



The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2016) is published by the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BCAP). A link to the complete document is provided at the end [1].

By its nature counselling can deal with sensitive information that the client is sharing with the practitioner. The client needs to be able to trust the practitioner in order to do this. Without this trust then the work of counselling cannot happen. The aim of the ethical framework is to create a basis of trust in the client-therapist relationship through a series of commitments and establishing the ethics of the relationship.

Values - Principles - Personal moral qualities

"Values can be thought of as priorities, internal compasses or spring-boards for action-moral imperatives" (D. Oyserman) [2]

Values are intrinsic to us as individuals and those of us who wish to go into counselling, need to ensure that we share the values of the counselling profession. It is highly likely that if you are motivated to help others, then you will already share these values. At their heart is the belief in enhancing people's wellbeing and capabilities, improving relationships, improving resilience and effectiveness, integrity, honesty, fairness and quality.

These values inform the principles that we then adopt. These are more precisely defined.

Being Trustworthy: Respecting the trust placed in the practitioner.

Autonomy: The client, should be self-directing.

Beneficence: A commitment to the client's wellbeing.

Non-maleficence: A duty to avoiding harm to the client.

Justice: Fair treatment of all clients.

Self-respect: The practitioner's ongoing commitment to self-awareness and integrity.

- If the practitioner has to make an ethical decision, if she can support that decision with two of these principles without contradicting another, then she is making a well-founded decision. Of course, some decisions will prove very difficult and possibly controversial, in which case careful consideration and accountability are important.
- The third pillar of the ethical framework is the personal moral qualities of the practitioner. These are grounded in the idea of 'virtues' from moral philosophy. These moral qualities are informed by the values that the individual holds, but can be worked on, considered, honed and aspired to.

These moral qualities are:

Care: Attentiveness to someone's needs & wellbeing.

Diligence: The conscientious use of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a good outcome for the client.

Courage: Acting despite personal fears and uncertainty.

Empathy: The ability to understand the experience of another from their perspective.

Identity: The sense of self in relation to others, that enables responsibility & resilience.

Humility: Facing one's weaknesses and acknowledging strengths.

Integrity: Commitment to a moral approach to relationships.

Resilience: Working with a client's challenges without suffering personal cost.

Respect: Giving due regard to others and their understanding of themselves.

Sincerity: A consistency between word and deed.

Wisdom: Displaying sound judgement.

The practitioner will always have to use personal, professional judgement, but an ethical framework gives a go-to place for more difficult or thorny issues. It also informs the work that the therapist will also be doing on themselves (and with mentors) in order to improve themselves and their capacity to guide others.

When Jung talked about the relationship between therapist and client, he described it as a 'chemical reaction' [3] that could not help but impact the therapist as well as the client. It is worthwhile to acknowledge that a therapist cannot remain entirely unaffected or dispassionate when dealing with clients, indeed it may be counterproductive to do so. However, there is a line to be walked, an ethical line, that requires a well-developed sense of self on the part of the therapist. Dealing with client's challenges will inevitably present its challenges for the practitioner, which is why it is important to understand the ethical foundations upon which the relationship is based. This way, the practitioner will be aware enough to know when difficult decisions need to be made and the responsible way in which that should happen.

By committing to the ethics of the profession, practitioners are making a commitment to themselves and their clients. It is a pledge to high principle and to courage, to serve others and leave the world a better place than they found it.

References:

1. Bond, T. et al (2016). The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions. British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BCAP). Retrieved from: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/>
2. Oyserman, D. (2002). Values: Psychological Perspectives. Retrieved from: http://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/783/docs/oyserman_2002.pdf
3. Jung, Carl (1933). Modern Man in Search of a Soul. 2nd ed. Routledge.