

Extract from the 'Ethical Framework'

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/>

1. Our ethics are based on values, principles and personal moral qualities that underpin and inform the interpretation and application of *Our commitment to clients* and *Good practice*.

Values

2. Values are a useful way of expressing general ethical commitments that underpin the purpose and goals of our actions.

3. Our fundamental values include a commitment to:

- respecting human rights and dignity
- alleviating symptoms of personal distress and suffering
- enhancing people's wellbeing and capabilities
- improving the quality of relationships between people
- increasing personal resilience and effectiveness
- facilitating a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned within their personal and cultural context
- appreciating the variety of human experience and culture
- protecting the safety of clients
- ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
- enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application
- striving for the fair and adequate provision of services

4. Values inform principles. They become more precisely defined and action-orientated when expressed as a principle.

Principles

5. Principles direct attention to important ethical responsibilities. Our core principles are:

- **Being trustworthy:** honouring the trust placed in the practitioner
- **Autonomy:** respect for the client's right to be self-governing
- **Beneficence:** a commitment to promoting the client's wellbeing
- **Non-maleficence:** a commitment to avoiding harm to the client
- **Justice:** the fair and impartial treatment of all clients and the provision of adequate services
- **Self-respect:** fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge, integrity and care for self

6. Ethical decisions that are strongly supported by one or more of these principles without any contradiction with the others may be regarded as well-founded.

7. However, practitioners may encounter circumstances in which it is impossible to reconcile all the applicable principles. This may require choosing which principles to prioritise. A decision or course of action does not necessarily become unethical merely because it is controversial or because other practitioners would have reached different conclusions in similar circumstances. A practitioner's obligation is to consider all the relevant circumstances with as much care as possible and to be appropriately accountable for decisions made.

Personal moral qualities

8. Personal moral qualities are internalised values that shape how we relate to others and our environment. They represent a moral energy or drive that may operate unconsciously and unexamined. This moral energy or drive is ethically more beneficial when consciously examined from time to time and used to motivate our ethical development or shape how we work towards a good society.

9. 'Personal moral qualities' are a contemporary application of 'virtues' from moral philosophy.

10. The practitioner's personal and relational moral qualities are of the utmost importance. Their perceived presence or absence will have a strong influence on how relationships with clients and colleagues develop and whether they are of sufficient quality and resilience to support the work.

11. High levels of compatibility between personal and professional moral qualities will usually enhance the integrity and resilience of any relationship.

12. Key personal qualities to which members and registrants are strongly encouraged to aspire include:

- **Candour:** openness with clients about anything that places them at risk of harm or causes actual harm
- **Care:** benevolent, responsible and competent attentiveness to someone's needs, wellbeing and personal agency
- **Courage:** the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty
- **Diligence:** the conscientious deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a beneficial outcome
- **Empathy:** the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective
- **Fairness:** impartial and principled in decisions and actions concerning others in ways that promote equality of opportunity and maximise the capability of the people concerned
- **Humility:** the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses
- **Identity:** sense of self in relationship to others that forms the basis of responsibility, resilience and motivation

- **Integrity:** commitment to being moral in dealings with others, including personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence
- **Resilience:** the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished
- **Respect:** showing appropriate esteem for people and their understanding of themselves
- **Sincerity:** a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done
- **Wisdom:** possession of sound judgement that informs practice

Conclusion

13. The challenge of working ethically means that practitioners will inevitably encounter situations that require responses to unexpected issues, resolution of dilemmas, and solutions to problems. A good understanding of the ethics that underpin our work is a valuable resource which is helpful in making significant decisions. The use of an ethical problem-solving model and discussion about ethics are essential to good practice. This *Ethical Framework* is intended to assist practitioners by directing attention to the variety of ethical factors that may need to be taken into consideration and to identify alternative ways of approaching ethics that may prove more useful.

14. No statement of ethics can eliminate the difficulty of making professional judgements in circumstances that may be constantly changing and full of uncertainties. By accepting this statement of ethics, members and registrants of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy are committing themselves to engaging with the challenge of striving to be ethical, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously.