

# ETHICS AND PRACTICE

REVISED DECEMBER 2004

With effect from 1st December 2004, the documents in this publication represent the Association's principles for safe, effective practice of Christian Counselling and related activities. As such we require all members to be fully aware of their contents and to engage in their activities in compliance with "Ethics and Practice". The aim of the Association has been, and will remain, to promote excellence in Christian Counselling. This publication is part of our strategy to further that aim.

David Depledge  
Chief Executive

## FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING

### 1. Framework for Christian Counselling

This document is one part of a set of four, brought together in this booklet. We have produced them to inform and enable safe professional practice by counsellors who work from a Christian standpoint. The other three documents are:  
"Ethics for Members of the Association of Christian Counsellors"  
"Good Practice in Christian Counselling and related fields"  
"Complaints Procedure"

### 2. Definitions

#### 2.1. Basis of Christian Counselling

- 2.1.1. It is not our purpose to make all Christian counsellors think the same or counsel in the same way. However, we do expect our counsellors to have a specifically Christian worldview. A Christian counsellor works with overall assumptions that underpin his or her counselling. These may be implicit or explicit. They should be consistent with:
- 2.1.2. What the Scriptures reveal about the nature and activity of God – that He is both the creator and judge of human beings and their redeemer in Christ.
- 2.1.3. People being created in the image of God – although, because they are fallen and sinful, they are in need of God's redeeming grace.
- 2.1.4. Christ as the one true Saviour and Lord. Through His life, death, resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, God has made available all the resources of His grace to rescue people, heal them and bring them to maturity and wholeness.
- 2.1.5. God's work of justice and mercy in the world and His love towards all people.
- 2.1.6. His work of rescuing people, even though they do not deserve it, and bringing them to faith and maturity in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- 2.1.7. The reality of a fallen world where suffering, pain, guilt, fear, broken relationships and fragmented communities occur.
- 2.1.8. God's desire for His people to work to bring healing and wholeness of spirit, mind and body.

### 3. Christian Counselling

In light of the above, we may define Christian counselling as: "that activity which seeks to help people towards constructive change and growth in any or every aspect of their lives through a caring relationship and within agreed relational boundaries, carried out by a counsellor who has a Christian worldview, values and assumptions."

### 4. Statement of Faith

- 4.1. We affirm the central truths of the Christian faith as expressed in the Bible and historic creeds. God is one and He has revealed this unity to mankind as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We recognise these truths and specifically the Lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture in all areas of belief and practice.
- 4.2. We acknowledge that there are different emphases within the various Christian counselling traditions and we recognise that some Christian approaches are more at ease than others in drawing on insights from secular theory and practice.

### 5. Ethical dilemmas

We acknowledge that ethical norms may sometimes clash. Counsellors may sometimes need to hold them in tension. Since every situation is different, it is not possible to set out a hierarchy of norms. However, applying broader Christian ethical norms such as love, grace, holiness and forgiveness may help in resolving dilemmas.

## ETHICS FOR MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELLORS

1. This document brings together and replaces all the earlier codes for counsellors, trainers and supervisors. It is also applicable to the use of counselling skills and to the running of organisations engaged in these areas. It is therefore applicable to members of the Association of Christian Counsellors at every level and to participants in the Voluntary Register of Christian Counsellors. It is one part of a set of four documents, brought together in this booklet. We have produced this booklet to inform and enable safe professional practice by counsellors who work from a Christian standpoint. The other documents are:  
"Framework for Christian Counselling"  
"Good Practice in Christian Counselling and related fields"  
"Complaints Procedure"
2. **Terminology and rationale**  
In this document:
  - 2.1. The word 'we' refers to the Association of Christian Counsellors
  - 2.2. The term 'counselling' refers to
    - 2.2.1. individuals and organisations working to provide counselling, training, supervision, research, or other services which use counselling skills
    - 2.2.2. or the management of any of these activities.
  - 2.3. The term 'client' is a generic term which refers to anyone who receives any of these services. The client may be an individual or a group.
  - 2.4. In this document we are following a trend set within many

other professions by moving away from Codes which try to have a ruling for every conceivable circumstance. Instead, we are setting a framework within which we can measure judgements about the appropriateness of action or inaction.

### 3. Methods of working

- 3.1. The methods we employ will be consistent both with the 'Framework for Christian Counselling' and with a high standard of professional practice (specifically as set out in "Good Practice in Christian Counselling and Related Fields".) We take this to imply that the Association and its members will:
- 3.1.1. maintain a high quality of skills and knowledge, and apply these well;
  - 3.1.2. conduct their relationships with clients with integrity;
  - 3.1.3. respect individuals' rights and dignity;
  - 3.1.4. value the quality of relationships between people;
  - 3.1.5. minimise distress and suffering;
  - 3.1.6. encourage clients to understand themselves appropriately;
  - 3.1.7. allow clients to move towards personal wholeness - mentally, spiritually and physically;
  - 3.1.8. be sensitive to the diversity of human experience, values and culture.

### 4. Values

- 4.1. In support of our values, we have set out below a series of principles which further define appropriate conduct of members. We will assess actions on these values and principles. We acknowledge that in some circumstances, members may face situations where adhering to a particular principle seems to put them in contravention of others. We expect members to consider all the relevant circumstances with as much care as is reasonably possible and to be appropriately accountable for decisions they make.

### 5. Principles of Ethical Work by members of ACC

- 5.1. Members should be trustworthy. The relationship with the client creates a position of trust which creates responsibilities. An example of one such responsibility is the obligation to maintain confidentiality, using information only for the purpose for which the client disclosed it, or in accordance with a contract (normally written) between the member and the client.
- 5.2. Members should respect their clients' right to take decisions for, and to act for, themselves. The member will maintain the client's integrity by, among other things:
- 5.2.1. supplying accurate information about the service they are offering the client;
  - 5.2.2. agreeing a clear and freely entered into contract for counselling;
  - 5.2.3. providing the client with privacy and confidentiality;
  - 5.2.4. avoiding conflicts of interest (for example line manager/supervisor, trainer/counsellor);
  - 5.2.5. avoiding manipulation (even for apparently beneficial purposes).
- 5.3. Members should be committed to securing the client's best interests. This means, among other things, that members should:
- 5.3.1. work within the limits of their competence;
  - 5.3.2. monitor and review the outcome of their work;
  - 5.3.3. have regular and adequate professional supervision and/or appropriate professional support;
  - 5.3.4. continue training and professional development.
- 5.4. Members should be particularly aware of their responsibility to clients who are not well equipped to take decisions for themselves because of youth, advancing age, illness, distress, lack of understanding or learning disability.
- 5.5. Members should avoid any action which might cause harm to a client. This means, among other things, that members:

- 5.5.1. will not take advantage of clients or exploit them in any way;  
(For example, sexually, financially, psychologically, spiritually or emotionally)
- 5.5.2. will work only when they are fit (physically, psychologically and spiritually) to do so without harm to the client;
- 5.5.3. will work to minimise any harm they cause to the client unintentionally;
- 5.5.4. will challenge incompetence or malpractice on the part of others whenever they become aware of it;
- 5.5.5. will co-operate with any professional investigation of standards.

### 5.6. Members should treat all clients fairly. This means, among other things, that members:

- 5.6.1. will respect the rights and dignity of every client;
- 5.6.2. will be aware of their legal responsibilities in relation to clients;
- 5.6.3. will allocate services to potential clients in a fair and equal way;
- 5.6.4. will avoid acting with discrimination (though we do allow positive discrimination in favour of particularly disadvantaged groups).

### 5.7. Members should act in a way that safeguards their own welfare. This means, among other things, that members:

- 5.7.1. will work in a way which is likely to help them keep healthy and safe. This includes keeping a good balance between working time, family time, social time, non-work interests and time for self;
- 5.7.2. will seek counselling or therapy or ministry and other opportunities for personal development as they need them;
- 5.7.3. will normally protect their own position by obtaining appropriate insurance to cover the work they undertake;
- 5.7.4. will make use of regular and adequate supervision and/or other appropriate means of professional and personal support.

### 6. Personal qualities

- 6.1. Each member is unique and has their own blend of gifts, skills and attributes. We can describe these as their personal qualities. There are some qualities that members should try to develop in order to benefit the client. These include:
- 6.1.1. Genuineness: what they say must match what they think and what they do
  - 6.1.2. Honesty: they must be straightforward and avoid all forms of deception.
  - 6.1.3. Wisdom: they must make sound judgements based on sound principles.
  - 6.1.4. Spiritual maturity: they must have an informed faith which influences the way they live.
  - 6.1.5. Competence: they must only do work which reflects the abilities they have developed through training and experience.
  - 6.1.6. Empathy: they must be able to appreciate another person's experience from that person's perspective and to show that they understand its significance.
  - 6.1.7. Steadfastness: they must be able to cope with the client's concerns without being personally undermined.
  - 6.1.8. Respect: they must respect everyone and show compassion to all.
  - 6.1.9. Humility: they must have a realistic estimate of their own strengths and weaknesses.
  - 6.1.10. Equity: they must make fair assessments of people and situations based on the best available information.
  - 6.1.11. Courage: they must not allow fear or uncertainty to stop them doing what they need to do.

