



CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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BACKGROUND

Note that the Code of Professional Ethics does not form part of the Memorandum and Articles of Association.

The first *Code* of the Society was endorsed by a General Meeting on 3rd November 1978.

A revised and much expanded *Code* was adopted by a General Meeting on 9th November 1991.

A second revision of the *Code* was endorsed at the AGM of 16th May 1998. This revision adopted the structure of the *Meta-Code of Ethics* (proposed in 1995 by the European Federation of Professional Psychologists' Associations) and introduced a preamble and a formal procedure for ethical decision making borrowed from the 1991 *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*.

The present, third, revision incorporates further amendments, adds a summary, and offers more detailed help on ethical decision making. It was adopted at a General Meeting of the Society on 13th November 1999.

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OF
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND**

SUMMARY

This summary conveys the essence of the Code of Professional Ethics to PSI members and the general public. It is not intended to replace the Code: for all formal purposes (for example, ethical decision-making or complaint against a member) reference should be made to the full Code.

Summary of the Preamble

Psychologists are specialists in the study of human behaviour and experience. The Preamble to the Code lists a number of professional roles which they occupy (for example, researcher, educationalist, diagnostician, psychotherapist, consultant, expert witness) and introduces the term 'client' to refer to those who receive professional services from a psychologist.

Psychologists are scientist-practitioners - that is, their professional practice is grounded in a body of scientific knowledge. They should be committed to ethical practice, which means that they are alert to the misuse of their specialised knowledge. In joining the Psychological Society of Ireland, members agree to comply with the provisions of the Code. The Code applies to their professional lives, but not to their personal conduct unless the latter impinges on the professional sphere; nor is the Code intended to extend to wider social concerns.

The Society's Board of Professional Conduct is charged with maintaining professional discipline. Non-members of the Society are not bound by the Code or the Board, but all psychologists are subject to the law, and their conduct is open to scrutiny by the courts.

To promote ethical conduct, psychologists are required to use a formal procedure in examining ethical aspects of their work. Because ethical issues are complex, the best decisions will be based on systematic consideration of all the relevant factors.

Summary of the Code

The Code consists of four overall ethical principles, which subsume a large number of specific ethical standards.

Principle 1: Respect for the rights and dignity of the person

This principle requires of psychologists that they treat their clients as persons of intrinsic worth with a right to determine their own priorities, that they respect clients' dignity and give due regard to their moral and cultural values. Psychologists shall take care not to intrude inappropriately on clients' privacy. They shall treat as confidential all information (including oral, verbal, written and electronic) obtained in the course of their work, except where the law requires disclosure. As far as possible, they shall ensure that clients understand and consent to whatever professional action they propose.

Principle 2: Competence

Psychologists must constantly maintain and update their professional skills and ethical awareness. They shall recognise that psychological knowledge and their own expertise and capacity for work are limited, and take care not to exceed the limits.

Principle 3: Responsibility

In their professional and scientific activities, psychologists are required to act in a trustworthy, reputable and accountable manner towards clients and the community. They shall avoid doing harm to clients and research participants, and act to prevent harm caused by others. They shall co-operate with colleagues and other professionals to ensure the best service to clients, and act positively to resolve ethical dilemmas. They shall ensure that those whom they supervise act ethically. In research with animals, they shall take care to treat the animals humanely.

Principle 4. Integrity

Psychologists are obliged to be honest and accurate about their qualifications, the effectiveness of the services which they offer, and their research findings. They shall take steps to manage personal stress and maintain their own mental health. They shall treat others in a fair, open and straightforward manner, honour professional commitments, and act to clarify any confusion about their role or responsibilities. Where possible, they shall avoid the use of deception with research participants. They shall not use the professional relationship to exploit clients, sexually or otherwise, and they shall deal actively with conflicts of interest. They shall take action against harmful or unethical behaviour in colleagues or members of other professions.

PREAMBLE

Psychologists develop and apply knowledge about human cognition, emotion and behaviour. In carrying out their professional activities, they occupy a diversity of roles such as researcher, educationalist, diagnostician, psychotherapist, consultant and expert witness. They are committed to improving the condition of both the individual and society, and to helping citizens and institutions to develop informed judgments and choices about psychological issues. The term 'client' is often used to denote those with whom psychologists engage in professional relationships, or to whom they offer professional services.

