

# **NEW ZEALAND CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION**



## **CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE**

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# **NEW ZEALAND CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE**

This Code is designed as a set of principles and guidelines for best counselling practice, and to support our members to make sound judgments where conflicting ethical values are encountered.

The Code has its foundation in the values and principles of the Association. Members will draw on this Code as well as the Laws of New Zealand and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

## **OUR STORY**

The New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association was founded in 1992 and gained charitable status in 1995. The founders were responding to a need to resource counsellors and other helpers who identified as Christian to provide a pathway for them to transition to counselling as a professional activity.

The Association's aim was and continues to be to resource and nurture its members to engage with their clients in a loving professional manner, maintaining high ethical standards, credibility, and client-centered practice. It continues now to offer a professional community for people with a shared Christian faith.

This Code of Ethics has been revised and updated regularly to reflect best practice, current law and the changing environment in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **OUR VALUES**

**RESPECTFULNESS**

**AUTHENTICITY**

**HUMILITY**

**INTEGRITY**

**WELLBEING**

**FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE**

**PROFESSIONALISM**

**HOPEFULNESS**

**SPIRITUALITY**

**AWARENESS**

## OUR PRINCIPLES

*We are committed to maintaining professional practice via sound management practices, collaboration and consultation, and healthy self-care. Our practice is disciplined, intentional and evidence-based. We respect, model and promote the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.*

**Whakawhanaungatanga:** connection, building relationships

**Manaakitanga:** welcoming and caring

**Karakia:** prayer, the door-opener for Wairua

**Aroha:** embracing one another

**Non-maleficence:** Do no harm

**Beneficence:** Do good

**Autonomy:** We respect the client's right to be self-governing

**Justice:** We offer fair and impartial service to all clients based on respect and the dignity of the individual

**Sanctity of the counselling space:** We honour the sacredness of the therapeutic relationship

**Wellbeing and Safety:** We prioritise our clients' wellbeing and safety

**Trustworthiness:** We keep our word and honour the trust placed in us as counsellors

**Self-Awareness:** We will ensure that our personal values and beliefs do not disadvantage our clients

**Scope of Practice:** We work within the levels of our competence

**Accountability:** We are open about our work with our supervisors, and seek regular feedback about our practice

**Learning:** We are committed to increasing and expanding our knowledge with ongoing education and development, and integrating this with our practice

**Spirituality:** We respect the absolute right of our clients to choose their own spiritual path. Our Association has as its foundation the principles of Christian faith and practice.

## GUIDELINES FOR BEST PRACTICE

- Faithfully attends to forming, supporting and maintaining an effective relationship with the client and regularly evaluates the efficacy of counselling practice.
- Consults with relevant professionals when appropriate.
- Seeks opportunities to be an active and participating member of the professional counselling community.

- Faithfully attends to ensuring this Code of Practice is carried out in all aspects of their work including counselling, administration, management and supervision whether in private practice or part of any agency.
- Monitors and responds to changes in personal health and wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social).

*"I will attend to my own health, well-being and abilities in order to provide care of the highest standard"*

*-Physician's Oath Amendment 2017*

## **1. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CLIENT**

**1.1 Client Interest and Wellbeing:** While taking account of their obligations under the law, counsellors hold the interests and wellbeing of their clients to be of primary importance. They recognise that counselling should be practised only in the best interests of the client, and they seek to avoid doing harm in all aspects of their professional work.

The wellbeing of clients takes precedence over the self-interest of counsellors and over the interests of colleagues, employers and other agencies.

**1.2 Cultural Sensitivity:** Counsellors are sensitive to the cultural and social diversity and complexity of their clients. Counsellors accord due respect to the Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand and demonstrate a commitment to the principles of partnership, protection and participation inherent within Te Tiriti o Waitangi. They are aware that clients have a right to access culturally appropriate services where available and will ensure clients are aware of the options available to them. When considering entering into a therapeutic relationship, counsellors will be sensitive to the options of either cultural supervision for the counsellor or referring the client to a more culturally appropriate practitioner.

**1.3 Respect for Diversity:** Counsellors recognise the differences among people and do not discriminate in relation to ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, sexuality, disability, gender identity, political or religious beliefs. They seek training, consultation and supervision to ensure competent and inclusive service to all clients. They are aware of their own personal values and beliefs and how these may impact or affect their work with clients, and practise within their competencies.

