

Addiction Counsellors of Ireland Code of Ethics and Practice for Supervision of Counsellors

(This document was passed unanimously at ACI AGM, September 2001)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this Code is to establish and maintain standards for supervisors who are members of the ACI and to inform and protect counsellors seeking supervision.
- 1.2 Members of the ACI accept a common code of reference within which they will manage their responsibilities to supervisees, to clients, members of this association and to the wider community.
- 1.3 The term supervisee refers to all the following, but not exclusively, recipients of individual, group or peer supervision, including trainees on courses.
- 1.4 Members of this Association are expected to inform supervisees and trainees that the ACI Code of Ethics governs their practice.

2. THE NATURE OF SUPERVISION

- 2.1 Supervision is an evolving and distinct form of practice supported by a growing body of literature and knowledge. It holds a pivotal position in professional training programmes as well as in post-training employment/practice.
- 2.2 Supervision is an essential part of good practice in counselling. It is different from training, personal development and line management, and thereby should not be carried out by the said groups.

3. WHY A CODE OF ETHICS?

- 3.1 The aim of the code is to offer general principles to guide and assist supervisors/supervisees in dealing with practical and ethical complexities of their work. While the Code cannot resolve all ethical and practice issues, it aims to provide a framework for addressing ethical issues, thereby encouraging optimum levels of practice.

4. POINTS DEEMED ESSENTIAL IN A CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE FOR SUPERVISORS

- 4.1 Supervisors are required to have appropriate malpractice and professional indemnity insurance as well as public liability insurance. ACI accredited supervisors must satisfy themselves that prospective supervisees have the following measures in place:
 - They belong to an appropriate professional association
 - They subscribe to and abide by the Code of Ethics and Practice of that Association
 - They are subject to the Association's complaint's procedure
 - They have appropriate malpractice and indemnity insurance as well as public liability cover. Trainees may be covered by the insurance of the training group or organisation

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- 4.2 It is acknowledged that the clinical responsibility for client work remains with the supervisee. The exception to this is in the case of trainee counsellors where the clinical responsibility may rest with the supervisor trainers and organisations concerned.
- 4.3 Supervisors have a shared responsibility with supervisees to gainfully use supervision time.
- 4.4 The supervisory process is set within the context of the professional relationship.
- 4.5 The Supervisor aims to create a safe and trusting climate to enable maximum exploration and learning to occur.
- 4.6 Supervisors are responsible for setting and maintaining boundaries between the supervisory relationship and other professional relationships, for example, training and in all cases.
- 4.7 Supervisors must work in ways that respect the value and dignity of supervisees and their clients with due regard to issues such as age, race, origin, gender, sexual orientation and disability.
- 4.8 A supervisor should not hold the dual relationships of supervisor/supervisee and counsellor/client at the same time. As a general principle it is not advisable to contract supervision with a former client unless there has been a lapse of considerable time and full consideration of the implications, in which case this should have been discussed with the supervisor's supervisor.
- 4.9 All appropriate steps must be taken to provide appropriate privacy and safety to supervisee / client.
- 4.10 The supervisor must not exploit their supervisee financially, sexually or emotionally.
- 4.11 In the event of suspected misconduct of a supervisee the Supervisor must take all reasonable steps to resolve the matter. This could mean implementing the Complaint's Procedure.
- 4.12 Where a supervisor has serious concern regarding the quality of a supervisee's work, they must ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to resolve the situation. This process may include options such as consultation on the matter, restructuring the supervisory methods, recommending personal therapy.
- 4.13 Supervisors must ensure that their own personal emotional needs are met outside the supervision work.
- 4.14 Supervisors must have regular supervision/consultancy for their supervision work.

