



**NEW ZEALAND CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS  
CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE  
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# **NZCCA CODE OF ETHICS AND PRACTICE**

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## **CODE OF PRACTICE AND ETHICS | New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association** (Hereafter referred to as 'the Code')

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this Code of Practice and Ethics the term 'counsellor' refers to any member of NZCCA with responsibility for the provision of counselling related services. Counselling is a set of advanced interpersonal skills and personal awareness that draws from theoretical models to facilitate clients' inner resources to affect a change process. Counselling is based on respecting clients' beliefs, values, uniqueness, and self-determination. Counselling is a professional, contractually agreed relationship that seeks to empower clients to achieve their goals. It may focus on addressing aspects of physical, mental/emotional, spiritual, and/or relational well being in a confidential and safe environment. 'Counsellor' therefore encompasses anyone who meets the criteria for membership of the Association while the word client may refer to an individual, couple, family group, organisation or any other defined social group who are the recipient, of the above mentioned services.

### **STATEMENT OF FAITH**

Foundational for a Christian counsellor is the central belief of the Christian faith modelled in a Trinitarian God who is love and the expression of this love in relationship with God, community and creation.

### **RATIONALE**

The consequence of living in relationship with God is a desire to live in a way that reflects the character of God. This 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. This is not an abstract theology but a very practical 'down-to-earth' pattern of relating which is also demonstrated by respecting the law of the land and the principles and practice of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. A desire to reflect the love of God could be expressed in many ways including: honesty, humility, integrity, respect, justice, compassion, accountability, forgiveness, and the giving of honour. While acknowledging the call to lead a God honouring life we also acknowledge our inability to do that consistently and at times we may relate in ways that result in hurt, misunderstanding and conflict.

For a Christian counsellor, the Code is rooted in the character of God and is designed as an encouragement to Christian counsellors to live and work in ways that honour God, and where possible to bring hope and healing to the people with whom we work.

This Code is designed as a set of principles and guidelines for counsellors who may find themselves trying to negotiate conflicting ethical values. It is neither a set of laws nor designed to comprehensively address every situation which a Christian counsellor might encounter. In some specific situations, different aspects of the Code may appear to contradict one another. Each individual situation is not to be examined in isolation but in the light of the intent of the Code. In order to prevent simplistic solutions to ethical dilemmas, serious consideration, wisdom, and the use of a fuller ethical decision making

process is imperative: for example, a recognised ethical decision- making model and supervision. Even after thoughtful collaborative consideration some ethical dilemmas cannot be resolved easily or in ways that seem satisfactory.

The Code is intended to be outworked with accountability to the profession. In practice this means responsibility for: personal openness, a willingness to engage in deeper reflective practice, collegial discussion with appropriate professionals, and engagement with current literature.

## **DEFINITION OF A CHRISTIAN COUNSELLOR**

Through their relationship with God, counsellors seek to draw on and express God's unconditional love, grace and healing presence. Christian counsellors seek to be qualified, accountable counsellors, 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 sensitively promote the wellbeing of their clients whilst still respecting the client's unique perspective and circumstances.

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

- personal well-being by developing an openness to, and fluency in, self-awareness both intra-personally and inter-personally and by being curious about how the self functions in practice,
- being an effective influence within the therapeutic professions, at all times being respectful of individual rights of choice and belief, and
- serving the Christian community and the wider community, **and** demonstrating integrity in their personal and professional lives, through seeking to know, love and serve **God** and one another.

## **STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE**

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 in order that these roles don't compromise the integrity of the therapeutic relationship.

### **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. Counsellors accord due respect to the Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa and demonstrate a commitment to the principles of partnership, protection, and participation inherent within Te Tiriti o Waitangi. They recognise the differences among people in relation to ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic background, sexuality and religious beliefs. 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 therapeutic relationship, and seek to minimise the potential negative impact of that differential.

1.5.1. Counsellors are responsible for ensuring that the therapeutic relationship is not compromised by their own emotional needs.

