

Polish Psychological Association

Code of Professional Ethics for the Psychologist

Both as a profession and as a scientific discipline, psychology belongs to those spheres of human operation in which the center of interest and activity is man. Interpersonal relations established by the psychologist in the practice of his profession, in the research role and as a teacher, similarly as all interpersonal relations, have always an ethical dimension. These relations possess, however, a peculiar nonsymmetrical nature arising due to the advantage of interpersonal competence on the side of the psychologist who has at his disposal specialized knowledge and techniques designed for cognitive understanding of other people, and to influence them. The professional role of the psychologist involves intervention in the essential being of another person as an individual and unique entity, intervention whose consequences may prove irreversible. These circumstances dictate the necessity of observing at all times the principles of professional ethics in the psychologists' actions, and also justify requiring from them high ethical standards.

For the psychologist, the paramount consideration is the welfare of the other person. In his professional capacity, the objective is to help the other person in resolving life problems encountered and in achieving a better quality of life, by developing the individual capabilities and improving interpersonal contacts. In scientific research this objective exists only in an overall perspective. Contacts made for research purposes, if not designed specifically to give help, must in no case cause injury to be sustained by the persons participating in this research.

Despite the many and varying moral and geopolitical outlooks there exists a set of fundamental humanist values which have found their expression in the United Nations General Declaration on Human Rights. In the exercise of his profession, the psychologist must always respect these basic values, in particular the dignity of the human being, his integrity and autonomy and his right to unconstrained development. The psychologist will fully recognize the right of every person to observe his own system of values, to make his own choices and also the right to privacy. At the same time, the psychologist must be aware of the consequences or possible future consequences of his actions, which should ultimately be to the benefit of the subjects of professional treatment. In every case, the psychologist is charged with responsibility of the consequences of this contact made with another person in his professional capacity. The limits of a psychologist's intervention are determined on the one hand by his professional competence and on the other by the needs and expectations expressed by the person seeking help from the psychologist.

In cooperating with members of other professions, the psychologist will not overstep the limits of his competence and will respect the competence of other specialists. At the same time, he will endeavor to maintain his own professional identity; will respect the objectives and values proper to his own profession and will avoid identifying himself with the professional approaches of other specialists if these approaches are incompatible with the ethical principles of the profession of psychology. This rule is always valid whenever the psychologist acts in his professional role, irrespective of the specific tasks and objectives of the institution by which he is employed.

In the event of ceasing to practice as a professional psychologist to take up some other professional work (e.g. administrative), the qualified psychologist should not purposely make use

of his psychological knowledge or skills in understanding and influencing people in a manner not compatible with the professional ethics of a psychologist.

A psychologist engaging in political activities should not exploit the prestige of the psychologist's profession as an argument to gain support for the views put forward.

General Principles

1. In his professional conduct, the psychologist will always endeavor to ensure that contact with him is beneficial for the person or group of persons. In his professional capacity the psychologist is obliged to render psychological help in all circumstances where this is needed.
2. The psychologist is aware of the special responsibility arising from the nature of his profession. He should know the limits of his competence and not undertake any task beyond his abilities. He will make every effort to ensure the highest level of services.
3. Accepting certain attitudes to moral and customary norms in his private life, the psychologist is cognizant of the fact that his decisions in personal matters can affect on social confidence in psychology and psychologists. Society expects high standards of observance of ethical principles by persons whose professional role involves influencing other persons.
4. It is the duty of the psychologist to strive towards continual professional and personal development. The psychologist's qualifications should reflect the most up to date level of psychological knowledge and techniques. The psychologist should make use of worldwide scientific achievements. Prior to the application of results or methods developed in other social or cultural conditions, a critical analysis must be made of their suitability for Polish conditions.
5. The psychologist will adopt a forward-looking attitude to the current state of knowledge in this discipline. He will try to contribute to the development of knowledge, to improvements in research methods, diagnostic tools and therapeutic techniques. He will be critical of his own achievements and in announcing them, he will state verification methods applied. He will be impartial and objective in evaluating new psychological techniques and non-professional forms of psychological help, and refrain from hindering their development if there are no substantial reasons for so doing.
6. The psychologist will make available his own scientific achievements while observing the principle of professional responsibility, the good of the person treated and of society in general.
7. The psychologist will not make untrue claims as to his professional competence or experience.
8. The psychologist will terminate his professional treatment if external circumstances or his own state of physical or psychological health are such that they could appreciably diminish the quality of his work or hinder the objectivity of the professional evaluation.
9. Relations between psychologists shall be based on mutual respect and fellowship resulting from the common values and objectives, awareness of the social status of the shared profession and the professional responsibilities undertaken.
10. The psychologist will not be indifferent to breaches of the code of professional ethics by other psychologists. Being aware of unprofessional conduct by a colleague or hearing of such conduct, the psychologist will endeavor to convince the offender of the impropriety

