International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors Code of Ethics

Preamble

The International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC) is a division of the American Counseling Association dedicated to advancing research, training and practice of couple and family counseling. Members of IAMFC are dedicated to the advocacy of the counseling profession, advocacy of clients and the professionalism of counselors. Members of IAMFC commit themselves to enhancing family relationships and advocate for the healthy development of families while also considering the uniqueness of individuals within family systems.

The guidelines presented in the Ethical Code of the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC) supplement the current ethical standards of the American Counseling Association (ACA).

This code of ethics provides guidelines for counselors who provide couple and family counseling. The code is divided into ten sections:

Section A: The Counseling Relationship and Client Welfare

Couple and family counselors advocate for the family as a whole system while considering the uniqueness of each family member. Couple and family counselors use systems perspectives and theories as they practice counseling. In addition, couple and family counselors understand that each family presents diverse cultural backgrounds and actively attempt to promote their cultural awareness and knowledge. Couple and family counselors promote multicultural inclusion and do not promote bias or stereotyping regarding family status and/or roles within families.

Couple and family counselors promote client autonomy and facilitate problem solving skills to prevent future problems. They do not make decisions for families or family members when the decision-making rightfully belongs to the family and/or family members. When it is beneficial, couple and family counselors share clinical impressions and recommendations for the purpose of better informing families.

Couple and family counselors do not participate in keeping secrets for or from clients and maintain professional relationships with clients, refraining from multiple relationships with clients involving business and social contacts, whenever possible. Couple and family counselors also generally refrain from nonprofessional relationships with clients and former clients. At all times, couple and family counselors do not harass, exploit, coerce, or manipulate clients for personal gain.

Couple and family counselors adhere to the following:

1. Couple and family counselors do not discriminate or condone discrimination based on age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, language preference, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.
2. Couple and family counselors inform clients of the goals of counseling.
3. Couple and family counselors inform clients in writing of their counseling qualifications, costs of services, goals of counseling and reasonable expectations for outcomes.
4. Couple and family counselors inform clients that they cannot guarantee that counseling will produce positive results for the couple and/or family.
5. Couple and family counselors inform clients if they have any potentially conflictual relationships with the identified client(s) and a third party or institution.
6. Couple and family counselors must monitor their places of employment and make recommendations to promote cultural awareness, inclusivity, and human growth and development.
7. Couple and family counselors do not harass, exploit, coerce, or manipulate clients for personal gain.
8. Couple and family counselors avoid multiple relationships with clients, including but not limited to, business, social, or educational relationships.
9. Couple and family counselors must refrain from sexual relationships with clients, former clients, and family members of clients.
10. Couple and family counselors withdraw from a counseling relationship if the continuation of the relationship is not in the best interests of the client or would result in a violation of ethical standards.
11. Couple and family counselors do not abandon clients and do not withhold treatment to clients for discriminatory reasons such as race, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation or identification, cultural background, national origin, marital status, affiliation or socioeconomic status.
12. Couple and family counselors arrange appropriate termination of counseling relationship.
13. Couple and family counselors maintain accurate and up-to-date records.
14. Couple and family counselors establish fees that are reasonable and customary based upon the scope and location of their practices.
15. Couple and family counselors do not solicit gifts or fees for referrals.
16. Couple and family counselors recognize that gifts as tokens of respect and gratitude are culturally appropriate with certain clients and may receive gifts of small value.
17. All treatment notes must include the date and time of service.
18. All treatment notes must include the names of those present during the counseling session.
19. All treatment notes must include the name of the clinician(s) providing the counseling services.

Section B: Confidentiality and Privacy

Couple and family counselors recognize that trust is fundamental to the counseling relationship and client(s) information must not be shared without prior written consent of the client(s). Couple and family counselors must know and understand the limits of confidentiality, privacy, and privileged communication, including the fact that family members may disclose counseling - related information outside counseling thereby rendering the counselor no control over information thus shared. Therefore, couple and family counselors inform clients that in these instances, confidentiality, while desired, cannot be guaranteed.