The authority of psychologists derives from the scientific methods of investigation on which their knowledge is based, and the ethics which govern all their professional activity. They accept that codes of ethics are necessary to protect the interests of clients and prevent misuse of psychological knowledge. In joining the Society, members agree to comply with the Code's provisions.

The Code is designed to regulate only the professional activities of psychologists, and is not intended to monitor their activities in other contexts, or embrace wider social concerns. Personal behaviour becomes a concern of the Society only if it casts doubt on practitioners' ability to conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner, or if it undermines public trust in the profession.

The Society has a Board of Professional Conduct which is charged with promoting ethical awareness among members, and investigating complaints about individual psychologists. Non-members of the Society are not bound by the Code or its associated disciplinary procedures, but like all other citizens, members and non-members alike must take account of the law, and their conduct is subject to legal sanction.

To assist members in dealing with ethical issues, the Code requires them to use a formal decision-making procedure. Ethical issues are complex, and the Society believes that the best ethical decisions come from considering the relevant factors in a systematic manner.

THE CODE IN DETAIL

1.0 RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF THE PERSON

Psychologists shall honour and promote the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people. They shall respect the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy, consistent with the psychologist's other professional obligations and with the law.

More specifically, psychologists shall:

1.1 General Respect

- 1.1.1 Have sensible regard for individual clients' moral and cultural values.
- 1.1.2 Not allow their service to clients to be diminished by factors such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, age, national origin, party politics, social standing or class.
- 1.1.3 Convey respect for and abide by prevailing community mores, social customs, and cultural expectations in their scientific and professional activities.
- 1.1.4 Use language that conveys respect for the dignity of others (for example, gender-neutral terms) in all written or verbal communication.
- 1.1.5 Avoid or refuse to participate in practices which are disrespectful of the legal, civil, or moral rights of others.

1.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

- 1.2.1 Explore and collect only that information which is germane to the purposes of a given investigation or intervention, or which is required by law.
- 1.2.2 Take care not to infringe, in research or service activities, on the personally or culturally defined private space of individuals or groups unless clear and appropriate permission is granted to do so.
- 1.2.3 Respect the right of employees, supervisors, students, or psychologists in training to reasonable personal privacy.
- 1.2.4 Take care not to relay, except as required or justified by law, confidential information about others (for example, colleagues, colleagues' clients, students, or members of organisations) to which they have become privy in the course of their professional activities.
- 1.2.5 Share confidential information with others only with the informed consent (see Section 1.3) of those involved, or in a manner that the individuals involved cannot be identified, except as required or justified by law, or in circumstances of actual or possible serious physical harm or death.
- 1.2.6 Store, handle, transfer and dispose of all records, both written and unwritten (for example, computer files, video tapes), in a way that attends to the needs for privacy and security. They also make adequate plans for records in circumstances of their own serious illness or death.
- 1.2.7 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that records over which they have control remain personally identifiable only as long as is necessary in the interests of those to whom the records refer and/or to the research project for which they were collected, or as required by law, and render anonymous or destroy any records under their control that no longer need to be personally identifiable.

- 1.2.8 Be acutely aware of the need for discretion in the recording and communication of information, so as to prevent it from being interpreted or used to the detriment of others. Appropriate action includes, but is not limited to: not recording information which could lead to misinterpretation and misuse; avoiding conjecture; clearly labelling opinion; and, communicating information in language that can be understood clearly by the particular recipient of the information.
- 1.2.9 Inform those to whom they offer services about legal limits on confidentiality where it is appropriate to do so.
- 1.2.10 Clarify what measures will be taken to protect confidentiality, and what responsibilities family, group, and community members have for the protection of each other's confidentiality, when engaged in services to or research with individuals, families, groups or communities.

