Code of Ethics & Practice for Supervisors of Counsellors

These Codes ceased to be effective as of 31 March 2002. All members of BACP are now bound by the Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy, which became effective as of 1 April 2002.

The Codes can only be used/cited for any complaint that may have occurred throughout the time the Codes were effective, subject to the limitations detailed in clause 1.4 of the Professional Conduct Procedure. For further advice on this issue, please contact the Professional Conduct Department on 0870 443 5215.

1. Status of the Code

1.1 In response to the experience of members of BACP, this Code is a revision of the 1988 Code of Ethics & Practice for the Supervision of Counsellors.

2. Introduction

2.1 The purpose of the Code is to establish and maintain standards for supervisors who are members of BACP and to inform and protect counsellors seeking supervision. Throughout this Code the terms Counsellor and Counselling are used in accordance with the definition of counselling in the Code of Ethics & Practice for Counsellors.

2.2 All members of this Association are required to abide by existing Codes appropriate to them. They thereby accept a common frame of reference within which to manage their responsibilities to supervisees and their clients, colleagues, members of this Association and the wider community. Whilst this Code cannot resolve all ethical and practice related issues, it aims to provide a framework for addressing ethical issues and to encourage optimum levels of practice. Supervisors and supervisees (counsellors) will need to judge which parts of this Code apply to particular situations. They may have to decide between conflicting responsibilities.

2.3 Counselling Supervision is a formal and mutually agreed arrangement for counsellors to discuss their work regularly with someone who is normally an experienced and competent counsellor and familiar with the process of counselling supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the supervisee's counselling practice.

Counselling Supervision is the term that will be used throughout this Code. It is also known as supervision, consultative support, clinical supervision or non-managerial supervision. It is an essential part of good practice for counselling.
It is different from training, personal development and line management accountability.

2.4 The Association has a Complaints Procedure which can lead to the expulsion of members for breaches of its Codes of Ethics & Practice.

3. Nature of Counselling Supervision

3.1 Counselling supervision provides supervisees with the opportunity on a regular basis to discuss and monitor their work with clients. It should take account of the setting in which supervisees practise. Counselling supervision is intended to ensure that the needs of the clients are being addressed and to monitor the effectiveness of the therapeutic interventions.

3.2 Counselling supervision may contain some elements of training, personal development or line-management, but counselling supervision is not primarily intended for these purposes and appropriate management of these issues should be observed.

3.3 Counselling supervision is a formal collaborative process intended to help supervisees maintain ethical and professional standards of practice and to enhance creativity.

3.4 It is essential that counsellor and supervisor are able to work together constructively as counselling supervision includes supportive and challenging elements.

3.5 There are several modes of counselling supervision (see 5), which vary in appropriateness according to the needs of supervisees. More than one mode of counselling supervision may be used concurrently. This code applies to all counselling supervision arrangements.

3.6 The frequency of counselling supervision will vary according to the volume of counselling, the experience of supervisees and their work setting.

4. Anti-discriminatory Practice in Counselling Supervision

4.1 Anti-discriminatory practice underpins the basic values of counselling and counselling supervision as stated in this document and in the Code of Ethics & Practice for Counsellors. It also addresses the issue of the client's social context, B.2.7.3 of that Code (1996).

4.2 Supervisors have a responsibility to be aware of their own issues of prejudice and stereotyping, and particularly to consider ways in which this may be affecting the supervisory relationship. Discussion of this is part of the counselling supervision process.
4.3 Supervisors need to be alert to any prejudices and assumptions that counsellors reveal in their work with clients and to raise awareness of these so that the needs of clients may be met with more sensitivity. One purpose of counselling supervision is to enable supervisees to recognise and value difference. Supervisors have a responsibility to challenge the appropriateness of the work of a supervisee whose own belief system interferes with the acceptance of clients.

4.4 Attitudes, assumptions and prejudices can be identified by the language used, and by paying attention to the selectivity of material brought to counselling supervision.

5. Modes of Counselling Supervision

There are different modes of counselling supervision. The particular features of some of these modes are outlined below. Some counsellors use combinations of these for their counselling supervision.

5.1 One to One, Supervisor-Supervisee. This involves a supervisor providing counselling supervision on an individual basis for an individual counsellor who is usually less experienced than the supervisor. This is the most widely used mode of counselling supervision.

