

# CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

## CODE OF ETHICS

### Preamble

The purpose of this code is to establish minimum standards of ethical practice for the CCAA Inc. The adherence to the wide range of ethical issues incorporated within the Code of Ethics applies to all levels of membership; that is, Associates, Graduate Members and Clinical Members.

Registered Members, as stated hereafter within this document, refers to Graduate Members and Clinical Members. Counsellors, as stated hereafter, refers to all members irrespective of membership status. In making ethical decisions, all counsellors affiliated with the CCAA are required to adhere to this Code of Ethics.

As Associates are not Registered Members, the CCAA carries no responsibility to investigate or mediate or act on complaints against Associates. The CCAA may choose to investigate, advise or act at discretion or for goodwill.

For an Associate to be responsible in terms of Counselling procedure, the CCAA advises that they should:

- Maintain regular supervision with a suitably qualified supervisor at a ratio of 1 supervision hour to 10 face to face counselling hours
- Maintain appropriate professional indemnity insurance cover either with their employing organisation or as an individual
- Rely upon the involvement of their Supervisor or appropriate people in their Course, church or work for the mediation of any formal complaints according to the CCAA Complaints Procedure.

For **CCAA's Values, Vision and Mission**, please refer to the CCAA website, [www.ccaa.net.au](http://www.ccaa.net.au) under 'About Us'.

### 1. General Principles

1.1 Members of Committees and counsellors affiliated with the Christian Counsellors Association of Australia, herein called the Association or the CCAA shall subscribe to;

1.1.1 the Statement of Faith of the Association

1.1.2 accept and maintain the highest ethical standards in their own personal life

1.1.3 not judge others by such standards, and

1.1.4 the maintenance and demonstration of both competence and ethical Christian behaviour in their dealings/relationships with clients, colleagues, other professionals and the general public

1.2 The maintenance of high standards of professional competence is a responsibility to be shared by all members of the CCAA in the interests of the public, the Christian community and the helping professions. Each counsellor shall work towards the improvement and refinement of counselling practice through the adherence to the high ethical standards stated herein.

1.3 Counselling is designed to provide encouragement and guidance to stimulate personal growth and development in the client. This will enable the client to cope more effectively with life issues, inner conflict, or crippling emotions. It assists individuals, families and couples to resolve interpersonal tensions, relate more effectively and help

overcome self-defeating life patterns. This is the work of skilled, properly trained personnel, who have been recognised by the CCAA for their professional conduct and competency in the therapeutic application of counselling theory, using a variety of healing methods consistent with the integration of faith and practice.

- 1.4 As distinct from counselling, pastoral care refers broadly to the overall ministries of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. Lay counselling lends itself well to aspects of pastoral care ministry but is distinct from the training required of professional counsellors. In the practice of counselling, counsellors shall show respect for their client's personal worldview and offer help without bias across the boundaries of gender, race, religion, disability, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

## **2. Professional Practice**

- 2.1 In all professional matters, the Christian counsellor shall maintain practices that will protect the public and advance the profession. Counsellors shall not overstate their levels of competence or professional qualifications, nor shall they allow misrepresentation of a counsellor's qualifications or affiliation. They shall offer only truthful statements of expertise and realistic expectations of counselling outcomes. Counsellors must correct others who represent any counsellor's professional qualifications or services in a manner incompatible with these guidelines. Counsellors shall not use their knowledge or professional association to secure unfair personal advantage, nor shall they knowingly permit their services to be used by others for purposes inconsistent with the ethical standards of the Association. Communication of Membership of CCAA should not express or imply that membership confers special status, expertise, or extraordinary competence in counselling. Similarly, counsellors do not express or imply that other counsellors not in the CCAA are less competent or less ethical because of their lack of association. Counsellors must not use their affiliation with the Association for purposes that are not consistent with the stated purposes of the Association.
- 2.2 The recognised categories of membership in the CCAA are: Clinical Members, Graduate Members and Associates. Counsellors affiliated with the Association shall not falsely represent their category of membership. Only Registered Members are authorised to use the name of the Association as a recommendation for their counselling ethics and expertise. Where counsellors are advertising, public speaking or writing, due care must be practised to avoid any emphasis on their own professional expertise.
- 2.3 Counsellors are not to engage in financial practices that result, or appear to result, in greedy or self-serving outcomes. Counsellors are not to select clients based on their ability to pay high fees. Counsellors are not to unnecessarily prolong therapy or continue counselling with high fee clients or quickly terminate counselling with low fee clients. Financial arrangements for payment of professional service should be contracted before counselling begins, in a manner befitting normal business practice. Fee schedules and payment procedures shall be clearly stated and agreed upon by both counsellor and client. Fees for services should be established having due regard for a client's ability to pay. In the event of a crisis (i.e. an event that holds immediate significance for recovery), counsellors should first respond to the crisis need. Financial considerations are of secondary importance and may even be waived. Payment of commission for the referral of a client is prohibited.
- 2.4 Referrals are to be accompanied by appropriate information to assist the referral process. Counsellors shall maintain records indicative of the problems and scope of service offered to each client. They shall be adequate for legal and other official recall, reflecting the level of professionalism presumed by the CCAA of its counsellors. Client communications shall be recorded in such a way as to protect privacy rights and confidentiality. Records shall be maintained, stored and disposed of by the counsellor according to ethical standards of confidentiality and security.
- 2.5 Counsellors shall avoid disparagement of a colleague to a client. If a counsellor considers that a colleague is worthy of criticism, it is his/her responsibility to approach