1.3 Informed Consent and Freedom of Consent

- 1.3.1 View informed consent not just as the signing of a consent form, but as the outcome of a process of agreeing to work collaboratively. However, they recognise that certain investigations and interventions may be compulsory under the law.
- 1.3.2 Respect and integrate as much as possible the opinions and wishes of others regarding decisions which affect them.
- 1.3.3 Obtain informed consent from all independent and partially dependent persons for any psychological services provided to them.
- 1.3.4 Provide, in obtaining informed consent, as much information as a reasonable or prudent person, family, group, or community would want to know before making a decision or consenting to an activity. The psychologist relays this information in language which the persons understand and shall take whatever reasonable steps are necessary to ensure that the information is, in fact, understood.
- 1.3.5 Ensure, in the process of obtaining informed consent, that at least the following points are understood: purpose and nature of the activity; mutual responsibilities; likely benefits and risks; alternatives; the likely consequences of non-action; the option to refuse or withdraw at any time, without prejudice; over what period of time the consent applies; and, how to rescind consent if desired.
- 1.3.6 Act in emergencies (for example, where a client threatens suicide) on the basis of their professional judgment, if necessary without consent, but if possible obtain fully informed consent at a later stage.
- 1.3.7 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that consent to receive service or participate in research is not given under conditions of coercion or undue pressure.
- 1.3.8 Take all reasonable steps to confirm or re-establish freedom of consent, if consent for service is given under conditions of duress or conditions of extreme need.
- 1.3.9 Obtain informed consent for all research activities which involve obtrusive measures, invasion into the private lives of research participants, risks to the participant, or any attempt to change the behaviour of research participants.
- 1.3.10 Seek willing and adequately informed participation from any person of diminished capacity to give informed consent, and proceed without this consent only if the service or research activity is considered to be of direct benefit to that person.

- 1.3.11 Carry out informed consent processes with those persons who are legally responsible or appointed to give informed consent on behalf of individuals who are not competent to give consent on their own behalf.
- 1.3.12 Do not use persons of diminished capacity to give informed consent in research studies, if the research involved might equally well be carried out with persons who have a fuller capacity to give informed consent.
- 1.3.13 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of human rights issues and protections for any research involving vulnerable groups and/or persons of diminished capacity to give informed consent, before making a decision to proceed.
- 1.3.14 Ensure that information is revealed only with the client's consent, except when subject to the requirements of law or where concealment would result in danger to the client or others.
- 1.3.15 Discuss psychological or evaluative data on individuals only for professional purposes, and only with those who are clearly entitled to know or be consulted.
- 1.3.16 Publish information about clients, in oral or written form, only with their consent, or where their identity is adequately disguised.
- 1.3.17 Make audio, video or photographic records of clients or research participants only where these persons have given prior agreement to the making of the record and the conditions of subsequent access. This clause does not apply to recording of public behaviour or research situations where other ethical safeguards have been implemented.
- 1.3.18 Clarify to all concerned the nature of their loyalties in cases of conflict of interest (between, for example, the interests of the client and the psychologist's employing institution).
- 1.3.19 Clarify the nature of any multiple relationships to all concerned parties before obtaining consent, if services or research are at the behest of third parties (which may include schools, courts, government agencies, insurance companies, police, and special funding bodies). The clarification includes, but is not limited to, the following information: the purpose of the service or research; the use that will be made of information collected; and the limits on confidentiality.
- 1.3.20 Obtain clients' consent to the attendance of trainees and other third parties not directly involved in the provision of professional services.

1.4 Self-determination

- 1.4.1 Seek as full and active participation as possible from others in decisions which affect them.
- 1.4.2 Respect the right of recipients of service, research participants, employees, supervisees, students, and others, to safeguard their own dignity.
- 1.4.3 Respect the right of individuals to discontinue participation or service at any time, and are responsive to non-verbal indications of a desire to discontinue if individuals have difficulty in verbally communicating such a desire.

2.0 COMPETENCE

Psychologists shall strive to ensure and maintain high standards of competence in their work. They recognise the boundaries of their particular competencies and the limitations of their expertise. They shall provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by education, training or experience.

More specifically, psychologists shall:

2.1 Ethical Awareness

- 2.1.1 Accept the obligation to study and understand the provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.
- 2.1.2 Avoid entering into agreements or contracts which might oblige them to contravene provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.

