The word ‘ethics’ comes from Greek language meaning ‘custom’ and is the branch of axiology, which attempts to understand the nature of morality; to distinguish that which is ‘right’ from that which is ‘wrong’. The origin of ethics is related to the introduction of moral behaviour in the early societies. The application of concepts such as ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and the definition of these concepts in different environments, induced the need for a formal approach to social behaviour an attempt to create commonality and organization in a society. In this context, codes of behaviour were created and different forms of behaviour enforcement adopted.

As societies evolve, the relationships between individuals become more complex and so the etiquettes and codes of conduct. The development of business relationships has raised many ethical dilemmas, ethical counselling being one of them. Counselling is not a regulated profession in many countries therefore, the use of ethical standards is a method of guiding:

1. Quality of the services provided by the counsellors, quality of training provided to counsellors and the duty of protecting the clients.

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2. These standards provide conduct guidelines for professionals. It also serves the purpose of structuring the counselling services, providing professional descriptions and service boundaries. According to Daniluk and Haverkamp (1993) “the main ethical framework referred to in many discussions of therapy is one based on the concepts of autonomy, fidelity, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence and self-interest.”

The need for professionalisation has created a common link between ethical behaviour and legal conduct in the therapy fields. Legislation was provided to primarily protect clients from misguidance and ultimately to provide guidelines for the profession. However, as cited previously, in most countries ethical conduct in counselling is not yet part of the legal framework— which outlines the importance of professional associations in providing guidelines and codes of conduct for affiliated professionals. The very labeling of counselling as a helping professional suggests that one has assumed the responsibilities of the profession in providing for the clientele and serving the public. These responsibilities include acceptable standards of performance or competence, an accepted code of personal conduct in relationships with clients and the public and a commitment to contribute to the public well-being that transcends monetary gain. A profession’s commitment to appropriate ethical and legal standards is critical to the profession’s earning, maintaining and deserving the public’s trust. Adhering to such guidelines is, therefore, the responsibility of all members of the profession (Gibson & Mitchell, 2003).

Counsellor will offer a non-judgmental professional service, free from discrimination, honouring the individuality of the client. Counsellors respect the essential humanity, worth and dignity of all people and this is reflected in their work. It is very important that no value judgement should be passed at the client and the counsellor should be free from bias, preference, opinion, favour, feelings of prejudice regarding the physical appearance, gender,
locality and status of the client. To be aware of one’s values, attitudes and beliefs and not to impose these on the clients. Secondly, establish the helping relationship in order to maintain the integrity and empowerment of the client without offering advice. To assist the client in taking the decision without advice is the most important goal of counselling. Counsellor own opinion and suggestions have to be restrained and the client has to be capacitated to take the decision for himself. They make clear to the clients the terms on which counselling is being offered and establish clear agreements about the counselling process. The commitment is to ongoing personal and professional development i.e., working for larger and more inclusive goals than short-term individual goals (APA, 1990).

Some of the Ethical Principles of Counselling are discussed below:

1. Confidentiality and Privileged Communication:
   Confidentiality plays a major role in defining the communication between a counsellor and a client. Counsellors should respect the privacy of their clients and preserve the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of their work. Trust is the backbone of therapy. There may be many predominant issues in confidentiality.

   (a) Consultation with supervisor may breach confidentiality except when serious physical harm to themselves and others is involved.

   (b) Record keeping information.

   (c) Confidentiality of the information that the client has revealed identity to be kept a secret.

   (d) Inform the client about confidentiality. In distinguishing between confidentiality and privileged communication, it is important to remember that confidentiality is primarily an ethical concept whereas privileged communication is a
Confidentiality is defined as an ethical responsibility and professional duty that demands that information learned in private interaction with a client not be revealed to others. Professional ethical standards mandate this behaviour except when the counsellor’s commitment to uphold client confidences must be set aside due to special and compelling circumstances or legal mandate. Exceptions to confidentiality and privileged communications are given by Remley and Herlihy, 2001.

2. **Autonomy:** Counsellors should make every effort to foster self-determination and individual responsibility on the part of clients. It’s a respect for the client right to be self-governing. This principle emphasizes the clients’ commitment to participate in counselling, usually on a voluntary basis, to seek informed consent, protect privacy, informing the client of any conflicts once they become apparent. It prohibits the counsellor from manipulation of the client against their will may be for socially beneficial ends. Clients are seen as ends in themselves not means to an end.

3. **Beneficence:** A commitment to promoting the clients well-being. This principle means to act in the best interest of your client. To provide service based on training/experience. To continue updating ones knowledge for professional development and to enhance the quality of services provided to the client. Here, the obligation of the counsellor becomes important because the client may have at that point of time diminished autonomy based an immaturity, distress, psychological disturbance, emotional imbalance or nervous break down.

4. **Non-maleficence:** A commitment to avoiding harm to the client. This principle is to avoid sexual, financial and emotional or any form of exploitation. In India where there are no specified rules for same sex therapist/
counsellor this becomes pertinent. The counsellor should not to take any financial favour, help or aid from the client for their own needs and not to exploit the weaker, dependent and vulnerable position of the client. To cause no harm and to foster psychological and physical well-being of the client.