of his conduct, if necessary calling on the help of colleagues. If such intervention proves ineffective, the psychologist is obliged to inform the local branch of the Polish Psychological Association, which will determine further procedures.

11. Critical assessment of the work or actions of other psychologists should not be of the nature of personal disparagement and may in no case serve for personal advantage. The psychologist will not utter such criticism in the presence of third persons, taking care not to undermine confidence in psychology and psychologists.
12. The psychologist will at all times show care of the prestige and status of his profession. He will not make the specific techniques of psychological diagnosis available to persons not competent to apply them. He will oppose the undertaking of psychological treatment, in particular the use of specific diagnostic and therapeutic techniques by persons other than qualified psychologists.
13. The psychologist may not accept working conditions which limit his professional independence, in particular conditions making it impossible to observe the principles of the code of professional ethics. The psychologist must insist on respect for his own independence irrespective of the position held in the professional hierarchy. Every psychologist is obliged to act in defense of the independence of his colleagues.

The Practicing Psychologist

14. Undertaking practical activity, the psychologist accepts that his professional responsibility then takes the specific form of responsibility for another person or group of persons.
15. The psychologist will perform his duties endeavoring to reach the highest professional level irrespective of for whom this is and of his personal attitude to the client¹ or clients. In particular, the psychologists' clear intent to help and be conscientious carrying out his professional duties will not be affected by such aspects as the client's social position, material situation, political or social attitudes, race, nationality, age, and also the nature of the problems requiring his intervention.
16. The psychologist will advise the client of possible risks involved in the therapeutic methods proposed and of the existence of alternative methods, including non-psychological methods. If the psychologist is unable to render effective help due to lack of qualifications required in the given case or if an unsatisfactory relation with the client develops, he will recommend the client to consult another psychologist or specialist. The psychologist will only undertake professional activities for which he has the appropriate qualifications confirmed by suitable training and practical experience.

¹ The "client" is taken to the person seeking psychological help for himself or the person who, exercising legal authority, refers to the psychologist another person requiring psychological intervention and for whom he takes responsibility (e.g. parents or guardians of a child, doctor treating a patient etc.). In the latter case, the rules of the "Code of Ethics" apply equally to the person actually treated (i.e. child, patient etc.).

17. Prior to starting therapy, the psychologist will, every time, come to an agreement with the client as to the purpose and scope of the therapy and the basic procedure. These arrangements are of a preliminary nature and may change in the course of further contacts. If a conflict of opinions arises, attempts must be made to reach agreement. The psychologist will respect the client's system of values and his right to make his own decisions, nevertheless, he should not undertake intervention if the objective or methods applied are not compatible with professional ethics.
18. Persons coming to a psychologist not of their own initiative, both adults and children sent for diagnostic test or corrective therapy, should be informed of the purpose of the procedure, methods and anticipated results and how they will be made accessible. The psychologist will endeavor to gain acceptance of the planned clinical measures by this person.
19. Minors should be accorded special status in treatment. The fundamental objective for the psychologist working with juveniles is to seek their best interests; that is to say that these persons in their contacts with the psychologist have rights in no way less than adult clients. In no case may contacts with a psychologist take under pressure brought to bear by institutions or adults deciding in the name of the minor. In such a case, if it is ascertained the institutions or adults are jeopardizing the best interest of the minor concerned, the psychologist has the right to refuse cooperation with these institutions or persons. The psychologist has the moral duty to defend the rights of a minor. The psychologist has the right and also the duty to respect the decisions of a minor as a human being in all contacts with him.
20. The psychologist will give information to persons undergoing psychological diagnoses and therapy on the methods used and results achieved, being guided by the good of these persons. The psychologist will avoid procedures which could offend the client's convictions of the information given. In doubtful cases, the psychologist will ensure that this information is correctly understood.
21. The psychologist is strictly obliged to observe professional secrecy. Information covered by professional secrecy may only be divulged when the safety of the client or other persons are seriously at risk. Whenever possible, decisions in such cases should be carefully discussed with an experienced and unbiased colleague. Confidential materials should be destroyed under collective supervision if there is good cause to believe that their secrecy is endangered.
22. Questioning the client about intimate or personal matters is only permissible in so far as it is strictly necessary for psychological therapy.
23. When cooperating with specialists from other disciplines or making use of their consultations (i.e. conducting tests at their request), the psychologist will make his results available only as far as is necessary. At the same time, he will draw attention to the obligation of maintaining secrecy.
24. When helped by not fully qualified psychological personnel (psychological assistants, students, nurses, etc), the psychologist is responsible for respecting the principles of professional ethics. In particular, the psychologist will advise his assistants of the obligation of absolute observance of professional secrecy with the exception of risks to the safety of other persons, while reports and documents passed on for elaboration must be protected as far as possible to preserve the anonymity of the person concerned.