## 7. Working ethically

- 7.1. By moving to this sort of ethical statement we aim to avoid legalism – obeying the letter of a detailed code rather than the spirit of it. We hope this statement will cause members to take responsibility for ethical judgements and that they will base their ethical judgements on the principles within it. Some of these judgements will be difficult. In some circumstances the best decision will be less than obvious. Where this is the case we encourage members to keep a record, at the time, of the reasons why they have taken particular decisions and what advice they took. They should keep this record so they can refer back to it if they need to. We would like members to tell us about challenges they face, so that these can inform future publications.

## GOOD PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING AND RELATED FIELDS

1. This document is one of a set of four, brought together in this booklet. We have produced them to inform and enable safe professional practice by counsellors who work from a Christian standpoint. The other documents are:
  - “Framework for Christian Counselling”
  - “Ethics for Members of the Association of Christian Counsellors”
  - “Complaints Procedure”
2. **Terminology and rationale**
  - 2.1. Achieving, maintaining and developing good practice are fundamental to our aims. We have designed this document to cover the many different situations in which counselling and related activities take place. However, a circumstance might arise which this document does not seem to cover. If this should happen, we assert that we have set out here sufficient principles of good practice for those involved to make proper judgements.
  - 2.2. We use the term ‘member’ to refer to anyone who is delivering counselling or counselling related services. ‘Member’ may include [as the context permits] anyone undertaking the role(s) of counsellor, trainer, educator, supervisor, researcher, provider of counselling skills or manager of any of these services.
  - 2.3. In this document “related services” refers to training, teaching, research and provision of services including counselling skills.
  - 2.4. The term ‘client’ is used as a generic term to refer to anyone receiving any of these services
  - 2.5. ‘We’ refers to the Association of Christian Counsellors.
3. **Fundamental premise** “All clients are entitled to high standards of practice and care from members.”
  - 3.1. To achieve this, members will need to be professionally competent, have appropriate, constructive relationships with clients and colleagues and adhere to professional ethics.
  - 3.2. High standards of practice and care
    - 3.2.1. Good practice requires the member and client to agree their respective rights and responsibilities at the start of work and to review them as appropriate throughout the relationship.
    - 3.2.2. Members should communicate to clients the nature and basis of counselling they offer, including availability, degree of confidentiality offered and any other significant matters.
    - 3.2.3. A high standard of care requires competent counselling (or a related service) that meets the client’s needs, delivered by a member who is appropriately supported and accountable.
    - 3.2.4. Members should work within the limits of their training and experience, taking advantage of available professional support. If a member believes that work with a client requires additional services by others and such services are not available they must consider whether they are able provide a good standard of care.
- 3.2.5. Members should exercise great care when entering into an agreement to provide counselling (or related services) with someone with whom they already have (or have had) a different type of relationship (for example, as a friend, a colleague or a trainer). It may not be beneficial to provide counselling (or a related service) in these circumstances. It is particularly important in these circumstances to be fully accountable to colleagues and/or a supervisor for any such relationships that occur.
- 3.2.6. Members should keep at least brief records of their counselling work with clients, unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so. Members must make sure that records are accurate and respectful of clients and colleagues. They should keep records in a safe place where confidentiality will not be compromised. Members should comply with all legal requirements with regard to protecting information and giving clients rights of access.
- 3.2.7. Review and audit of the competence and effectiveness of services delivered can enhance the standard of practice. The procedures should respect agreed limits of confidentiality.
4. **Fundamental premise** “Counsellors and those offering related services should be competent”
  - 4.1. Competent practice
    - 4.1.1. Counsellors, trainers and supervisors must have regular supervision or consultative support for their work. We strongly encourage managers, researchers and providers of counselling skills to consider their professional needs and to obtain appropriate support for themselves.
    - 4.1.2. As an essential part of maintaining good practice, members should regularly evaluate the work they have done. We recommend that this evaluation should include feedback from colleagues, supervisors, managers and others as well as client satisfaction feedback. Responding openly and constructively to evaluation helps to maintain and enhance competent practice.
    - 4.1.3. Members must keep up to date with the latest professional knowledge, debates and techniques (at a level appropriate to their work). They must respond to changing thinking and ideas. They should carefully consider their own need for continuing professional development and engage in appropriate training.
    - 4.1.4. Members need to know any legal requirements that affect their work. They must comply with these.
5. **Fundamental premise** “Clients may expect members to be trustworthy.”
  - 5.1. Trustworthy practice
    - 5.1.1. We expect members to gain and keep the trust of clients. This means that:
      - 5.1.1.1. Clients have all the information they need to make an informed choice as to whether to use any service a member is offering. Clients have a right to terminate the service they are receiving. Members should make clients aware of circumstances in which they might terminate the work. (A written contract or agreement should cover any financial implications of a client withdrawing).
      - 5.1.1.2. The client has the member’s full attention and respect.
      - 5.1.1.3. Members use clear, culturally appropriate forms of respectful communication.
      - 5.1.1.4. Members respect clients’ privacy and dignity.
      - 5.1.1.5. Members pay careful attention to maintaining confidentiality.