1. Couple and family counselors must disclose to clients the conditions upon which counselors must legally disclose confidential counseling information.
2. Each person who is legally competent and deemed an "adult" must be provided a confidentiality agreement with the couple and family counselor(s). The agreement must be time limited, consistent with legal statutes. The parameters of confidentiality must be agreed upon by the client and counselor.
3. Clients must be informed of their rights and the limitations of their rights to confidentiality.
4. Clients must be informed of their rights to terminate or rescind any existing authorization to disclose confidential counseling information.
5. Couple and family counselors inform parents and legal guardians about the confidential parameters of the counseling relationship. When working with minor or juvenile clients and/or adults who lack the capacity to authorize release of confidential information, couple and family counselors seek consent of appropriate custodial parent or guardian to disclose information.
6. Couple and family counselors should, prior to counseling of any minor client, obtain all court orders pertinent to that child's custody in order to assure they have obtained appropriate legal consents of treatment of their minor clients. Further, copies of the relevant court orders should be placed into the client's file along with their signed consents for treatment.
7. Couple and family counselors inform clients of exceptions to confidentiality in accordance with state and federal law.
8. Couple and family counselors inform clients that third party payers have access to their counseling records and adhere to state and federal law regarding the release of confidential counseling information related to billing and collections.
9. Couple and family counselors maintain records according to state and federal statutes.
10. Couple and family counselors maintain the same types of record storage and security regardless of client reimbursement type or status. That is, client records are maintained in consistent manner regardless of whether or not the client pays directly for services or receives third party reimbursement.
11. Couple and family counselors must inform clients if sessions are to be recorded via external media and the purpose of the recording must be provided. Each person who is legally competent must provide informed consent in writing for the recording.

12. Couple and family counselors provide their clients access to records within the timeframes mandated by state and federal statutes.
13. In situations involving multiple clients, couple and family counselors provide only the records directly related to a particular individual, protecting confidential information related to any other client.
14. Couple and family counselors have a written plan or professional will to ensure clients' access to records and client confidentiality in the event of a counselor's incapacitation.
15. Couple and family counselors maintain privacy and confidentiality in research, teaching, publication, case consultation, teaching, supervision and other professional activities.

Section C: Competence and Professional Responsibilities

Couple and family counselors actively seek training, ongoing supervision and/or consultation, and continuing education directly related to couples and family counseling, including the ethical standards of couples and family counseling. Couple and family counselors develop and maintain their skills in counseling through ongoing training, supervision and consultation and recognize the need to familiarize themselves with new research in couples and family counseling.

1. Couple and family counselors must maintain basic skills and knowledge in couples and family counseling as outlined by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).
2. Couple and family counselors recognize the need to know current developments and research in couples and family counseling and actively pursue continuing education opportunities related to couples and family counseling.
3. Couple and family counselors accurately represent their education, expertise, training and experience. Membership in professional organizations, including IAMFC, is not used to suggest competency.
4. Couple and family counselors do not advertise or communicate with the public in ways that misrepresent counseling or counseling outcomes. Thus, couple and family counselors neither guarantee nor predict that counseling outcomes will be consistent with clients' views of "success."
5. Couple and family counselors do not attempt to diagnose or treat problems beyond the scope of their training and abilities.
6. Couple and family counselors do not engage in specialized counseling interventions or techniques unless they have received appropriate training and preparation in the methods they are using.
7. Couple and family counselors do not participate in any professional activity; including but not limited to, counseling, supervision, teaching, research, in which their professional objectivity may be obscured by personal issues.
8. If couple and family counselors have personal issues which impact their professional objectivity, they seek supervision and/or counseling in order to address these issues.
9. Couple and family counselors do not engage in actions that violate the legal standards of their community and do not encourage client or others to engage in unlawful activities.

10. Couple and family counselors provide public information based upon sound, scientific theories, techniques and approaches that enhances couple and family life.
11. Couple and family counselors provide services to those whom they can provide follow-up care and comprehensive assessment; thus, they do not provide specific advice to individuals through public media, although they may provide general information about couples and family counseling to the media.
12. Couple and family counselors promoting media for commercial sale make every effort to ensure that announcements and advertisements are presented in a professional and factual manner.

Section D: Collaboration and Professional Relationships

Couple and family counselors maintain professional relationships with other mental health professionals within and outside the field of counseling. Since interdisciplinary relationships may be required to best serve clients, couple and family counselors actively promote these relationships while maintaining their own ethical boundaries. Further, couple and family counselors are knowledgeable of the roles and functions of other mental health disciplines, such as psychiatry, psychology and social work, as well as other specialties of professional counseling. As they work with others, couple and family counselors promote and maintain healthy boundaries and organizational climate. Thus, couple and family counselors avoid splitting, triangulation, gossip and other indirect forms of communication that are harmful to colleagues or organizations.

1. Couple and family counselors shall not charge a fee for offering or accepting referrals.
2. Couple and family counselors do not engage in harmful relationships with individuals over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or instructional control. They adhere to their respective state statutes which may prohibit dual relationships with supervisees.
3. Couple and family counselors working as subcontractors of counseling services for a third party have a duty to inform clients in writing of the limitations that the contracting entity may place on the counseling or consulting relationship.
4. Couple and family counselors do not participate in triangulation, splitting, or other indirect forms of communication that could be harmful to colleagues or the organization they share.