25. The psychologist will preserve his ethical sensitivity, not avoiding the resolution of moral conflicts but endeavoring to discern them, evaluating the situation and taking decisions guided by his own perceptions with regard to the overriding ethical principles of his profession.
26. If in the course of this professional duties the psychologist becomes involved in a conflict of interests, either between persons or between persons in an institution, he will behave so as to cause no harm to either of the interested parties. In conflicts arising between the interests of a person and an institution, the psychologist will maintain impartiality. Even when not accepting a person's behavior, the psychologist should endeavor to help him.
27. In notifying or advertising his professional services, the psychologist will truthfully describe his qualifications and the scope of services offered.
28. Acting in his psychotherapeutic capacity, the psychologist, being aware of the dangers inherent in his powers of influencing other people, will undergo supervision or consultations in the matter.

The Psychologist as Researcher

29. In his research role, the psychologist will be aware that the results of scientific research not only represent a broadening of the scope of human knowledge, but can also be utilized in social practice. Due to its close interlinking with social life, psychology is a field of knowledge where results could be misused in order to influence people's beliefs and behavior. When undertaking scientific research, the psychologist will cautiously consider its ethical aspect, in particular the possible positive and negative consequences of making known the results and their utilization in social practice.
30. The psychologist implementing scientific research will only undertake topics not violating the ethical standards of his profession. He is responsible for choice of research methods enabling reliable results to be achieved and for the integrity of the results announced. Making decisions on these points, the psychologist will not be swayed by pressure exerted by persons or circumstances.
31. Undertaking research involving people, the psychologist will cautiously assess if the planned project is in accord with the general principles of professional ethics. In confirming research plans put forward by junior research team (candidates for the doctors' degree or master's degree), the project leader or proprietor should take into account ethical criteria. Persons working under the direction of a leader are equally responsible for the ethical aspect of the research; to the extent in which it is dependent on their decisions.
32. The psychologist will observe the principle of voluntary participation in psychological studies and also respect the right of participants to withdraw at any moment from further participation. If the participants have a dependent relation with the researcher, as students, clients or staff members and also when social pressure to take part could be exerted, particular care must be taken to ensure that the voluntary principle is not violated.
33. The psychologist will not undertake research when participants could be exposed to suffering or lost cherished values. If important scientific and practical considerations appear to authorize research of this kind and there exists no other means of obtaining the relevant data, an impartial judgment must be made whether the anticipated results

sanction and justify carrying out the research. In such cases, prior to seeking the consent of future participants, they must be particularly and carefully informed of the course of research. Such participants may not be persons in a dependent position relative to the research leader. The psychologist is also obliged to take all feasible steps to minimize discomfort involved in the tests and also their possible negative effects for the participants.