2.2 Limits of Competence

- 2.2.1 Be aware of how their own experiences, attitudes, culture, beliefs and values influence their interactions with others, and integrate this awareness into all efforts to benefit and not harm others.
- 2.2.2 Recognize the boundaries of their competence, and do not exceed these.
- 2.2.3 Offer or carry out (without supervision) only those professional activities for which they have established their competence to practise to the benefit of others.
- 2.2.4 Take immediate steps to consult or to refer a client to a colleague or other appropriate professional, whichever is most likely to result in competent service to the client, if it becomes apparent that they are not competent to deal with a client's problem.
- 2.2.5 Avoid delegating professional activities to persons not competent to carry them out to the benefit of others.

2.3 Limits of Procedures

- 2.3.1 Be mindful, when they make decisions based on psychological data and the use of psychological techniques, of the limitations of such data and techniques.
- 2.3.2 Direct their interventions towards clear objectives, and do not persist with those interventions after the objectives have been met or if it has become apparent that the objectives cannot be met.
- 2.3.3 Terminate an activity when it is clear that the activity is more harmful than beneficial, or when the activity is no longer needed.
- 2.3.4 Carry out pilot studies to determine the effects of all new procedures and techniques which might carry some risks, before considering their use on a broader scale.
- 2.3.5 Not carry out any scientific or professional activity unless the probable benefit is proportionately greater than the risk involved.
- 2.3.6 Provide thorough discussion of the limits of their data, if their work touches on social policy and structure.

2.4 Continuing Professional Development

- 2.4.1 Maintain and develop their professional competence.
- 2.4.2 Participate in and contribute to continuing education and their own and colleagues' professional and scientific growth.

2.4.3 Keep themselves up to date with relevant knowledge, research methods, and techniques, through the reading of relevant literature, peer consultation, and continuing education activities, in order that their service or research activities and conclusions shall benefit and not harm others.

2.4.4 Perform their teaching duties on the basis of careful preparation, so that their instruction shall be current and scholarly.

2.5 Incapacity for Practice

2.5.1 Refrain from practice when their professional judgment or ability to benefit and not harm others is seriously impaired by a physical or psychological condition. When they become aware of problems that may affect their competence, they seek competent professional assistance to determine whether they should limit, suspend or terminate their professional activity.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists shall be aware of their professional and scientific responsibilities to clients, to the community, and to the society in which they work and live. Psychologists shall avoid doing harm and shall be responsible for their own actions, and assure themselves, as far as possible, that their services are not misused.

More specifically, psychologists shall:

3.1 General Responsibility

3.1.1 Contribute to the discipline of psychology and to society's understanding of itself and human beings generally, through a free pursuit and sharing of knowledge.

3.1.2 Monitor and evaluate the effect of their professional activities, record their findings and, if appropriate, communicate new knowledge to others in the field.

3.1.3 Are sensitive to the needs, current issues, and problems of society when determining research questions to be asked, services to be developed, information to be collected, or the interpretation of results findings.

3.1.4 Protect the dignity and wellbeing of research participants at all times.

3.1.5 Help develop, promote, and participate in accountability processes and procedures related to their work.

3.1.6 Help to establish and abide by fair procedures in their activities as employers, evaluators, adjudicators, editors, and peer reviewers.

3.1.7 Make every reasonable effort to ensure that psychological knowledge is not misused, intentionally or unintentionally, to infringe on human rights.

3.1.8 Speak out if the policies, practices or regulations of the organisation within which they work seriously ignore or oppose any of the principles of this Code of Professional Ethics.

3.2 Promotion of High Standards

3.2.1 Uphold the discipline's responsibility to society by promoting and maintaining the highest standards of the discipline.