**1.4 Communication:** Counsellors present information in a fair, respectful and honest manner, distinguishing between factual information, professional judgment and personal opinion.

**1.5 Power Differential:** Counsellors recognise the power differential implicit within every therapeutic relationship, and seek to minimise the potential negative impact of that differential.

1.5.1 Counsellors are responsible for ensuring the therapeutic relationship is not compromised by their own needs, opinions or beliefs. Counsellors are responsible for attending to and maintaining safety within the interpersonal dynamic of the therapeutic relationship (this includes, but is not limited to the presence of transference and countertransference).

1.5.2 Counsellors recognise that it is their responsibility to remain accountable for relationships with current and/or former clients, and must consider the possible consequences of entering into friendships, business relationships, training, supervision, and other relationships with these clients. Any changes in the counsellor-client relationship need to be discussed with the client and in supervision.

The decision to enter into any relationship, other than a counselling relationship, with a former client needs to take into account whether the issues presenting in therapy have been resolved and also needs to be discussed in supervision. This also needs to be considered in light of relevant parts of this Code of Ethics and Practice.

1.5.3 Counsellors are to be aware of, and maintain, appropriate personal and professional boundaries in their work. Where there is awareness for boundaries to be potentially compromised, counsellors are responsible for bringing this to supervision.

**1.6 No Harassment:** Counsellors do not condone or engage in coercion or harassment in any form: physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, cultural, spiritual, sexual or financial.

**1.7 Informed Consent:** The terms and conditions on which counselling is provided must be clear, reasonable and gained without coercion or undue pressure as outlined in 1.5 above. Counsellors have a responsibility to explain, gain and document the informed consent of their clients. Where the client is judged incapable of giving informed consent, this should be documented and consent sought from those authorised to represent the interests of the client.

Informed consent includes:

- 1.7.1 clearly identifying who the client is (eg. Individual, couple, family);
- 1.7.2 understanding the goals, nature and procedures of the therapeutic process;
- 1.7.3 being informed in advance of important aspects of the therapeutic relationship that might influence a client's decision to enter that relationship, such as professional fees, record keeping, personal commitments, time constraints, and the limits of confidentiality;
- 1.7.4 being informed that they have an ongoing right to refuse or to withdraw consent to participation in the therapeutic process without fear of negative repercussion for exercising that right;
- 1.7.5 being informed of the right of access to their own records;
- 1.7.6 Any time the nature of the counselling relationship (as outlined in 1.7.1, 1.7.2, 1.7.3, 1.7.4 or 1.7.5) changes, consent must be renegotiated.

**1.8 Ending the Counsellor / Client Relationship:** The process of concluding a counselling relationship is undertaken in collaboration between the counsellor and the client where possible. Where appropriate, the counsellor offers to help the client find alternative sources of assistance and takes every possible step to ensure best outcomes for both parties.

**1.9 Record Keeping:** Counsellors keep sufficient records of their activities in a secure manner in compliance with current professional health provider regulations (see the Health Information Privacy Code 1994 (or any enactment or amendment thereof or in substitution therefore) which state that client notes are to be kept for a minimum period of ten (10) years from the date of the last meeting with the client. These records are kept:

- 1.9.1 for the counsellor's own reference;
- 1.9.2 to ensure that there is a record of the process undertaken;

1.9.3 to enable the information to be presented clearly if required, for example, by a court of law.

**1.10 Confidentiality:** Counsellors will be deeply respectful of the confidentiality of all data related to clients. They refrain from sharing any client data with anyone without serious consideration to possible consequences.

1.10.1 Subject to the expectations and limitations listed in clause 1.10.3., and save as otherwise required by law, counsellors do not disclose information obtained from practising as a counsellor to a third party without the informed consent of the client.

1.10.2 Counsellors working with agencies, schools or churches should clearly inform clients of organisational policy regarding confidentiality, especially regarding any limits of that confidentiality within the organisation.

1.10.3 Exceptions/limitations to clause 1.10.1.:

1.10.3.1 **Incapacity:** Where clients are judged incapable of giving consent to disclosure, consent must be sought from those authorised to represent their interests.

