

# Standards of Practice

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Realistically, common sense is not as common as we would like. The art and business of providing addiction-specific counseling services has changed over the last decade; addiction counseling is not business-as-usual any more. Discrimination, judgment, aggression, and stigma are on the rise. Addictions have become more sophisticated and accessible. The costs of doing business are high and cumbersome. Burn-out is a reality. Our



work is misunderstood by colleagues in other specialty areas. And, as clinicians, we have an obligation to be advocates on behalf of our clients. As advocates, we influence decisions made regarding our clients' care within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Our work as advocates and service providers is governed by laws, rules, ethics, and policies and procedures. There is often confusion amongst advocates regarding personal versus professional versus organization ethics. In addition, there is confusion about professional ethical codes versus organizational policies and procedures.

Personal ethical codes are specific to one's personal values and morals, and concern right, wrong, good, bad, etc. They are developed through a lifetime of experience and modeling, and are taught by family, friends, and society. Personal ethics include honesty, genuineness, responsibility, and commitment. Not adhering to a high standard of personal ethics can harm self and others.

Professional ethics include rules, values, and morals imposed on a practitioner by their employer and/or by their professional membership organization. Professional ethics are learned through education, training, and experience. Ethical codes for addiction professionals, service providers and others working in our profession include confidentiality, record keeping, and delivery of services. Not adhering to professional ethical codes can result in harm to the client as well as jeopardizing one's career and reputation. Professional ethics often build on personal ethics; professional ethics do not supersede personal ethics and often have greater authority over a person's scope of practice.

Organizational ethics study the decisions and actions taken by an organization/institution internally and externally. Organizations are governed by policies and procedures. Policies provide direction for an organization and influence decisions made; policies guide decision making and frame business mission, objectives, goals, and management philosophies. Typically, you will see policies referring to employees' conduct and procedures related to organizational mission. Procedures delineate how to accomplish a task within the organization.

As advocates and service providers we have to hold our work and ourselves accountable; we are responsible for our work and how we conduct ourselves within both clinical and organizational circles. A professional Code of Ethics defines acceptable behaviors, promotes high standards of practice, provides a benchmark for self-evaluation, establishes professional boundaries, specifies professional identity, and offers a standard

d of professional maturity. "A Professional Code of Ethics" cannot be totally prescriptive as it cannot address every potential ethical violation; however, Code of Ethics offer clinicians and service providers standards of practice to adhere to or extrapolate for their situation.

Why have a Code of Ethics? Because our clients deserve the best available service delivery, and a Code of Ethics governs the specific work and practice of the clinician. A professional Code of Ethics allows a professional to understand and emulate acceptable standards for practice. The client's perspective matters. Change happens when a therapeutic relationship is established through connection, empathy and active listening. Confidentiality and accurate record keeping matters. Collaboration is the vehicle for addiction counseling. Agendas are agreed upon that are realistic and attainable. We know addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery services help people heal. A Code of Ethics is a realistic and accessible reminder of what it means to have common sense. In a world that wants to loudly proclaim one philosophy or another at will, a Code of Ethics keeps us grounded in the reality that our work is about the client first and us second. When's the last time you read and/or considered your professional Code of Ethics?

*The NAADAC/NCC AP Code of Ethics is available online at [www.naadac.org/code-of-ethics](http://www.naadac.org/code-of-ethics).*



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