

**CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY EC1
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TOPIC: PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

APA adopted its first ethics code in 1951, and there have been several revisions since then. In 1951, the APA committee published six separate sets of draft ethical standards, each accompanied by relevant critical incidents (APA Committee on Ethical Standards, 1951).

The six topic areas were:

- • Ethical standards and public responsibility
- • Ethical standards in professional relationships
- • Ethical standards in client relationships
- • Ethical standards in research
- • Ethical standards in writing and publishing
- • Ethical standards in teaching



- In 1953, it formally published the Ethical Standards of Psychologists (American Psychological Association, 1953). Revisions of these standards appeared in 1958, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1990, 1992, and most recently, 2002. The 2002 version of the **Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct** presents five general principles as well as specific ethical standards relevant to various activities of clinical psychologists—assessment, intervention, therapy, research, forensic activities, and so on (American Psychological Association, 2002).
- The latest version of the APA ethics code includes an introduction, preamble, five general principles, and specific ethical standards.



The general principles include the following:

- **Beneficence and non-maleficence:** Psychologists strive to benefit those they serve and to do no harm.
- **Fidelity and responsibility:** Psychologists have professional and scientific responsibilities to society and establish relationships characterized by trust.
- **Integrity:** In all their activities, psychologists strive to be accurate, honest, and truthful.
- **Justice:** All persons are entitled to access to and benefit from the profession of psychology; psychologists should recognize their biases and boundaries of competence.
- **Respect for people's rights and dignity:** Psychologists respect the rights and dignity of all people and enact safeguards to ensure protection of these rights.



THE ETHICAL STANDARDS CAN BE DESCRIBED INTO TEN MAJOR CATEGORIES:

1) Resolving ethical issues- When any ethical issue arises, a clinical psychologist should be equipped with a process by which to make the most ethical decision possible. Psychologists regularly encounter situations that require a consideration of the proper ethical decision. In the book *Decoding the Ethics Code*, Celia Fisher (2009), the chair of the American Psychological Association's Ethics Code Task Force proposes an eight-step model for ethical decision making which is presented here:

1. Prior to any ethical dilemma arising, make a commitment to doing what is ethically appropriate.
2. Become familiar with the American Psychological Association ethical code.
3. Consult any law or professional guidelines relevant to the situation at hand.



4. Try to understand the perspectives of various parties affected by the actions you may take. Consult with colleagues (always protecting confidentiality) for additional input and discussion.
5. Generate and evaluate your alternatives.
6. Select and implement the course of action that seems most ethically appropriate.
7. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your course of action.
8. Modify and continue to evaluate the ethical plan as necessary.

Canter et al. (1994) emphasized actions taken prior to a point in time when an actual problem is occurred. This includes knowing the ethics code and applicable laws and legal and institutional regulations, taking continuing education workshops in ethics, and learning a formal method for analyzing ethical issues.



The following steps are one decision-making system.

- Identify the ethical aspects
- Identify the ethical problems.
- Identify relevant ethical and other standards.
- Determine the facts
- List options for resolving the problem
- Decide on and evaluate an action plan

2) Competence- Ethical Standard 2.01a of APA's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" states: "Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, or appropriate professional experience" (APA, 2002, p. 1063). Psychologists have an ethical responsibility to know their competencies and to practice only within those competencies.



They must only provide services for which they have the appropriate training and experience and remain up-to-date regarding advances in the field. It is important for psychologists to be well aware of their strengths and weaknesses, their skills and deficits, and most importantly, their limitations. Accordingly, it is a primary requirement, ethically and in licensure laws and regulations, for each professional to practice within the limits of his or her competence.