that colleague personally. Should a counsellor disagree with a colleague in counselling or with another professional on professional issues, the counsellor must nevertheless refrain from criticising in a manner which casts doubt on that colleague/professional's competence.

- 2.6 While counsellors are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards at all times in their counselling, they are encouraged to investigate and acquire appropriate insurance to indemnify themselves against legal redress. It is incumbent upon counsellors who are employers to provide such insurance in accordance with federal and state law for their employees. It is also incumbent upon counsellors who are employees to investigate and ensure that adequate insurance arrangements are in place by the organisation by which they are employed.

### **3. Client Relationship and Confidentiality**

- 3.1 Counsellors shall respect and serve clients with excellence and ethical integrity, strictly avoiding all client harm and exploitation
- 3.2 Counsellors shall demonstrate sensitivity, humility, honesty, integrity and capability towards the client. In demonstrating respect for a client, counsellors shall avoid undue invasion of privacy in the collection and dissemination of information
- 3.3 Counsellors shall maintain client confidentiality, clearly defining the boundaries of such. Apart from the exceptions stated below, counsellors shall not disclose confidential client communications without first discussing the intended disclosure and then securing written permission from the client
- 3.4 Exceptions to maintaining confidentiality are: a client threatening to harm self or another through suicide, homicide, or serious and imminent abuse. It is the duty of counsellors to disclose such information to their supervisors and/or other appropriate professional
- 3.5 Counsellors must be aware of the power differential that exists between them and the client. The client is in a vulnerable position and the counsellor must adequately discharge their duty of care to protect the client and preserve the integrity of the client-counsellor relationship.
- 3.6 A counsellor shall maintain a relationship with a client on a professional basis, and avoid dual or multiple relationships. Should a dual relationship arise, counsellors are required to deal with the situation professionally and ethically, realising the potential damages of dual relationships.
- 3.7 Counsellors should not abruptly cut off or end services without giving notice and adequately preparing the client for termination or referral. Termination or referral is indicated when:
- 3.7.1 objectives have largely been achieved;
  - 3.7.2 the client declines further counselling;
  - 3.7.3 the client no longer benefits from counselling; and/or
  - 3.7.4 the counselling is harming the client.
- 3.8 Except when precluded by unforeseen behaviour of the client, counsellors should discuss termination or referral with the client, offer referral if wanted or appropriate, and facilitate termination in the client's best interest
- 3.9 Counsellors need to respect the religious convictions of clients and strive to understand their belief system. Bearing in mind the considerable influence counsellors have over clients, they need to avoid any imposition of their own faith.

