

## Codes of ethics and practice

### Introduction

The purpose of this Code is to set down the Ethical Principles for Good Practice of Sexual and Relationship Psychotherapy. The College for Sexual and Relationship Psychotherapy ("CSRP") requires that Psychotherapists adhere to these in all aspects of their work wherever they practise. The principles are established to underpin and guide the work of each Psychotherapist and to inform and protect all those who use their services ("the Client").

This Statement is to be read in conjunction with the CSRP Complaints Procedure, which can be obtained from UKCP, Edward House, 2 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7LV

### Ethical principles of CSRP

Trustworthiness of the Psychotherapist, striving for the highest standards of professional competence and fitness to practise

- respect for the dignity, autonomy and right to self-determination of the Client
- beneficence: the promotion of the wellbeing of the Client and acting in their best interests
- non-maleficence: the avoidance by the Psychotherapist of exploitation and abuse, and to do no harm
- anti-discrimination: a commitment by the Psychotherapist to transparency and fairness in all interactions

### Code of practice

The guidance that follows is intended to inform good practice in the implementation of the Ethical Principles. It is supplemented by CSRP Practice Guidelines where indicated. These are for the use of the Psychotherapist in circumstances where more detail is required. In specific instances of dilemmas arising in the clinical work, supervision is usually the appropriate forum in which decisions about the conduct of the work can be taken. The primary function of supervision is to ensure safe and ethical practice as outlined in the following Code of Practice.

#### 1. Fitness to practise

- a. Psychological and emotional health and fitness to practise are monitored and maintained at a level that ensures the provision of an effective service.
- b. Advice from a supervisor or other suitable colleague should be sought if a Psychotherapist's effectiveness becomes impaired for any reason, including health or personal circumstances. Withdrawal from practice for a period of time may be considered in some eventualities.
- c. Self-awareness is essential for safe practice. It is recommended that Psychotherapists continue working on their own self development and self-awareness throughout their professional lives, using personal counselling or psychotherapy or other means as necessary.
- d. Engaging in life-enhancing activities and relationships that are independent of sexual and relationship psychotherapy can aid the Psychotherapist's personal growth and development, and thereby reinforce fitness to practise.

## 2. Clinical competence

- a. Supervision and consultancy are essential, and all Psychotherapists must have access to experienced colleagues or supervisors for appropriate personal and professional support and development. (See CSRP Practice Policy 1: Supervision)
- b. Continuing professional development is required by CSRP for all practising Psychotherapists. (See CSRP Practice Policy 2: Continuing Professional Development) Seeking training and other opportunities for continuing learning is encouraged, to extend the Psychotherapist's professional knowledge and skills where relevant.
- c. Awareness of new developments in the field of sexual and relationship psychotherapy is necessary for all practising Psychotherapists, in order that the Client can be offered treatment options in the light of the fullest available knowledge.
- d. Awareness of any statutory legislation that may impact on the Psychotherapist's work should be maintained.
- e. Recognising one's own limitations as a psychotherapist is important, as is having knowledge of the availability of other resources to which referral can be made.
- f. Breaks in Practice may occur during a Psychotherapist's career. It is the responsibility of the Psychotherapist to ensure they are competent and fit to practice when they return to work. (See CSRP Practice Policy 4: Breaks in Clinical practice)

