



College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy

*A theologically based  
certifying and accrediting covenant community*

# Principles for Processing Ethical Complaints

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ..... 3

THE CPSP CODE OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS ..... 4

THE CPSP ETHICS COMPLAINT PROTOCOL ..... 5

STANDARDS ..... 6

A COMMUNITY IN COVENANT ..... 7

THE COVENANT OF THE COLLEGE OF PASTORAL SUPERVISION AND PSYCHOTHERAPY ..... 7

SPIRITUAL CARE COLLABORATIVE CODE OF ETHICS ..... 8

SPIRITUAL CARE COLLABORATIVE PRINCIPLES FOR PROCESSING ETHICAL COMPLAINTS ..... 15

## **Introduction:**

The College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP) seeks to maintain the highest standards of professional ethics. Therefore members covenant to work together with colleagues, students, clients and institutions in an attitude characterized by respect, commitment and professionalism consistent with the CPSP Covenant.

Professional ethics for CPSP are rooted in respect for all persons regardless of their race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, age, abilities or sexual orientation. In other words, who they are is the reason for our respect. Members agree to commend the call, vocation and personal lives of coworkers, patients, counselees, students, supervisees, and parishioners. Members respect each other. When there is an allegation of misconduct, all responses will be intentional while maintaining an attitude characterized by forgiveness, humility, and an empowering love. All responses to allegations will focus on accountability, education, redemption, reconciliation, and growth. Respect includes issues of confidentiality.

Members are committed and accountable to each other through Chapter participation. Therefore, members will be pro-active in issues of professional abilities, continuing education, pastoral concerns, ethics and personal integrity. This form of peer review is crucial to our covenant with each other.

CPSP members recognize those who have gone before us, endeavoring to preserve, create and implement the body of knowledge in the fields of pastoral education, pastoral care and counseling. CPSP members maintain professional relationships with other persons in their institutions, their community, and with members of other professional organizations.

CPSP recognizes that not all ethical issues can be detailed through this or any other code. Therefore, we depend on the professional judgment of our colleagues and agree to abide by and to engage their decisions.

## **The CPSP Code of Professional Ethics**

### **Respect**

Colleagues, students, clients, parishioners, and patients deserve our respect. Therefore, members will not proselytize nor force their own theologies on others. CPSP members will refrain from exploiting relationships or using them to their own advantage. Exploitation includes emotional, financial, sexual, and/or social gain. Records, evaluations, personal notes, and informational conversations will be kept confidential.

### **Commitment**

Members will maintain their commitment and good standing with their CPSP Chapters. Members will maintain good standing outside of CPSP, including faith groups, endorsing agencies, licensing agencies, and employing institutions. CPSP members will take concerns of impairment, incompetence, or behavioral problems seriously. Concerns for such are expected to be addressed within each Chapter.

### **Professionalism**

CPSP members will continue to use their Chapters, as well as other resources, for professional and personal growth. This includes attention to spiritual, family and health related issues which are always significant to the professional functioning of members. CPSP members will represent their qualifications correctly, limiting their practice only to their level and area of certification. CPSP members will keep accurate financial and training records, will be accurate in professional brochures, and will make timely responses to inquiries and applications. “Stewardship” of our programs is the essential theological words. CPSP members have the freedom to share their private and public opinions, distinguishing these from the positions of CPSP.

## The CPSP Ethics Complaint Protocol

### Complaint Procedure

1. Any incident of ethical violation, or presumed violation, will be processed in the following manner:
2. Any person with an ethical complaint against a person certified by CPSP will first inform the General Secretary or President of the violation in writing, stating the exact nature of the complaint, the individual(s) against whom the allegation is made, and when the alleged event occurred. If the General Secretary and President are both objects of the grievance, the complaint will be filed with the immediate Past President.
3. The officer receiving the complaint will immediately notify the Chapter Convener of the person against whom the complaint is registered. The Chapter convener, with the officer delivering the complaint, will decide if the complaint has merit within thirty days. If the complaint is deemed without merit, the complainant will be notified to that effect. If the complaint is judged to have merit, it will be referred to the Chapter where the object of the complaint has credentials.
4. The Chapter within sixty days of receiving the complaint will process it, interview the parties as needed, and make a judgment on any appropriate recompense or penalties required, and notify the complainant of such.
5. The interview process will allow for the person against whom the complaint has been made to have an opportunity to respond to the allegations. As in all matters of chapter life, an outside consultant will serve in consultation to the chapter. For ethical complaints, the outside consultant will be appointed by the Governing Council in consultation with the chapter, the person against whom the complaint has been made, and the person making the complaint.
6. If the complainant is not satisfied with the Chapter's judgment, he or she may, within thirty days, again notify the General Secretary, or President, who will together create a Panel to review the complaint and the Chapter's decision. The Panel is to convene within thirty days of the request. The Panel may sustain the Chapter's decision or overrule it and make its own decision, and notify the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made.
7. If the person against whom the complaint has been filed is not satisfied with the Chapter's judgment, he or she may, within thirty days, again notify the General Secretary, or President, who will together create a Panel to review the complaint and the Chapter's decision. The Panel is to convene within thirty days of the request. The Panel may sustain the Chapter's decision or overrule it and make its own decision, and notify the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been made.
8. The Panel's decision may be appealed to the Executive Committee, within the next thirty days. If the complainant is not satisfied, he or she may appeal next to the Governing Council within thirty days. The decision of the Governing Council will be final.
9. The Person against whom the complaint is made may similarly appeal to the Executive Committee, within the next thirty days. If the person against whom the complaint has been made is not satisfied with the decision of the Executive Committee, he or she may appeal next to the Governing Council within thirty days. The decision of the Governing Council will be final.
10. The chapter, in consultation with the Governing Council, will monitor and review any sanctions pertaining to its members, with a mindset toward redemption and restoration as well as that of justice.
11. It is the responsibility of the Chapter Life Committee to provide consultation to chapters regarding training and resources for dealing with ethical concerns.