- 3.10 A counsellor who wishes to use case material in a publication, conference, public lecture or the like, needs to obtain written permission from the client(s) concerned. It is the responsibility of the member to thoroughly disguise the identity of the client, and the report shall provide a statement to this effect
- 3.11 A counsellor under supervision will disclose that fact to their clients, including information about discussion of case materials in supervisory sessions. Records of client communications are to be worded respectfully, in light of the client's right to peruse his/her case notes, or where there are legal or court demands.
- 3.12 A counsellor will disclose only information that has written permission from the client, or which is required by legal or ethical mandates. The same principles of client confidentiality shall apply to group and family therapy, bearing in mind the problems of keeping confidences in these modes. Family or group members are encouraged to keep a contract of confidentiality with one another. Both supervisors and supervisees are required to maintain confidentiality, having first explained this to the client.
- 3.13 Counsellors accept the limitations of confidentiality when human life is endangered. Disclosure will be necessary if there is a threat to any person in the case of suicide, homicide, and/or the abuse of children, elders, and dependent persons. Protective action should be taken when the counsellor has:
- 3.13.1 reasonable suspicion that a minor (under 18 years), older person (over 65), or dependent adult has been harmed by the client; or
- 3.13.2 direct or implied client admissions of harmful acts or threatened action that is serious, imminent, and attainable against a clearly identified person(s).
- 3.14 Disclosure in situations, as described above, shall be made to the counsellor's supervisor, and as appropriate, to the intended victim, to their family or friends, and/or to law enforcement personnel. In the case of child abuse, the counsellor shall report to child protective services or any other designated agency established for protective services.
- 3.15 Counsellors are responsible for maintaining adequate records that facilitate the rendering of professional services to their clients. These same records need to satisfy the requirement of lawful and regulatory processes, as well as the procedures required of the agency or institution to which the counsellor is associated.
- 3.16 Counsellors are responsible for securing and maintaining the confidentiality of records they have created. In the event of transfer, records should be secured and transported by authorised personnel only. Counsellors are responsible for the supervision of destroying records according to agency regulations and legal requirements. Clients are to be consulted for permission to electronically record a session, or for enabling observation of the session.
- 3.17 Counsellors acknowledge that records are maintained for the benefit of clients in the facilitation of rendering a professional service. Whilst client access to records cannot be reasonably refused, it may be appropriate to consider the competence of the client to manage information that may otherwise be misleading or detrimental. Therefore disclosure may be appropriately discouraged. If records pertain to multiple clients (e.g. family case) discretion of disclosure remains the responsibility of the counsellor to contain disclosure of records that pertain only to the inquiring client.

#### **4. Dual Relationships**

- 4.1 A counsellor is prohibited from carrying on sexual activities, inappropriate attachment or cohabitating with a current client under any circumstances. In determining whether a counsellor may marry, have a defacto relationship, engage in a friendship, or liaison with a former client where more than two years have elapsed since the ending or

termination of the professional relationship, the following matters will be taken into consideration by the Ethics Committee:

- 4.1.1 the length of the professional relationship;
  - 4.1.2 the nature of the professional relationship;
  - 4.1.3 the client's mental state at the time he or she commenced the personal relationship with the counsellor;
  - 4.1.4 the circumstances in which the professional relationship ended or was terminated;
  - 4.1.5 the duration of time that has expired since the ending of the professional relationship; or,
  - 4.1.6 whether anything else suggests that the counsellor is exploiting or harming the former client.
- 4.2 Counsellors must avoid dual relationships that could impair their professional judgement or increase the risk of client exploitation. This prohibition protects the client and reduces trouble with transference and counter-transference dynamics. Specifically, this means that counsellors will not provide counselling for those with whom they have the following relationships: sexual or romantic, family, close friends, employees, trainees or supervisees. Some dual relationships are not per se unethical, but are presumed troublesome and should be avoided whenever possible. Relationships in this category would include: business, church/ministry, fraternal clubs, students and other such acquaintances. Counsellors have the responsibility of proving a justified dual relationship by showing that the client:
- 4.2.1 has given informed consent (and understands how the relationship might be harmed as counselling proceeds);
  - 4.2.2 will not be harmed or exploited through the counselling process;
  - 4.2.3 will recognise that counselling is a different process to Prayer Ministry or Prayer Counselling and that all types of Prayer Ministry including Theophostic, Word of Knowledge, Spiritual Discernment, Prophecy and other similar practices are not counselling per se; they are practices of the Christian Church. Those engaged in such Prayer Ministries who are untrained counsellors are not covered by this Code of Ethics. There is a distinction between people who engage in Prayer Ministries and those who engage in Counselling.
- 4.3 Counsellors do not terminate counselling to engage in dual relationships of any kind.
- 4.4 Counsellors do not enter into closer relationships with former clients without reflecting on, and in most cases discussing with the former client, the potential adverse impact of closer relations on possible future counselling. Some counsellors and their former clients will agree that future counselling will be done by someone else if they decide to pursue another kind of relationship.

