

**B.C. ASSOCIATION OF CLINICAL COUNSELLORS**  
**GUIDELINES FOR ETHICS in SUPERVISION & TEACHING**  
**(November 1999)**

A common theme in discussions of this topic is the recognition that within the counselling field, the goals of supervision/teaching can overlap with therapeutic goals. Another issue implicit in teaching/supervision is the power differential. This creates a unique set of ethical issues for supervisors and, to a lesser degree, for teachers<sup>(1)</sup>. These issues can be roughly divided into five categories:

**COMPETENCE**

- ⇒ supervisors have demonstrated competence in supervision as well as clinical competence in areas of instruction or supervision.
- ⇒ supervisors need a clear understanding of the legal and ethical implications of a supervisory role with both students and clients.
- ⇒ supervisors benefit from supervision of their supervision to assist them in monitoring the ethical issues.
- ⇒ self knowledge and managing countertransference are important skills for counsellors. Students need to demonstrate to supervisors that they are competent to manage these issues. Independent personal counselling may be the most ethical means to satisfy a supervisor's need to evaluate student competence while protecting student confidentiality.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

- ⇒ the primary client is the client and not the student although both have interests which need to be balanced.
- ⇒ when a supervisor has multiple roles with a student there can be built-in dual relationships to manage. This needs to be avoided or minimized wherever possible. Multiple evaluative roles are especially undesirable and potentially most stressful.
- ⇒ Boundaries need to be clearly defined and maintained. This needs to be monitored closely as students progress to more advanced stages which more closely approximate a peer relationship. Social contact is likely to compromise the supervision relationship. Sexual relationships with students are not acceptable.
- ⇒ Several articles cite the tendency for graduates to repeat unethical practices which were role modelled by teachers or supervisors during their training. In the interests of the public good, a supervisor is obligated to promote ethical behaviour and skill levels which meet acceptable standards for the field.
- ⇒ Both supervisor and student need to represent their competencies accurately to the client.
- ⇒ Clients need to be informed of the qualifications and identity of the supervisor.

**STUDENT INTERESTS**

- ⇒ managing potential conflicts of interest need to be clear and discussed with student in advance.
- ⇒ supervisors need to be sensitive to personal or student issues with any student. Option of referral to an alternate supervisor may be warranted in some situations.

- ⇒ supervision must be clearly distinguished from personal counselling – students’ needs are to be referred for personal issues which are not directly associated with the counselling skills under supervision. This is based on the risk of a dual relationship impairing a supervisor’s ability to objectively evaluate a student in a dual role and on the recognition that the power differential has the potential to be experienced as coercion for a student who is offered personal counselling by a supervisor.
- ⇒ disclosure of personal information needs to be restricted to information only as it applies to skills for counselling a client.
- ⇒ Confidentiality and performance evaluation information need to be carefully balanced.
- ⇒ A protocol for complaint resolution needs to be clearly defined and students need to be encouraged to raise questions, challenges and/or doubts in order to manage the perceived power differential in a manner which protects student interests.

### STUDENT ETHICS

- ⇒ students are expected to meet ethical standards of conduct of the field in which they are training.
- ⇒ students need to receive realistic expectations of their developing competence.
- ⇒ students need to receive clear expectations of the level and nature of competency as this relates to the program and course content.

### INFORMED CONSENT

- ⇒ a written supervision contract is recommended to clarify expectations - including format for case presentation, method of evaluation, recordkeeping, and relevant time frames.

(1) For language simplicity the term student will be used to mean student, supervisee or trainee.

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#### Suggested reading:

**Ethical Issues of Supervision.** Patrick Sherry, *The Counselling Psychologist*. Oct 91, Vol. 19, No.4.

**Ethical Supervision.** In *Dimensions of Psychotherapy Supervision: Maps and Means*. Russell Haber, WW Norton, 1996.

**Boundary Issues in Supervision & Consultation.** In *ACAeNews*, Counsellor Education & Supervision/The Student Center. Vol. 2, Issue 6, Part 1 & Issue 8, Part 2.

**The Blueprint for Supervision Contracts.** In *The Complete Systemic Supervisor: Context, Philosophy, and Pragmatics*. Thomas Todd and Cheryl Storm, Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

**Supervision and Consultation for Trauma Therapies.** In *Trauma and the Therapist: Countertransference and Vicarious Trauma in Psychotherapy with Incest Survivors*. Laurie Anne Perlman and Karen Saakvitne, WW Norton, 1995.

**The Reasonably Complete Systemic Supervisor Resource Guide.** Cheryl Storm and Thomas Todd, eds. Allyn and Bacon, 1997.