- 5.1.1.6. Members provide services with the client's explicit consent. For counselling and supervision, this will normally be in writing. It is best to avoid relying on implicit consent unless there are compelling reasons to, because this approach is more prone to misunderstandings. Taking any action with regard to a client without their consent is an exceptional course of action that members should only undertake after consulting appropriately with colleagues, managers and supervisors. This consultation must be documented
- 5.1.1.7. Members deal appropriately with situations in which clients pose a risk of causing serious harm to themselves or others. This can be particularly difficult and stressful for members. The overriding objective must be to protect all concerned from harm but there should also be an aim to ensure for the client a high quality of care that is as respectful of the client's ability to decide issues for themselves as circumstances permit. As far as possible, members should only take potentially contentious decisions after consulting appropriately with colleagues, managers and supervisors.
- 5.1.1.8. We would normally expect members working with children and young people to do so with the consent of someone with parental responsibilities. Members should clarify the level of confidentiality they are offering to the child or young person, preferably in writing. A member should not offer services to a child or young person without permission from a person with parental responsibility unless they:  
have consulted appropriately with colleagues, managers and supervisors and/or are following clear written guidelines from an employing agency.
- 5.1.1.9. Members show respect for the client by protecting identifiable and sensitive information from unauthorised disclosure. If the client authorises disclosure or the law requires it, members should undertake disclosure in ways that best protect the client and his or her trust in the member. Members are accountable to their clients and to their profession for the way they manage confidentiality in general and particularly for any disclosures they make without their client's consent.
- 5.1.1.10. If any client asks a member for information about the way that they are working or about any assessment that they have made, the member should provide that information, unless they consider that giving this information would be detrimental to the client. Clients have legal rights to information and members should understand and comply with these.
- 5.1.1.11. Members will not abuse their working relationship with the client in order to gain sexual, emotional, financial or any other kind of personal advantage. Any type of sexual activity with a client is inappropriate even where the client has given consent. Members should exercise extreme caution if entering into personal or business relationships with former clients. They should expect to be professionally accountable if the relationship becomes detrimental to the client or to the standing of the profession.
- 5.1.1.12. Members should not allow any personal views they may hold about lifestyle, gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, beliefs or culture to prejudice their professional relationships with clients.
- 5.1.1.13. Members should be willing to undergo independent vetting of their suitability (for example, by the Criminal Records Bureau or Disclosure Scotland.)
- 5.1.1.14. Members should honour commitments to clients, colleagues and others with whom they have a professional relationship.
- 5.1.1.15. Members must not bring the Association or the counselling profession generally into disrepute, by anything they do or fail to do.
- 6. Fundamental premise "Teachers and Trainers will be competent."**
- 6.1. Teaching and training
- 6.1.1. We encourage members with appropriate skills and experience to engage in teaching and training so that their professional knowledge and practice will assist other counsellors, trainees and ultimately the public.
- 6.1.2. Members who provide training should have the necessary learning, experience and resources to be competent trainers.
- 6.1.3. Trainers should not impose their personal values and beliefs on to trainees.
- 6.1.4. Members should demonstrate respect for other models, theories, churchmanship, spirituality, beliefs and value systems. Trainees should be made aware of the importance of working within the Association's Ethical Framework or that of another professional body.
- 6.1.5. Members should be objective and honest in their assessments of their students.
- 6.1.6. Members must not observe clients, record them or make personally identifiable disclosures about them for training purposes without first obtaining their willing consent, obtained without pressure.
- 7. Fundamental premise "Supervision and support are essential to counselling and related services."**
- 7.1. Supervising and managing
- 7.1.1. Those who provide supervision and management should have appropriate training so that they are able to monitor and improve practice by members with the aim of protecting clients from incompetent practice.
- 7.1.2. Members are assumed to hold responsibility for work with the client unless a formal agreement exists to transfer the responsibility to a supervisor or consultant.
- 7.1.3. All counsellors, supervisors and trainers must receive supervision/consultative support.
- 8. Fundamental premise "Research is vital to the future of the profession."**
- 8.1. Researching
- 8.1.1. We encourage members to support research on professional issues and to be willing to take part in it.
- 8.1.2. We expect members who undertake research to do so with close attention to the quality and integrity of the work. When they publish results of research they must do so in such a way as not to mislead those receiving it.
- 8.1.3. Members undertaking research must make sure that no-one takes part in it unless that person has freely given informed consent and is aware that they may withdraw from the research.