## **5. Inter-professional Relationships**

- 5.1 Each counsellor shall seek to create and maintain collaborative and constructive relations with other helping professionals and inter-professional groups within the community throughout the course of his/her counselling practice.
- 5.2 Each counsellor must know and respect the limits of his/her expertise, knowledge and competence. Therefore, a counsellor shall not work in isolation, but shall seek out and maintain inter-professional associations for the purposes of clinical consultations, supervision and referrals. When consulting or referring, counsellors will fully consider

their faith and value stance in the promotion or commendation of treatment techniques and procedures.

- 5.3 Counsellors shall consult with and/or refer to others when these limits of counselling competence are reached: when counsellors face issues not dealt with before and need help; when clients need further help which is beyond the training and skill of the counsellors; when counsellors or clients are stuck; when clients cease to benefit from the counselling process. The client's best interests shall be upheld in all consultations and referrals, with the client's objectives and confidential privacy interests honoured.
- 5.4 When possible, a counsellor shall seek out the best Christian help at a higher level of knowledge and expertise. If Christian help is unavailable, the counsellor will refer to another professional who will respect the client's faith and values.
- 5.5 Members shall consider the holistic nature of a client, and therefore be willing to refer the client for medical, psychiatric, psychological or spiritual assessment and treatment.
- 5.6 Counsellors may also consider appropriate legal and social services available to the client.
- 5.7 Counsellors do not advise against medical or psychiatric treatment, the use of medications, legal counsel, or other forms of professional service solely because of personal Christian beliefs or because the provider is not Christian.
- 5.8 Counsellors shall not normally offer specialised counselling services to an individual who is currently receiving counselling.
- 5.9 Counsellors must not solicit business from any client in a similar existing relationship with another professional in pursuit of individual gain.

## **6. Professional Growth**

- 6.1 Counsellors are obliged to remain as informed as possible and where applicable, contribute to new knowledge, issues, and resources in Christian Counselling.
- 6.2 Counsellors must maintain an active program of study, continuing education and personal and professional growth to improve helping effectiveness, and ethical practice.
- 6.3 Counsellors are expected to remain active in the meetings and affairs of the Association. When applicable, counsellors should combine with fellow counsellors and with the representatives of other helping professions to promote mutual professional growth.

## **7. Publication and Communication**

- 7.1 Counsellors are expected to be scrupulous in any publicity, public announcements or publications to ensure that their private views are differentiated from that of the Association. All advertising and public communications (print media, electronic media or the Internet) by counsellors will proceed with humility, caution and with due regard to the limits of present knowledge. The primary goal of such communications will be assisting clients to make informed choices about counselling services.
- 7.2 Counsellors must avoid the following in their communications:
  - 7.2.1 False statements, inaccuracy, exaggeration and sensationalism;
  - 7.2.2 Any statement likely to mislead or deceive others because it is taken partially or fully out of context;

- 7.2.3 Any statement likely to create an exaggerated belief or expectation of a favourable outcome merely because one has chosen you as a counsellor;
  - 7.2.4 Any statement intended to appeal to a client's fears, anxieties or emotions concerning the possible results of failure to obtain the desired services;
  - 7.2.5 Testimonials by current or former clients;
  - 7.2.6 Any statement concerning the inferiority or negative characteristics of another counsellor, whether in this Association or in another;
  - 7.2.7 Any statement that expresses or implies unique or unusual helping abilities outside the range of accepted professional, pastoral, and lay practices in Christian counselling.
- 7.3 When expressing professional opinions, a counsellor or an officer shall not make it appear, directly or indirectly, that he or she speaks on behalf of the Association or its official position, unless authorised by the Committee of Management. When announcing or advertising professional services, Registered Members may list the following to describe the provider and services offered: name, postal and email addresses, telephone and facsimile numbers, consultation hours, languages spoken, appropriate information concerning fees, relevant academic qualifications, CCAA membership, and a brief statement of the type of counselling services offered.