1.5.2. Counsellors recognise that it is their responsibility to remain accountable for relationships with former clients and must consider the possible consequences of entering into friendships, business relationships, training, supervision, and other relationships. Any changes in relationships need to be discussed with the client and in supervision. The decision about any changes in the relationship with former clients needs to take into account whether the issues presented in therapy have been resolved.

1.5.3. Counsellors do not enter into intimate friendship or sexual relationships with clients during the therapeutic process or with former clients for a minimum of two years from the cessation of the therapeutic relationship. The development of such a relationship at any stage after the therapeutic relationship has ceased is likely still to be inappropriate due to the implicit power differential inherent in the relationship and is therefore strongly discouraged.

1.6. Counsellors do not condone or engage in coercion or harassment in any form: physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, spiritual or sexual.

1.7. Counsellors have a responsibility to obtain the informed consent of their clients with respect to all aspects of therapeutic relationship. 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:

1.7.1. understanding the goals, nature and procedures of the therapeutic process;

1.7.2. being informed in advance of important aspects of the therapeutic 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;

1.7.3. being informed that they have a continuing right to refuse or to withdraw consent to participation in the therapeutic process without fear of negative repercussion for exercising that right;

1.7.4. being informed of the right of access to their own records; and

1.7.5. being informed of the NZCCA Complaints Process and Procedure (see the NZCCA website).

1.8. The process of concluding the counselling relationship is done in collaboration with the client. The relationship with the client may end for the following reasons: when client goals have been achieved, when it is clear that the client is no longer benefiting from the relationship, when the relationship is no longer therapeutic, or when the client wants to end the relationship. When appropriate the counsellor offers to help the client find alternative sources of assistance.

1.9. Counsellors keep sufficient records of their activities in a secure manner in compliance with current professional health providers' regulations, which state that client notes need to be kept for a period of ten (10) years from the last date of meeting with the client. These records are kept:

1.9.1. for their own reference;

1.9.2. 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; and

1.9.3. to enable the information to be presented clearly if necessary.

1.10. Confidentiality:

1.10.1. Subject to the exceptions and limitations listed in clause 1.10.3. counsellors do not disclose information obtained from practicing as a counsellor to any third party without the informed consent of the client.

1.10.2. 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.

1.10.3. The exceptions/ limitation 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 imminent or immediate 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 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.

1.10.3.3. **Law:** Acts of Parliament and Courts of Law may compel disclosure of information given by a client. Counsellors seek to be conversant with current law with regards to official third party requests for clinical or evidential information and will inform the client in advance of such limitations of confidentiality.

1.10.3.4. **Client or public safety:** Counsellors who believe that nondisclosure of information given by a client in therapy may endanger a client or another person but are denied permission to disclose such information exercise professional judgement. A decision to breach confidentiality or not, wherever possible, is done in consultation with senior colleagues. In such circumstances counsellors are able to justify their decision.

1.10.4. When disclosing information, counsellors provide only that which in their opinion would enable the recipient to assist their client. Should such information become obsolete counsellors inform the recipient accordingly.

1.10.5. Case information in any form (for example verbal, visual, written or electronic material) in publications, teachings or public presentations is used only with the permission from the client.

1.10.6. Where information is gathered by counsellors for use by a third party, this is done in collaboration with the client, informed consent is obtained and the recipient of the information is informed by the counsellor of the need to protect confidentiality. Reasonable care should be taken to ensure:

1.10.6.1. the recipient of the referral is able to provide the required service to the client;

1.10.6.2. any confidential information disclosed during the referral process is adequately protected; and

1.10.6.3. the referral will benefit the client.

1.10.7. Prior to accepting a referral the counsellor should carefully consider the following:

1.10.7.1. the appropriateness of the referral;

1.10.7.2. that the referral will benefit the client; and

1.10.7.3. the client's consent has been obtained for the referral.