## 3. The Psychotherapy relationship

- a. Appropriate professional care of the Client is maintained in the psychotherapy relationship and in all interactions between the Psychotherapist and the Client.
- b. A contract between the Psychotherapist and Client needs to be in place before embarking on any psychotherapy. This establishes the rights and responsibilities of both parties in their working relationship. (See CSRP Practice Policy 3: The Contract for psychotherapy)
- c. Confidentiality is an essential part of the psychotherapy relationship and its limits and the occasions on which it might be broken should be clarified with Clients. The very existence of a psychotherapy relationship must be kept confidential as it implies the Client is undergoing personal difficulties. The requirement to maintain confidentiality remains after the psychotherapy with the Client has ended. (See CSRP Practice Policy 4: Confidentiality)
- d. Psychotherapists must not abuse the psychotherapy relationship financially, emotionally, sexually, or in any other way.
- e. Appropriate boundaries to the psychotherapy relationship must be made and maintained both during and after psychotherapy and in all interactions.
- f. Dual Relationships require careful consideration of the possible implications for the Client. Every effort should be made to avoid risking confusion between any pre-existing relationship and the professional relationship, which may impact adversely on the psychotherapy.
- g. Trust and safety in the psychotherapy relationship can be undermined if conflictual issues arise and are not dealt with effectively. Where this occurs, the Psychotherapist is expected to manage the situation honestly and to refer on if the issues cannot be resolved, or if the psychotherapy relationship becomes untenable for any other reason.
- h. Responsibilities to others as well as to the Client need to be taken into account if the Client's activities are potentially detrimental or damaging to themselves or to others who may be involved.
- i. Informed consent to the use of sexually explicit material is necessary when it is considered to be appropriate within the overall context of psychotherapy.
- j. Sexual contact or sexualised behaviour by the Psychotherapist are unacceptable with anyone to whom the Psychotherapist is providing or has provided psychotherapy.
- k. Working with Young People and Vulnerable Adults requires special knowledge of relevant issues and protection for the individual. Psychotherapists must ensure they have appropriate training to work with these Clients.

## 4. Safekeeping

- a. Appropriate premises are necessary, where privacy can normally be ensured and there is a minimum likelihood of interruption.
- b. Record Keeping is an expected ingredient of good practice, and the purpose and nature of any records in whatever form, access to them by Clients, their safe keeping, and arrangements for their disposal all require attention and can be explained to Clients. (See CSRP Practice Policy 5: Record Keeping)
- c. Adequate insurance cover is mandatory and needs to be sufficient to meet any legal claim made by a Client, or third parties, either through the Psychotherapist's own professional insurance or public insurance where an employer provides cover. Psychotherapists working online ensure that they are covered for working in this environment. Consideration should be given to continuing the period of insurance to provide adequate cover in the event of a complaint being brought and upheld in the first five years after cessation of clinical practice. In such a case the Psychotherapist, or the Psychotherapist's estate if deceased, might still be liable for damages.
- d. A Professional Executor should be appointed to ensure appropriate care of Clients in the event of unplanned cessation of practice. (See CSRP Practice Policy 6: The Appointment and Duties of a Professional Executor)
- e. Medical or legal opinions may be required and it is advisable to be aware of such resources in the area where the psychotherapy is conducted. Clients may be encouraged to seek these opinions where appropriate.

## 5. Anti-discriminatory practice

- a. Anti-discriminatory practice should underpin all professional activities. Any form of discrimination or exploitation is unacceptable.
- b. Issues of prejudice and stereotyping are likely to be present within the Psychotherapist, and Psychotherapists have a duty to bring these into their conscious awareness, and to consider ways in which they may affect the psychotherapy relationship.
- c. The value and dignity of Clients is recognised at all times. The Psychotherapist works in ways that respect the individuality of Clients and colleagues with regard to issues of difference, such as religion, race, gender, age, beliefs, orientation, sexuality and disability.
- d. Attitudes assumptions and values can be identified by the language used and interventions offered. Psychotherapists work to be aware of their own assumptions and to monitor their use of language, and ensure that interventions offered are culturally acceptable to Clients.
- e. Autonomy and right to self-determination of the Client and of others with whom they may be involved must be protected and respected in all interactions.
- f. Imposing a particular set of standards values or ideals on a Client is not appropriate in any context.

## 6. Conducting psychotherapy online

- a. Adherence to CSRP Code of Ethics and Practice applies to all virtual environments, and it is recommended that Psychotherapists also familiarise themselves with BACP Guidelines for online counselling.
- b. Training is recommended to provide a professional service when working online. It is not assumed that a Psychotherapist competent in working face to face will automatically have competence working online. Psychotherapists considering working online have a responsibility to ensure they have sufficient therapeutic experience and technological knowledge.