- 8.1.4. The research methods used should follow standards of good practice and must not affect clients adversely.
- 9. Fundamental premise** “Members should only work when fit to do so.”
- 9.1. Fitness to practice
- 9.1.1. Members must make sure that they remain fit to provide an effective professional service. If, for any reason, this is not possible, for example because of health, personal or professional circumstances, they should seek the advice of their supervisor or experienced colleagues and, if necessary, withdraw from practice until they are once again fit to practice. They should make suitable arrangements for any clients that are affected.
- 10. Fundamental premise** “When mistakes are made, harm should be minimised.”
- 10.1. Mistakes and client dissatisfaction
- 10.1.1. Members must respond promptly and appropriately to any complaint they receive from a client.
- 10.1.2. A member who has made an error in their practice should seek professionally acceptable ways to minimise its effects.
- 10.1.3. A member should discuss with their supervisor, manager or other experienced practitioners any circumstances in which they may have made errors in their work so as to ensure that they have taken appropriate steps to minimise any harm and to prevent those errors taking place again.
- 10.1.4. We strongly encourage members to obtain adequate professional indemnity and liability insurance cover for their work. (This is mandatory at some levels of counsellor accreditation with the Association.)
- 10.1.5. If a member believes he/she has acted in accordance with good practice but their client is not satisfied, they may wish to suggest that the client seeks a second opinion where this is appropriate and practical.
- 10.1.6. When appropriate, members should tell clients about the existence of this Association’s Complaints Procedure and any other applicable complaints or disciplinary procedures. If asked to do so, practitioners should explain to their clients how to obtain further information about these procedures.
- 11. Fundamental premise** “Members have a role in maintaining professional standards generally.”
- 11.1. Maintaining professional standards
- 11.1.1. All members, when they have good reason to believe that other practitioners are placing clients at risk of harm, have a responsibility to protect those clients.
- 11.1.2. Members should raise any concerns with the practitioner concerned in the first instance, unless it is inappropriate to do so. If they cannot resolve the matter, they should gather the evidence available to them and, when appropriate, make it available to the practitioner’s manager, agency or professional body. It is usually inappropriate to discuss the concerns with the client.
- 11.1.3. If members are uncertain what to do, they should discuss their concerns with an experienced colleague, or a supervisor, or raise them with the Association.
- 11.1.4. All members of this Association share a responsibility to take part in its Complaints Procedures whether as the person complained against or as the provider of relevant information.
- 12. Fundamental premise** “Good working relationships assist good care of clients.”
- 12.1. Working together
- 12.1.1. Good relationships between colleagues build up the standing of counselling and related services. Poor relationships diminish it. Members therefore need to work to develop good relationships with colleagues – both other counsellors and professionals in other disciplines with which they have contact.
- 12.1.2. Members should treat all colleagues (whether in their own organisation or another) fairly and with respect. In particular, they should not allow personal views about a colleague’s lifestyle to affect working relationships and decisions, unless that lifestyle compromises the colleague’s professional performance.
- 12.1.3. It is unacceptable and unethical to discriminate against colleagues on grounds which are illegal or not related to their suitability for the work that they are engaged to do.
- 12.1.4. Members must not undermine a colleague’s relationships with clients.
- 12.1.5. All communications between colleagues about clients should be purposeful, respectful and consistent with the level of confidentiality declared to clients.
- 13. Fundamental premise** “Members are sensitive to a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic society.”
- 13.1. Members are responsible for working in a way that is sensitive and appropriate to the client’s culture, beliefs and understanding.
- 14. Fundamental premise** “Making appropriate referrals assists care of clients.”
- 14.1. Making and receiving referrals
- 14.1.1. Members must discuss with the client in advance all onward referrals to colleagues and other services. They should obtain the client’s consent both to making the referral and also to disclosing information to accompany it. The standards of good practice applicable to a referral are the same as for any other member/client relationship. In particular, members should take reasonable care to ensure that, when they disclose any confidential information during the referral process, those to whom they disclose it will treat it with the same degree of confidentiality that they have already agreed with the client.
- 14.1.2. If the professional status of a member making a referral requires that they retain overall responsibility for the work with the client, they may arrange for the person to whom they refer the client to provide them with brief progress reports. This practice is professionally acceptable. However, the person to whom they refer the client should only make such reports in consultation with the client. They should not normally do so against the client’s explicit wishes.
- 15. Fundamental premise** “Clients should be well informed about services offered.”
- 15.1. Provision of information
- 15.1.1. Members must communicate to the client the nature and basis of the counselling they are offering, including availability, the degree of confidentiality they are offering and any other significant matters.
- 15.1.2. Members are responsible for clarifying the terms on which they are offering their services before the client incurs any financial obligation.
- 15.1.3. All the information members give about services should be honest and accurate. It should avoid unjustifiable claims and be consistent with maintaining the good standing of the counselling profession.
- 15.1.4. Members should give particular care to make sure

that they do not confuse or mislead clients about their membership of professional bodies, qualifications, accreditation and experience.