5.2 Group Counselling Supervision with Identified Counselling Supervisor(s). There are several ways of providing this form of counselling supervision. In one approach the supervisor acts as the leader, takes responsibility for organising the time equally between the supervisees, and concentrates on the work of each individual in turn. Using another approach the supervisees allocate counselling supervision time between themselves with the supervisor as a technical resource.

5.3 One to One Peer Counselling Supervision. This involves two participants providing counselling supervision for each other by alternating the roles of supervisor and supervisee. Typically, the time available for counselling supervision is divided equally between them. This mode on its own is not suitable for all practitioners.

5.4 Peer Group Counselling Supervision. This takes place when three or more counsellors share the responsibility for providing each other's counselling supervision within the group. Typically, they will consider themselves to be of broadly equal status, training and/or experience. This mode on its own is unsuitable for inexperienced practitioners.

5.5 Particular issues of competence for each mode are detailed in the Code of Practice B.2.6.

6. The Structure of this Code
6.1 This code has two sections. Section A, the Code of Ethics, outlines the fundamental values of counselling supervision and a number of general principles arising from these. Section B, the Code of Practice, applies these principles to counselling supervision.

A. CODE OF ETHICS

A.1 Counselling supervision is a non-exploitative activity. Its basic values are integrity, responsibility, impartiality and respect. Supervisors must take the same degree of care to work ethically whether they are paid or work voluntarily and irrespective of the mode of counselling supervision used.

A.2 Confidentiality
The content of counselling supervision is highly confidential. Supervisors must clarify their limits of confidentiality.

A.3 Safety
All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the safety of supervisees and their clients during their work together.

A.4 Effectiveness
All reasonable steps must be taken by supervisors to encourage optimum levels of practice by supervisees.

A.5 Contracts
The terms and conditions on which counselling supervision is offered must be made clear to supervisees at the outset. Subsequent revisions of these terms must be agreed in advance of any change.

A.6 Competence
Supervisors must take all reasonable steps to monitor and develop their own competence and to work within the limits of that competence. This includes having supervision of their supervision work.

B. CODE OF PRACTICE

B.1 Issues of Responsibility

B.1.1 Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that an individual contract is worked out with their supervisees which will allow them to present and explore their work as honestly as possible.

B.1.2 Within this contract supervisors are responsible for helping supervisees to reflect critically upon their work, while at the same time acknowledging that clinical responsibility remains with the counsellor.
B.1.3 Supervisors are responsible, together with their supervisees, for ensuring that the best use is made of counselling supervision time, in order to address the needs of clients.

B.1.4 Supervisors are responsible for setting and maintaining the boundaries between the counselling supervision relationship and other professional relationships, e.g. training and management.

B.1.5 Supervisors and supervisees should take all reasonable steps to ensure that any personal or social contact between them does not adversely influence the effectiveness of the counselling supervision.

B.1.6 A supervisor must not have a counselling supervision and a personal counselling contract with the same supervisee over the same period of time.

B.1.7 Supervisors must not exploit their supervisees financially, sexually, emotionally or in any other way. It is unethical for supervisors to engage in sexual activity with their supervisee.

B.1.8 Supervisors have a responsibility to enquire about any other relationships which may exist between supervisees and their clients as these may impair the objectivity and professional judgement of supervisees.

B.1.9 Supervisors must recognise, and work in ways that respects the value and dignity of supervisees and their clients with due regard to issues such as origin, status, race, gender, age, beliefs, sexual orientation and disability. This must include raising awareness of any discriminatory practices that may exist between supervisees and their clients, or between supervisor and supervisee.

B.1.10 Supervisors must ensure that together with their supervisees they could consider their respective legal liabilities to each other, to the employing or training organisation, if any, and to clients.

B.1.11 Supervisors are responsible for taking action if they are aware that their supervisees' practice is not in accordance with BACP's Codes of Ethics & Practice for Counsellors.

B.1.12 Supervisors are responsible for helping their supervisees recognise when their functioning as counsellors is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties, any condition that affects judgement, illness, the influence of alcohol or drugs, or for any other reason, and for ensuring that appropriate action is taken.

B.1.13 Supervisors must conduct themselves in their supervision-related activities in ways which do not undermine public confidence in either their role as supervisor or in the work of other supervisors.