1.10.8. Counsellors make provision for protecting client confidentiality in the storage and professional, secure disposal of case records including hard copy data, electronic data, and computer hardware. Client case records must be retained for ten (10) years from the date of the last consultation with the client.

1.10.9. 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 protecting client confidentiality in the continued storage, and professional, secure disposal of case records. In the event of these changes case records still need to be retained for the requisite time (1.9).

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

2.1. Counsellors respect and practice 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 qualifications and description of services help the public to make informed choices about the quality and type of service provided. Accordingly, counsellors accurately and honestly represent their qualifications, experience, services, and competency.

2.4. Counsellors will be alert to any potential conflict of interest in all aspects of their work. They will proactively refrain from compromising any third party e.g. NZCCA, clients, agencies, and training providers and actively seek supervision.

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

3.1. Counsellors will be respectful of counselling colleagues and other allied professional colleagues.

3.2. Counsellors continue to develop, maintain and encourage a high standard of professional preparation, competence, and undertake on-going personal and professional development.

3.3. Counsellors recognise the limits of their own competence and only provide services for which they are qualified and which they can verify by training and/ or experience. They refer matters outside their areas of experience and training to appropriately qualified persons including but not limited to theology, culture, relationships, parenting, addictions, and sexual issues.



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

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

3.5.1. accept the requirement of on-going regular supervision from an appropriately qualified supervisor who will enhance, extend, and support their practice;

3.5.2. be accountable for engaging in professional development: lectures, seminars, workshops, formal courses, professional interest groups, and on-going reading;

3.5.3. be knowledgeable about appropriate agencies and resources for referral and consultation relevant to the client's needs; and

3.5.4. 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 and outcomes taken by the Association will include the fact that the member resigned during the investigation.

3.6.4. Counsellors may be subject to termination/alteration 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 deemed no longer competent to practice;

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

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

Members are responsible for notifying the Association if they are subject to any of the circumstances cited in 3.6.4.1, 3.6.4.2, 3.6.4.3, and 3.6.5.

Failure to cooperate with this Association may result in the termination of membership at any point from the inception of an ethical complaint.

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 the Code and seek supervision- for example, expectations around client confidentiality, storage of notes, and role definitions/ 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 impact upon their work with clients.

4.2. Counsellors will take responsibility to maintain their own health and well-being. They will take relevant action when stressed, over-extended, or when personal circumstances negatively impact on their ability to practise safely.

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

4.4. Counsellors will engage in seeking extra support, personal counselling, and/ or supervision to ensure their on-going well-being and fitness to practice.

#### **5. RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social Media includes any form of electronic communication. Whatever form of communication is undertaken by counsellors, either professionally or personally, client confidentiality remains paramount.

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

5.2. Counsellors should take every reasonable precaution to ensure that all electronic equipment and methods are secure. This includes gaining informed consent from clients who are engaging with the counsellor using electronic communications.

5.3. Counsellors will ensure they have sufficient knowledge and training in the use of electronic media to ensure the safety of client information.

## **6. WORKING WITH GROUPS**

When counsellors lead or take responsibilities for groups they should:

- 6.1. ensure the screening of prospective group members where appropriate;
- 6.2 provide information about the purpose of the group and the group process;
- 6.3. obtain informed consent from group members;
- 6.4. discuss issues of confidentiality, group safety and group members' rights;
- 6.5. provide a safe environment and take reasonable precautions to protect group members against harm resulting from interactions within the group;
- 6.6. ensure a complete process for the group in opening, working with and closing the group;
- 6.7. show appropriate respect to group members' cultural perspectives and individual needs;
- 6.8. maintain an awareness of how their "own identity, cultural perspectives, power and privilege, goals, and motivations, needs, limitations, strengths, values, feelings, and problems impact on their work with groups" (Corey et al. 2010, pg. 36); and
- 6.9. ensure they have the necessary professional experience, skills and qualifications required to facilitate the group.

### **REFERENCE:**

Corey, M., Corey, G., & Corey, C. (2010). *Groups process and practice* (8th ed.) Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.