

Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center

Ethical Principles and Standards of Conduct

Introduction

The Ethical Principles and Standards of Conduct serve as a guide for expected behavior of the Center's staff. This includes administrative and clinical personnel, volunteers, and interns. They also serve to help clinicians make decisions concerning their professional behavior. The Standards are not absolute, and the fact that a given behavior is not addressed, it does not mean that such behavior is either ethical or unethical.

The Standards of Conduct address issues related to respect for rights of individuals, avoidance of exploitative behavior, service, privacy and confidentiality, respect towards other staff members, professional responsibility, and resolution of ethical matters.

The Standards of Conduct are displayed on the client's bulletin board at each facility and are accessible to the clients at their request.

South Carolina Department of Mental Health Values and Principles

Principle One: Commitment to Clients of Mental Health Services and their Families

We reflect our commitment by expressing in our daily work dependability, compassion, empathy, advocacy, and sensitivity.

Principle Two: Commitment to the Highest Quality of Clinical Care

We express this commitment by having our actions reflect honesty, fairness, competence, integrity, and diligence.

Principle Three: Commitment to our Coworkers

We value the contributions of every member of the Department of Mental Health team and reflect our commitment to our coworkers in these ways: authority and autonomy, reliability, loyalty, cooperation, trustworthiness, and sacrifice.

Principle Four: Commitment to the Department of Mental Health and the State of SC

As public servants, our commitment must be to the whole agency and to the citizens of our State. We display that commitment through accountability, courage of convictions, creativity, ownership, personal responsibility, professionalism, stewardship, and partnership.

Standards of Conduct

1. Respect for People's Rights

- 1.01 In connection with their work, staff members shall not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or status.
- 1.02 Staff members respect the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy; and in their work, they promote self-sufficiency and independence.
- 1.03 Staff members respect the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own and in their work, they refrain from imposing their personal values and religious beliefs on the client.

2. Avoidance of Exploitative Behavior

- 2.01 Staff members do not engage in any behavior that is exploitative or demeaning with any person who has been or is a client.

- 2.02 To avoid exploitation, staff members refrain from accepting goods, services, or monetary remuneration from clients in return for services.
- 2.03 Clinicians do not engage in sexual intimacies with current or former clients.
- 2.04 Clinicians do not provide services to individuals with whom they have engaged in sexual intimacies.
- 2.05 Staff members refrain from providing direct services to clients with whom they have a prior non-professional relationship as this may impair their objectivity and may compromise the client's confidentiality. In such cases, it is highly recommended that the client be referred to another provider. If a client cannot be referred elsewhere because of extenuating circumstances, the staff member will consult with Quality Assurance to ensure that all alternatives are explored and that the case is handled with objectivity.
- 2.06 Staff members provide clients with accurate information regarding fees for services before receiving any clinical services. Financial limitations are discussed at this time and billing arrangements agreed upon.

3. Service

- 3.01 Clinicians perform clinical interventions only within the context of a professional relationship.
- 3.02 Staff members provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent and nature of services available to them and make referrals as appropriate to meet their needs.
- 3.03 Clinicians only provide services for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience.
- 3.04 Every effort will be made toward recognition of individual and cultural differences. Clinicians will obtain appropriate training, experience, and supervision to ensure that reasonable competence of services is provided.
- 3.05 Clinicians participate in continued education activities to maintain a reasonable level of awareness of current scientific and professional information and competence in their fields of clinical activity and skills they use.
- 3.06 Clinicians do not commit fraud or misrepresent their professional qualifications, experience, education, affiliations, or services performed.
- 3.07 Clinicians discuss with clients early in the therapeutic relationship, appropriate issues such as nature and anticipated plan for treatment and confidentiality.
- 3.08 Clinicians obtain appropriate consent to treatment, using language that is understandable to clients. In circumstances when the client is legally incapable of giving informed consent, the clinicians will obtain informed permission from a legally authorized person as allowed by law.

Clinicians make effort to inform these persons of the proposed intervention in a manner understandable to seek their consent to those interventions and consider their preferences and best interest.

- 3.09 When services are provided to several persons who have a relationship, clinicians clarify at the beginning of treatment, or when appropriate, which individuals are clients and the roles that the clinicians have with each person.
- 3.10 Whenever clinicians are required to perform potentially conflictive roles (legal proceedings, consultations with another service provider, etc.), they clarify the extent of confidentiality and role expectations to avoid compromising their relationship with their clients.
- 3.11 In ending the professional relationship, clinicians do not abandon clients. Clinicians who anticipate the end or interruption of services to clients notify them promptly and seek their transfer, referral, or continuation of service in relation to the clients' needs and preferences.

Termination of professional relationships occur when it is clear that the client no longer needs services, is not benefiting, or is harmed by continued services.

4. *Privacy and Confidentiality*

- 4.01 Clinicians respect the privacy of the clients and hold in confidence information obtained in the course of their professional services except as mandated or permitted by the law for a valid reason. These reasons include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Consultation with another ABMHC professional on behalf of the client
 - b. Duty to warn or to protect the client or others from harm
 - c. Physical and sexual abuse and/or molestation
 - d. Statutory requirements such as court orders
- 4.02 Staff members refrain from discussing any information, administrative or clinical, which pertains to the client in a public place and will make all effort to protect the identity of the client when referring to or about him/her.
- 4.03 Clinicians discuss, at the outset of services, the limitations of confidentiality as applicable and the foreseeable use of the information generated through their services.
- 4.04 Clinicians obtain informed consent of clients before taping, recording, or permitting third-part observation of their activities.
- 4.05 Clinicians make provisions for the maintenance of confidentiality of records.
- 4.06 Clinicians recognize that ownership of records and data is governed by legal principles, and they take the necessary measures so that records and data remain available to the extent needed to serve the best interest of the clients.
- 4.07 Clinicians ensure confidentiality of records by use of coding techniques when entering information in databases.

5. *Respect Towards Other Staff Members*

- 5.01 Staff members do not engage in any form of harassment or demeaning behavior. Harassment refers to deliberate, repeated comments, gestures, or physical contacts that are annoying and unwanted by the recipient.
- 5.02 Staff members treat colleagues and coworkers with respect, courtesy, and fairness and must afford the same professional courtesy to other professionals.

6. *Professional Responsibility*

- 6.01 Clinicians maintain professional standards of conduct and refrain from exhibiting behavior that may compromise their professional responsibilities or reduce the public's trust in their professional and/or in the Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center.
- 6.02 Clinicians are aware of their professional responsibilities in the community and comply with the law and social policy that serves the best interest of their clients.
- 6.03 Clinicians do not use their public position for any form of financial gain or private work and their private work cannot interfere with the demands and needs of the Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center.

7. *Resolving Ethical Issues*

- 7.01 Staff members have the obligation and responsibility to be familiar with the South Carolina Department of Mental Health Ethics Directives and Guidelines.
- 7.02 Staff members have the obligation to be familiar with the stipulations of the Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center Ethics Principles and Standards of Conduct.
- 7.03 When a staff member believes that a violation of the Ethics Code has occurred, it is his/her responsibility to make the staff member aware of the alleged violation and inform him/her that a report will be provided to the staff member's immediate supervisor and/or the Clinical Director in the Aiken-Barnwell Mental Health Center to ensure the investigation and correction of the action.