



**UK Council for Psychotherapy**

**Ethical Principles and Code of  
Professional Conduct**



# **UKCP Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this UKCP Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct is to define generic UKCP ethical principles which UKCP members commit to and maintain.

This document may be taken into account by the Professional Conduct Officer, Professional Conduct Committee, Investigating Committee, Fitness to Practise Tribunal and Appeal Tribunal when considering allegations which may impair a UKCP member fitness to practise under the Central Complaints Process and Central Final Appeal Procedure.

This document may be used in conjunction with any codes of practise, conduct or ethics issued by a UKCP Organisational Member and/or College including but not limited to “Guidelines for Section and Institutional Members for the Development of Codes of Practice and Professional Conduct for Working with Children”. This Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct applies equally to all UKCP members, the term psychotherapist should be read to include psychotherapeutic counsellors.

For clarity and ease of expression, the third person plural pronoun is used as non-gendered pronoun for “psychotherapist”: so they is used for “she/he” and “their” for “her/his”.

This Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct cannot cover every potential ethical, conduct or competence related concern. UKCP Members must therefore depend on their own thoughtful evaluation of specific principles and the spirit expressed in these statements.

The psychotherapist commits to engage with the challenge of striving for ethical practice and conduct, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously.

## **General Ethical Principles**

### **1. Best interests of clients**

- 1.1 The psychotherapist takes responsibility for respecting their client's best interests when providing therapy.
- 1.2 The psychotherapist undertakes to treat their clients with respect.
- 1.3 The psychotherapist undertakes not to abuse or exploit the relationship they have with their clients, current or past, for any purpose, including the psychotherapist's sexual, emotional or financial gain.
- 1.4 The psychotherapist undertakes not to enter into a sexual relationship with a client.
- 1.5 Psychotherapists are required to carefully consider possible implications of entering into dual or multiple relationships and make every effort to avoid entering into relationships that risks confusing an existing relationship and may impact adversely on a client. For example, a dual or multiple relationships could be a social or commercial relationship between the psychotherapist and client, or a supervisory relationship which runs alongside the therapeutic one. When dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, for example in small communities, psychotherapists take responsibility to clarify and manage boundaries and confidentiality of the therapeutic relationship.
- 1.6 The psychotherapist undertakes to take into account the length of therapy and time lapsed since therapy and pay great attention to exercise reasonable care before entering into any personal or business relationships with former clients. Should the relationship prove to be detrimental to the former client, the psychotherapist may be called to account to the charge of a misuse of their former position as the former client's psychotherapist.
- 1.7 The psychotherapist undertakes to respect their client's autonomy.
- 1.8 The psychotherapist undertakes not to harm or collude in the harming of their client or a client of others.
- 1.9 The psychotherapist undertakes to know and understand their legal responsibilities concerning the rights of children and vulnerable adults and to take appropriate action should the psychotherapist consider a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm.
- 1.10 The psychotherapist recognises that their behaviour outside their professional life may have an effect on the relationship with their clients and takes responsibility for working with these potential negative or positive effects to the benefit of the client.

## **2. Diversity and Equality**

- 2.1 The psychotherapist undertakes to actively consider issues of diversity and equalities as these affect all aspects of their work. The psychotherapist accepts no one is immune from the experience of prejudice and acknowledges the need for a continuing process of self-enquiry and professional development.
- 2.2 The psychotherapist undertakes not to allow prejudice about a client's sex, age, colour, race, disability, sexuality, social, economic or immigration status, lifestyle, religious or cultural beliefs to adversely affect the way they relate to the client.
- 2.3 The psychotherapist undertakes not to engage in any behaviour that is abusive or detrimental to any client or colleague based on the above factors.

