



The Society for Existential Analysis

# SEA Code of Ethics and Professional Practice

1 October 2019.

## Code of Ethics and Professional Practice

This Code contains the standards of ethics, practice and conduct which UKCP expects of all practitioners, and which must be followed whatever your modality of practice and whether you meet clients in person, online or otherwise.

The term 'practitioner' means an individual UKCP registrant who practises psychotherapy or psychotherapeutic counselling.

The term 'client' includes individuals, couples, families or groups who engage in psychotherapy or psychotherapeutic counselling.

**Should a concern arise about a practitioner's practice, it is against these standards that it will be judged under the Complaints and Conduct Process.**

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

In the numbered points below, we set out the things we regard as key to ethical practice and have grouped them under these headings:

- Best interests of clients
- Professionalism
- Communication and consent
- Records and confidentiality
- Professional knowledge, skills and experience
- Social responsibility
- Trust and confidence

**As a practitioner you must:**

*Best interests of clients*

1. Act in your client's best interests.
2. Treat clients with respect.
3. Respect your client's autonomy.
4. Not have sexual contact or sexual relationship with clients.
5. Not exploit or abuse your relationship with clients (current or past) for any purpose including your emotional, sexual or financial gain.
6. Not harm or collude in the harming of your client or the clients of others.

### *Professionalism*

7. Decline any gifts, favours, money or hospitality that might be interpreted as exploitative.
8. Be aware of the power imbalance between the practitioner and client, and avoid dual or multiple relationships<sup>1</sup> which risk confusing an existing relationship and may impact adversely on a client. If a dual or multiple relationship is unavoidable, for example in a small community, take responsibility for clarifying and managing boundaries and protecting confidentiality.
9. Exercise all reasonable care before entering into a personal or business relationship with former clients, taking into account the time that has elapsed since therapy ended. Should such a relationship prove to be detrimental to the former client, you may be called to answer an allegation of misusing your former position.
10. Recognise that your behaviour outside your professional life may have an effect on your relationship with clients and take responsibility for critically examining these potential negative or positive effects to the benefit of the client.

### *Communication and consent*

11. Provide in your advertising, and on request, a clear and honest statement of the qualifications relevant to your field of practice and your UKCP registration and advertise your services accurately and in a responsible and professional manner, without exaggeration.
12. Ensure that the use of title such as "Doctor/DR" and post nominal initials after a name in communications are: accurate; indicate whether it is a medical or academic qualification; and reasonably informs the public of their relevance to the practice of psychotherapy.
13. Not make any claims which you cannot demonstrate to be true or include testimonials from clients in any advertising.
14. Explain to a client, or prospective client, your terms, fees and conditions and, have information readily available to clarify other related questions such as likely length of therapy, methods of practice to be used, the extent of your own involvement, complaints processes and how to make a complaint, as well as arrangements for referral and termination of therapy.
15. Confirm each client's consent to the specifics of the service you will offer, through a clear contract at the outset of therapy. We do not specify a written contract but in the case of any conflict a clear written contract supports both the client and yourself. Help clients to understand the nature of any proposed therapy and its implications, what to expect, the risks involved, what is and is not being offered, and relevant alternative options.
16. Not intentionally mislead a client about the type or nature of psychotherapy practised.
17. Only participate in research about clients with clients' verifiable and informed consent before the commencement of therapy and research, clarifying the nature, purpose and

conditions of any research in which clients are involved and in accordance with relevant codes and guidance. Pay particular attention to any additional guidance or special considerations which may apply to specific groups, such as children and young people.

<sup>1</sup>Such relationships could be social or commercial relationships between practitioner and client, or a supervisory or training relationship running alongside the therapeutic one.

### *Records and confidentiality*

18. Respect, protect and preserve clients' confidentiality. You must protect sensitive and personally identifiable information obtained in the course of your professional work.
19. Safeguard the welfare and anonymity of clients when any form of publication of clinical material is being considered and to always obtain your 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.
20. Make notes appropriate to the modality of therapy being practised, and keep records which are accurate, legible and timely. Keep clients' information confidential, subject to legal and ethical requirements, and discuss it only within appropriate professional settings.
21. Notify clients, when appropriate or on request, that there are legal and ethical limits to confidentiality, and circumstances under which confidential information might be disclosed to a third party.
22. Consider obtaining legal and ethical advice in relation to providing information for judicial or administrative proceedings, and as to the potential impact that this could have on the commitment of confidentiality to the client, even when client consent is given.

### *Professional knowledge, skills and experience*

23. Offer only the forms of therapy in which you have had adequate training or experience.
24. Understand the limits of your competence and stay within them in all your professional activity, referring clients to another professional when appropriate. This includes recognising that particular client groups, such as children and families, have needs which not all practitioners are equipped to address.
25. Ensure continuing ability to practise by securing supervision and ongoing professional education and development sufficient to meet the requirements of UKCP, its modality colleges and its organisational members.
26. Ensure that you do not work with clients if you are not able to do so for physical or mental health reasons, or when impaired by the effects of drugs, alcohol or medication.
27. Make considered and timely arrangements for the termination of a therapeutic relationship, or if you are unable to continue to practise, ensuring that clients are informed and alternative practitioners are identified where possible.
28. Have arrangements in place for informing clients and, where appropriate, providing them with support in the event of your illness or death.

### *Social responsibility*

29. Actively consider issues of diversity and equalities as these affect all aspects of your work and acknowledge the need for a continuing process of self-enquiry and professional development.
30. Not allow prejudice about a client's sex, age, colour, race, disability, communication skills, sexuality, lifestyle, religious, cultural or political beliefs, social economic or immigration status to adversely affect the way you relate to them.
31. Avoid behaviour that can be perceived as abusive or detrimental to any client or colleague based on the above factors.

### *Trust and confidence*

32. Act in a way which upholds the profession's reputation and promotes public confidence in the profession and its members, including outside of your professional life as a UKCP practitioner.
33. Maintain an awareness of, and comply with, all legal and professional obligations and UKCP policies which apply to your practice.
34. Ensure that any communication in which you take part, and in particular your participation in social media, is carried out in a manner consistent with this Code.
35. Safeguard children and vulnerable adults, recognising your legal responsibilities concerning their rights and taking appropriate action should you consider any such person is at risk of harm.
36. Ensure that you are familiar with and understand UKCP's published policies and guidance, in particular those on Safeguarding and on the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy (2).
37. Challenge questionable practice in yourself or others, reporting to UKCP potential breaches of this Code, and activating formal complaints procedures especially where there may be ongoing harm to clients or you have significant grounds for believing clients to be at risk of harm.
38. Ensure that your professional work is adequately covered by appropriate indemnity insurance or by your employer's indemnity arrangements.
39. Co-operate with any lawful investigation or inquiry relating to your psychotherapeutic practice. Inform UKCP and any relevant organisational member if you are:
  - a. Charged with a criminal offence;
  - b. convicted of a criminal offence, receive a conditional discharge for an offence, or accept a police caution;

<sup>2</sup>These can be found on the UKCP website.

c. disciplined by any professional body or membership organisation responsible for regulating or licensing a health or social care profession; or

d. suspended or placed under a practice restriction by an employer or similar organisation because of concerns relating to your competence, health or practice of psychotherapy.

*Code of Ethics and Professional Practice (2019) as of 1 October 2019.*

SEA ETHICS COMMITTEE:

PAOLA POMPONI (CHAIR SEA)  
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