1.10.3.2 **Emergency:** Situations may arise where it is impossible or impractical to seek consent to disclosure in time to prevent harm or injury to the client or some other person. Where danger is serious and imminent, counsellors (whenever possible in consultation with their supervisor and/or other health professionals), should decide if information is to be disclosed. In this event it is expected that, where possible, counsellors would report to the client, or persons authorised to represent his/her interests, as soon as possible, any information disclosed to a third party.

1.10.4 Case information in any form (including verbal, visual, written or electronic) may be shared in the context of professional practice only with permission from the client, and always in an anonymous form, in a way that the client cannot be identified.

1.10.5 Counsellors make provision for protecting client confidentiality in the secure storage, retrieval and disposal of case records. This includes both hard



copies and electronic records. When using electronic devices to store records, counsellors need to ensure the safety of the information (i.e. that it is password-protected) and that at the time of disposal all copies are permanently deleted. In provision they should also refer to the Privacy Act 1993 (or any enactment or amendment thereof or in substitution therefore).

1.10.6 In the event of any changes that may occur in the counsellor's practice including but not restricted to ill-health, death, change of profession or retirement, counsellors make provision for the protection of client confidentiality in the continued storage and secure disposal of case records. In the event of any of these changes records are still required to be retained for the requisite ten (10) year period.

**1.11 Limits of Competence:** Counsellors will be aware of, and practice within, the limits of their competence, referring clients or supervisees to other more appropriate practitioners where necessary.

**1.12 Use of Technology:** Counsellors understand that the profession is evolving to include interactions with clients which are not limited to face-to-face encounters. They understand that their Code of Ethics and Practice applies to all interactions with clients, whether face-to-face or via technology. They make every effort to protect confidentiality and meet the requirements of this Code for all interactions.

Counsellors are aware and ensure potential clients are also aware that there is less non-verbal data available to them and to the client when interactions with clients and supervisees are undertaken using technology rather than face to face.

Counsellors considering using technology to work remotely with clients should consider and discuss with their supervisor the implications on such things as client safety and risk management, and the suitability of using this medium for working with vulnerable client groups.

1.12.1 Counsellors who engage in counselling or communications with clients using technology (including social media) are careful to ensure they have the relevant knowledge, skills, understanding and resources to meet their ethical and legal obligations.

1.12.2 Counsellors who use technology as an alternative to face-to-face counselling or supervision are careful to formally obtain informed consent from their clients. This consent should include particular risks and issues related to this way of interacting (e.g. confidentiality, technology failure, client

safety). They should be certain that this method of working is suitable for the needs of the client, considering cultural, intellectual, emotional, physical, linguistic and functional capabilities.

1.12.3 Counsellors should be aware of the ethical issues (e.g. boundaries/dual relationships/transference) implicit in any relationships with clients via social media. They should take precautions to avoid their personal information/social media presence being publicly available, and keep any personal and professional social media or websites separate.

1.12.4 Counsellors do not seek information about their clients online (for example, on social media pages) without their consent.

1.12.5 Counsellors who keep their client notes and other confidential information online or on their electronic device will take precautions to ensure the confidentiality of this information is preserved and not accessible by any other unauthorised party without the client's consent.

1.12.6 Counsellors shall not exhibit any behaviour in their interactions via social media which in any way brings disrepute to the counselling profession or to the Association.

1.12.7 Counsellors will take all reasonable steps to ensure their knowledge and skills when working with any electronic device or media is current.

**1.13 Working with Children:** It is to be noted that all parts of this code also apply to working with children.

1.13.1 Counsellors working with children are familiar with The Children's Act 2014 (or any enactment or amendment thereof or in substitution therefore).

1.13.2 They recognise that the interests, welfare and safety of infants, children and adolescents are paramount and are given precedence over other considerations.

1.13.3 Before beginning work with a child, consent is obtained. Under the Gillick Competence Principle, children can seek counselling without a parent's consent if they are considered competent and capable of making this decision. Obtaining consent of both parents/guardians is desirable when circumstances permit.

1.13.4 The rights and wishes of the child will be respected with regards to engagement in a counselling relationship.

**1.14 Dual and Multiple Relationships:** Counsellors are aware of the impact of engaging in multiple relationships / roles.

1.14.1 Counsellors will not engage in a counselling relationship with a client where any existing relationship will compromise the safety and efficacy of this therapeutic relationship. (Examples may include, but are not limited to, family members, friends or colleagues.)