## **8. Unethical Conduct**

- 8.1 All counsellors irrespective of membership status bind themselves to honour and enforce high standards of professional ethics. They must agree to abide by the disciplinary procedure of the Association.
- 8.2 Counsellors endeavour to assist and support all investigations, proceedings, actions, and rulings of the Ethics Committee that has jurisdiction over those charged with ethical violations. Every party involved in the procedure of investigation should endeavour to safeguard the confidentiality of alleged violators before the allegations have been proven.
- 8.3 Direct touch or other physical contact between client and counsellor is not advised. Any direct sexual touch or contact is forbidden.
- 8.4 Counsellors need to be mindful of their influential position and of the inherent power imbalance of helping relationships, thereby avoiding all harm and exploitation of clients. This includes all forms of sexual misconduct, whether by physical contact or non-contact. Non-contact includes sexual innuendoes, harassment or abuse such as seductive speech or non-verbal behaviour, promises/threats with sexual connotations, or any other sexual misconduct as defined by applicable laws, ethics and organisational practice policies.

## **9. Procedural Guidelines for the Ethics Committee**

- 9.1 If counsellors appear to violate the Statement of Ethics, they may be cautioned through informal and/or formal resolution. Informal resolution is done through friendly remonstrance, a direct consultation with alleged violators or by working through local or regional collegial networks. A formal complaint may be made to the Ethics Committee in accordance with the following procedures:
  - 9.1.1 A written and signed complaint of unethical practice shall be sent to the Ethics Committee.
  - 9.1.2 A copy of the complaint shall be furnished simultaneously to the alleged violator(s).

- 9.1.3 The Ethics Committee shall decide whether the complaint warrants investigation.
- 9.1.4 The Ethics Committee shall make one or more local visits to investigate the complaint.
- 9.1.5 Alleged violators shall have free access to all charges and evidence cited against them. They shall have full freedom to represent themselves before an oral hearing of the Ethics Committee, including the right to be represented by legal counsel.
- 9.1.6 The Ethics Committee after considering all representations, may advise that the charges are unfounded, or recommend a specified admonishment, reprimand, probation, suspension, or dismissal from membership.
- 9.1.7 The Ethics Committee may disclose the identity of a counsellor who has been proven to have violated the Association's Ethical Code of Conduct. Should such disciplinary action result in suspension and/or dismissal from membership, the member's accreditation certificate shall be surrendered to the Ethics Committee.
- 9.1.8 Alleged violators shall have a right of appeal to the Committee of Management following the disposition of the case by the Ethics Committee.
- 9.1.9 If a counsellor is removed for unethical conduct from either his or her denomination, church, faith group or from another professional group, the Ethics Committee shall investigate the matter in the same way as it investigates other resolutions or charges of unethical conduct.
- 9.1.10 Counsellors who make unfounded allegations for any reason against any counsellor of the Association shall be subjected to the disciplinary procedure by the Ethics Committee.
- 9.1.11 Members of the Ethics Committee shall disqualify themselves from investigating any allegation against a counsellor in which they are a party to, or have a pecuniary or other interest in.
- 9.1.12 Members of the Committee of Management shall disqualify themselves from voting on a recommendation of the Ethics Committee if they are party to the allegation examined or have a pecuniary or other interest in it.

## **10. Ethics in Supervision**

- 10.1 The Association requires that a counsellor shall receive regular and frequent supervision with a qualified and experienced counsellor, in order to best serve the client. It is the duty of a counsellor to report to his/her supervisor when progress with clients is not being made, or there is a possible need for referral.
- 10.2 It is strongly recommended that counsellors communicate with their supervisors any problems, uncertainties, doubts or challenges that they face in dealing with clients, colleagues or other professionals.
- 10.3 Counsellors need to be aware of the potential dangers of transference and counter-transference, noting any reactions in themselves to their clients that are either inappropriate or out of control, hence reducing the effectiveness of the therapeutic process.
- 10.4 Supervision is not to be confused with personal therapy or education for the counsellor, but is a contract of accountability involving skill development. Peer Supervision is also an acceptable and useful form of professional development for counsellors at the Clinical Membership level.