

NEW ZEALAND CHRISTIAN
COUNSELLORS ASSOCIATION



NZCCA

**CODE OF PRACTICE
AND
ETHICS**

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(hereafter referred to as 'the Code')

May 2008

INTRODUCTION:

Statement of Faith:

Foundational to Christian counsellors is the central belief of the Christian faith in the God who is Love, and the expression of this love in relationship with God, community and creation.

Rationale:

The consequence of loving God is a desire to live in a way that reflects the character of God. That lifestyle will be expressed in the way followers relate to God, to creation and to the people with whom they relate in all aspects of life, both personal and professional. 'Right living' is not abstract theology but is a very practical 'down-to-earth' pattern of relating. Right living could be expressed in many ways including: honesty, humility, integrity, respect, justice, compassion, accountability, and the giving of honour. Whilst acknowledging God's call in scripture to, "Be holy as I am holy" we acknowledge our inability to consistently match that level of right living, and our tendency to relate at times in ways that result in hurt, misunderstanding and conflict.

For a Christian counsellor, a Code of Ethics is rooted in the character of God and seeks to identify the practical application of right living to the counselling situation.

The Code of Ethics is designed as an encouragement to Christian counsellors to live and work in a way that honours our sovereign Lord and brings hope and healing to the people with whom we work.

The Code of Ethics is not in any way designed to replace our need of a living relationship with our creator God. It is designed as a set of principles and of guidelines. It is neither a set of laws nor designed to comprehensively address every situation which a Christian counsellor might encounter. Each individual situation needs to be considered in the light of the principles outlined below. In some specific situations different aspects of the Code of Ethics may appear to contradict one another. Such situations require serious consideration and wisdom – there are rarely simplistic solutions.

The Code of Ethics is intended to be outworked with accountability, in community. In practice this means personal open-ness and collegial discussion with appropriate colleagues and other professionals.

Definition of a Christian Counsellor:

Through their relationship with Christ, Christian counsellors seek to draw on and express God's unconditional love, grace and healing presence. Christian counsellors seek to be qualified, accountable practitioners, who work with integrity within the wider community. Christian counsellors support their clients on their journey, deeply respecting both the uniqueness of each individual and the context within which they live.

Counsellors use their professional knowledge and skills in ways that actively promote the wellbeing of their clients.

Consequently, members of the New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association are committed to:

- being an effective influence within the therapeutic professions, at all times being respectful of individual rights of choice and belief.
- serving the Christian community and the wider community, sharing their gifts and being open to the giftedness of others.
- demonstrating integrity in their personal and professional lives, through seeking to know, love and serve Jesus Christ, and one another.
- the foundational principle of the sanctity of life.

STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE:

1. The Relationship with Clients:

- 1.1. While taking account of their obligations under the law, counsellors hold the interests and well-being of their clients to be of primary importance. They recognise that since counselling so directly and intensely affects clients, it should be practiced only in the best interests of the client.
- 1.2. The well-being of clients takes precedence over the self interest of counsellors and over the interests of colleagues, employers and other agencies.
- 1.3. Counsellors are sensitive to the cultural and social diversity of their clients. They recognise the differences among people in relation to ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic background, sexuality and religious beliefs. When necessary they seek training, consultation or supervision to ensure competent service to all clients.
- 1.4. Counsellors present information in a fair, respectful and honest manner, distinguishing between factual information and personal opinion.
- 1.5. Counsellors recognise the power differential implicit within every counsellor-client relationship, and seek to minimise the potential negative impact of that differential.
 - 1.5.1. Counsellors do not enter into intimate friendship or sexual relationships with clients during the counselling process. The development of such a relationship at any stage after counselling has ceased is likely still to be inappropriate due to the implicit power differential inherent in the relationship following counselling.
- 1.6. Counsellors do not condone or engage in harassment in any form; physical, emotional, financial, spiritual or sexual.
- 1.7. Counsellors recognise the potential for multiple relationships to exist, in that 'counsellor' and 'client' may relate to each other in different roles in other environments. Counsellors seek to recognise when such circumstances exist and to establish clear boundaries for the conduct of differing roles.
- 1.8. Counsellors have a responsibility to obtain the informed consent of their clients with respect to all aspects of counselling practice. Informed consent

means obtaining the agreement of the client or, where the client is judged incapable of giving informed consent, of those authorised to represent the interests of the client. Informed consent includes:

- 1.8.1. understanding the goals, nature and procedures of the counselling process.
 - 1.8.2. being informed in advance of important aspects of the counsellor-client relationship that might influence a client's decision to enter that relationship, such as financial arrangements concerning professional fees, record keeping, personal commitments and time constraints, and the limits of confidentiality.
 - 1.8.3. being informed that they have a continuing right to refuse or to withdraw consent to participation in the counselling process without fear of negative repercussion for exercising that right.
 - 1.8.4. being informed of the right of access to their own records.
- 1.9. Counsellors end a counselling relationship when it is clear that the client is not benefiting from it. When appropriate they offer to help the client find alternative sources of assistance.
- 1.10. Counsellors keep sufficient records of their activities, in a secure manner:
- 1.10.1. for their own reference.
 - 1.10.2. to ensure that at some future date the client, or other relevant professional(s) responsible for the client, can be informed of the process undertaken.
 - 1.10.3. to enable the information to be presented clearly if necessary.