B.1.14 If a supervisor is aware of possible misconduct by another supervisor which cannot be resolved or remedied after discussion with the supervisor concerned, they should implement the Complaints Procedure, doing so within the boundaries of confidentiality required by the Complaints Procedure.
B.1.15 Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their emotional needs are met outside the counselling supervision work and are not solely dependent on their relationship with supervisees.

B.1.16 Supervisors are responsible for consulting with their own supervisor before former clients are taken on as supervisees or former supervisees are taken on as clients.

B.2 Issues of Competence

B.2.1 Under all of the modes of counselling supervision listed above, supervisors should normally be practicing and experienced counsellors.

B.2.2 Supervisors are responsible for seeking ways to further their own professional development.

B.2.3 Supervisors are responsible for making arrangements for their own supervision in order to support their counselling supervision work and to help them to evaluate their competence.

B.2.4 Supervisors are responsible for monitoring and working within the limits of their competence.

B.2.5 Supervisors are responsible for withdrawing from counselling supervision work either temporarily or permanently when their functioning is impaired due to personal or emotional difficultes, illness, the influence of alcohol or drugs, or for any other reason.

B.2.6 Some modes require extra consideration and these are detailed in this section.

One to one supervisor - supervisee A
Group counselling supervision with identified and more experienced supervisor - A, B, D, E
One to one peer counselling supervision - A, B, C, D, G, H
Peer group counselling supervision - A, B, C, D, F, G, H

A. All points contained elsewhere within the Code of Practice should be considered.
B. Sufficient time must be allocated to each counsellor to ensure adequate supervision of their counselling work.
C. This method on its own is particularly unsuitable for trainees, recently trained or inexperienced counsellors.
D. Care needs to be taken to develop an atmosphere conducive to sharing, questioning and challenging each others' practice in a constructive and supportive way.
E. As well as having a background in counselling work, supervisors should have appropriate groupwork experience in order to facilitate this kind of group.
F. All participants should have sufficient groupwork experience to be able to engage the group process in ways which facilitate effective counselling supervision.
G. Explicit consideration should be given to deciding who is responsible for
providing the counselling supervision, and how the task of counselling supervision will be carried out.

H. It is good practice to have an independent consultant to visit regularly to observe and monitor the process and quality of the counselling supervision.

B.3 Management of Work

B.3.1 The Counselling Supervision Contract

3.1.1 Where supervisors and supervisees work for the same agency or organisation the supervisor is responsible for clarifying all contractual obligation.

3.1.2 Supervisors must inform their supervisee, as appropriate, about their own training, philosophy and theoretical position, qualifications, approach to anti-discriminatory practice and the methods of counselling supervision they use.

3.1.3 Supervisors must be explicit regarding practical arrangements for counselling supervision, paying particular regard to the length of contact time, the frequency of contact, policy and practice regarding record keeping, and the privacy of the venue.

3.1.4 Fees and fee increases must be arranged and agreed in advance.

3.1.5 Supervisors and supervisees must make explicit the expectations and requirements they have of each other. This should include the manner in which any formal assessment of the supervisee's work will be conducted. Each party should assess the value of working with the other, and review this regularly.

3.1.6 Supervisors must discuss their policy regarding giving references and any fees that may be charged for this or for any other work done outside counselling supervision time.

3.1.7 Before formalising a counselling supervision contract supervisors must ascertain what personal counselling the supervisee has or has had. This is in order to take into account any effect this may have on the supervisee's counselling work.

3.1.8 Supervisors working with trainee counsellors must clarify the boundaries of their responsibility and their accountability to their supervisee and to the training course and any agency/placement involved. This should include any formal assessment required.

B.3.2 Confidentiality

3.2.1 As a general principle, supervisors must not reveal confidential material concerning the supervisee or their clients to any other person without the express consent of all parties concerned. Exceptions to this general principle are contained within this Code.
3.2.2 When initial contracts are being made, agreements about the people to whom supervisors may speak about their supervisees work must include those on whom the supervisors rely for support, supervision or consultancy. There must also be clarity at this stage about the boundaries of confidentiality having regard for the supervisor’s own framework of accountability. This is particularly relevant when providing counselling supervision to a trainee counsellor.

3.2.3 Supervisors should take all reasonable steps to encourage supervisees to present their work in ways which protect the personal identity of clients, or to get their client’s informed consent to present information which could lead to personal identification.