## **3. Confidentiality**

- 3.1 The psychotherapist commits to respect, protect and preserve the confidentiality of their clients. The psychotherapist undertakes to notify their clients, when appropriate or on request that there are legal and ethical limits of that confidentiality and circumstances under which the psychotherapist might disclose confidential information to a third party.
- 3.2 The psychotherapist commits to protect sensitive and personally identifiable information obtained from the course of their work as a psychotherapist.
- 3.3 Should the psychotherapist be required by law to serve in judicial or administrative proceedings, they commit to getting clarification at the outset of the potential impacts this could have on their commitment of confidentiality to any client. In such a situation the psychotherapist commits to maintaining this clarification as the situation proceeds and to seek legal and ethical advice as appropriate.
- 3.4 The psychotherapist commits to safeguard the welfare and anonymity of clients when any form of publication of clinical material is being considered and to always obtain their client's verifiable consent in any case where the welfare or anonymity of a client may be compromised. This includes situations where a client or former client might recognise themselves in case material despite the changing of names or actual circumstances.

#### **4. Conduct**

- 4.1 The psychotherapist acknowledges that their professional and personal conduct may have both positive and negative effects on the way they are experienced by a client. The psychotherapist undertakes, in a continuing process, to critically examine the impact these effects may have on the psychotherapeutic relationship with any client, placing a priority on preserving the client's psychotherapeutic best interests.
- 4.2 The psychotherapist agrees to inform UKCP and the relevant organisational member if they are:
- (a) Convicted of a criminal offence, receive a conditional discharge for an offence, or accept a police caution;
  - (b) Disciplined by any professional body or membership organisation responsible for regulating or licensing a health or social-care profession; or
  - (c) Suspended or placed under a practice restriction by an employer or similar organisation because of concerns relating to practise of psychotherapy, competence or health.
- 4.3 Subject to the rules of confidentiality and other code of ethics adhered to by the psychotherapist, the psychotherapist commits to co-operating with any lawful investigation or inquiry relating to their capacity to appropriately carry out their psychotherapy practise. Good practise would indicate that the psychotherapist should consult with a colleague/member of their Ethics Committee, or seek legal advice with request to any request for information by anyone involved in a legal case even where the client has given their consent.
- 4.4 If a psychotherapist is convicted of a criminal offence, receives a conditional discharge for an offence, or accepts a police caution UKCP will consider any implications their conviction, conditional discharge, or in exceptional cases police caution, may have for their professional practice. UKCP will consider and assess potential risk posed to clients or for public confidence in the register and may reject their application for membership or removal of name from its register on such grounds.

#### **5. Professional knowledge, skills and experience**

- 5.1 The psychotherapist agrees to disclose their qualifications to clients and UKCP when requested and commits to not claiming or implying qualifications that they do not have.
- 5.2 The psychotherapists commits to ensure that the use of title such as "Doctor/Dr" and post nominal initials after a name in all published materials are accurate; indicate whether it is a medical or academic qualification; and reasonably informs the public of their relevance to the practise of psychotherapy.

- 5.3 The psychotherapist commits to recognise the boundaries and limitations of their expertise and techniques and to take the necessary steps to maintain their ability to practice competently.
- 5.4 If it becomes clear that a case is beyond a psychotherapist's scope of practice, the psychotherapist commits to inform the client and where appropriate offer an alternative psychotherapist or other professional where requested.
- 5.5 The psychotherapist commits to adhering to the UKCP policies on standards of education, training and practise.
- 5.6 The psychotherapist commits to an on-going process of professional and personal enquiry and challenge, commonly referred to as "Continuing Professional Development" The psychotherapist commits adhering to the Continuing Professional Development policies held by UKCP and the relevant College of the UKCP that the psychotherapist is a member of.
- 5.7 The psychotherapist accepts responsibility to ensure that they are competent and have sufficient supervisory arrangements and other necessary support to enable them to meet their psychotherapeutic obligations to any client. This includes the responsibility of ensuring the very careful consideration of how best to refer a client to another psychotherapist or professional should it become clear that this would be in the client's best interest.