- c. Supervision of online work from someone who is trained and experienced in working online is advisable.
- d. Knowledge of law relevant to the Client's geographic location need to be understood and complied with, including the right to practise. If the psychotherapy is being provided within the UK, then the law of the UK prevails.
- e. Assessment of Clients for online work is vital. This ensures that where there are limitations or exceptions to the advisability of working online, appropriate referrals are made either online or within the Client's geographical area.
- f. Possible advantages and disadvantages of online psychotherapy, for example the lack of visual and auditory cues, possible limitations to technology in the event of an error in use of technology, need clarification with the Client.
- g. The technology skills of the Client need to be assessed to ensure that their platform is compatible with the varying programs and platforms the Psychotherapist may use during the course of psychotherapy.
- h. The terms of use of the Psychotherapist's online service should be available to Clients either as a download document, or on a website, and should contain information about how email addresses, credit card information and the Client's records are used, shared or stored. Also included is the Psychotherapist's geographical location and how they can be contacted, whether through a postal address, telephone or email.
- i. The contract for psychotherapy when working online includes, in addition to the issues included in face to face work, agreement about how to proceed in the event of a technology breakdown or other disconnection occurring during a session. It also contains a statement clarifying the possible risks of the use of insecure communications or storage methods, such as unencrypted email, that the Client may elect to use.
- j. Security of data relating to the Client is paramount and breaches of security can amount to professional negligence. Privacy of data is maintained by the use of encryption and appropriate access control for all drives, files, and communication systems, and firewall and virus protection for computers. If the Psychotherapist is not completely confident of the security of any storage or communications mechanism it is inadvisable to proceed with working in this way. Security should be regularly reviewed and updated.
- k. Confidentiality is best maintained in all electronic communications by Psychotherapists ensuring that as little sensitive or personally identifiable material as possible is stored or transmitted.

## 7. Research and publication

- a. Any research involving Clients or participants should conform to the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki 1964, as modified by the Assembly in 1989, which provides guidelines and basic principles for combining research involving human subjects with professional care.
- b. The research methods used should comply with the CSR Code of Ethics and Practice and must not adversely affect Clients or participants. The dissemination of research in any format which includes clinical material must safeguard the welfare and anonymity of Clients. (see CSR Practice Policy 7: Research)
- c. Publication of work within the field of sexual and relationship psychotherapy develops the profession by communicating research and knowledge to the community. Psychotherapists of CSR are encouraged to publish their work. It is the responsibility of authors to be both objective and critical, and not to abuse the trust of the reader. Informed written consent of Clients is obtained when any clinical material is offered for publication.
- d. Correctness and accuracy of work reported in publication are essential, so as to not bring the profession into disrepute. Research misconduct such as falsification, fabrication, plagiarism and the misappropriation of credit in publication are to be avoided at all times.

## 8. Other professionals, agencies and the college

- a. In agency employment it is advisable to be acquainted with agency policies or codes of conduct with regard to such matters as child protection, record keeping, research and publication, clients access to records, correspondence and so on. Where there is a discrepancy between CSRP standards and agency standards, the Psychotherapist will need to be clear about which codes of ethics and practice and which standards they are working to at any time.
- b. The clinical practice of another Psychotherapist should not be commented upon adversely to Clients.
- c. Concern about the fitness to practise of another Psychotherapist may be raised by information disclosed in psychotherapy. In such circumstances, the Psychotherapist has a duty to respond appropriately. This response might mean, after due process, bringing a complaint about another Psychotherapist, always taking due regard of the need for confidentiality.
- d. The requirement for responsible conduct on behalf of a Psychotherapist extends not only to Clients, but to CSRP, UKCP and the profession as a whole, thus any activities which could bring CSRP or the profession of sexual and relationship psychotherapy into disrepute should be avoided. Caution should be exercised when participating in social activities in all public venues including social networking sites on the Internet, where information about and images of the Psychotherapist are made public.
- e. Advertising is appropriate so long as statements are descriptive and not evaluative. The information should be limited to name, relevant qualifications and registration, address and telephone number, times of availability, and listing of services and conditions of referral. The correct descriptor for Psychotherapists who are on the UKCP Register of Psychotherapists is Sexual and Relationship Psychotherapist.
- f. Conviction of a criminal offence wherever incurred, or a civil judgement wherever entered against a Psychotherapist relating to their professional work, or a complaint upheld against a Psychotherapist in another organisation, must be reported to CSRP.