3.2.2 Ensure that they maintain the highest standards of scientific integrity in their research.

- 3.2.3 Protect the reputation of the profession and discipline by ensuring that all professional activities carried out conform to the provisions of this Code of Professional Ethics.
- 3.2.4 Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to undermine public confidence in the profession.
- 3.3 Avoidance of Harm**
- 3.3.1 Behave in professional activities in such a way as not to damage clients' interests.
- 3.3.2 Be sufficiently sensitive to and knowledgeable about individual differences and vulnerabilities to discern what will benefit and not harm persons involved in their professional activities.
- 3.3.3 Assess the individuals, families, groups, and communities involved in their professional activities adequately enough to discern what will benefit and not harm those persons.
- 3.3.4 Do everything reasonably possible to stop or offset the consequences of actions by others when these actions are likely to cause serious physical harm or death. Action may include reporting to appropriate authorities (for example, the police) or an intended victim, and may be carried out even when a confidential relationship is involved.
- 3.3.5 Make every reasonable effort to ensure that psychological knowledge is not misused, intentionally or unintentionally, to harm others or infringe human rights.
- 3.3.6 Take all reasonable steps to ensure that tests and assessment methods are only used by those qualified and trained to do so.
- 3.3.7 Refuse to advise, train, or supply information to anyone who, in their judgement, will use the knowledge or skills to harm others or infringe human rights.
- 3.3.8 Not contribute to nor engage in research or any other activity which promotes or is intended for use in deliberate impairment of the individual's psychological integrity (for example, torture), the development of prohibited weapons, destruction of the environment, or any other act which contravenes relevant international law.
- 3.3.9 Act to minimise the impact of their research activities on research participants' personality or their mental or physical integrity.
- 3.3.10 Screen research participants and select those not likely to be harmed, if risk or harm to some research participants is possible.
- 3.3.11 Debrief research participants in such a way that any harm caused can be discerned, and act to correct any resultant harm.
- 3.3.12 Not disadvantage participants (individuals, groups, families or communities) by offering them no service over an unreasonable period of time in order to fulfil a control condition in a research study; where a study reveals beneficial effects, and resources allow, psychologists subsequently offer the beneficial service to participants in the control condition.
- 3.3.13 Not offer rewards to motivate individuals or group to participate in activity that has possible or known risks for them or others.
- 3.3.14 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of the balance of risks and potential benefits of all research which involves procedures of unknown consequence, or where pain, discomfort, or harm are possible, before making a decision to proceed.

- 3.3.15 Exercise particular care when reporting results on vulnerable groups to counter misinterpretation or misuse in the development of social policy, attitudes, or practices (for example, manipulation of vulnerable persons or discrimination against specific populations).
- 3.3.16 Refuse to help individuals, families, groups, or communities to carry out or submit to activities which, according to current knowledge and/or legal and professional guidelines, would cause serious physical or psychological harm to themselves or others.
- 3.3.17 Use animals in research only where there is a reasonable expectation that the research will increase understanding of the structures and processes underlying behaviour, or increase understanding of the particular animal species used in the study, or result eventually in benefits to the health and welfare of humans or other animals.
- 3.3.18 Use procedures subjecting animals to pain, stress, or deprivation only if alternative procedures are unavailable and the goal is justified by prospective scientific, educational, or applied gains.
- 3.3.19 Make every effort to minimize discomfort, illness and pain in animals. Such effort includes performing surgical procedures only under appropriate anaesthesia, using techniques to avoid infection and minimise pain during and after surgery, and disposing of experimental animals only in a humane way.
- 3.3.20 Use animals in classroom demonstrations only if the instructional objectives cannot be achieved through the use of video-tapes, films, or other methods, and if the type of demonstration is warranted by the anticipated instructional gain.

3.4 Continuity of Care

- 3.4.1 Make themselves aware of the knowledge and skills of other disciplines (for example, law, medicine) and advise the use of such knowledge and skills, where relevant to the benefit of others.
- 3.4.2 Strive to obtain the best possible service for those needing and seeking psychological service. This includes recommending professionals other than psychologists, if appropriate.
- 3.4.3 When referring a client, maintain support and responsibility for caring until contact has commenced with the agent to whom referral was made.
- 3.4.4 Give reasonable notice, and make reasonably certain that discontinuation will cause no harm to the client, before discontinuing services.
- 3.4.5 Contribute where appropriate to the co-ordination of client services in order to avoid duplication or working at cross purposes. To facilitate this process, they shall maintain adequate records and communicate with other service providers.

