

AGCA CODE OF ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

At the Annual General Meeting of the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association (AGCA), held in September 1991 in Melbourne, the Code of Ethics of the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) was adopted as an interim code for the purposes of the new company (AGCA, Ltd). During 1994, it was acknowledged, by the National Executive of the AGCA, Ltd. that the code of Ethics had neither been fully adopted, nor been reviewed and adapted on behalf of the AGCA, Ltd. membership. In 1995/96 a small working party considered and adapted the ISPA Code of Ethics to reflect the professions of Guidance and Counselling within Australian Educational settings. The revised Code of Ethics was presented to members for consideration in the April, 1997 issue of the Newsletter and was formally adopted by the members at the Annual General Meeting of the company, in Melbourne, Victoria, on Friday, 18th July, 1997.

The AGCA recognises that the nomenclature, role definitions and work settings of its members vary according to their state and territory, and the institution or agency for whom they work. For the purposes of this code the term *member* has been used to represent those who are members of the company in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association and Regulations. Whereas some members of the AGCA are not registered psychologists, the sections of this code that directly apply to psychological practice should be considered as relevant and indicative for all members.

Although this code is specifically for the members of the AGCA Ltd., it is hoped that it will serve to provide guidelines for the practice and conduct of all individuals employed in the fields of guidance and counselling, in education settings around Australia. For current and prospective members, and for those working with the profession, this code will provide information about acceptable professional practice and ethical responsibilities held in common by the members. The intent of this code is not to be restrictive, nor punitive, but to encourage members to reflect upon their practice and to strive for higher levels. Members do not accede to lower ethical standards asked of them by others.

GENERAL PRINCIPALS

The Australian Guidance and Counselling Association believes that members should be expected to exemplify the profession's values and principles. These include transcending narrow personal, social and cultural values and attitudes; adopting positions that benefit professional-client relationships and acting in ways that are consistent with the best interests of children and youth, educators, parents, institutions, the community and the professions.

Psychologists, Guidance Officers and School Counsellors work within their professional competencies and continually seek to up grade their academic and professional competencies. They also strive to acquire and maintain the highest standards of professional competence and ethical behaviour.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

I. *Professional Responsibilities*

- A. Members familiarise themselves with the goals and philosophy of the school system and the organisations within which they work, in order to work effectively within the organisational structure.
- B. Members, when working with families, attempt to familiarise themselves with the goals and philosophies of the families and to work effectively within their structures.
- C. Members are knowledgeable about educational policy, regulations and guidelines. When administrative codes and regulations conflict with ethical principles, good faith efforts are instituted to resolve problems and discrepancies. Should these efforts prove to be ineffective, ethical principles should take precedent.
- D. Members should not allow personal prejudices or biases to interfere in their decision making. They should not engage in discriminatory procedures or practices based on social and economic background, race, disability, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, or national origin.
- E. Members respect the cultural environment within which they work and are sensitive to cultural differences and of appropriate ways to provide services within multi-cultural populations.

- F. Members protect the welfare and act in the best interests of students, their parents, educators, colleagues and employers. Protecting the welfare of students, their parents, and educators is of utmost concern and takes precedence over self-serving actions by members. When conflicts of interest arise the member's first priority is to serve the best interests of students.
- G. Members normally provide services to students with the informed consent of the parents or guardian, and preferably with the parent's or guardian's involvement. Exceptions to the need for parental consent prior to service may exist, particularly in a crisis situation (e.g. when the student may be a danger to his/herself or others).
- H. Preparation and Supervision
 1. Educators of psychologists and school counsellors ensure that all information conveyed during their presentation is accurate and timely.
 2. Educators and supervisors of psychologists, guidance officers and school counsellors promote an awareness of and adherence to ethical standards.
 3. Educators and supervisors of psychologists, guidance officers and school counsellors provide a wide range of appropriate professional experiences and offer constructive consultation and evaluation.
- I. Members avoid situations which would present a conflict of interest due to economic, political, social or personal issues.

II Confidentiality

- A. Members have an obligation to safeguard confidential client information that has been obtained in the course of their practice, teaching or research.
- B. Client records are kept in a secure place in order to maintain confidentiality.
- C. Members obtain consent (preferably written) from parents before releasing confidential student information to professionals in other agencies. Under some circumstances they may obtain consent from students before releasing information to parents or professionals in other agencies. The need to obtain consent from students should take into account the age at which a person is legally defined as being independent as well as the level of the student's mental and moral development. An exception to this policy exists when the member believes clients are in immediate danger to themselves or to others.

- D. Confidential information obtained on children and youth is discussed only for professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with the case.
- E. When case studies are utilised in lectures or publications members ensure that the identities of all persons are adequately disguised.
- F. When using computers, or electronic communication, members take precautions to ensure that the confidentiality of records is maintained.

III *Professional Growth*

- A. Members recognise the need for and participate in continuing professional development and supervision.
- B. Members seek supervision and collaboration when working on issues with which they are less knowledgeable.
- C. Members maintain knowledge of current scientific and professional information in the field by reading current research, attending workshops and conferences and becoming active in professional organisations.