**16. Fundamental premise** “Financial arrangements must be clear and open.”

16.1. Financial arrangements

- 16.1.1. Members’ financial relationships both with clients and others should be honest and open and must adhere to any agreements they make with the client.

**17. Fundamental premise** “The care of the client should not be compromised by other interests.”

17.1. Conflicts of interest

- 17.1.1. Members should avoid conflicts of interest. If a conflict of interest does occur, the member’s first concerns should be to safeguard the client’s interests and to maintain the standing of the counselling profession.

**18. Fundamental premise** “Members should seek to maintain their own well-being.”

18.1. A member’s well-being

- 18.1.1. A member’s well-being is essential to maintaining good standards of practice.
- 18.1.2. Members should make sure that their work does not have adverse effects on their health, personal relationships or mental or spiritual well-being. To achieve this they should maintain a reasonable balance between work and other aspects of life. They should get appropriate support as required to achieve this.
- 18.1.3. Members are entitled to proper consideration and respect. The Association and its member bodies should enable them to work without fear, intimidation or manipulation.

**19. Fundamental premise** “Respect should be shown to Associations of Christian Counsellors in countries outside of the United Kingdom.”

19.1. Working in other countries

- 19.1.1. Members must establish whether there is a national ACC in any country in which they may wish to work.
- 19.1.2. We expect members to communicate with any national ACC to investigate the need for any proposed initiative in the country in question.
- 19.1.3. Members should inform any national ACC in the country concerned if they receive an invitation from a church or other organisation to give teaching, ministry or training related to Counselling or Pastoral Care.
- 19.1.4. We will only accept applications from a country where there is a national ACC with the specific agreement of the ACC in that country. This applies both for applications for membership of ACC (UK) or for accreditation.

## 1. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

**1.1. This complaints procedure covers Association members (previously called Counsellor members) and Affiliated organisations of the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) and participants in the Voluntary Register of Christian Counsellors (VRCC)**

- 1.2. This document forms an essential part ACC’s commitment to protect members of the public and the reputation of the profession. ACC Members, VRCC participants and the general public should view this procedure as an umbrella over local complaints procedures. This procedure should only normally be resorted to when local complaints procedures have been exhausted.

- 1.3. The contract that a client has with an individual counsellor or an organisation should give information about Complaints Procedures including information on how to access the ACC procedure if local procedures do not resolve matters. Clients should be told to contact ACC Head Office if they wish to use the ACC Complaints procedure.
- 1.4. This document is produced to inform and enable safe professional practice by counsellors who work from a Christian standpoint. The other documents that should be read in conjunction with this document are:
- Framework for Christian Counselling
  - Ethics for Members of the Association of Christian Counsellors
  - Good Practice in Christian Counselling and related fields

**Footnote:-** Throughout this document, references to an ACC post-holder should be taken to include a deputy approved by the Board in the event of the post holder being unavailable or having a conflict of interest.

## 2. BRINGING A COMPLAINT

- 2.1. ACC will implement its Complaints Procedure in the following way:
- 2.2 The basis for making a complaint is a breach of “Ethics for members of the Association of Christian Counsellors” (The current version of this document can be found on the ACC website:- [www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org)).
- 2.3. In order for a complaint against an ACC member, affiliated organisation or a VRCC participant to be considered, it should normally be lodged within two years of the alleged breach occurring. The complainant should give the details of the complaint in writing to the Chair of ACC. The following information should be included:
- the name of the person and/or organisation against whom the complaint is made.
  - the date or dates of the alleged breach of professional ethics.
  - the place or places in which the alleged breach occurred.
  - whether the alleged breach took place within a contracted counselling relationship
  - the name of the organisation (if any) to which the counsellor belongs.
  - the details of the complaint in writing, signed and dated.
- 2.4. A complaint not satisfying the above conditions will be rejected. Complaints will normally only be investigated when the person or persons who were involved in the alleged incidents (or their duly appointed representatives) initiate the complaint.
- 2.5. All records will be held for a period of two years only, except for a summary of the complaint and the decision of the panel.
- 2.6. No expenses will be paid by the Association in respect of travel or other expenses incurred either by the complainant or the person complained against.
- 2.7. The protocols followed will be those laid down by the Association from time to time. These will be administered by the Chief Executive.
- 2.8. Before making a complaint, the complainant is expected to have sought to resolve the matter through the individual counsellor’s or organisational members’ normal complaints procedure. There should be adequate demonstration that all informal channels, or in the case of organisational members, all internal processes and procedures have been exhausted.