3.5 Extended Responsibility

- 3.5.1 Assume overall ethical responsibility for the scientific and professional activities of those (students, trainees, assistants, supervisees, employees) whose work they supervise. The responsibility includes monitoring of subordinates' activity, and making them aware of the values and ethical prescriptions of the discipline.
- 3.5.2 Facilitate the professional and scientific development of those whose work they supervise by arranging appropriate work experience and offering constructive feedback.
- 3.5.3 Guard against misuse or misinterpretation by others of psychological data.

3.6 Resolving Dilemmas

- 3.6.1 Use a systematic procedure for investigating ethical issues and resolving ethical dilemmas. A recommended procedure is presented in Appendix A, and a categorisation of affected/interested parties (stakeholders) in Appendix B.
- 3.6.2 Inform all parties, if a real or potential conflict of interest arises, of the need to resolve the situation in a manner that is consistent with this Code of Professional Ethics, and take all reasonable steps so to resolve it.
- 3.6.3 Consult with colleagues and/or appropriate groups and committees if faced with a difficult situation or apparent conflict between compliance with the law and following an ethical principle. They seek consensus on the most ethical course of action and the most responsible, knowledgeable, effective, and respectful way to carry it out. In an emergency, where there is no time to consult, they make their own best professional judgment.

4.0 INTEGRITY

Psychologists seek to promote integrity in the science, teaching and practice of psychology. In these activities psychologists shall be honest, fair and respectful of others. They shall attempt to clarify for relevant parties the roles they are performing and to function appropriately in accordance with these roles.

More specifically, psychologists shall:

4.1 Recognition of Professional Limitations

- 4.1.1 Engage in self-care activities which help to avoid conditions (for example, burnout, addictions) which could result in impaired judgement and interfere with their ability to benefit and not harm others.
- 4.1.2 Seek emotional support and/or supervision from colleagues when feeling stressed or vulnerable due to professional dilemmas.

4.2 Honesty and Accuracy

- 4.2.1 Ensure that they and others accurately represent their education, training and experience, and the effectiveness of the services which they offer, in all spoken, written or printed communications. Relevant communications include but are not limited to: advertisements of services, course and workshop descriptions, academic grading requirements, and research reports. Where misrepresentation has occurred, they act quickly to correct it.
- 4.2.2 Avoid misrepresentation, exaggeration or distortion by themselves or others of psychological findings or the effectiveness of the services which they offer, and act quickly to correct any such misrepresentation, exaggeration or distortion.
- 4.2.3 Make clear whether they are acting as private citizens, as members of specific organisations or groups, or as representatives of the discipline of psychology, when making statements or when involved in public activities.
- 4.2.4 Ensure that families, and other interested parties, are aware that the psychologist's primary responsibilities are generally to the individual.
- 4.2.5 Take care in communicating their knowledge, findings and views to clearly differentiate facts, opinions, theories, hypotheses, and ideas.

- 4.2.6 Not suppress disconfirming evidence of their findings and views, and acknowledge alternative hypotheses and explanations.
- 4.2.7 Conduct research in a way that is consistent with a commitment to honest, open inquiry, and to clear communication of any research aims, sponsorship, social context, personal values, or financial interests that may affect or appear to affect their research.
- 4.2.8 Compensate others justly for the use of their time, energy, and intelligence, unless such compensation is refused in advance.
- 4.2.9 Not accept or attempt to secure fees or benefits over and above those agreed contractually in advance. They shall not accept significant gifts where such acceptance would undermine their impartiality.
- 4.2.10 Not participate in, condone, or allow themselves to be associated with dishonesty or fraud.
- 4.2.11 Honour all promises and commitments included in any written or verbal agreement unless serious and unexpected circumstances (for example, illness) intervene. If such circumstances occur, then the psychologist shall make a full and honest explanation to other parties involved.
- 4.2.12 Be clear, when entering into contracts with third parties, about obligations under this Code of Professional Ethics, and ensure that all parties concerned are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- 4.2.13 Ensure that those who commission research are aware of the rights and responsibilities of all interested parties.
- 4.2.14 Clarify ownership of documentation, data, and rights of publication with those who commission research.
- 4.2.15 Give publication credit to others (including students) in proportion to the professional contribution that they have made. Publication includes all forms of media. Professional contributions include but are not limited to: ideas generated, execution of research, analysis of results, and writing.