In order to prevent duplication of counseling services, couple and family counselors do not offer services to clients who are being served by other couple and family counselors without securing a referral, thereby preventing duplication of counseling services. The couple and family counselor should obtain written authorization from the client(s) authorizing contact with the other couple and family counselor regarding the transfer of care. This ethical standard applies to prospective and current clients.

Section E. Assessment and Evaluation

Couple and family counselors use assessment procedures to promote the well-being of the client. Couple and family counselors only use assessments and evaluations that are scientifically sound and relevant to client(s') goals.

1. Couple and family counselors use assessment methods that are reliable, valid and relevant to the goals of the client(s).
2. Couple and family counselors do not use assessments that are based upon outdated items or normative data.
3. Couple and family counselors do not use assessments that are biased or prejudiced.
4. Couple and family counselors do not use assessment methods or instruments that are outside their scope of training and/or qualifications.
5. Couple and family counselors who conduct custody evaluations use information from both parents and do not make custody recommendations based solely upon information from one parent. If a parent refuses to participate in the evaluation process, this refusal should be noted in the evaluation.
6. Couple and family counselors do not make custody recommendations based solely on test and inventory scores.
7. Couple and family counselors insure that their clients are aware of the differences in counseling and forensic examination. If clients are in a forensic relationship with the couple and family counselor, the couple and family counselor must, in their initial informed consent, inform the clients of the scope and nature of the forensic counseling, including the entity(ies) to whom the couple and family counselor is reporting client information, and obtain written consent from the client to release counseling information. The written release must specify the types of information that will be released, to whom the information will be released, the time span of the release, and the purpose of the release of information.
8. Couple and family counselors follow current guidelines and standards for testing published or disseminated by the American Counseling Association, American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education, and other groups dedicated to professional expertise in assessment.

Section F. Counselor Education and Supervision

Couple and family counselors recognize the inherent power differentials when they engage in teaching, supervision, and consultation. They do not use their power in these relationships for personal gain or exploitation. As teachers, supervisors and consultants, couple and family counselors maintain professional boundaries while recognizing and respecting cultural differences.

1. Couple and family counselors actively seek current knowledge related to supervision practice and theory.

2. Couple and family counselors who provide supervision respect the balance of power in the supervisory relationship and do not exploit students, supervisees, or employees for personal gain, including financial gain.
3. Supervisors do not ask supervisees to engage in behaviors not directly related to the counseling relationship.
4. Supervisors clearly separate supervision and evaluation activities in the supervision relationship. Supervisors clearly identify the goals of supervision and the process(es) of supervision.
5. Supervisors avoid multiple relationships that might impair their professional judgement or increase the possibility of exploitation of supervisee(s).
6. Sexual intimacy with students and/or supervisees is prohibited.
7. Supervisors inform supervisees and students of specific expectations regarding skill building, knowledge acquisition, and development of competencies.
8. Supervisors provide ongoing and timely feedback to supervisees.
9. Supervisors are responsible for protecting the rights and well-being of their supervisees' clients and provide ongoing monitoring of their supervisees' counseling to ensure that clients are receiving beneficial and appropriate counseling services.
10. Couple and family counselors who provide supervision maintain the ethical standards for counselor supervision by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.
11. Supervisors and counselor educators implement advocacy awareness for students and supervisees and infuse culturally relevant ethical studies throughout supervision and teaching.
12. Supervisors adhere to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics throughout their training and supervision and inform students and supervisees that this code is being used throughout their training and supervision.

Section G. Research and Publication

Couple and family counselors should engage in research and publication that advances the profession of couple and family counseling and proactively prevent harm to research participants. Couple and family counselors solicit input from peers, institutional review boards, and other stakeholders to adhere to and maintain best practices of research. Couple and family counselors are aware of their obligations to be role models for graduate students and future researchers and act in accordance with the highest standards of research and publication.

1. Couple and family counselors must not present research findings that are misleading.
2. Couple and family counselors must allow for the inclusion of alternative hypotheses and limitations of their research.
3. Couple and family counselors safeguard the privacy of research participants and data about individuals is not released unless the individual is informed of the exact nature of the information to be released and gives written permission for the disclosure.
4. Couple and family counselors protect the safety of their research participants, following the guidelines of peer review committees or institutional review boards, where applicable.