- 2.9. The Association reserves the right to distribute any findings upheld against a member where it considers it just and right to do so in all the circumstances.

### 3. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

- 3.1. On receiving the complainant's letter, the Chair of ACC will write to acknowledge it, normally within 7 days, and then begin the process of investigation.
- 3.2. The Chair of ACC may, after consulting with other Directors and/or Officers, suspend a counsellor from accreditation and/or membership, an organisation from affiliation or a participant from the VRCC.
- 3.3. The Chair can make this suspension with immediate effect and it may continue until the investigation is complete and the Disciplinary Committee and the Appeals Panel have made their decisions.
- 3.4. No liability for any loss suffered, or expenses incurred, will attach to the Association for the suspension of membership or rights of membership even where a complaint is not upheld.
- 3.5. The Chair of ACC will write to the person against whom the complaint was made, normally within 14 days. This letter will explain what the complaint is about.
- 3.6. Where necessary, the Association will take legal advice to guide it as it investigates the complaint. It will continue to do so throughout the duration of the investigation, as necessary.
- 3.7. The Chair of ACC will ask a suitable person to act as a complaint investigator and to deal with the preliminary investigation.
- 3.8. ACC will carry out the investigation through correspondence unless it is decided that the relevant parties need to meet with the appointed complaint investigator.
- 3.9. The complaint investigator has the authority to request copies of the counselling contract, advertising material, supervisor's report and training certificates. In addition, the Chair of ACC may give permission for the complaint investigator to access accreditation files. The Chair will only give permission for access to be requested to other material if the party concerned (e.g. the client) gives ACC written permission to do so. (e.g. summary case notes).
- 3.10. When the investigator has collated all relevant information, the findings will be submitted to a Pre-hearing Assessment Panel, normally consisting of the Chair, Chief Executive and Director of Professional Standards. This panel will decide whether there is a *prima facie* case to answer and therefore whether to accept the complaint to be dealt with by the Disciplinary Committee of the Board, refer it back for further information/clarification, or reject it. The panel has the discretion to interview the complainant and/or the person(s) complained against if deemed appropriate.
- 3.11. If further information/clarification is requested, upon receipt of same, the complaint will be re-submitted to the Pre-hearing Assessment Panel which will decide whether to accept it to be dealt with at Disciplinary Committee or reject it.
- 3.12. Once the complaint is accepted to be dealt with at Disciplinary Committee, the formal procedure will begin.
- 3.13. If the complaint is rejected by the panel, the complainant and the person(s) complained against will be formally notified. The decision of the Pre-hearing Assessment Panel will be final.

### 4. FORMAL PROCEDURE

- 4.1. When there is acceptance of a complaint, both parties will be notified in writing that the complaint is proceeding to the Disciplinary Committee of the Board of Directors.

