



Certification Body of the European Centre for Clinical Social Work e.V. (registered Society)

Professional Ethical Principles for recognition as

- Clinical Practitioner (CP-ECCSW),
- Specialist Social Worker for Clinical Social Work - Clinical Social Worker (CSW-ECCSW),
- Clinical Mentor (CM-ECCSW)

PREAMBLE

The primary goal of Clinical Social Work is to promote the social and mental health and well-being of the individuals and families who use its services. Clinical social work is governed by ethical principles rooted in the core values of social work. These core values include:

- the recognition of the dignity and self-determination of the individual and their well-being,
- a commitment to professional conduct characterised by competence and integrity,
- and attachment to our democratic society, which should provide equal life opportunities to all its members in a fair and unprejudiced manner, regardless of nationality, religion, gender or ethnicity.

Clinical social work reviews its tasks and work situations in practice with regard to ethical problems. The core question is always whether the formulation and initiation of a solution by clinical social work fulfils the conditions of ethical professional practice:

- avoiding criminal offences (not causing harm to clients),
- charity (helping clients),
- autonomy (promoting the self-determination of clients).

The following is a specific codification of these ethical principles. They are intended to serve as a standard and orientation for clinical social work in various professional situations and functions. Clinical social work is expected to consider these principles within its scope of duties and responsibilities, and to use only practices that are consistent with its spirit and wording.

Social workers trained and practising in Clinical Social Work agree and affirm to abide by the rules set forth herein. If it is suspected that this ethical framework is being violated, these guidelines shall be the standard for assessing the nature and extent of a violation.

PRINCIPLE I

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKERS

Clinical Social Workers observe high standards in all their professional roles, i.e. professional competence, objectivity and integrity. They take responsibility for the consequences of their work and ensure that their services are used in an appropriate and suitable manner.

- a. Clinical Social Workers have a significant professional responsibility because their actions and recommendations can have a major impact on the lives of their clients. They perform their work only within the limits of their skills/competences and ensure and improve these skills by participating in in-service training throughout their professional activity. They refrain from professional activity when personal difficulties or other limitations could lead to irresponsible inadequacies in professional practice.
- b. Clinical Social Workers do not exploit professional relationships sexually, financially or for any other professional or personal gain. They maintain this standard of conduct towards all persons with whom they have professional relationships.
- c. Clinical Social Workers often work as employees in counselling centres, practices, hospitals and other health and social care facilities. In these positions, they are responsible for identifying any conflicts with their professional ethical obligations and actively modifying the conflict-generating conditions or processes where possible.
- d. When conflict arises, their primary responsibility is to uphold the moral standards of the profession. These standards require a commitment to the welfare of clients as a primary duty.
- e. Clinical Social Workers have a special responsibility to those who enter the profession as learners, students or trainees. As university lecturers, teachers/trainers, supervisors, mentors and supervisees, they are responsible for maintaining high standards of objectivity and training. In all their professional activities, they consistently seek to expand their professional knowledge.

Principle II

RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CLIENTS

Clinical Social Workers are primarily accountable to individual clients, families or groups with whom a professional relationship exists. Clinical Social Workers respect the dignity, protect the well-being and maximise the self-determination of their clients.

1. STATEMENT

- a. Clinical social work takes place within a context of information and consensus. This requires that clients are informed about the nature and extent of the service and know the mutual limits, rights, opportunities and responsibilities involved in providing these services. In order for such consensus to be achieved, clients must be informed in a way that is recognisable and comprehensible to them, so that they can choose and decide freely and without undue influence. In such cases, where clients are minors or otherwise incapable of making meaningful decisions, attempts shall be made to achieve an understanding of the measures offered that is appropriate to their level. In such situations, authorisation for counselling or treatment and intervention must come from a third party, such as a parent or other legal care or guardian.
- b. Clinical Social Workers have a duty to address and clarify payment for their work and to point out any expectations of the cost unit. Such issues may include: restrictions on payment, restrictions on confidentiality to the cost unit, availability of services and advice on alternative treatment options.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND TERMINATION

- a. Clinical Social Workers enter into professional relationships based on their ability to appropriately meet the needs of clients. Clinical Social Workers terminate services and relationships with clients when they are no longer in the best interests of the client. Clinical Social Workers do not dismiss clients by arbitrarily withdrawing services except in special circumstances.
- b. Clinical Social Workers carefully consider all factors to minimise possible adverse outcomes for their clients before terminating services. Prior to interruption or termination of services, clients are notified in a timely and comprehensible manner, and consistent arrangements are made for referral or other continuation of services that consider the client's needs.