34. Before starting research, the psychologist is obliged to inform participants of its purpose, course, and especially those aspects which could be expected to influence their readiness to participate; and also to explain all other aspects of the research plan when questioned by the participants, and then obtain their voluntary consent. If it is planned to make use of devices for recording participants' behavior (cameras, tape recording, concealed observation), participants must be clearly informed of this and their consent obtained. This refers both to adults and children. In exceptional circumstances, this information may be given after finishing the research, in which case, the tested persons must be given full liberty to refuse consent for such data to be utilized.
35. In every case, when the psychologist's specific research results are to be cited, everything must be done to remove any evidence that could lead to identification of the participant.
36. In conducting tests on animals, the psychologist will avoid causing suffering; if for unusually important research objectives a degree of suffering is unavoidable, the psychologist will do everything to keep this to a minimum.
37. The psychologist will ensure the integrity of test results announced and endeavor to prevent their improper utilization. For this reason, mention must always be made of results not corroborating research hypotheses and of the existence of alternative hypotheses and alternative ways of interpreting results, while the scope of results generalization should be strictly defined. Particular caution must be observed in formulating practical research conclusions.
38. It is the duty of the psychologist to give true and complete information on sources used. He will duly acknowledge that he has made use in his publications of research work or materials from other authors and of consultations with other persons.
39. Taking part in joint research projects, the psychologist will respect the author's copyright of other members of the group and will carefully protect his own. This is of significant importance in the case of interdisciplinary research.
40. The psychologist will not allow his name to be appended as co-author in any publication or papers in which he did not take part, nor present his participation in a manner not in accordance with his actual contribution.
41. In giving critical reviews of the research work of other authors, the psychologist will be always aware of the importance of scientific criticism in the development of psychology, and his consequent personal responsibility for the integrity of the assessment made. The psychologist will not undertake to give an opinion on another's research work, if circumstances make it impossible to give an unbiased, reliable and competent assessment.
42. As a member of the academic community, the psychologist will uphold the cardinal ethical principles of his profession, such as respect, dignity, agency and autonomy of a person in contacts with representatives of other fields of science, and will endeavor to propagate relations of a type based on these values.

The Psychologist as Teacher and Disseminator

43. The psychologist is cognizant of the fact that due to the specific nature of his profession, his personal system of convictions, values and ethical norms can influence the choice and method of communication of the didactic message. In his role as teacher, the psychologist must make it clear when he is obliged to be apprised of other points of view and to present them fairly.
44. In training, students and graduates for the practice of their profession, attention must be drawn to its ethical aspects, stressing the paramount ethical values of this profession. The psychologist will make use of actual examples to develop the ethical sensitivity of future psychologists and their competence to resolve the moral dilemmas confronting them in carrying out their professional duties. He will demonstrate and promote among students positive ethical models of conduct in professional situations.
45. The psychologist in his role as teacher, especially in training students in practical skills, will be fully aware that his conduct towards clients and personnel will shape the professional attitudes of the students.
46. During the course of instruction involving demonstrations using persons or their creations, the psychologist will avoid any theatrical or sensational presentations, always observing discretion and tact. When the demonstration involves the participation of people, this participation must be wholly voluntary and they must be protected against any kind of negative consequences. Experiments must be immediately broken off if there appears to be a risk of such effects.
47. Teaching sessions of a laboratory-practical exercise type, allowing participants a means of assessing their own emotional problems, will only be conducted by specially trained psychologists who will be responsible for their immediate and long term consequences, and will not permit these consequences to be harmful to the participants.
48. The psychologist will not conduct any partial training for non-psychologists to prepare them for performing tasks that require a fully educated and qualified psychologist.
49. To the best of his abilities, the psychologist will oppose the teaching of psychology by persons not having psychological qualifications, by notifying the Board of Directors of the Polish Psychological Association of such facts.
50. In propagating psychological knowledge, the psychologist will take care to ensure that the matter communicated is in accord with the contemporary state of the science, clearly distinguish between hypotheses and well-documented conclusions, and will truthfully present the practical possibilities of psychology. The psychologist will be particularly cautious in speaking of these which are not in accord with current psychological knowledge or are susceptible to ambiguous interpretation.

The Code of Professional Ethics is binding for all Polish psychologists. In joining the Polish Psychological Association, the psychologist takes upon himself the obligation of scrupulous observance of the principles embodied in the Code of Professional Ethics, and will promote them among psychologists who are not members of the Association. A member of the Polish Psychological Association behaving in a manner contravening the Code of Professional Ethics renders himself liable to sanction as laid down in the rules of the Collegiate Court of Honor.