## Standards

**700.00** All CPSP certified and non-certified members, students and trainees are required to maintain the highest level of personal, professional, moral and ethical standards. When moral and ethical standards are in question, the Chapter will initiate a meeting for engaging the person and issue. These engagements are expected to be redemptive and problem solving in intent and nature.

### **620. Duties of a Chapter**

**620.3** Each Chapter will provide support, guidance, full accountability, consultation and continuing education for its members' life and practice of ministry under the auspices of CPSP.

**620.6** Each Chapter will annually assess each member's competency to practice and each member's fidelity to the ongoing life of the Chapter. It will recommend to the CPSP Governing Council matters of discipline, sanctions, or termination of membership. An annual Chapter Report will be sent to the CPSP Administrative Assistant by January 31st of each year, for review by a member of the Executive Committee, prior to the Governing Council meeting.

**620.7** Each Chapter will work to resolve any grievances that are filed, and, if unresolved, will refer those grievances to the CPSP Governing Council.

## A Community in Covenant

CPSP is a covenant community bound by its covenant to hold one another mutually responsible for our professional work and direction. While other organizations require a signed statement of adherence to ethical standards CPSP requires a lived experience as reflected the CPSP covenant. CPSP members' credentials are renewed annually and contingent upon satisfactory participation in Chapter life and adherence to the CPSP covenant.

The CPSP Covenant reads:

***The Covenant of the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy***

**Spiritual pilgrims**  
*We, the CPSP members see ourselves as spiritual pilgrims seeking a truly collegial professional community. Our calling and commitments are, therefore, first and last theological. We covenant to address one another and to be addressed by one another in a profound theological sense. We commit to being mutually responsible to one another for our professional work and direction.*

**Chapters**  
*Matters that are typically dealt with in other certifying bodies by centralized governance will be dealt with primarily in Chapters. Thus, we organize ourselves in such a way that we each participate in a relatively small group called a Chapter consisting of approximately a dozen colleagues. Teaching or counseling programs directed by CPSP Diplomates are the primary responsibility of the Chapter.*

**Recovery of soul**  
*We commit ourselves to a galaxy of shared values that are as deeply held as they are difficult to communicate. "Recovery of soul" is a metaphor that points toward these values. We place a premium on the significance of the relationships among ourselves. We value personal authority and creativity. We believe we should make a space for one another and stand ready to midwife one another in our respective spiritual journeys. Because we believe that life is best lived by grace, we believe it essential to guard against becoming invasive, aggressive, or predatory toward each other. We believe that persons are always more important than institutions, and even the institution of CPSP itself must be carefully monitored lest it take on an idolatrous character.*

**A Living Experience**  
***We intend to travel light, to own no property, to accumulate no wealth, and to create no bureaucracy. We are invested in offering a living experience that reflects human life and faith within a milieu of supportive and challenging community of fellow pilgrims.***

The College of Pastoral Supervision & Psychotherapy Code of Professional Ethics and Complaint Procedures are in keeping with the Spiritual Care Collaborative code of Ethics.

CPSP formally adopts the Code of Ethics promoted by the Spiritual Care Collaborative in 2007.

## **Spiritual Care Collaborative Code of Ethics**

The Code of Ethics for Spiritual Care Professionals:

- Gives expression to the basic values and standards of the profession;
- Guides decision-making and professional behavior;
- Provides a mechanism for professional accountability; and
- Informs the public as to what they should expect from Spiritual Care Professionals.

### **Preamble**

Spiritual Care Professionals are grounded in communities of faith and informed by professional education and training.