5. THE CONTRACT - KEY COMPONENTS

- 5.1 Supervision involves a contractual arrangement that enables supervisees to discuss their professional work on a systematic and regular basis. It is a process that involves all aspects of setting up, maintaining, reviewing, and terminating a supervisory agreement.
- 5.2 It is important that supervisors advise prospective supervisees of their qualifications, experience and their approach and methods used in supervision.
- 5.3 Supervisors must clarify all contractual obligations in relation to the supervisee, including any accountability to the supervisees' organisation or training institution.
- 5.4 The Supervisor must communicate the terms of supervision, including the contract period, frequency, fee structure, cancellation policy and any other significant matter.
- 5.5 Supervisors together with their supervisees should explore and make explicit the expectations and requirements they have of each other. This includes assessment methods and procedures.
- 5.6 Where assessments or reports will be required as part of the supervision, the supervisor will discuss and clarify with the supervisee the assessment methods and procedures involved.

- 5.7 Supervisors who undertake supervision with trainees must include in their contracting with supervisees and training organisations such issues as accountability, responsibilities, and boundaries of confidentiality.
- 5.8 Supervisors should make clear to their supervisees what action they could take if they have serious concerns about the supervisee's practice.
- 5.9 Ideally, Counsellors should not be supervised by their Line Managers. Where this happens, they should have access to outside consulting supervision.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 6.1 Supervisors must indicate the limit on confidentiality offered.
- 6.2 Supervisors are bound by the principles of confidentiality regarding all information that becomes known to them during their supervision practice, with the following exceptions:
 - Where law mandates them
 - When the Supervisor considers it necessary to prevent serious emotional or physical damage to the client, the supervisee or a third party. In such circumstances the supervisee's agreement will, wherever possible, be sought, unless there are good grounds for believing that the supervisee is no longer able to take responsibility for their own actions
- 6.3 Whenever possible the Supervisor's decision to breach confidentiality in any circumstances will be made after consultation with an experienced Supervisor. In circumstances where the Supervisor is in doubt about breaching confidentiality, he/she will consult with a legal expert and record the outcome.
- 6.4 In circumstances where the supervisor intends to breach confidentiality, they have an obligation, whenever possible to inform the supervisee of this intention.
- 6.5 Supervisors have a responsibility to inform themselves of all prevailing statutory obligations and guidelines (and any changes therein) in Child Protection Legislation. Attention is drawn to the Childcare Act (1991) and the National Guidelines for the protection and Welfare of Children, Department of Health (1991), Children First Guidelines (1999).
- 6.6 The disclosure of confidential information relating to supervisees is relevant to the following situations:
 - Recommendations concerning supervisees for professional purposes. e.g. references and assessments
 - Pursuit of disciplinary action involving supervisees in matters pertaining to standards of ethics and practice

In the later instance, any breaching of confidentiality must be minimised by conveying only information pertinent to the immediate situation on a need-to-know basis. The ethical considerations needing to be taken into account are:

- Maintaining the best interests of the supervisees and their clients
- Enabling the supervisee to take responsibility for their actions
- The Supervisor's responsibility to the client, to the profession and to the wider community

7. COMPETENCY

- 7.1 Guidelines for what constitutes an experienced supervisor are determined by ACI
- 7.2 Supervision is a particular field, and as such, requires a specific array of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics, necessary for the effective performance of this role. Such competence is normally acquired by extensive supervised counselling experience and/or specific training in supervision.
- 7.3 In the interest of maintaining competence, supervisors must be actively, engaged in counselling work with clients.
- 7.4 Supervisors are required to practice their profession in a competent and ethical manner. They must limit their practice to those areas in which they have gained sufficient knowledge and expertise.
- 7.5 Supervisors must have supervision-consultative support for their supervision work. The volume of such supervision should be in proportion to the supervision undertaken and should happen on a regular basis with an appropriately qualified, experienced supervisor.
- 7.6 Supervisors will not practice when their personal competence is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties, illness or any other reason.
- 7.7 The practice of Supervision may take different forms including the following:
- One To One Supervision. The supervisor must have considerably more experience than the supervisee
 - Group Supervision. One identified supervisor who is more experienced than the supervisees and has group work training
 - One-to One Peer Supervision. This method is not suitable for trainees and inexperienced counsellors
 - Peer Group Supervision. All participants should have adequate group work experience in order to harness the group process effectively. It is only for experienced counsellors and not in all cases

With regard to all the above forms of supervision, it is important to ensure that each participant has sufficient time for adequate supervision of their counselling work.