

State of Ohio Counselor, Social Worker & Marriage and Family Therapist Board

Chapter 4757-5 Rules for Standards of ethical and professional conduct

4757-5-02 Standards of ethical practice and professional conduct: clients/consumers of services.

(A) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to competency:

- (1) Licensees and registrants shall be able to present reliable and substantial evidence of competency in the areas in which they practice. Licensees and registrants shall not misrepresent directly, indirectly or by implication their professional qualifications such as education, specialized training, experience, or area(s) of competence. Licensees or registrants shall not use a doctorate designation in their professional capacity unless it is related to the field of mental health and is from a recognized accredited educational institution.
- (2) Licensees and registrants shall practice only within the competency areas for which they are qualified by education and training. Licensees and registrants shall maintain appropriate standards of care based on their individual professional license. Standards of care shall be defined as what an ordinary, reasonable professional with similar training would have done in a similar circumstance.
- (3) While developing new skills in specialty areas, a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall take steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect the clients from possible harm. A counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall develop skills in specialty areas only after appropriate education, training, and while receiving approved supervision.
- (4) Licensees and registrants do not diagnose, treat, or advise on problems outside the recognized boundaries of their competencies. Licensees and registrants shall make appropriate referrals when the client's needs exceed the counselor's, social worker's, or marriage and family therapist's competence level. The referrals shall be made in a timely manner.
- (5) Counselors and social workers shall use techniques/ procedures/ modalities in diagnosing and treating mental and emotional disorders that are grounded in theory and/or have an empirical or scientific foundation. Counselors and social workers who do not shall define the techniques/ procedures as "unproven" or "developing" and explain the potential risks and ethical considerations of using such techniques/procedures and take steps to protect clients from possible harm.

(B) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to informed consent:

- (1) Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall inform clients/consumers of services the extent and nature of services available to them, as well as the limits, rights, opportunities and obligations associated with the services to be provided which might effect the clients/consumers of services decisions to enter into or continue the relationship.
- (2) Licensees and registrants shall provide services to clients only in the context of a professional relationship based on valid informed consent. Licensees and registrants shall use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purposes of services, limit to the services due to legal requirements, relevant

- costs, reasonable alternatives, the clients' rights to refuse or withdraw consent, and the timeframe covered by the consent.
- (3) In instances when clients are unable to read or understand the consent document or have trouble understanding the primary language contained in the informed consent document, licensees shall take steps to ensure the client's comprehension including providing a detailed verbal explanation or arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator as needed. If a client because of age or mental condition is not competent to provide informed consent the licensee will obtain consent from the parent, guardian, or court appointed representative. Best professional practice dictates that a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall adhere to the court documents. If a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist does not understand the court document, they shall contact the court for clarification before proceeding with treatment.
 - (4) In situations when clients are receiving services involuntarily, counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall provide information about the nature and extent of the services and about the client's right to refuse services and the consequences of that refusal.
 - (5) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists who provide services via electronic means shall inform the clients and recipients of the limitations and risks associated with such services.
 - (6) When a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist provides services to two or more clients who have a relationship with each other and who are aware of each other's participation in treatment (for example couples, family members), a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall clarify with all parties the nature of the licensee's professional obligations to the various clients who are receiving services, including limits of confidentiality. A counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist who anticipates a conflict of interest among the clients receiving services or anticipates having to perform in potentially conflicting roles (for example a licensee who is asked or ordered to testify in a child custody dispute or divorce proceeding involving clients) shall clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest.
 - (7) When a counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist sees clients for individual or group treatment, there may be reason for a third party to join the session for a limited purpose. The client or legal guardian shall be asked to provide written authorization that describes the purpose and need for the third party to join the session and describes the circumstances and extent to which confidential information may be disclosed to the third party. The counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall make it clear that the third party is not a client and there is no confidentiality between the licensee and the third party. The counselor, social worker, and marriage and family therapist shall make it clear to the third party that he/she shall not have rights to access any part of the client's file including any session in which they participated unless the client signs a release. A counselor, social worker, or marriage or family therapist shall not make recommendations to courts, attorneys or other professional concerning non-clients.