They are called to nurture their personal health of mind, body and spirit and be responsible for their personal and professional conduct as they grow in their respect for all living beings and the natural environment.

When Spiritual Care Professionals behave in a manner congruent with the values of this code of ethics, they bring greater justice, compassion and healing to our world.

Spiritual Care Professionals:

- Affirm the dignity and value of each individual;
- Respect the right of each faith group to hold to its values and traditions;
- Advocate for professional accountability that protects the public and advances the profession; and
- Respect the cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, sexual orientation, and religious diversity of other professionals and those served and strive to eliminate discrimination.

## 1.0 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Clients

Spiritual Care Professionals understand clients to be any counselees, patients, family members, students or staff to whom they provide spiritual care. In relationships with clients, Spiritual Care Professionals uphold the following standards of professional ethics. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 1.1 Speak and act in ways that honor the dignity and value of every individual.
- 1.2 Provide care that is intended to promote the best interest of the client and to foster strength, integrity and healing.
- 1.3 Demonstrate respect for the cultural and religious values of those they serve and refrain from imposing their own values and beliefs on those served.
- 1.4 Are mindful of the imbalance of power in the professional/client relationship and refrain from exploitation of that imbalance.
- 1.5 Maintain relationships with clients on a professional basis only.
- 1.6 Avoid or correct any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicting interest(s).
- 1.7 Refrain from any form of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment or sexual assault in relationships with clients.
- 1.8 Refrain from any form of harassment, coercion, intimidation or otherwise abusive words or actions in relationships with clients.
- 1.9 Safeguard the confidentiality of clients when using materials for educational purposes or written publication.
- 1.10 Respect the confidentiality of information entrusted to them by clients when communicating with family members or significant others except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment, granted by client permission, for the safety of any person or when required by law.
- 1.11 Understand the limits of their individual expertise and make referrals to other professionals when appropriate.

## **2.0 Ethical Principles in Relationships Between Supervisors/Educators and Students**

Spiritual Care Professionals respect the integrity of students using the power they have as supervisors/educators in responsible ways. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 2.1 Maintain a healthy educational environment free of coercion or intimidation.
- 2.2 Maintain clear boundaries in the areas of self-disclosure, intimacy and sexuality.
- 2.3 Provide clear expectations regarding responsibilities, work schedules, fees and payments.
- 2.4 Provide adequate, timely and constructive feedback to students.
- 2.5 Maintain a healthy respect for the personal growth of students and provide appropriate professional referrals.
- 2.6 Maintain appropriate confidentiality regarding all information and knowledge gained in the course of supervision.

## **3.0 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Faith Community**

Spiritual Care Professionals are accountable to their faith communities, one another and other organizations. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 3.1 Maintain good standing in their faith group.
- 3.2 Abide by the professional practice and/or teaching standards of the state/province, the community and the institution in which they are employed. If for any reason a Spiritual Care Professional is not free to practice or teach according to conscience, the Spiritual Care Professional shall notify the employer, his or her professional organization and faith group as appropriate.
- 3.3 Do not directly or by implication claim professional qualifications that exceed actual qualifications or misrepresent an affiliation with any institution.

#### 4.0 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Other Professionals and the Community

Spiritual Care Professionals are accountable to the public, faith communities, employers and professionals in all professional relationships. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 4.1 Promote justice in relationships with others, in their institutions and in society.
- 4.2 Represent accurately their professional qualifications and affiliations.
- 4.3 Exercise good stewardship of resources entrusted to their care and employ sound financial practices.
- 4.4 Respect the opinions, beliefs and professional endeavors of colleagues and other professionals.
- 4.5 Seek advice and counsel of other professionals whenever it is in the best interest of those being served and make referrals when appropriate.
- 4.6 Provide expertise and counsel to other health professionals in advocating for best practices in care.
- 4.7 Seek to establish collaborative relationships with other community and health professionals.
- 4.8 Advocate for changes in their institutions that would honor spiritual values and promote healing.
- 4.9 Provide other professionals with chart notes where they are used that further the treatment of the clients or patients, obtaining consent when required.
- 4.10 Communicate sufficient information to other care team members while respecting the privacy of clients.
- 4.11 Ensure that private conduct does not impair the ability to fulfill professional responsibilities or bring dishonor to the profession.
- 4.12 Clearly distinguish between statements made or actions taken as a private individual and those made as a member or representative of one of the cognate organizations.

## 5.0 Ethical Principles in Relationships with Colleagues

Spiritual Care Professionals engage in collegial relationships with peers, other chaplains, local clergy and counselors, recognizing that perspective and judgment are maintained through consultative interactions rather than through isolation.

Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 5.1 Honor all consultations, whether personal or client–related, with the highest professional regard and confidentiality.
- 5.2 Maintain sensitivity and professional protocol of the employing institution and/or the certifying organization when receiving or initiating referrals.
- 5.3 Exercise due caution when communicating through the internet or other electronic means.
- 5.4 Respect each other and support the integrity and well being of their colleagues.
- 5.5 Take collegial and responsible action when concerns about or direct knowledge of incompetence, impairment, misconduct or violations against this code arise.
- 5.6 Communicate sufficient information to other care team members while respecting the privacy of clients.

## 6.0 Ethical Principles in Advertising

Spiritual Care Professionals engage in appropriate informational activities that educate the public about their professional qualifications and individual scopes of practice. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 6.1 Represent their competencies, education, training and experience relevant to their practice of pastoral care, education and counseling in an accurate manner.
- 6.2 Do not use any professional identification (business cards, letterhead, Internet or telephone directory, etc.) if it is false, misleading, fraudulent or deceptive.
- 6.3 List and claim as evidence only degrees and certifications that are earned from educational institutions and/or training programs recognized by the certifying organizations of Spiritual Care Professionals.
- 6.4 Ascertain that the qualifications of their employees, supervisees and students are represented in a manner that is not false, misleading, fraudulent or deceptive.
- 6.5 Represent themselves as providing specialized services only if they have the appropriate education, training or supervised experience.

## 7.0 Ethical Principles in Research

Spiritual Care Professionals engaging in research follow guidelines and applicable laws that strive to protect the dignity, privacy and well being of all participants. Spiritual Care Professionals:

- 7.1 Engage only in research within the boundaries of their competence.
- 7.2 In research activities involving human participants, are aware of and ensure that the research question, design and implementation are in full compliance with ethical principles.
- 7.3 Adhere to informed consent, including a clear and understandable explanation of the procedures, a description of the risks and benefits, and the duration of the desired participation.
- 7.4 Inform all participants of the right to withdraw consent and to discontinue involvement at any time.
- 7.5 Engage in research while being sensitive to the cultural characteristics of participants.
- 7.6 Maintain the confidentiality of all research participants and inform participants of any limits of that confidentiality.
- 7.7 Use any information obtained through research for professional purposes only.
- 7.8 Exercise conscientiousness in attributing sources in their research and writing thereby avoiding plagiarism.
- 7.9 Report research data and findings accurately.

## Spiritual Care Collaborative Principles for Processing Ethical Complaints

As spiritual care professionals from many faith traditions we recognize the infinite value of each person and demonstrate respect for all living beings and the natural environment.

While our individual spiritual care organizations may configure specific procedures in different ways, we are all committed to accountability to the principles stated in this document. We strive toward the very best in our common calling as healers as we steadfastly seek to confront ethical breaches as both challenge and opportunity. In so doing we seek to discover the true meaning of concepts like “faithfulness” and “justice.”

The principles of restorative justice should inform the lens and questions by which situations are addressed within each organization’s process of addressing ethical concerns. Restorative justice asks: Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? (Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 2002, p. 21)

It is with the above realization in mind that the following principles for ethical processes have been fashioned. They exist to serve two complementary purposes:

1. To provide our organizations and their members with procedures designed to support highly ethical behavior and a means to address breaches in the Code of Ethics.
2. To communicate clearly to the public at large the means by which we seek to fashion our ethical ideals into practical instruments of service.

### Guiding Principles

Following is a general set of principles, which should serve as the foundation for procedures for addressing ethical concerns:

1. Each process for ethical accountability shall be consistent with the adopted Code of Ethics.
2. Each organization shall administer its own procedures and impose sanctions maintaining a commitment to respect for the dignity and wellbeing of each person involved in the process.
3. Each process should be based on transparency, and designed to encourage as much openness and communication as possible.
4. Each process will balance transparency and confidentiality. Maintenance of records will permit access to information and materials only in accordance with an organization’s policies.

**Recommended Elements for Ethics Procedures**

Each professional organization's framework within which to process concerns about ethical behavior of members should include the following:

1. Use of an accountability statement (with renewal subject to the discretion of each organization, e.g. annual renewal when membership is renewed)
2. Structure for processing an ethical complaint
3. Optional procedures for intervention before a formal complaint is filed
4. Guidelines for filing a written complaint
5. Guidelines for investigating a complaint, which include
  - a. notice of allegations to the person purported to have violated the Code of Ethics
  - b. opportunity for that person to be heard in responding to the allegations
  - c. by an impartial gatherer of facts
6. Guidelines for adjudicating a complaint after investigation and a clear standard of review by which evidence will be evaluated by an impartial fact finder
7. Guidelines for determining remedies and sanctions
8. Guidelines for communicating a decision
9. Guidelines for appealing a decision on the limited grounds within an organization's policies
10. Guidelines for processing an appeal and rendering a final decision
11. Guidelines for monitoring and review of sanctions
12. Guidelines for recruiting, training and providing resources for Commission members