1.11. Confidentiality:

- 1.11.1. Subject to the exceptions and limitations listed in clause 1.11.3, a counsellor does not disclose information obtained from practicing as a counsellor to any third party without the informed consent of the client.
- 1.11.2. Counsellors working within agencies, schools or churches should clearly inform clients of organisational policy regarding confidentiality, especially regarding the limits of confidentiality within the organisation.
- 1.11.3. The exceptions/limitation to clause 1.11.1 are:
 - 1.11.3.1. **Incapacity:** Where clients are judged incapable of giving consent to disclosure, consent must be sought from those authorised to represent their interests.
 - 1.11.3.2. **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. In these circumstances counsellors should decide if information is to be disclosed. In this event it is expected that counsellors would normally report to the client, or persons authorised to represent his/her interests, as soon as possible, any information disclosed to a third party.
 - 1.11.3.3. **Law:** Acts of Parliament and Courts of Law may compel disclosure of information given by a client. Counsellors inform the client in advance of such limitations of confidentiality.
 - 1.11.3.4. **Client or public safety:** Counsellors who believe that nondisclosure may endanger a client or another person but are denied permission to disclose, exercise professional judgement, if necessary after consultation with senior colleagues, in deciding whether to breach confidentiality or not. In such circumstances the counsellors are able to justify the decision made.
- 1.11.4. In disclosing information, counsellors provide only that which in their opinion would enable the recipient to assist their client. Should such information become obsolete Christian counsellors inform the recipient accordingly.

- 1.11.5. Case information in any form (for example verbal, visual, written or electronic material) in publications, teachings or public presentations is used only where the identity or the client is disguised, unless informed consent has been obtained for presentation.
- 1.11.6. Where information is gathered by counsellors for use by a third party, the informed consent of those to whom the information refers is obtained and the recipient is informed by the counsellor of the need to protect confidentiality.
- 1.11.7. Counsellors make provision for protecting client confidentiality in the storage and disposal of case records.

2. The Relationship with the Wider Community:

- 2.1. Counsellors respect and seek to work within New Zealand law.
- 2.2. Counsellors seek to understand and uphold principles of social justice, and respect cultural diversity within their community. This includes seeking to understand the cultural dynamics of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the principles and contemporary application of the Treaty of Waitangi.
- 2.3. Professional qualification and description of services help the public to make informed choices about the quality and type of service provided. Accordingly counsellors seek to accurately and honestly represent their qualifications, experience or services.

3. The Relationship with the Counselling Profession and Colleagues:

- 3.1. Counsellors seek to develop, maintain and encourage a high standing of professional training and competence. They accept that they are accountable for their actions as a counsellor.
- 3.2. Counsellors recognise the boundaries of their own competence and provide only services for which they are qualified by training and/ or experience. They refer matters outside their areas of experience and training to appropriately qualified persons.
- 3.3. Counsellors act in such a way that they are able to justify their professional decisions and provide current theoretical rationale for their practice.

- 3.4. In the interests of maintaining a high standard of service to clients, counsellors:
 - 3.4.1. Accept the requirement of on-going regular supervision from an appropriate supervisor.
 - 3.4.2. Regularly engage in professional development, which could take the form of appropriate lectures, seminars, workshops, formal courses, professional interest groups or reading.
 - 3.4.3. Are obliged to be knowledgeable about appropriate agencies and resources for referral and consultation.
- 3.5. Counsellors do not exploit their professional relationships with employers, supervisors or other colleagues.
- 3.6. Professional misconduct.
 - 3.6.1. 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.
 - 3.6.2. Counsellors cooperate with duly constituted committees of the Association, particularly those charged with the duty of investigating any complaints against members of the Association. Cooperation implies responding to any inquiries promptly and completely, and adhering fully to any procedures established by the Association for such investigations.

3.6.3. If an NZCCA member resigns from the Association in anticipation of, or during the course of, an investigation, the Committee appointed for the purpose will complete its investigation. Any publication of action taken by the Association will include the fact that the member attempted to resign during the investigation.

3.6.4. Counsellors may be subject to termination of membership if they:

- 3.6.4.1 are convicted of any crime,
- 3.6.4.2 are disciplined by another professional organisation,
- 3.6.4.3 are no longer competent to practice,
- 3.6.4.4 fail to cooperate with this Association at any point from the inception of an ethical complaint.

Members are responsible for notifying the Association of such circumstances.

3.6.5. Notwithstanding the above clause, in the event of a member being accused of or charged with a serious offence, membership may be suspended or restricted at the discretion of the Executive Committee on a case by case basis.

3.7 Counsellors who seek employment or counselling experience in a school, church or other such agency should be careful to identify any conditions of employment that might be in conflict with this Code of Ethics – for example, expectations around client confidentiality.

4. Postscript

These statements of principle and practice have been written with the specific context of the counsellor –client relationship in view. However, NZCCA works with the belief that the principles can be extrapolated to a supervisor-supervisee, or counsellor trainer – student relationship.