4.3 Straightforwardness and Openness

- 4.3.1 Respect the right of clients and research participants to receive an appropriate explanation of the nature, purpose and results of investigations, assessments and research findings, in language that these persons can understand.
- 4.3.2 Be clear and straightforward about all information needed to establish informed consent or any other valid written or unwritten agreement (for example: fees; concerns; mutual responsibilities; ethical responsibilities of psychologists; purpose and nature of the relationship; alternatives; likely experiences; possible conflicts; possible outcomes; and, expectations for processing, using, and sharing any information generated).
- 4.3.3 Fully explain reasons for their actions to persons who have been affected by their actions, if appropriate and/or if asked.
- 4.3.4 Avoid using deception (or techniques which might be interpreted as deception) in research or service activities if there are alternative procedures available or if negative effects cannot be predicted or offset.

- 4.3.5 Provide a debriefing for research participants following studies in which deception (or the use of techniques which could be interpreted as deception) has occurred. Psychologists shall clarify the real nature of and rationale for the study, and seek to remove any misconceptions and re-establish trust.
- 4.3.6 Seek an independent and adequate ethical review of the risks to public or individual trust and of safeguards to protect such trust for any research which uses deception or techniques which might be interpreted as deception, before making a decision to proceed.

4.4 Conflict of Interests and Exploitation

- 4.4.1 Not exploit any professional relationship to further their own personal, political or business interests. Examples include: soliciting for private practice clients of one's employing agency; taking advantage of trust or dependency to frighten clients into receiving services; appropriating student's ideas, research or work; using the resources of one's employing institution for purposes not agreed to; securing or accepting significant financial or material benefit for professional activities which are already rewarded by salary; prejudicing others against a colleague for reasons of personal gain.
- 4.4.2 Not exploit clients for gratification of sexual desires, either during the professional relationship or after its termination.
- 4.4.3 Be acutely aware of the problematic nature of dual relationships (with, for example, students, employees or clients), and recognise that it is not always possible to avoid them (for example, when offering services in a small community, or engaging in person-centred teaching or training). Where it is possible, psychologists shall avoid such relationships; where it is not, they take active steps to safeguard the students', employees' or clients' interests.

4.5 Actions of Colleagues

- 4.5.1 Act to stop or offset the consequences of professional activities of a colleague or a member of another discipline which are clearly harmful or apparently unethical. Depending on the nature of the harmful activities, action may include talking informally with the professional involved, and obtaining an assurance that any harm will discontinue and be corrected. However, if the harm is serious and/or the activities persist, the psychologist shall report the situation to the Society's Board of Professional Conduct, or other appropriate regulatory body. Where such activities come to psychologists' attention in the course of a confidential client relationship with the professional, they use their professional judgment on whether to break confidentiality.
- 4.5.2 Offer, as appropriate, emotional support and/or supervision to colleagues who request it.

APPENDIX A
RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE FOR ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

Section 3.6 of the Code of Professional Ethics deals with the resolution of ethical dilemmas, and all the clauses in that section are relevant to the making of ethical decisions.

Clause 3.6.1 states that members shall adopt a systematic approach to both the investigation of ethical issues and the resolution of dilemmas, and recommends use of the formal decision-making procedure presented here. The procedure is designed for both routine issues and immediate problems.

- 1. Define carefully the issues and parties involved. See Appendix B for a categorisation of affected/interested parties (stakeholders).**
- 2. Scan the Code of Professional Ethics and identify all relevant clauses. Also check other applicable professional guidelines (for example, those of government departments or health boards) and any pertinent legislation. Consulting with colleagues is also often appropriate.**
- 3. Evaluate the rights, responsibilities and welfare of all affected parties.**
- 4. Generate as many alternative decisions as possible - the more the better.**
- 5. Evaluate carefully the likely outcome of each decision.**
- 6. Choose what, in your professional judgment, is the best decision, implement it, and inform relevant parties.**
- 7. Finally, take responsibility for the consequences of the decision.**

The complexity of ethical issues makes it likely that different principles and subclauses will occasionally clash; in addition, the provisions of the Code may also be at odds with legal provisions and/or other relevant guidelines. Unfortunately, the resolution of ethical dilemmas is not guaranteed to be simple.

