SCPTI
Scarborough Counselling & Psychotherapy Training Institute

Code of Ethics and Professional Practice for Trainees and Graduates

The Ethics Committee of the Scarborough Counselling & Psychotherapy Training Institute (SCPTI) reviews this Code regularly, and whenever a major professional body such as UKCP revises its own code, so that it stays compatible with the UKCP Code of Ethics and Professional Practice and the codes of other relevant professional bodies. Therapists are responsible for observing the principles in this Code, and should use it as the basis of good practice rather than as a set of minimum requirements.

1. Jurisdiction

1.1 The Code applies to all categories of SCPTI membership, in managing their professional responsibilities to clients, to colleagues within SCPTI and to the wider professions of counselling and psychotherapy.

2. Intention

The Code of Ethics is intended to:

2.1 protect and inform members of the public who are enquiring about, or receiving, the clinical services of SCPTI members;

2.2 make the standards of professional practice of SCPTI members clear and explicit, and promote good practice.

2.3 If the Code is breached, the SCPTI Complaints Procedure may be invoked. Sanctions may include suspension or termination of membership.

2.4 SCPTI is a full organisational member of UKCP and is required to report to UKCP the names of members whose membership has been suspended or terminated.

3. Client–therapist relationship

3.1 The client–therapist relationship is a professional relationship in which the welfare of the client is the member's primary concern.

3.2 The dignity, worth and uniqueness of the client must always be respected.

3.3 The member aims to promote increased awareness, encourage self-support, and facilitate the self-development and autonomy of clients, so as to increase the range of choices available to them and their ability and willingness to take responsibility for the decisions they make.

3.4 Members are responsible for working in ways that enhance their clients' sense of empowerment, their capacity to become self-supporting, and their ability to make creative choices and changes in response to their evolving needs, circumstances, values and beliefs.

3.5 Members should respect their clients' age, disability, health, gender and gender identity, sexuality, religion or belief, ethnicity, culture, social context and any other significant aspect of their lives, in line with the SCPTI Equality, Equity, Ecology, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality (EEEDII) Policy. Under no circumstances may a member practise conversion therapy as an approach to their client work, at any time.

3.6 Members should give clients regular opportunities to review the terms of the therapeutic contract and the progress of therapy.

3.7 Decisions about ending therapy are normally the joint responsibility of client and member. If a member's professional assessment does not agree with a client's decision to end, the member should facilitate the ending in a way that respects the client's autonomy. Ending therapy, or helping a client change therapist, should be managed with care and consideration for the client's dignity and wellbeing.

3.8 The therapist has the right to end therapy with appropriate notice, or without notice if circumstances, including the client's behaviour, make therapy no longer viable.

3.9 Members must recognise the importance of a good relationship for effective therapy and be aware of the power and influence this responsibility gives them. Members must act consistently with this, and must not exploit clients financially, sexually or emotionally for their own advantage or needs.

3.10 Members should not take money under false pretences, for example by knowingly keeping a client after therapy has stopped being effective, or by increasing fees without first negotiating with the client.

3.11 A physical, sexual relationship with a client is exploitative.

3.12 Sexual harassment, in the form of deliberate or repeated comments, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature that are, or could be, considered offensive by the client, is unethical.

3.13 Members need to be aware when other relationships or external commitments conflict with the interests of the client. When such a conflict of interest exists, the member is responsible for declaring it and being prepared to work through the issues with the client. See the SCPTI Conflict of Interest and Dual Relationships Policy.

3.14 Members need to recognise that dual relationships, where the client is also an employee, close friend, relative or partner, are likely to impair their professional judgement and cause undue stress to clients and themselves.

3.15 Members will not normally enter into a personal or business relationship with a former client. If, in exceptional circumstances, this happens and the relationship proves detrimental to the former client, the member will be deemed to have acted unethically. Members should therefore think very carefully before entering into such a relationship.

4. Confidentiality

4.1 Confidentiality is intrinsic to good practice. All exchanges between members and clients must be regarded as confidential. A member who has any doubt about the limits of confidentiality should seek supervision.

4.2 Clients should be told at the start of therapy, as part of the therapist–client contract, that in extreme circumstances, where the client is a danger to themselves or others, the member may break confidentiality and take appropriate action, in line with the SCPTI Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

4.3 When a member wishes to use specific information from work with a client in a lecture or publication, the client's permission should be obtained and their anonymity preserved. Clients should be told that they can withdraw consent at any time.

4.4 Members should provide a working environment that ensures privacy.

4.5 Members should not make trivialising comments about clients.

4.6 Members must maintain confidentiality after therapy has ended.

5. Client safety

5.1 Members must take all reasonable steps to protect clients from physical or psychological harm during therapy.

5.2 When a client develops a medical condition, members should encourage the client to get advice from their doctor or another suitably qualified person. Members should obtain the client's permission before contacting other professionals, unless there are overriding ethical or legal considerations.

