

Overview of Revisions to the  
American Counseling Association 2005 Code of Ethics

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A code of ethics (COE) for any profession is a living document that changes as the profession grows and develops. Thus, revisions for a code are a necessary part of the growth and development of the profession. The American Counseling Association (ACA) and its predecessor bodies have had 6 different codes of ethics including the current 2005 COE (1961, 1974, 1981, 1988, 1995, 2005). Each is a reflection of the changing nature of the profession, the continued expansion of the profession's body of knowledge, and the evolving expectations we have placed upon ourselves as we work with clients, students, and each other.

The first COE (1961) was five pages long and contained no glossary. The 2005 COE is 20 pages long and has an 18 word glossary. The first draft of the 2014 COE has an expanded glossary and contains a new section specifically addressing distance counseling, social media, and technology related issues that were previously only addressed within Section A of the 2005 COE. Additionally, the role and ethical use of technology in counseling, consultation, and supervision is embedded within its sections.

The current Ethics Revision Task Force (ERTF) members wish to acknowledge the fine work of their predecessors. Each task force begins with the work of those who have gone before them for they provided the foundation of the current task forces' revision. Additionally, our most recent predecessors had the task of creating a COE that revised not only the code, but combined the former standards of practice and the 1995 Code of Ethics into one document. They provided the profession with a COE which has proven to be very beneficial not only to counselors, but to our clients and other mental health professionals as well.

This brief paper will serve as an introduction and review of the major changes in the first draft of the 2014 American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics. We invite your constructive feedback as any revision is a reflection of the commonly held values and combined wisdom of the profession as well the inclusion of new knowledge, information, and challenges we face as a member of the mental health community.

### **Preamble and Purpose**

The *ACA Code of Ethics* (2005) serves as the basis for over twenty states ethical codes and is referenced in many more. As such, the ERTF began its work by acknowledging the COE is a document not only for ACA members but also for the counseling profession as a whole. Secondly, the ERTF recognizes the complicated nature of ethical decision making and sought to reinforce the necessity of using an ethical decision-making model.

The Preamble serves to introduce the philosophical foundation of the revision. In that light, the ERTF sought to clarify those professional values that provide a basis for the moral principles that are the foundation for the ethics of the mental health professions. Most of the professional values identified in the revised COE were already identified in the previous version and are merely clarified in this revision. Additionally, we provided definitions for those moral principles that are informed by our professional values.

### **Section A: The Counseling Relationship**

- 1) Every counseling relationship has a beginning. The revised COE now identifies when that relationship begins and reflects that it is an ongoing process (see A.1.b.).
- 2) Issues surrounding persons who are mandated to counseling are now addressed specifically, reflecting the counselor's responsibility to be very clear concerning the boundaries of that professional relationship (see A.2.e.).

- 3) The ERTF sought to provide additional clarity concerning whom counselors can and cannot work with and issues concerning the boundaries a professional counselor must maintain when working with a client (see A.5. & A.6.).
- 4) The ERTF removed A.9.b. (Counselor Competence, Choice, and Referral in End of Life Counseling) as its presence created more confusion than clarity concerning competence, values conflict, and a counselor's duty to serve clients' needs.
- 5) As a reflection that counselors are to respect and be able to work with a diverse client population, clarity was provided concerning the prohibition of referring clients based on a values conflict (see A.12.b & A.13).
- 6) Section A.12. (Technology applications) was revised and included into its own section (H) as well as infused into the entire COE to take into account the burgeoning influence of social media.

### **Section B: Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy**

- 1) The ERTF sought to reinforce the duty of counselors for record keeping in all mediums (see B.6.a.).
- 2) Concepts were updated (Treatment Teams vs. Interdisciplinary teams) (see B.3.b).

### **Section C: Professional Responsibility**

- 1) The ERTF sought to clarify the importance of providing services to society in various ways at little or no remuneration for those who cannot afford help (See Section C: Introduction & C.6.e.).
- 2) Counseling is a profession that uses research and science to provide direction for the services provided to society. The ERTF sought to reinforce this concept by clarifying that counselors have an ethical responsibility to use those therapies that have a basis in science. Those

services that have shown to be harmful are not to be used. Additionally, counselors inform clients of those services that are in development and/or are innovative so clients can make the choice as whether to participate (see C.7).

#### **Section D: Relationships with Other Professionals**

Working with other professionals requires many of the same skills and competencies as working with clients. This section was revised to clarify the nature of consultation and the ethical requirements counselors have to consultees including informed consent, clarity of goals, and respect for each professional's contribution to the process (See D.2.).

#### **Section E: Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation**

Much of the revisions in this section are for clarity. Additional revisions are focused on the use and impact of assessment and diagnosis within a diverse world (see E.5.c.).

#### **Section F: Supervision, Training, and Teaching**

- 1) Many sections were edited for clarity and brevity.
- 2) A new section was created to reinforce the need for counselor educators to be knowledgeable and competent in the areas they provide supervision or instruction (see F.6.b.).
- 3) Because case examples are often used in instruction, presentations, and publications to provide clarity, the ERTF sought to address the issue of confidentiality when using these examples (see F.6.f & G.5.a.).
- 4) Additional clarity was provided for counselor education programs in the area of student development (see F.7).

#### **Section G: Research and Publication**

- 1) The ERTF sought to update and clarify issues concerning confidentiality of participants and the requirements for independent researchers (see G.1.b. & c.).

2) Additional guidance was provided concerning student research and publication (see G.5.f..

### **Section H Distance Counseling, Technology, Social Media**

This new section is an expansion of A.12. of the 2005 COE. Due to the expanding presence of social media and the increasing use of technology in the field of counseling, a separate section was developed to provide a more comprehensive review of the ethical obligations counselors have when infusing these tools into their practices.

### **Section I: Resolving Ethical Issues**

Changes in this section reinforce the need for all counselors to use a formal ethical decision-making model in their practice (see I.1.b). Counselors continue to be required to know and adhere to the ACA Code and to be familiar with the complaint process as well as to how to resolve ethical issues between colleagues and other professionals (see Introduction).

### **Glossary of Terms**

The glossary is being updated and expanded. The revision in this section is ongoing.