations, assessments and reports on information and techniques that are sufficient to support their findings.

APPROPRIATE USE OF ASSESSMENTS AND INTERVENTIONS

Psychologists use tests, interviews and other assessment techniques in a manner that is appropriate and that takes in account the limitations and the extent of usefulness of such tests, interviews and

techniques. Psychologists do not misuse assessment tools and they take steps to prevent unqualified persons from using assessments tools. Psychologists do not release raw test data to unqualified persons. Psychologists take reasonable steps to preserve the integrity and security of tests and other assessment tools. They must be willing to release all test data to another trained professional if requested by clients.

OBSOLETE TESTS

Psychologists do not base their assessment decisions and recommendations on tests that are obsolete, outdated and not useful to the current purpose for which they are being used.

EXPLAINING ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Psychologists take reasonable steps to ensure that assessment and test results are explained in a manner that is understandable to the person being assessed.

THERAPY

STRUCTURING THE RELATIONSHIP

Psychologists discuss with their clients or patients the nature and anticipated course of therapy, fees and confidentiality as soon as possible in the therapeutic relationship. Psychologists make efforts to answer clients' or patients' questions and to avoid misunderstandings. Where possible, psychologists provide oral and/or written information that is understandable to the client or patient.

COUPLE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

When a psychologist agrees to provide services for several people who have relationships with each other (e.g. husband, wife, parents and children), the psychologist attempts to clarify from the start:

1. who is the patient or client; and
2. the relationship that the psychologist will have with each person.
3. Psychologists are culture-sensitive to tests which have been normalised for foreign populations. They inform clients or patients of the limitations of such test.

PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO THOSE SERVED BY OTHERS

In deciding whether to provide services to a client or patient who is already receiving such services elsewhere, the psychologist carefully considers the treatment issues and the client's or patient's welfare. The psychologist discusses these issues with the client or patient in order to avoid any confusion or conflict, consults with other service providers where appropriate, and proceeds with caution.

SEXUAL INTIMACIES WITH CURRENT PATIENTS OR CLIENTS

Psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with current patients or clients.

THERAPY WITH FORMER SEXUAL PARTNERS

Psychologists do not do therapy with former sexual partners.

INTERRUPTION OF SERVICES

Psychologists take reasonable steps to facilitate care for their clients in the event of the psychologist's illness, unavailability, relocation, or the client's relocation or financial limitations.

SEXUAL INTIMACIES WITH FORMER THERAPY PATIENTS

- a. Psychologists do not engage in intimacies with a former therapy patient or client for at least two (2) years after cessation or termination of professional services.

- b. Because sexual intimacies with a former patient or client are so frequently harmful to the patient or client, and because such intimacies undermine public confidence in the psychology profession and thereby deter the public's use of needed services, psychologists do not engage in sexual intimacies with former therapy patients and clients even after a two year interval except in the most unusual circumstances. The psychologist who engages in such activity after the years following cessation or termination of treatment, bears the burden of demonstrating that there has been no exploitation, in light of all relevant factors including, 1. the amount of time that has passed since therapy terminated, 2. the nature and duration of the therapy, 3. the circumstances of termination, 4. the patient's or client's personal history, 5. the patient's or client's current mental status' 6. the likelihood of adverse impact on the patient or client and others, and 7. any statements or actions made by the therapist during the course of therapy suggesting or inviting the possibility of a post termination sexual or romantic relationship with the patient or client.

TERMINATING THE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Psychologists do not abandon clients or patients. Psychologists terminate a professional relationship when it becomes clear that the client or patient no longer needs services, is not benefiting from, or is being harmed by continued service.

Prior to termination for whatever reason, and provided that the client or patient allows it, the psychologist discusses the patient's or client's needs, provides appropriate pre-termination counselling, makes referrals if possible, and facilitates transfer or responsibility to another service provider if the client or patients requests so immediately.

RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

FAMILIARITY WITH THE ETHICS CODE

Psychologists have a responsibility to be familiar with the Ethics Code and how it applies to their work. Ignorance of or misinterpretation of the Ethics Code cannot be used as a defense against a charge of unethical conduct.

CONFRONTING ETHICAL ISSUES

When a psychologist is confronted with a situation or has to take a course of action and is uncertain as to whether the Ethics Code would be violated, the psychologist consults with other psychologists, as soon as practicable, who are knowledgeable about ethical issues, in order to arrive at an appropriate course of action. In extenuating circumstances, where they have to act at once, consultation with another psychologist as soon as possible after the fact should be done.

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ETHICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEMANDS

When the demands of an organization with which a psychologist is affiliated conflict with the Ethics Code, the psychologist does his/her best to adhere as fully as possible to the Ethics Code.

DEALING WITH ETHICAL VIOLATIONS

When a psychologist has reliable evidence that another psychologist may be violating the Ethics Code, the psychologist attempts to resolve the situation informally, if appropriate, by speaking to the other psychologist about the situation in a manner that does not violate confidentiality issues. If an informal resolution is not appropriate, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Executive of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists as soon as possible for appropriate action.

