# ETHICS IN COUNSELLING

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Ethics in counselling refers to the moral principles and professional standards that guide the behavior and decision-making of counsellors in their practice. Counselling involves working closely with individuals who may be vulnerable, distressed, or facing personal challenges.

Ethical standards exist in psychological counselling for many reasons. They are considered to provide some guidelines for the professional behaviour of members.(*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*, 2017) According to Allen "without a code of established ethics, a group of people with similar interests can not be considered a professional organisation"(*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*, 2017)

Van Hoose and Kottler(1985) offer three reasons for the existence if ethical codes(*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*, 2017):

Ethical standards protect the profession from the government. They allow the profession to regulate itself and function autonomously.

Ethical standards help control internal disagreement and bickering, thus promoting stability within the profession.

Ethical standards protect practitioners from the public. Especially in malpractice cases. If professionals behave according to ethics, the behaviour is judged to be in compliance with the standards.

PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS:

The American Counseling Association (ACA) proposed five main purposes and eight major sections of ethical standards. (*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*, 2017)

Five main purposes of ethical standards (ACA):

i) The Code enables the association to clarify to current and future members, and to those served by members, the nature of the ethical responsibilities held in common by its members.
ii) The Code helps support the mission of the association.
iii) The Code establishes principles that define ethical behaviour and best practices of association members.
iv) The Code serves as an ethical guide designed to assist members in constructing a professional course of action that best serves those utilising counseling services and best promotes the values of the counseling profession.
v) The Code serves as the basis for processing of ethical complaints and inquiries initiated against members of the association.

Eight major sections of ethical standard:

A: The Counseling Relationship Section

B: Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy Section

C: Professional Responsibility Section

D: Relationships with Other Professionals Section

E: Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation Section

F: Supervision, Training, and Teaching Section

G: Research and Publication Section H: Resolving Ethical Issues

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is a statutory body established under the RCI Act, 1992 to regulate training and professional standards in rehabilitation and counselling services in India. It has proposed a set of ethical obligations as part of its Code of Ethics to guide counsellors and rehabilitation professionals in practicing ethically and safeguarding the rights and well-being of their clients.(*Homepage | Rehabilitation Council of India | India*, n.d.). The Key General Ethical Obligations proposed by RCI are mentioned below:

## GENERAL ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS(RCI):

Obligations to the Public:

Members and registrants should uphold the letter and spirit of the ethical standards governing their professional affairs and should consider the full impact of their actions on the community at large. Thus, a member or registrant shall: i). Engage only in accurate, appropriate and truthful promotion of his/her practice; ii) Be respectful of the rights of others in obtaining professional work or employment; and iii) Make only accurate, truthful and appropriate statements or claims about his/her professional qualifications, experiences or performance.

## Obligations to the Client:

Members and registrants shall conduct themselves in a fashion which brings credit to themselves, their employers and their profession. In addition to upholding the behavioural standards described above, a member or registrant:(*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*, 2017)

i) Shall preserve the confidence of his/her client or employer and serve each in a professional and competent manner.
ii) Shall exercise unprejudiced and unbiased judgment and conduct when performing all professional services.
iii) Shall practice only in his/her area of competence.
iv) Shall decline any activity or employment, avoid any significant financial or other interest, and decline any contribution if it would reasonably appear that such activity, employment, interest, or contribution could compromise his or her professional judgment or conduct, or prevent him/her from serving the best interest of his/her client or employer, without making full disclosure to the client and obtaining the client's consent thereto.

v) Shall neither offer nor make any payment or gift to any public official, private client or industry representative with the intent of influencing that person's judgment or decision in connection with an existing or prospective project in which the member/registrant is interested.

vi) May contribute his services or anything of value to those endeavors which the member deems worthy. Further, a member or registrant has the right to participate in the political process and to contribute time and money to political campaigns.

Obligations to the Profession and Building Industry Members and registrants shall:

i) Recognise the value and contributions of others engaged in the design and construction process, and refrain from making false statements about the work of others, and shall not maliciously injure or attempt to injure the prospects, practice, or employment position of others; and

ii) Encourage professional education and research, as well as the development and dissemination of information relating to the design and construction of roofing, waterproofing, and building envelope systems.

Based on the Above Discussion it can be conclude that:

1. Adherence to Moral Principles and Professional Standards:
   Counsellors must follow established ethical guidelines that govern their behaviour and decision-making in professional practice.
2. Protection of Client Welfare:
   The primary responsibility of the counsellor is to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of clients, especially those who are vulnerable or distressed.
3. Confidentiality and Privacy:
   Counsellors must maintain strict confidentiality of client information and respect their right to privacy, disclosing information only when ethically or legally required.
4. Informed Consent:
   Clients should be fully informed about the counselling process, its goals, risks, and their rights before giving consent to participate.
5. Professional Competence:
   Counsellors should practice only within their area of training and expertise and continuously update their knowledge and skills.
6. Integrity and Honesty:
   Counsellors must provide truthful information regarding their qualifications, experience, and services, avoiding any misleading claims.
7. Avoidance of Conflict of Interest:
   Professionals should avoid situations where personal, financial, or other interests may interfere with their professional judgment.
8. Respect for Clients' Rights and Autonomy:
   Counsellors must respect clients' freedom to make their own decisions without coercion or discrimination.
9. Responsibility to the Profession:
   Counsellors should uphold the dignity of the profession, respect the work of other professionals, and contribute to professional development and research.
10. Accountability and Ethical Decision-Making:
    Ethical codes help counsellors handle ethical dilemmas and maintain accountability in their professional actions.

11. Social Responsibility:
    Counsellors should consider the impact of their work on society and promote fairness, equality, and respect in their practice.

In conclusion, ethics in counselling play a crucial role in ensuring responsible, professional, and client-centered practice. Ethical standards not only guide counsellors in maintaining appropriate behaviour but also protect the rights and well-being of clients, especially those who are vulnerable or in distress. The establishment of ethical codes, as highlighted by scholars like Allen and by Van Hoose and Gerald Corey Kottler, helps regulate professional conduct, maintain internal harmony within the profession, and safeguard practitioners from legal and public challenges.

Furthermore, structured frameworks such as those developed by the American Counseling Association provide clear purposes and detailed guidelines that support ethical decision-making in diverse counselling situations. In the Indian context, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) reinforces these principles through its Code of Ethics, emphasizing obligations toward the public, clients, and the profession.

References :

*Homepage | Rehabilitation Council of India | India*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2026, from https://rehabcouncil.nic.in/

*Unit-4 Ethics in Counseling*. (2017). IGNOU. http://egyankosh.ac.in//handle/123456789/21200