IV *Professional Limitations*

- A. Members offer only those services which are within their area of professional competence and do not misrepresent their competence, qualifications, training, or experience.
- B. Members are aware of their professional limitations, and enlist the assistance of other professionals in a consultative or referral role when appropriate. Implicit in their referral process is knowledge of the expertise and competence commonly held by other professionals.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

I Professional Relationships

A. Generally

1. Members do not exploit their professional relationships with children and youth, parents, teachers, trainees or other clients or research subjects for personal gains. This includes refraining from engaging in harassment and physical relations of a sexual nature, and from using one's employment affiliation to recruit clients for one's private practice.
2. Members attempt to interpret the nature of any assessment or professional interactions with children and youth, to teachers and parents/guardians.
3. Members attempt to communicate with people in their first language.
4. Members attempt to discuss with children and youth, teachers and parents/guardians, their plans for assisting in the student's development, including various alternatives. Conflicts should not be avoided when their avoidance may result in a lowering of service to students.
5. Members refrain from making demeaning or derogatory remarks about students, parents/guardians, staff and colleagues.

B. Students

1. Members consider the welfare of the children and youth to be of primary importance.
2. Members ensure that children and youth understand the nature and purpose of any assessment or intervention to the best of their abilities.

C. Colleagues and School Staffs

1. Members strive to develop harmonious and cooperative working relationships with colleagues and school staffs. They recognise the need to function as a member of a team within schools, other institutions and communities.
2. Attempts to develop harmonious and cooperative relationships should not result in the lowering of standards for services provided to students.

3. When members are aware of possible unethical practices by another guidance officer or school counsellor, they should informally attempt to resolve the issue by bringing the behaviour of concern to the attention of that guidance officer or school counsellor in a constructive manner. If such informal efforts to resolve the issue are not productive, other steps to resolve alleged unethical practices should be taken. Procedures outlined by the national body, state bodies, or state legislation should be followed when available.

D. Interprofessional

1. Members strive to establish cooperative working relationships with professionals from related fields, community leaders, and others holding positions of respect.
2. Members strive to insure the integrity of information given in confidence.
3. Members understand the areas of competence and limitations of professionals in related fields.
4. Members use their best professional judgement when making referrals to other professionals.
5. Members do not offer professional services to a person who is receiving similar assistance from another professional except by agreement with, or after termination of the relationship with, the other professional.
6. Members avoid making expedient decisions.

II **Assessment**

- A. Members maintain the physical security of test and assessment techniques within the limits of legal mandates in order to maintain the validity of tests.
- B. Members typically administer according to publisher guidelines in order to maintain the validity of the results. However, when modifications are made or the validity of a test is questioned, these aspects are noted in the assessment report along with interpretation of possible effects of these factors.
- C. Members interpret tests in light of the appropriateness of their norms or other well established standards, as well as the ability and validity estimates for the purpose for which they are used.
- D. Members guard against misinterpretation or misuse of assessment data.

- E. Members are accountable for assessment techniques they use and are able to defend their use.
- F. Members discourage utilisation of psychological assessment instruments by inappropriately trained or otherwise unqualified persons.
- G. When using tests developed in other countries, members conduct studies that help ensure the test is suitably normed and has adequate reliability and validity.

III *Research*

- A. Members seek permission from the appropriate authority, and in particular the administrators of the agencies and institutions involved, before undertaking research.
- B. Members strive to avoid cultural, racial, social class or ethnic bias in their research.
- C. Members inform parents when their children are participating in research projects, and respect the right of parents to decline for their child to participate in a research project, or to withdraw from it at any time.
- D. Whenever possible members will fully inform students and their parents of the nature and purpose of the investigation.
- E. Members follow the accepted procedures for good research; e.g.
 - 1. possible unintended direct and indirect consequences to the various members of the community are considered,
 - 2. students are not distressed and their welfare and dignity protected,
 - 3. credit is given to participants and contributors,
 - 4. open communication with those involved,
 - 5. feedback is provided to those involved and interested parties,
 - 6. results are reported with exactness, and
 - 7. the limitations of the research are recognised and acknowledged.
- F. Members do not undertake research without the necessary skills and knowledge.
- G. Research experiences will benefit and enrich, in some way, the individuals involved, the host institution or the community.

- H. Members undertaking cross-cultural research are knowledgeable in cross-cultural methodology and familiar with the cultural context of the research setting. The member should exercise care while selecting measuring instruments particularly when these are to be used for cross-cultural comparisons, and while interpreting cultural differences. Members demonstrate a respect for the host culture and avoid actions that violate cultural expectations or reveal culturally biased perspectives while formulating the research problem, executing the study or reporting findings.

IV *Use of Current and Future Technologies*

- A. When using computer assisted testing members will ensure the appropriateness of application for the needs of the client.
- B. Members ensure the client understands the use of, and is capable of using, the computer technologies.
- C. Members apply the same ethical standards to the use of computer applications as outlined in previous sections of this code.
- D. Members inform themselves of the benefits and limitations of all new technologies before incorporating them into their practice.