- (8) When a court or other judicial body orders an evaluation, assessment or other official report, the licensee shall inform the client of the parameters of the court order. The counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall not go beyond the parameters of the court order without obtaining written permission from the court or other judicial body.
- (9) A counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist shall only make recommendations to a court, attorney or other professional concerning a client.
- (10) Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall communicate information in ways that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate. Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall use clear and understandable language when discussing issues related to informed consent. When clients have difficulty understanding the language used by Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists, they shall provide necessary services (e.g., arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator) to ensure comprehension by clients. In collaboration with clients, Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall consider cultural implications of informed consent procedures and, where possible, Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall adjust their practices accordingly.

(C) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to delegation: Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall delegate professional responsibilities to another person only when the licensee delegating the responsibilities knows that the task is within the person's scope of practice and the person is qualified by training, experience and/or licensure to perform them.

(D) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to confidentiality:

- (1) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall have a primary obligation to protect the client's right to confidentiality as established by law and the professional standards of practice. Confidential information shall only be revealed to others when the clients or other persons legally authorized to give consent on behalf of the clients, have given their informed consent, except in those circumstances in which failure to do so would violate other laws or result in clear and present danger to the client or others. Unless specifically contraindicated by such situations, clients shall be informed and written consent shall be obtained before the confidential information is revealed.
- (2) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall discuss with clients and the client's legally authorized representatives, the nature of confidentiality and the limitation of clients' right to confidentiality. Licensees shall review with clients circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information is legally required. This discussion shall occur as soon as possible in the professional relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.
- (3) When counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists provide counseling services to families, couples, or groups, licensee's shall seek agreement among the parties involved concerning each individual's right to confidentiality and obligations to preserve the confidentiality of information

shared by others. Licensees shall inform participants in family, group, or couples counseling that the licensee can not guarantee that all participants will honor such agreements.

- (4) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall take reasonable and appropriate steps to protect the confidentiality of information transmitted to others parties through the use of computers, electronic mail, facsimile machines, telephones and telephone answering machines, and other electronic or computer technology.

(E) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to termination:

- (1) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall terminate services only after giving careful consideration to factors affecting the relationship and making effort to minimize possible adverse effects. If an interruption or termination of services is anticipated, reasonable notification and appropriate referral for continued services shall be provided to the client/consumer of services.
- (2) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists employed by an agency or practice, may not solicit or refer a current client of the agency or practice, to the licensee's private practice. Licensees and registrants when leaving the employment of an agency or practice may offer referrals to the client. The referral shall include multiple options for the client to choose from, and the agency where the client is currently being seen shall be included as an option, the licensee's private practice may be one of the multiple options.
- (3) In the event that a licensee or registrant is terminated for cause from a position as a volunteer or paid licensee, it is not the responsibility of the licensee or registrant to provide continuation of services or appropriate referrals. Licensees who are terminated for cause shall not contact their ex-clients.

(F) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to sexual harassment: Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall not sexually harass clients/consumers of services family members of clients, ex-clients or other persons encountered in professional settings. Licensees shall not sexually harass supervisees, students, or colleagues. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. A client of the agency is considered a client of each counselor, social worker, or marriage and family therapist employed or contracted by the agency for purposes of ethics under the sexual harassment section of this chapter. The duty of the licensee is based on that particular licensee's knowledge of a client's identity prior to starting a relationship.

(G) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to discrimination: Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, veteran status, or mental or physical challenge.

(H) Responsibility to clients/consumers of services as to conduct with clients and other individuals:

- (1) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall not physically or verbally abuse or threaten clients family members of clients, ex-clients or other persons encountered in professional settings. Licensees shall be aware that any physical touching between the professional and the client is subject to review for appropriate professional boundaries. The professional will have the burden of proof to explain why physical touching was professionally necessary.
- (2) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists shall not use derogatory language in their written or verbal communications to or about clients, ex-clients or family members of clients or ex-clients. Licensees shall use accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about clients and other persons in professional settings.

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