However, professional bodies and the law accept that practitioners may make errors of judgment, and that such errors are distinct from malpractice. The formal decision-making procedure is intended to reduce the incidence of decisions which are mistakes because they are taken in the heat of the moment, without consideration of all the relevant factors. What is required, in all cases, is a considered professional judgment taken in a systematic way.

It is strongly recommended that notes be kept of deliberations at each stage of the process.

APPENDIX B

A CATEGORISATION OF PARTIES AFFECTED BY ETHICAL DECISIONS

Step 1 of the decision-making procedure entails the identification of parties, or stakeholders, who are affected by, or have an interest in, the psychologist's ethical decision. The extent of involvement in an ethical dilemma, particularly through secondary relationships, can be very complex. The following categorisation should simplify the task of systematically identifying relevant stakeholders.

The Psychologist: It is the Psychologist who experiences the dilemma and must make the ethical decision. Psychologists should therefore include a critical view of their own position in the decision-making process.

Direct Beneficiary: This term refers to any individual (or group) directly receiving the services of a psychologist. Direct Beneficiaries are often referred to as clients. The terms consumer, patient, student, trainee or applicant may also be appropriate. The term Direct Beneficiary can refer to a wide variety of individuals depending on the role and specialisation of the Psychologist.

Extended Beneficiary: This term can be applied to any individual (or group) benefiting indirectly from psychological services delivered to others. It may be appropriate to include the relatives, friends, spouse or colleagues of a Direct Beneficiary in this way. The term can also be applied to those who may ultimately benefit, such as future clients in the case of a new intervention or procedure.

Participant: Participants are those who provide data in the context of either research or evaluation. They may well also be Direct Beneficiaries of a particular intervention, procedure or methodology. They should be categorised according to which role is most relevant in the decision-making process.

Referrer: This term specifies the source of referral of a direct beneficiary. Referrers can include agencies, individuals in a range of professions, families, schools, and employers.

Colleague: This term refers to psychologists (and may also be used to refer to members of related professions) with whom there exists a working relationship either within or outside the Psychologist's own work setting. An immediate superior or employee can also be specified under this category if that is the relationship which is most relevant to the decision-making process.

Contractor: This term refers to any individual or agency, other than the Direct Beneficiary, with whom a legal or implied contract to carry out research or services exists. In some cases the contract may be between the Contractor and the individual Psychologist; in other cases the contract may be with the Psychologist's employer. The category Contractor includes entities as varied as the European Commission, research trusts, sponsors of particular projects, and families of direct beneficiaries.

Employer: This term refers to any agent (individual or organisational) with whom a Psychologist has a contract of service. Generally speaking an Employer can be identified as the agent who pays the Psychologist's salary, although this feature may be absent, for example in the case of secondment. An Employer is usually also in a position of authority with reference to the Psychologist.

Manager: This term can be used in cases where it is important to differentiate between the interests of a Psychologist's Employer and those of a direct supervisor or Manager.

Supervisor: It is appropriate to distinguish a role of clinical Supervisor from that of Manager. Some psychologists, especially in counselling or psychotherapeutic specialisations, receive regular supervision in which they review work with clients and explore their own personal reactions. Such supervision may be one-to-one or in small groups and may be on a mutual or fee-paying basis.

Employee: This term refers to those employed by the Psychologist. Employees may include psychologists, other professionals and administrative staff.

Wider Profession: This term refers to the Psychologist's colleagues whose interests or reputation may be affected by an ethical decision.

Other Parties: This is a general term which can be used to specify any other individuals or constituencies considered relevant to the decision-making process, for example: non-psychologist colleagues; the press; organisations representing particular interests; community groups; politicians; government departments; the Psychologist's own family.

General Public: Although psychologists' activities are usually private, there may nevertheless be a public dimension, for example when they offer services in relation to controversial issues such as abortion. In such cases it is useful to give formal consideration to the public interest.