## **6. Communication**

- 6.1 The psychotherapist agrees to explain at the outset to a client or prospective client: their terms, fees and conditions; and on request, clarify other related questions such as likely length of therapy, methods of practice to be utilised, referral or termination processes.
- 6.2 The psychotherapist agrees to notify clients of any other codes of ethics & practise to which they subscribe, including the availability of the complaints procedure.

## **7. Obtaining consent**

- 7.1 The psychotherapist undertakes to explain to the client, to the extent applicable to their modality and the client's capacity: the psychotherapist's clinical method(s) of working; and the client's choice to participate in any therapeutic interventions suggested by the psychotherapist including any commitments the psychotherapist makes to the client and any commitments the psychotherapist requires of the client.
- 7.2 The psychotherapist undertakes not to intentionally mislead a client concerning the type or nature of the psychotherapy practised.

7.3 The psychotherapist commits to clarify with clients the nature, purpose and conditions of any research in which the clients are to be involved and to ensure that informed and verifiable consent is given before commencement of the therapy and research.

## **8. Records**

8.1 The psychotherapist agrees to keep such records as are necessary to properly carry out the type of psychotherapy offered.

8.2 The psychotherapist commits to store and dispose any personally identifiable records or data securely in order to protect the client's confidentiality.

## **9. Physical or Mental Health**

9.1 The psychotherapist accepts an ongoing responsibility to ensure that they do not work with clients if they are not able to do so for physical or mental health reasons, or when impaired by the effects of drugs, alcohol or medication.

9.2 The psychotherapist accepts a responsibility to take appropriate action should their ability to meet their obligations to their clients be compromised by their physical or mental health.

9.3 The psychotherapist commits to carefully consider how, in the event of their sudden unavailability this can be most appropriately communicated to their clients. This will also include careful consideration of how a client might be informed of a psychotherapist's death or illness and, where appropriate, supported to deal with such a situation.

## **10. Professional Integrity**

The psychotherapist commits to report potential breaches of this Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct by themselves or by other psychotherapists to the relevant organisational member or UKCP.

## **11. Advertising**

11.1 The psychotherapist commits to ensuring that any advertising or promoting they undertake will not be misleading, false, unfair or exaggerated.

11.2 The psychotherapist commits to ensure that if they are involved in advertising or promoting any particular therapy, product or service, this is done in an accurate and responsible way.

11.3 The psychotherapist undertakes not to make or support unjustifiable statements relating to particular therapies or therapists or include testimonials from clients in any advertising material.

## **12. Indemnity Insurance**

The psychotherapist commits to ensuring that their professional work is adequately covered by appropriate indemnity insurance or by their employer's indemnity arrangements.

## **13. Complaints**

13.1 The psychotherapist accepts the responsibility for maintaining reasonable awareness and a level of understanding regarding complaints procedures, relevant laws and statutory responsibilities that are applicable to their practise.

13.2 The psychotherapist accepts a responsibility to act against colluding with practise harmful to clients including that carried out by other professionals and colleagues. This should include, where appropriate, activating procedures for addressing ethical concerns including formal complaints if necessary.



<b>Revised</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Submitted to Ethics Committee and Registration Board</b>	<b>27 Nov 08</b>
<b>Ethics Committee</b>	<b>4 Dec 08</b>
<b>Board of Trustees</b>	<b>26 Jan 09</b>
<b>Standards Board</b>	<b>5 Feb 09</b>
<b>Education &amp; Training Committee</b>	<b>19 Feb 09</b>
<b>Ethics Committee</b>	<b>5 Mar 09</b>
<b>Feedback following consultation with OM's/College/College Chair of Ethics</b>	<b>Aug 09</b>
<b>Changes following Consultation with OMs and College</b>	<b>Sept 2009</b>
<b>Changes following Ethics Committee meeting</b>	<b>17 Sept 09</b>
<b>Adopted by Board of Trustees</b>	<b>26 Sept 09</b>