3) Human relations- Ethical Standard 3.05a (American Psychological Association, 2002) states that a multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist is in a professional role with a person and (1) at the same time is in another role with the same person, (2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the psychologist has the professional relationship, or (3) promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person. (p. 1065). Psychologists must maintain professional and personal integrity and be respectful, fair, and honest in their dealings with others. They must be truthful in describing their services, their areas of expertise, and what can be expected from their services. They must be well aware of their biases, needs, and values and how these may impact their work. Psychological treatment relationships involve a variety of emotional and cognitive reactions by both the client and the psychologist.



Addition of roles other than the treatment relationship, such as friend or business associate, are likely to create problems. Psychologists must avoid conflicts of interest and dual relationships with their patients, clients, students, and others. Because psychologists often maintain a position of power in their professional relationships with patients and students, they must never exploit this power differential and never place their own interests and needs above those they serve.

4) Privacy and confidentiality- “Psychologists have a primary obligation and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information” (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 1066). Confidentiality refers to a clinical psychologist’s duty not to reveal information about a client to anyone.



Confidentiality allows patients to tell their therapists secrets they might tell no one else. Even with confidentiality, it can take great courage for some patients to mention what to them is almost impossible to speak aloud: humiliating failures, sexual longings, loss of religious faith, betrayal of a partner, hatred of a new child, shame about looks or abilities, cheating to get ahead, thoughts of killing themselves, fears and anxieties they have kept hidden from others. But without confidentiality, these patients might not speak at all.

Privacy is the individual's right to decide how much personal information or private values, beliefs, preferences, or behavior should be known by anyone else.

5) Advertising and other public statements- The ethical principle of integrity requires that public statements, such as advertising, be truthful and not misleading. Psychologists should avoid any false or deceptive public statements misrepresenting themselves, their training, experience, degrees, and activities.



In section 3 of the 1992 ethics code, “Advertising and Other Public Statements.” As stated in Standard 3.01, “Public statements include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curriculum vitae, interviews or comments for use in media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials” (p. 1604). Psychologists must be very careful in how they represent themselves to the public. They must not mislead or deceive others by overstating or exaggerating their qualifications and abilities. Psychologists who conduct interviews for radio or television programming must be especially careful to prevent distortion of their statements and qualifications. Psychologists should also make sure that others issuing statements on their behalf (e.g., a company hired to produce a brochure for the psychologist’s practice) are accurate, and the psychologist should review materials at various points.



6) Record keeping and fees- Professional records must be maintained even following the termination of professional services. In the case of severe illness, a psychologist should make appropriate arrangements to ensure that client records are kept confidential yet are accessible to clients and their potential future psychologists or other mental health professionals with whom they choose to work.

7) Education and training- Psychologists must be accurate and objective in their teaching activities and teach only in areas that they are qualified. Training or educational programs that they conduct must include accurate descriptions of course information, goals, and evaluation methods. In addition to maintaining responsibility for professional behavior, psychologists must also assist in ensuring that colleagues maintain professional ethics.



8) Research and publication- Regarding research, Standard 8.02 (“Informed Consent to Research”) of the American Psychological Association’s (2002) ethical code instructs psychologists to inform prospective participants about numerous aspects of the study, including its purpose, procedures, and length of time it may require; any predictable risks or adverse effects; incentives for participation; and the right to decline or withdraw from participation.

9) Assessment- Psychologists must use assessment instruments only for the purposes for which they were developed and validated. Test selection should entail a number of factors, including the psychologist’s competence; the client’s culture, language, and age; and the test’s reliability and validity. Psychologists should make efforts to protect the security and integrity of the test materials they use.



10) Therapy- Psychologists must structure the therapeutic relationship in a professional manner. This includes clarifying from the outset what can be expected from psychotherapy, fees and confidentiality arrangements, and professional or training status. Ethical Standard 10.01 (“Informed Consent to Therapy”) explains that psychologists inform clients/patients as early as is feasible in the therapeutic relationship about the nature and anticipated course of therapy, fees, involvement of third parties, and limits of confidentiality and provide sufficient opportunity for the client/patient to ask questions and receive answers. (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 1072).