5. Research participants are informed in writing about any potential risk associated with a study and are notified before and during any study that they can withdraw at any time.
6. Couple and family counselors only take credit for research in which they have made a substantial contribution and give credit to all contributors. Authors are listed from greatest to least amount of contribution.
7. Couple and family counselors make their original data available to other researchers upon request.
8. Couple and family counselors do not plagiarize. They give due credit for ideas and data that did not originate with the author and are not common knowledge. Data and ideas must be credited to original source.
9. Couple and family counselors respect the rights of those who submit their research for publication and other scholarly purposes and encourage publication efforts of their colleagues to advance research in couples and family counseling.
10. Couple and family counselors refrain from personal biases in review of research by other authors.
11. Couple and family counselors respect confidentiality as they review research materials submitted for research publications, presentations, and other scholarly purposes, respecting the proprietary rights of those who submit their products for review.
12. Couple and family counselors who review research materials use valid and defensible standards, act within their competencies, and refrain from personal biases in the review process.
13. Couple and family counselors respect the present and future confidentiality of partners or family members in publishing or presenting clinical case studies, especially when the case involves minors or other persons who cannot give consent and may be harmed in the future.
14. Couple and family counselors protect the rights and confidentiality of clients presented in case studies by obtaining written consent from the client(s) after their review of the descriptive case material. The counselor must not misuse not exploit clients in publications or presentations.
15. When written consent cannot be obtained, clinical case studies should be disguised by altering several salient characteristics provided the alteration does not invalidate the research or contribute to false conclusions. Clinical case studies may be disguised by offering composite cases, restricting details, or adding extraneous material, as well.

Section H. Ethical Decision-Making and Resolution

Couple and family counselors engage in ethical decision-making in all aspects of couple and family counseling. In so doing, couple and family counselors hold other counselors accountable to their respective ethical codes to ensure that best practices of counseling are followed and no harm occurs to clients. Couple and family counselors work proactively with other counselors to resolve ethical dilemmas and issues.

1. Couple and family counselors are responsible for understanding and implementing the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics, the Ethical Code of the International

Association of Marriage and Family Counselors, and other applicable codes of professional associations, certification and licensure boards and credentialing organizations who provide regulation pertinent to them.

2. Couple and family counselors confront unethical behavior of other counselors and therapists by discussing matters directly with the counselor or therapist at alleged fault, unless to do so would potentially harm a client.
3. Couple and family counselors have the responsibility to contact the professional organization and/or the licensure board of a counselor or therapist who persists in unethical behavior after the counselor or therapist has been made aware of his/her ethical infraction(s).
4. Couple and family counselors work within organizations to prevent ethical conflicts and do not compromise ethical standards to accommodate organizational policies, procedures, and practices.
5. Couple and family counselors follow reporting requirements specified by laws and regulations in their jurisdictions and do not knowingly engage in invalid ethical complaints against another therapist or counselor.
6. Couple and family counselors cooperate with ethics committees and other organizations having jurisdiction over any professional or professionals who have alleged ethics violations.
7. Counselors assist professional associations in promoting ethical behavior of couple and family counselors.

Section I: Technology Assisted Couples and Family Counseling

Couple and family counselors may use technology in counseling when the use of technology is deemed appropriate. Couple and family counselors must be compliant with all state and federal laws concerning technology assisted counseling. The following section deals with technology in the use of couples and family counseling.

1. Couple and family counselors must inform clients of the limits of confidentiality related to technology and must meet all applicable laws related to insuring that records are kept confidential and stored in a confidential manner.
2. Couple and family counselors must inform clients in writing of the limitations and risks of confidentiality related to technology assisted counseling.
3. Couple and family counselors follow all jurisdictional regulations related to technology assisted counseling and do not practice outside their legal jurisdiction.
4. Couple and family counselors only use technology that they are familiar with and that meets all legal requirements related to protected health information (PHI).
5. Couple and family counselors do appropriate assessment before using technology in counseling to determine that technology will be useful in counseling.
6. Couple and family counselors adhere to the most current American Counseling Association guidelines regarding technology assisted counseling.

Section J. Diversity and Advocacy

Couple and family counselors respect the dignity, worth, uniqueness, and potential of couples and families in their cultural contexts. They infuse counseling with advocacy strategies at all levels of counseling and advocate systems which promote positive growth, development and empowerment. They actively seek to eliminate oppression of human rights.

1. Couple and family counselors are aware of and implement the Advocacy Competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association.
2. Couple and family counselors are aware of and implement the Multicultural Counseling Competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association.
3. Couple and family counselors respect the rights of individuals and members to define their relationships and family units beyond boundaries imposed by dominant culture or tradition.
4. Couple and family counselors are especially sensitive to the rights of sexual minorities to define and express their identities, preferences, and relationships.
5. Couple and family counselors recognize sexual health is the integration of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual well-being, such that sexuality can be enriching and empowering.

Authored by the International Association of Marriage Counselors (IAMFC) Ethics and Bylaws Committee:

Bret Hendricks (Co-chair), Loretta Bradley (Co-Chair), Mary Ballard (Member), Paul Peluso (Member), Stephen Southern (Member)