5. **Justice**: Counsellor needs to provide fair, impartial and adequate service to all clients. To provide just and equal opportunity, disregarding their personal and social characteristics which might give rise to discrimination/oppression. Respect for human rights and dignity should actually reflect in their work.

6. **Self Respect**: Fostering the practitioners self-knowledge and care for self. Seeking counselling for appropriate personal, professional support and development. To keep update on training, active encouragement in life enhancing activities and relationships.

Counsellors are strongly encouraged to aspire for personal moral qualities like:

1. **Empathy**: Feeling from another person’s perspective. ‘Standing in the client’s shoes’.
2. **Sincerity**: A personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
3. **Integrity**: Straight forwardness and commitment to being moral in dealing with others, honesty and coherence.
4. **Resilience**: Strength to work for the client without getting stressed.
5. **Respect**: Showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves.
6. **Humility**: The ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one’s own strengths and weaknesses.
7. **Competence**: Using skills and knowledge to do what is required.
8. **Fairness:** The consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform discussions and actions.

9. **Wisdom:** Possession of sound judgment.

10. **Courage:** To act despite fears, risks and uncertainty.

11. **Commitment:** To keep up appointments and respect the individual.

12. **Concern:** To be all concerned and give adequate time/attention to the client.

The *ethical responsibilities* of the counselling relationship:

(i) **Client’s well-being:** Counsellors should take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client suffers neither physical nor psychological harm during counselling. They seek to promote the client’s control over his or her life, by respecting and supporting the client’s ability to make choices and decisions. Counsellors are aware of their influential positions with respect to clients and avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients in financial, sexual, emotional or any other ways. They should also avoid fostering long term dependence unnecessarily (Mabe and Rollin, 1986).

(ii) **Boundaries of the counselling relationship:** Counsellors should be responsible for setting and monitoring boundaries between the counselling relationship and any other kind of relationship and making this explicit to the client. Secondly having more than one type of relationship may lead to enmeshment of relationship boundaries, misuse of power and impaired professional judgement, resulting in harming the client. When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, counsellors should take appropriate steps to ensure that their judgement is not impaired and their power is not being misused, such precautions may include seeking supervision. Thirdly, engaging in any kind of sexual intimacy with clients
during counselling is unethical. Finally counsellors use discretion when accepting superiors or subordinates as clients.

(iii) **Contracting:** All information in any form given to clients before counselling commences should reflect accurately the nature of the service on offer and the training, qualifications and relevant experience of the counsellor. Counsellors are responsible for communicating the terms on which counselling is being offered, including availability the degree of confidentiality offered, provisions for safety and the counsellors expectations of clients regarding fees, cancelled appointments and any other significant matters.

Counsellors and their clients should work jointly to define counselling aims, taking into account the abilities and circumstances of clients and reviewing the counselling contract on an ongoing basis. Counsellors should communicate clearly the extent of the confidentiality they are offering to their clients (Shilloto-Clarke, 1996).

(iv) **Respecting diversity:** Counsellors should be aware of their own values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours and how these apply in a diverse society and avoid imposing their values on clients. They should not engage in unreasonable discrimination based on age, colour, culture, ethnic group, gender, sexual preference, race, religion, disability, political orientation, martial status, socio-economic status or any other aspect of human life.

(v) **Financial relationships:** It should be acceptable for counsellors to provide professional services for little or no financial return. Counsellors exercise great discretion in giving and receiving gifts and donations to or from clients during the course of counselling.

(vi) **Relationships with former clients:** Counsellors should always remain accountable for their relationships with
former clients. They should exercise caution entering into any other type of relationship with former clients.

(vii) **Termination and referral:** Counsellors should take steps not to abandon or neglect clients at any stage of counselling. If counsellors feel unable to be of professional assistance to the client, they should either avoid entering or immediately terminate a counselling relationship and suggest appropriate alternatives. If clients decline the suggested referral, counsellors are not obligated to continue the relationship. Counsellors who terminate a counselling relationship give advance and sufficient notice with adequate explanation to the client of impending termination. Counsellors attempt to gain client agreement when possible. Following termination, counsellors are required to assist their clients in making appropriate arrangements for a continuation of counselling, when required by the client.

(viii) **Research, training, publication and presentation:** Data derived from a counselling relationship can be used for research, training, presentation and publication only if the content is disguised so that the individuals remain anonymous. Identification of a client in research, training, publication or presentation is permissible only when the client has reviewed all the material and has agreed, in writing, to its release.

(ix) **Legal requirements:** When responding to legal requirements to disclose confidential information, counsellors should provide only essential information. Counsellors have a duty to inform the court of potential harm to the client or the counselling relationship as a result of the disclosure. Counsellors should seek legal advice if in doubt about their rights and obligations regarding confidentiality.
The overall effect has been the recognition that this profession is maturing and facing complex ethical challenges. It is for the counsellors to change the professional culture and ethos from conformity to rules to ethical accountability and engagement. This will foster ethical understanding and they will practice intrinsic ethics.

REFERENCES


*IACP Code of Ethics*. Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. html.


http://www.enhancehealing.com/articles/category.php