

Ethical Principles in Counselling

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Designed as concise, easy-to-read study notes

1. Core Ethical Foundations

Principle	Key Idea	Practical Implications
Beneficence	Act in the client's best interests; promote wellbeing.	Choose interventions that are evidence-based and likely to help.
Non-maleficence	Do no harm.	Avoid practices that could cause physical, emotional, or psychological injury.
Autonomy	Respect the client's right to make informed choices.	Obtain informed consent; honor clients' decisions even when you disagree (within legal limits).
Justice	Provide fair and equitable treatment.	Offer services without discrimination; allocate resources impartially.
Fidelity & Trustworthiness	Keep promises and maintain reliable professional relationships.	Follow through on agreements, be punctual, and honor confidentiality.
Integrity	Be honest, transparent, and accountable.	Disclose limits of competence, correct mistakes, and avoid deception.

2. Professional Codes & Guidelines

Organization	Main Document	Highlights
American Counseling Association (ACA)	<i>ACA Code of Ethics</i>	Detailed standards on confidentiality, dual relationships, and cultural competence.
British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP)	<i>Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions</i>	Emphasises self-awareness, supervision, and client-centered practice.

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Australian Counselling Association (ACAus)	<i>Code of Ethics</i>	Focus on respect for diversity, professional boundaries, and continuous professional development.
International Association for Counselling (IAC)	<i>Ethical Guidelines for Counselling</i>	Global perspective on cross-cultural ethics and human rights.

Tip: Always keep the most recent version of your relevant code handy; many jurisdictions require you to cite the code when documenting ethical decisions.

3. Major Ethical Areas & How to Apply Them

3.1 Confidentiality & Privacy

1. **What it covers** – Session content, records, and any identifying information.
2. **When disclosure is permitted** – Legal mandates (e.g., child abuse, imminent harm), client consent, or court order.
3. **Practical steps**
 - Explain confidentiality limits at the first session (informed consent).
 - Store records securely (encrypted digital files, locked cabinets).
 - Use pseudonyms or coded notes when sharing case material for supervision or training.

3.2 Informed Consent

- **Components:** purpose of counselling, procedures, risks/benefits, fees, limits of confidentiality, right to withdraw.
- **Process:** verbal explanation + written form; revisit when the therapeutic frame changes (e.g., shift to group work).

3.3 Dual Relationships & Boundaries

- **Definition:** Any non-therapeutic role that could impair professional judgment (e.g., friend, business partner).

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- **Guidelines**

- Avoid dual roles when possible.
- If unavoidable (small communities), discuss potential impacts, obtain informed consent, and document the decision.

3.4 Competence & Scope of Practice

- **Self?assessment:** regularly evaluate knowledge, skills, and cultural competence.
- **Continuing Education:** meet required CPD hours; seek supervision when working outside your expertise.
- **Referral:** refer clients when the issue exceeds your competence or when a conflict of interest arises.

3.5 Cultural Sensitivity & Diversity

- ****Principles**