- c. Clinical Social Workers who provide services that are reimbursed by a third party take primary responsibility for the welfare of the client. If coverage is not extended, it remains the duty of the Clinical Social Worker to arrange necessary continuing treatment in the best interest of the client.
- d. Clinical Social Workers who disagree with a refusal to pay for the treatment by the cost unit should discuss this with the client and draft a treatment plan that can be resubmitted to the cost unit. This treatment plan should justify the need for further treatment and identify possible alternative proposals.
- e. Clinical Social Workers keep files for each person or family or group in their counselling or treatment. These also include contractual agreements and legal regulations. In case of inspection of files by third parties, the Clinical Social Worker shall observe the legal provisions of data protection of the client and other persons named in the documents.
- f. The data protection requirements also apply to electronically stored records (see Principle III).
- g. Clinical Social Workers shall comply with the rules of their institution and legal requirements when retaining or disposing of records and shall justify this to clients.

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS

- a. Clinical Social Workers are responsible for setting clear and appropriate professional boundaries, especially when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable. They do not engage in dual or multiple relationships where there is any impairment of their professional conduct or judgement or where they may harm or exploit clients. When providing services to two or more people who have a relationship with each other, Clinical Social Workers declare their own professional responsibility to all parties. They also clarify, how appropriate boundaries might be maintained.
- b. Clinical Social Workers do not, under any circumstances, engage in romantic relationships or sexual contact with clients. Clinical Social Workers also consider their relationships with their clients' family and/or friends who may

influence their work. Therefore, they also avoid romantic or sexual relationships with members of the client's family or other persons with whom the client has a close personal relationship.

- c. Clinical Social Workers are aware of the authority of their professional role. They do not engage in activities that abuse their professional relationships or exploit the personal, political or corporate interests of others. As a practitioner, facilitator, teacher, supervisor or researcher, the primary professional responsibility is always the welfare of their clients.
- d. When acting on behalf of clients, Clinical Social Workers shall always act in a manner that safeguards the interests of the client. Where another person has been authorised to act on behalf of clients, Clinical Social Workers shall cooperate with that person in such a way that the interests of the clients are safeguarded.
- e. Clinical Social Workers recognise the right to self-determination of clients. If clients do not want to disclose private information to the cost units, they accept this. If conflicts arise because of this, they take appropriate measures to help clients find alternative funding so that counselling or treatment can continue.
- f. If a Clinical Social Worker sees a potential conflict that is harmful to the counselling or treatment process, he/she should inform the client, i.e. state the nature of the conflict and the possible impact on the service.

4. COMPETENCE

- a. Clinical Social Workers observe the scope and limits of their authorisation to provide and conduct services. This scope is defined by their training and competence and limited by legal provisions. They are responsible for complying with limitations on their activities to the areas for which they are competent or authorised. When necessary, they seek the knowledge and experience of members of other professions. When using consultants from other professions or supervisors, Clinical Social Workers must ensure that these consultants are recognised in their own profession and are qualified and competent to provide the service.

- b. Clinical Social Workers know that the personal closeness and intimacy within a professional relationship often intensifies client's feelings in unrealistic ways. Maintaining professional boundaries and objectivity is critical to the effectiveness of responsible treatment. Clinical Social Workers are self-critical and concerned to prevent possible harmful influences that may flow into the professional relationship from their own personal, unresolved difficulties. They take appropriate steps against this when in doubt. Such steps may be additional supervision and counselling or their own therapeutic treatment. In this case, alternative ways of treating the client may have to be sought.

- c. Clinical Social Workers recognise the responsibility to continuously educate themselves for the benefit of their clients with regard to professional developments in their field of work. Continuous supervision, counselling and training is a way to responsible professional work. Appropriate training and counselling should be used especially when applying new unpractised methods.