5.3 Members should consider what arrangements can be made for clients to be informed if the member becomes seriously incapacitated or dies. These arrangements include managing confidential files and audio or video recordings.

6. Initial contracting

6.1 Contracts with clients, whether written or verbal, should be explicit about fees, payment schedule, holidays, and cancellation of sessions by the client or the member. The length of therapy, transfer of clients and endings are discussed with clients and mutual agreement sought. This should be done at the start, before any commitment to ongoing therapy. Any later changes to the contract must be negotiated and agreed with the client.

6.2 If a client asks, members should give information about their qualifications and experience.

6.3 If a client asks, members should give information about the SCPTI Code of Ethics and the SCPTI Complaints Procedure.

6.4 Members must tell clients about any relevant conflict of interest they become aware of, at the initial interview or at any later stage of therapy.

6.5 Members are responsible for setting and monitoring the boundaries between a professional relationship and a social one, and for making these boundaries explicit to the client.

7. Competence

7.1 Members accept clients in line with their training, skill and supervision arrangements.

7.2 Members should pay attention to the limits of their competence. When a member recognises they are reaching their limit, consultation with a colleague or supervisor is essential. It may be appropriate to refer the client to someone else.

7.3 Members are responsible for maintaining their own effectiveness and ability to practise. Members should not work with clients when their capacity is impaired by emotional problems, illness, alcohol or any other reason.

7.4 Members should protect their own physical safety when working with clients (see the SCPTI Lone Working Policy).

7.5 Members should hold professional indemnity and public liability insurance to protect themselves if legal action is taken against them or against the owners of the premises where they work.

7.6 Members should have appropriate therapeutic and supervisory support to maintain ethical and professional practice.

8. Supervision

8.1 Supervision gives members a challenging and supportive space to share their work, increase their effectiveness and protect the client. Members should not practise without appropriate levels of supervision.

8.2 A member's supervisor should not be their therapist.

8.3 Members and their supervisors share responsibility for keeping supervision purposeful and relevant to the member's clinical practice.

9. Continuing professional development

9.1 Members have a particular responsibility to continue their personal and professional development through any or all of the following: personal therapy, regular supervision, further training, research, publication and other activities, as set out in the SCPTI CPD and Reaccreditation Policy.

10. Records

10.1 Members should keep adequate client records, stored safely under secure conditions.

10.2 As a minimum, records should include the client's:

10.2.1 name, address and telephone number;

10.2.2 GP's name and telephone number;

10.2.3 details of any current involvement with other members of the caring professions;

10.2.4 information about significant medical problems;

10.2.5 ongoing case notes.

10.3 Members must make sure that their records comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, and register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) where required. SCPTI's own handling of personal data is set out in the SCPTI Data Protection, Management and Retention Policy.

11. Advertising

11.1 Advertising should be limited to descriptive statements about the services available and the qualifications of the person providing them. Advertising should not include testimonials, make comparative statements, or in any way imply that the services offered are more effective than those of other schools of therapy or organisations. Members must not claim qualifications they do not hold.

11.2 Trainee members should not describe themselves as a psychotherapist or counsellor.

11.3 Members should not describe themselves as affiliated to any organisation in a way that inaccurately or improperly implies authorisation or sponsorship by that organisation.

11.4 Members' use of social media is covered by the SCPTI Social Media Policy.

12. Research

12.1 Members must conduct any research in counselling or psychotherapy ethically, following the UKCP Code of Ethics for Research and SCPTI's Ethical Guidelines for Research in Psychotherapy.

13. Legal proceedings

13.1 Members should be reasonably familiar with the legal implications of their work as counsellors or psychotherapists and have access to legal advice.

13.2 A member of SCPTI who is convicted in a court of law of any criminal offence, or is the subject of a successful civil action by a client, should inform SCPTI.

13.3 Members who become aware of a specific crime, current or past, during their clinical practice should seek supervisory and legal advice immediately.

14. Responsibilities to the counselling and psychotherapy professions

14.1 Members should not accept anyone as a client who is already the client of another counsellor or psychotherapist.

14.2 It is good practice to acknowledge the source of a client referral.

14.3 Members should conduct themselves personally and professionally in ways that promote public confidence in the professions of counselling and psychotherapy.

14.4 A member who is concerned about the professional conduct of another member should discuss their concerns with that person. If the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily, the SCPTI Complaints Procedure may be used.

15. Indemnity insurance

15.1 Members must make sure their professional work is adequately covered by appropriate indemnity insurance or by their employer's indemnity insurance arrangements.

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