

Ethics

Ethics are a group of moral principles. According to the American Counseling Association, or **ACA**, professional values are a way of living out ethical principles. The ACA has published a Code of Ethics to serve as a guideline for professional counselors. This code serves as a guideline for professional counselors, as well as a basis on which to process complaints and ethical concerns against counselors. Ethics are important in counseling, as they are a means to protect the welfare of the client and counselors by clearly outlining what is appropriate.

Counseling Relationship

The relationship between a counselor and client must cause no harm to the client. The ACA guidelines state that the relationship is to encourage client growth and development while keeping the client's welfare in mind. This is accomplished through maintaining appropriate records, formulating counseling plans, obtaining informed consent and avoiding dual relationships with clients. Romantic relationships are strictly forbidden; however, romantic relationships can be considered with former clients after a period of five years. Counselors must take care to observe all these guidelines, as the relationship between a counselor and client is imbalanced in that the counselor, by virtue of being the expert, holds more power.

Confidentiality

Communication between a counselor and client is confidential. There are, however, exceptions to confidentiality. Counselors may break confidentiality if they believe the client intends to self-harm or harm others. Counselors must also report, as required by law, child or elder abuse, if reported by the client. Other than these extenuating circumstances, counselors cannot share information regarding the client without client consent, typically in the form of a written release. Release of confidential information can be devastating to a client, affecting his physical, psychological and social well-being. As the first tenet of counseling ethics is to do no harm, this must be avoided.

Professional Responsibility

Counselors have a professional responsibility to behave in an open and honest manner when interacting with clients and the public. ACA states that counselors advocate promoting change that improves the quality of life for not only their clients, but the public, as well. Counselors must also take time to practice self-care. Without proper self-care, counselors risk burnout, which will lead to ineffective, even harmful, care for their clients.

Training

In order to practice as a counselor, you must be trained appropriately. All states require that counselors be licensed. In addition to this training, counselors must follow state guidelines for continuing education and training. This training is intended to keep counselors abreast of new developments in the field, as well as to ensure that the knowledge obtained in a training program is refreshed. As counselors directly apply this knowledge to the treatment of clients, it is important that continuing education be obtained. Misguided or inappropriate application of counseling techniques can be harmful to clients.