Principle III

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Clinical Social Workers have a primary obligation to keep confidential information from and about clients - those currently in treatment as well as past and deceased clients. This applies to all information that has come to their knowledge in any of their professional roles or functions. Exceptions to this obligation arise only if there are overriding legal or professional reasons for doing so, in which case the written permission of the informed client must be obtained in every case, if possible.

Clinical Social Workers discuss with their clients both the form of confidentiality and the potential limitations to that confidentiality that may arise in the course of their work together. In any case, confidential information should only be disclosed with the written permission of the client. In such a case, clients should be informed about what information may be released for what purpose and, if applicable, for what period of time through their consent.

Clinical Social Workers know the legal and professional standards for maintaining data protection, but also the obligation to report incidents such as abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults to competent authorities. However, reporting obligations are not limited to taking steps to protect or warn third parties who may be at risk from clients. Restrictions on confidentiality may also arise from:

1. the parental right to the data of minors,
2. the access of a legal guardian to adult data,
3. access to documents and reports by the judiciary.

If confidential information is given to third parties, Clinical Social Workers will ensure that the personal information is kept to the minimum necessary to fulfil the particular purpose of the release.

Clinical Social Workers who treat couples, families and groups obtain the consent of the parties involved. They respect the right to confidentiality of each individual and make all parties aware of the mutual obligation to respect the confidentiality of information about other clients who are also being treated. However, clients involved in collaborative treatment should be informed that there is no guarantee that all participants will respect the confidentiality agreement.

If confidential information is to be used for the purposes of professional education, research or publication, it is the primary responsibility of the Clinical Social Worker to ensure the protection of the client from possible harm. Particularly when extensive materials are used for any of these purposes, Clinical Social Workers will obtain consent from clients after they have been fully informed of the use. Every effort will be made to protect the identity of clients. Similarly, the use and presentation of data will be limited to the extent necessary for the professional purpose and will only be shared with other professionally responsible persons in compliance with the protection provisions.

The development of new technologies for storing and transmitting data poses a major threat to the confidentiality of personal information. Clinical Social Workers take special precautions to protect the confidentiality of information transmitted or stored by computers, electronic mail, telecopiers, telephones and answering machines, and any other electronic or data processing technology. When using these technologies, information that could identify clients should always be carefully encrypted or avoided.

Principle IV PUBLICITY

Public statements, announcements of services, etc. are intended to provide sufficient information to assist clients in making informed decisions. Clinical Social Workers shall describe their professional qualifications, memberships and functions as well as those of institutions or organisations with which they or their public statements may be associated, accurately, objectively and without misrepresentation.

- a. When disclosing professional services, the protection of the public is the primary concern. Clinical Social Workers may speak publicly provided they accurately describe their qualifications or accreditations and/or the services they offer. Information that is usually perceived as helpful by the public includes, in addition to the professional's name, the highest relevant academic degree, other qualifications and specialisations, and state or professional association accreditations.

- b. Clinical Social Workers are responsible for ensuring that all disclosures about their services are made in accordance with the ethical standards of the profession. In all publications they describe these services accurately. In doing so, they neither claim nor imply higher personal or professional competence.
- c. Clinical Social Workers are free to appear in public and to engage in public discussions. However, medical diagnosis and therapy should always be presented and discussed in close consultation or together with competent professionals. Such topics may be disseminated through public lectures, newspaper or magazine articles, radio or television programmes, but the use of the media or other public forums is appropriate only if the purpose is to inform the public about such profession-related topics about which Clinical Social Workers have special knowledge or expertise.
- d. Clinical Social Workers shall respect the rights and reputation of any professional association with which they are affiliated and shall not falsely imply certification or endorsement by other associations or organisations. When making public announcements, Clinical Social Workers shall make clear which expressions of opinion are personal and which are authorised statements on behalf of their organisation or association.

These guidelines refer - in free transfer and selective adaptation to German conditions - to the Code of Ethics of the Clinical Social Work Federation in the USA (currently: Clinical Social Work Association), which existed in 2000.

DATE, PLACE

Signature of Applicant

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