COOPERATING WITH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Psychologists cooperate with investigations, procedures and resulting requirements of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists while doing their best to resolve any confidentiality issues. Failure to cooperate is in itself an ethics violation.

IMPROPER COMPLAINTS

Psychologists do not file or encourage the filing of ethics complaints that are frivolous or petty and which are intended to harm the respondent rather than protect the general public.

Clients who bring complaints forfeit the rights to confidentiality if the complaint goes through.

FORENSIC ACTIVITIES

PROFESSIONALISM

Psychologists base their forensic activities on knowledge born out of training and experience in the discharge of their professional duties. In the forensic field, psychologists are engaged in assessments, consultations, reports and expert testimony. As practitioners, psychologists are obliged to be informed with legal and quasi-legal regulations as best serving the public interest.

They are also required to be cognizant of opportunities to contribute to legislation as it affects the rights of the public and profession. In forensic testimony and reports, psychologists testify truthfully, honestly and frankly and consistent with applicable legal procedures and describe fully the bases for their testimony and conclusions.

FORENSIC ASSESSMENT

Psychologists provide oral or written testimony of the psychological characteristics of an individual or group, only after they have conducted an examination of individuals or groups using standard psychological assessment techniques.

When such an examination is not possible, psychologists are obliged to state the impact of their limited information and are further sensitive to the extent of their conclusions and recommendations.

TEACHING, TRAINING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

In the preparation of programmes for education and training in Psychology, psychologists ensure that there is an accurate description of content, goals and requirements of the programme. Advertising of whatever kind, must not be misleading, but must describe the audience for which the programme is intended, the educational objectives, the presenters and the fees involved, whenever applicable.

In teaching or training, psychologists recognize the power they exercise over students or supervisees and therefore make reasonable efforts to avoid engaging in conduct that is personally demeaning to students or supervisees.

The teaching of the use of specialized techniques or procedures that require specialized training, such as the interpretation of test results or diagnostic formulation to individuals who lack the prerequisite training is strongly discouraged. It is the psychologists' responsibility to provide appropriate feedback to students and supervisees, based on their actual performance on relevant and established programme requirements.

Psychologists design and conduct research and report research findings according to recognized standards of scientific competence and ethical research. Researchers and assistants are permitted to perform only those tasks for which they are appropriately trained and prepared.

Psychologists obtain from most institutions, relevant authorities and from research subjects written approval prior to conducting their research. Participants are to be informed as to the nature of the research they are participating in, in language that is understandable and non technical.

Psychologists do not present elements of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data is cited occasionally. The taking of responsibility and credit only for work they have actually performed is the right of every psychologist.

Psychologists who have to review material submitted for publication, grants or other research proposals, respect the confidentiality of and the proprietary rights in such information, of those who submitted it.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

1. Psychologists comply with this Ethics Code in public statements relating to their professional services, products and publications or to the field of psychology.
2. Public statements, announcements of service and promotional activities of psychologists serve the purpose of providing sufficient information to aid the consumer public in making judgements and choices.
3. Psychologists make reasonable efforts to prevent others (such as employers, publishers, sponsors, organizational clients, and representatives of the print or broadcast media) from making deceptive statements concerning psychologists' practice or professional or scientific activities.
4. Psychologists do not make public statements that are false, deceptive, misleading, fraudulent or unfair. These include but are not limited to the following:
 - a. False or deceptive statements concerning:
 1. Their training, experience or competence;
 2. Their academic degrees;
 3. Their credentials;
 4. Their institutional or association affiliations;
 5. Their services
 6. Scientific or clinical basis for results or degree of success of their services;
 7. Their fees; or
 8. Their publications or research findings.
 - b. A statement falsely implying unusual, unique or only one of a kind of abilities.
 - c. A statement intended or likely to appeal to a client's fears, anxieties or emotions concerning the possible results of failure to obtain the offered services.
 - d. A statement comparing the advertiser's services with another psychologist's services, unless the comparison can be factually substantiated.

5. Psychologists do not participate for personal gain in commercial announcements or advertisements recommending to the public the purchase or use of property or single-source products or services when that participation is based solely upon their identification as psychologists.

COMPETENCE

1. Psychologists provide services, teach and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, or appropriate professional experience.
2. The psychologist discourages the practice of psychology by unqualified persons and assists the public in identifying psychologists competent to give dependable professional service.
3. When a psychologist or person identifying himself/herself as a psychologist violates the Psychologists' Code of Ethics, the psychologists who know first hand of these activities should bring this to the attention of the Executive of the Association as soon as possible for appropriate action.
4. Psychologists participate in continuing education programmes and keep informed of new professional procedures and knowledge.
5. Psychologists obtain whatever training, experience or counsel is necessary to enable them to recognise differences among people, such as those that may be associated with age, sex or socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds or other relevant variables.
6. Psychologists recognise that personal problems and conflicts may interfere with professional effectiveness. Accordingly, they refrain from undertaking activities in which their personal problems are likely to lead to inadequate performance or harm to a client, colleague, student or research participant. If engaged in the activity when they become aware of their personal problems, they seek competent professional assistance to determine whether they should suspend, terminate or limit the scope of their professional or scientific activities.