- 4.2. A full copy of the formal complaint will be submitted to the member complained against, who will have 28 days to respond to the complaint. Any response should be sent to the Chief Executive.
- 4.3. All evidence submitted either by the complainant or the person(s) complained against normally shall be available to the parties involved in the complaint. All relevant submissions made will be distributed by the Chief Executive to the parties concerned. Material received by the parties must be treated as strictly confidential and may not be passed on elsewhere.
- 4.4. It is the duty of the parties concerned to comply with the protocols of the Association in relation to the Complaints Procedure. Any failure to comply may result in the termination of the procedure and/or termination of membership of the Association.
- 4.5. Failure to renew membership or resignation from membership or withdrawal from the VRCC during the course of a complaint will not normally terminate nor invalidate the hearing of the complaint by the Association.
- 4.6. The Disciplinary Committee of the Board shall consist of at least three members of the Board or Executive who have not been involved in any way in investigating the Complaint. Members have a duty to declare any interest which may affect their impartiality, or be likely to be considered to do so, when approached by the Chair of ACC (who is responsible for convening the Disciplinary Committee).
- 4.7. The purpose of the Disciplinary Committee is to examine the complaint and decide whether the complaint is proved or not.
- 4.8. The Disciplinary Committee will receive reports from the complaint investigator (who may make a recommendation to the Committee) and all parties to the complaint may attend and put their case. One person of their choosing may accompany parties attending. ACC will not normally be responsible for the costs of parties attending. The venue will be at a place of the Association's choosing.
- 4.9. All written evidence and/or submissions and witness statements, from all parties concerned, must be submitted in advance to the Chief Executive. This must be not less than 28 days prior to the date fixed for the Committee's hearing. Such papers will be submitted to all concerned in the Disciplinary Hearing within a reasonable period prior to the hearing.
- 4.10. The Chair of the Disciplinary Hearing (who will be elected by the Committee after convening) will determine whether or not new evidence will be accepted on the day of the hearing, on advice.
- 4.11. Parties wishing to call witnesses must notify the Chief Executive, 28 days in advance, giving the name and details of such witnesses. Attendance will only be permitted by the Chair of the Committee if the witness has supplied a statement which requires clarification. The Committee has discretion to refuse attendance by a witness if it reasonably believes that such attendance is not relevant or will not add any weight to the issue(s) under consideration. Witnesses may be questioned by the Committee and either party connected with the case.
- 4.12. Where either party fails or refuses, without good reason or notice, to attend the Disciplinary Committee, the Chair has the power to decide to:
- Proceed with the hearing in their absence;
  - Adjourn to another date;
  - Terminate the proceedings; or
  - Terminate membership.
- 4.13. The Committee will normally make their decision on the day of the hearing.
- 4.14. ACC will write to the complainant and the person(s) complained against to inform them of the decisions of the Disciplinary Committee within 28 days.

- 4.15. The decision of the Disciplinary Committee, together with details of any sanction(s), will be published in the Association's journal in such detail as deemed appropriate to the findings and at its discretion.
- 4.16. ACC aims to complete this Complaints process within 6 months.

## 5. DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

- 5.1. ACC will carry out any disciplinary measures which the Disciplinary Committee of the Board of Directors decides are appropriate. These may include one or more of the following sanctions. These may be imposed at any given time:
- 5.2. A written warning, which may include a request for an apology and an undertaking that there will be no further breach of the Code.
- 5.3. A requirement for the person or organisation complained about to undertake further training or for a supervisor acceptable to the ACC Board of Directors to monitor their work.
- 5.4. Suspension of the accreditation of an individual or of the affiliation of the organisation or of participation in the VRCC for a period of time until they have met any conditions that the ACC Board of Directors has specified.
- 5.5. The permanent withdrawal of accreditation or participation in the VRCC with a request to cease counselling/ training/supervision immediately.
- 5.6. Suspending or excluding a person or organisation from membership of the Association or from participation in VRCC.
- 5.7. This list is not exhaustive and disciplinary measures may include such other measures as may be appropriate and fair in the circumstances.
- 5.8. Failure to comply with any sanction will result in the immediate termination of membership and/or participation in the VRCC, with the decision being published in the Association's journal.

## 6. APPEALS

- 6.1. The parties to a complaint may appeal against the decisions and any sanctions of the Disciplinary Committee of the ACC Board of Directors by writing to the Chair of ACC within 2 weeks from the date on which they are notified of the decision. The letter must state the grounds for appeal.

6.2. An Appeal will be granted unless the Chair of ACC considers:-

- that there is insufficient evidence available, or likely to be available, to satisfy the grounds for appeal.
- that the Appeal is frivolous or vexatious.
- This decision will be final.

6.3. An appeal will be considered on any of the following grounds:

- the decision was made against the weight of evidence.
- the sanction applied is disproportionate to the findings of the Committee and is unjust in all the circumstances.
- there is evidence to suggest that a procedural impropriety may have had a material effect on the finding and the Committee's decision.
- there is new evidence which was not available at the time of the Disciplinary Committee hearing.

6.4. When a person appeals, the Chair will appoint an Appeals Panel of experienced persons especially convened for the purpose and will lay the complaint before them. The Panel members will not currently be part of the ACC Board, Executive or other significant Committees and will not have had any involvement in the matters to be considered.

6.5. The Committee will consider the appeal fully (including allowing parties to attend a hearing as in 4.8 above) and, if necessary, will consult the Association's solicitor. The Chair of ACC will write to the person or organisation complained against to notify them whether the appeal has been successful or not.

**6.6. There is no further appeal beyond this point.**

## 7. PUBLICATION

- 7.1. The Association reserves the rights to publish such details of complaints as it considers appropriate.
- 7.2. The termination of membership or participation in the VRCC under the Disciplinary Procedures will be published in the Association's journal.
- 7.3. Any notification that the Association, under these procedures, is entitled to publish in its journal may, at its discretion, be published elsewhere.

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