When engaging with a client where multiple relationships exist, the counsellor will consider and address any impacts that may arise as a result. These need to be addressed with both the client and in supervision. (For example, where the counsellor also attends the same church as the client.)

1.14.2 Counsellors are responsible for setting, monitoring, and being transparent in maintaining the boundaries between a counselling relationship with a client and any other kind of relationship.

1.14.3 Sometimes multiple roles emerge further through the counselling process, in which case, clause 1.14.1 above must be considered. Counsellors must discuss this ethical dilemma in supervision and act accordingly. Due to the paramount consideration of confidentiality, disclosure to the client may, at times, not be appropriate.

## **2. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

2.1 Counsellors respect, and practise within, New Zealand Law, seeking both professional and legal advice where required.

2.2 Counsellors seek to understand and uphold the principles of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi and social justice, and respect diversity within their community.

2.3 Counsellors accurately represent their qualifications, experience, services and competency so that clients and wider services can make informed choices about the services they are engaging in or referring to.

2.4 Counsellors will be alert to and act on any potential conflict of interest in all aspects of their work.

2.5 Counsellors will model respectfulness and inclusiveness within their communities and maintain the integrity of their profession.

### **3. THE RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES AND THE PROFESSION**

3.1 Counsellors are respectful of counselling colleagues and other allied professional colleagues.

3.2 Counsellors act in a way that they are able to substantiate their professional decisions and provide current theoretical rationale for their practice.

3.3 In the interests of maintaining a high standard of service to clients, counsellors will:

3.3.1 accept the requirement of ongoing regular supervision from an appropriately qualified NZCCA approved supervisor who will seek to enhance, extend and support their practice. Additionally, counsellors are encouraged to engage with appropriate cultural supervision.

3.3.2 regularly engage in professional development, e.g. lectures, seminars, workshops, formal courses, professional interest groups, reading and online learning.

3.3.3 be informed about agencies and resources for referral and consultation relevant to their practice and their clients' needs.

3.4 Professional Misconduct:

3.4.1 When counsellors become aware of possible misconduct by a professional colleague that cannot be resolved by discussion with the colleague concerned, they take steps to bring the matter to the attention of those charged with the responsibility to investigate it, doing so without malice and with no breaches of confidentiality other than those necessary to the proper investigatory processes.

3.4.2 Counsellors who are the subject of a formal complaint will co-operate with those charged with the duty of investigating any complaints against members of the Association. Members will adhere to the steps of the Complaints Procedure within the timeframes established by the Association for such investigations through to completion.

3.4.3 If a member of NZCCA resigns from the Association in anticipation of, or during the course of, an investigation, the Committee appointed for the purpose reserves the right to complete its investigation. Any publication of action and outcomes taken by the Association will include the information that the member resigned during the investigation.

3.5 Counsellors may be subject to termination/alteration of membership if they:

3.5.1 are charged with or convicted of any crime

3.5.2 are disciplined by another professional organisation

3.5.3 are deemed no longer competent to practise

3.5.4 are found to be not acting in accordance with this Code or the Rules of NZCCA.

3.5.5 In the event of a member being the subject of a formal complaint pursuant to the NZCCA Complaints Procedure membership may be suspended or restricted at the discretion of the Executive.

3.5.6. Members are responsible for notifying the Association if they are subject to any of the circumstances in 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.5.3, and 3.5.4 above.

3.6 Counsellors who seek employment or counselling experience in a school, church or other agency, should be careful to identify any conditions of employment that may be in conflict with this Code and seek supervision or professional advice before entering into any agreement that contains conditions which are deemed unprofessional. These could include (but not limited to) expectations around client confidentiality, storage of notes, and role definitions/role conflicts.

#### **4. RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF**

4.1 Counsellors seek to develop and maintain self-awareness practices which take into account their own culture, beliefs and personal biases, and how these may influence or impinge on their work with clients.

4.2 Counsellors will take responsibility to maintain their own health and wellbeing. They will take relevant action when stressed, over-extended, or when personal circumstances impact on their ability to practice safely and maintain their health and wellbeing. Relevant action may include supervision, personal counselling, and/or taking leave from practice.

4.3 Counsellors will monitor the efficacy of their inner resourcefulness/resilience to ensure safe practice.