3.2.4 Supervisors must not reveal confidential information concerning supervisees or their clients to any person or through any public medium except:

a) When it is clearly stated in the counselling supervision contract and it is in accordance with all BACP Codes of Ethics & Practice.

b) When the supervisor considers it necessary to prevent serious emotional or physical damage to the client, the supervisee or a third party. In such circumstances the supervisee’s consent to a change in the agreement about confidentiality should be sought, unless there are good grounds for believing that the supervisee is no longer able to take responsibility for his/her own actions. Whenever possible, the decision to break confidentiality in any circumstances should be made after consultation with another experienced supervisor.

3.2.5 The disclosure of confidential information relating to supervisees is permissible when relevant to the following situation:

a) Recommendations concerning supervisees for professional purposes e.g. references and assessments.

b) Pursuit of disciplinary action involving supervisees in matters pertaining to standards of ethics and practice.

In the latter instance, any breaking of confidentiality should be minimised by conveying only information pertinent to the immediate situation on a need-to-know basis. The ethical considerations needing to be taken into account are:

i) Maintaining the best interest of the supervisee
ii) Enabling the supervisee to take responsibility for their actions
iii) Taking full account of the supervisor’s responsibility to the client and to the wider community

3.2.6 Information about work with a supervisee may be used for publication or in meetings only with the supervisee's permission and with anonymity preserved.

3.2.7 On occasions when it is necessary to consult with professional colleagues, supervisors ensure that their discussion is purposeful and not trivialising.
B.3.3 The Management of Counselling Supervision

3.3.1 Supervisors must encourage the supervisee to belong to an association or organisation with a Code of Ethics & Practice and a Complaints Procedure. This provides additional safeguards for the supervisor, supervisee and client in the event of a complaint.

3.3.2 If, in the course of counselling supervision, it appears that personal counselling may be necessary for the supervisee to be able to continue working effectively, the supervisor should raise the issue with the supervisee.

3.3.3 Supervisors must monitor regularly how their supervisees engage in self-evaluation of their work.

3.3.4 Supervisors must ensure that their supervisees acknowledge their individual responsibility for ongoing professional development and for participating in further training programmes.

3.3.5 Supervisors must ensure that their supervisees are aware of the distinction between counselling, accountability to management, counselling supervision and training.

3.3.6 Supervisors must ensure with a supervisee who works in an organisation or agency that the lines of accountability and responsibility are clearly defined: supervisee/client; supervisor/supervisee; supervisor/client; organisation/supervisor; organisation/supervisee; organisation/client. There is a distinction between line management supervision and counselling supervision.

3.3.7 Best practice is that the same person should not act as both line manager and counselling supervisor to the same supervisee. However, where the counselling supervisor is also the line manager, the supervisee should have access to independent counselling supervision.

3.3.8 Supervisors who become aware of a conflict between an obligation to a supervisee and an obligation to an employing agency must make explicit to the supervisee the nature of the loyalties and responsibilities involved.

3.3.9 Supervisors who have concerns about a supervisee's work with clients must be clear how they will pursue this if discussion in counselling supervision fails to resolve the situation.

3.3.10 Where disagreements cannot be resolved by discussions between supervisor and supervisee, the supervisor should consult with a fellow professional and, if appropriate, recommend that the supervisee be referred to another supervisor.

3.3.11 Supervisors must discuss with supervisees the need to have arrangements in place to take care of the immediate needs of clients in the event of a sudden and unplanned ending to the counselling relationship. It is good practice for the supervisor to be informed about these arrangements.
Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

The 'British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy' (BACP) is committed to promoting Equality of Opportunity of access and participation for all its members in all of its structures and their workings. BACP has due regard for those groups of people with identifiable characteristics which can lead to visible and invisible barriers thus inhibiting their joining and full participation in BACP. Barriers can include age, colour, creed, culture, disability, education, 'ethnicity', gender, information, knowledge, mobility, money, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, social class and status.

The work of BACP aims to reflect this commitment in all areas including services to members, employer responsibilities, the recruitment of and working with volunteers, setting, assessing, monitoring and evaluating standards and the implementation of the complaints procedures. This is particularly important as BACP is the 'Voice of Counselling' in the wider world.

BACP will promote and encourage commitment to Equality of Opportunity by its members.