



# ACCS Code of Ethics 2020

**Association of Christian Counsellors (Singapore)**

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## PREAMBLE

ACCS seeks to position and profile the Christian counselling profession in Singapore. Our membership reflects the diversity of roles and settings in which members serve the local community through counselling services as well as Christian ministries.

The ACCS Code of Ethics describes practices that support, not supersede, the [statutes of Singapore](#), the details of which members may peruse online.

This Code may be reviewed and updated periodically to best protect the interests of clients and ACCS members.

## STATEMENT OF FAITH

Members of ACCS declare [our Christian identity and faith](#) as explicitly elaborated and published on our website.

## APPLICABILITY OF CODE

The ACCS Code of Ethics is applicable to all members regardless of their level of counselling training. In this Code, *counselling* is defined as the processes of helping, supporting client change and healing that result from the counsellor-client relationship, wherein *client(s)* - sometimes referred to as *counselee(s)* - refers to the individual(s) or congregant(s) seeking help for personal and interpersonal issues.

*Psychotherapy, pastoral counselling and talk therapy* are deemed as counselling in this Code. Members who practise any of these processes should do so in observance of this Code.

It is not within the scope of this Code to define, articulate and differentiate between the ethical practices for mentoring, coaching, discipling, spiritual formation, pastoral care, inner healing prayer, and/or deliverance ministry.

This Code enumerates specific virtues and behaviours for members to account for in counselling their clients. This Code does not and cannot list exhaustively the highest standards of service expected of members. Nevertheless, with the publication of the ACCS Code of Ethics, it informs the Christian community and general public about principles of ethical practices in counselling.

## PRINCIPLES-GUIDED PRACTICES

### Foregrounding Information

ACCS Code of Ethics 2020 enumerates specific practices that are founded on principles of virtue ethics – a concept which can be understood through Greggo and Sisemore’s (2012) reminder:

For the growing number of (counselors) who are Christians, there is need for great wisdom in determining how to be true to the faith and the teachings of Scripture while in some way responding to the growing data of psychology and its sister mental health disciplines and the current marketplace. (p. 18)

In unpacking Greggo and Sisemore’s reminder, three themes are apparent.

#### ***. . . wisdom in determining how to be true to the faith and the teachings of Scripture:***

The first theme echoes ACCS’s statement of faith to honour Jesus Christ in our lives and to revere the Scriptures. Hence, the practices explained in this Code describe ways that ACCS members live out scriptural truths, as listed in 2 Peter 1: 5-8 and which are qualities consistent with virtue ethics.

#### ***. . . responding to the growing data of psychology and its sister mental health disciplines:***

In addressing the second theme, we agree with Collins’ (2007) statement that besides the Scriptures, God has permitted human beings to discover truth through other means such as scientific investigations and “we limit our counseling effectiveness when we pretend that the discoveries of psychology, neuropsychology, psychobiology, human genetics, and related fields have nothing to contribute to the understanding and solution of problems” (p. 43).

#### ***. . . (responding to) the current marketplace:***

The third theme applies to Singapore’s multicultural and multireligious society in which members strive to emulate Jesus’ traits and values while counselling clients. To this end, areligious and aspirational ethics allows counsellors to strive for “the highest standards of thinking and conduct, . . . It entails an understanding of the spirit behind the code and the principles on which the code rests” (Corey, Corey & Corey, 2018, p. 12).

The spirit behind this Code is thus ACCS’s statement of faith while the principles on which the Code rests are that of virtue ethics encompassing prudence or practical wisdom, integrity, respectfulness, trustworthiness or honesty, and compassion or care (Corey et al., 2018; Kitchener, 2000; Remley & Herlihy, 2001).

## PRINCIPLES-GUIDED PRACTICES

Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<b>Section A: Protecting the Counselling Relationship</b>	
A.1. As best as they could, members are to avoid dual relationships with clients due to their inability to remain objective and to be helpful to the clients. Entering a counselling relationship with family members, relatives, friends, ministry or business associates, congregants of the same church, or other acquaintances of the clients, may raise questions of members' ethical practice.	Prudence
A.2. When members need to enter dual relationships with clients, members document the reasons and determine with clients from the outset, a limitation of sessions or time frame within which to review the progress made in counselling, so that prompt referrals could be made for clients who require longer term counselling support.	Integrity
A.3. In order to maintain healthy and explicitly understood boundaries in the counselling relationship, members must clearly distinguish between the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Professional versus personal accounts in social media;</li> <li>b. Professional versus personal contact information; and</li> <li>c. Professional versus personal use of physical space.</li> </ul>	Prudence Respectfulness
A.4. Members proactively communicate with clients in a culturally sensitive manner during the processes of obtaining consent, defining the scope of care, assessing and evaluating procedures, and addressing developmental and/or linguistic issues.	Respectfulness Integrity
A.5. Members are aware of the inherent power imbalance in helping relationships and its potential to harm clients, even without harmful intent. Hence, members exert their psychosocial and spiritual influence in measured ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. By accepting clients of any race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, income, education, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and/or value system;</li> <li>b. By recognising that members' inability to accept clients unconditionally as explained in A.5.a. indicates potential gap(s) in members' training or personal unresolved issue(s), in which case members should make appropriate referrals for affected clients;</li> <li>c. By proactively avoiding exploitation and ensuring clients' overall wellbeing and safety, including safeguarding against sexual and/or romantic relationships with client; and</li> <li>d. By ascertaining as grounds for accepting or rejecting a client's gift:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The cultural background of the client regarding gift-giving;</li> <li>ii. The client's intent or motivation in giving the gift;</li> <li>iii. The monetary value of the gift; and</li> <li>iv. Therapeutic implications of accepting or rejecting the gift.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness Compassion

Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<b>Section B: Maintaining Clients' Privacy and Confidentiality</b>	
<p>B.1. Members do not disclose any confidential client communications, documents, notes, photographs, recordings, or materials that contain clients' information without their explicit consent, unless the following exceptions apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When disclosure is required by law; and/or</li> <li>b. When needing to protect life due to an assessed risk of harm to client and/or to others.</li> </ul>	<p>Respectfulness Trustworthiness</p>
<p>B.2. Members disguise clients' identities when citing cases in administrative, religious, supervisory or educational settings and/or public forums. When disguise alone provides insufficient client protection or when the client's identity is difficult to conceal, members will seek documented client consent.</p>	<p>Prudence Integrity Respectfulness</p>
<p>B.3. Members respect the privacy of their clients' presence on social media unless informed consent is given to view or participate in the clients' media as part of members' professional engagement with clients.</p>	<p>Integrity Prudence</p>
<p>B.4. Members ensure counselling sessions take place in venues that provide privacy and allow clients to feel safe without fear of being overheard or identified.</p>	<p>Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness</p>
<p>B.5. Members ensure all records and documentation are secured and no unauthorised person has access to them.</p>	<p>Prudence Integrity Respectfulness</p>
<p>B.6. Members observe the recommended timeline for storing as well as deleting clinical records and finance related documents - when a case has been closed or non-active for seven years, members delete all such records and documents.</p>	<p>Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness</p>
<b>Section C: Obtaining Informed Consent</b>	
<p>C.1. Members ascertain the following prior to obtaining informed consent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. That the client has the capacity to comprehend members' communication and to give consent without persuasion or coercion.</li> <li>b. The need to seek informed consent from the client's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. the client is a minor (under 18 years old); or</li> <li>ii. the client is an adult with incapacity.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness</p>

Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>c. The need to communicate contents of the informed consent with clients in developmental-age-appropriate language that corresponds to their maturity and psychological states, without compromising accuracy of the information.</li> </ul>	
<p>C.2. Members who are undergoing training and supervision will disclose this fact to their clients before seeking clients’ informed consent.</p>	Trustworthiness
<p>C.3. Members obtain written informed consent from clients to enter a counselling relationship in every instance, by first explaining clearly the terms of the engagement for their counselling services, including the limits of confidentiality, fees payable (if any) and the general approach in which counselling will take place.</p>	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness
<p>C.4. In recognising that members’ roles in the helping process can change over time (such as from individual to marital counsellor or vice versa), members will inform clients and discuss the benefits and risks associated with the role transition before securing new and/or additional written consent.</p>	Prudence Respectfulness Trustworthiness
<p>C.5. Members respect clients’ right of choice to enter or terminate the counselling relationship without persuasion or coercion.</p>	Respectfulness
<p>C.6. Members obtain written informed consent from clients before initiating any of the following whether at the intake and assessment phase or over the course of counselling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Video and/or audio recording of counselling sessions;</li> <li>b. Seeking supervisory and consultative help in session;</li> <li>c. Applying specific interventions (including prayer), procedures and evaluations;</li> <li>d. Communicating client data with other professionals and/or institutions;</li> <li>e. Addressing spirituality and religious issues; recognising that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. there is a difference between the two where spirituality generally refers to one’s subjective meaning-making and unique identifications with a faith, while religion has to do with the doctrines and practices of a faith that are outwardly visible; and</li> <li>ii. spirituality and religion are not uniformly defined or practised by other faiths or even different Christian denominations.</li> </ul> </li> <li>f. Gathering information from the client and/or other sources in striving to understand each client’s unique worldview.</li> </ul>	Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness Compassion

Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<b>Section D: Observing Duty of Care to Clients</b>	
D.1. Members practise only in areas of competence that can be verified by their education, training, credentials, clinical supervisors, and relevant experience.	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness Compassion
D.2. While recognising one’s competencies and ability in integrating spirituality into their practices, members also identify the limits of their understanding of clients’ spiritual and/or religious perspectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Hence, members need to be acquainted with relevant resources and/or spiritual leaders who can be avenues for consultation as well as to whom the counsellor can refer clients;</li> <li>b. When referral is deemed appropriate or necessary in such a case, members facilitate the referral by collaborating with clients on the steps involved, the options and potential outcomes of each option.</li> </ul>	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness
D.3. Members are aware of their personal values or beliefs about seeking professional counselling, medical or psychiatric treatment, legal counsel and/or other forms of professional service; members maintain accountability and seek regular supervision to ensure they do not influence clients’ decision making with members’ personal preferences.	Integrity Respectfulness Compassion
D.4. In recognising that clients’ spiritual and/or religious perspectives, as well as their personal values can a) enhance clients’ wellbeing; b) contribute to client problems; and/or c) exacerbate symptoms, members set goals with clients that are in clients' best interests and consistent with their unique worldviews.	Prudence Respectfulness Compassion
D.5. Members discuss and take steps to terminate counselling or to make referrals that are in clients’ best interests in specified situations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When clients require counselling support in areas that are not within members’ competence and training;</li> <li>b. When clients request for a referral;</li> <li>c. When counselling goals have been attained;</li> <li>d. When the client no longer wants to or does not return to counselling;</li> <li>e. When the client no longer benefits from counselling;</li> <li>f. When counselling is harmful to the client; or</li> <li>g. When crisis events alter or prematurely end the viability of continuing with counselling.</li> </ul>	Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness Compassion



Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<b>Section E: Using Technology</b>	
E.1. Before commencing any technology-assisted counselling, members must determine that clients are intellectually, emotionally, physically, linguistically and functionally capable of using such technology.	Prudence Integrity
E.2. When members believe that the use of technology is inappropriate or unhelpful to clients, they should recommend alternative modes of counselling.	Prudence Compassion
E.3. During counselling which is conducted via technologically assisted communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. members ensure clients’ privacy and confidentiality; and</li> <li>b. members ensure the protection and secure storage of all information transmitted.</li> </ul>	Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness
E.4. When conducting cross-border counselling via technologically assisted communication in Singapore, members need to inform clients of the applicable laws of Singapore.	Integrity Trustworthiness
E.5. When conducting counselling via technologically assisted communication, members need to verify clients’ identity and obtain clients’ informed consent in the same manner as detailed in Section C of this Code. Members should also inform clients of alternative modes of counselling in the event of technology failure.	Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness
E.6. Members avoid dual relationships by engaging clients through only their social media accounts that are distinguished from their personal accounts.	Prudence Trustworthiness
<b>Section F: Updating Practitioner Competencies</b>	
F.1. Members stay relevant and current in their counselling knowledge and skills through continual education, professional development and regular clinical supervision.	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness
F.2. Members recognise that the use of psychological tests requires training and/or certification, and seek relevant training in the use of specific tests before administering them. Members are committed to administer tests that are statistically backed by research to be reliable, valid and culturally appropriate.	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness
F.3. Members practise only under the supervision of the church, a pastoral counsellor, a registered community service organisation – whether faith-based or otherwise – and/or a counselling professional who is trained in supervision methods and techniques to monitor clients’ welfare. It is important that members consult supervisors who are recognised by a relevant professional organisation, and who practise in ways that do not contradict ACCS’s Code of Ethics.	Prudence Integrity Trustworthiness

Ethical Practices	Undergirding Principles
<p>F.4. Members develop and maintain cultural awareness through the following non-exhaustive list of attributes and behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Being aware of one’s personal worldview and actively exploring one’s own attitudes, values and spiritual and/or religious beliefs;</li> <li>b. Continually evaluating the influence of one’s personal worldview, attitudes, values and spiritual and/or religious beliefs on the client and the counselling process;</li> <li>c. Updating one’s knowledge of various cultural practices and worldviews, including those that may conflict with a Judeo-Christian worldview; and</li> <li>d. Adopting culturally competent practices including exercising cross-cultural sensitivity and skills that enhance the helping process.</li> </ul>	<p>Prudence Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness Compassion</p>

**Section G: Conducting Research and Publishing**

<p>G.1. When conducting research, members need to obtain clients’ informed consent in the same manner as detailed in Section C of this Code.</p>	<p>Prudence Integrity</p>
<p>G.2. Members are responsible for the welfare of the clients in their research and should take precautions to prevent psychological and emotional harm and/or physical injuries to their clients.</p>	<p>Respectfulness Trustworthiness Compassion</p>
<p>G.3. When publishing any works, members give recognition to previous works on that topic and anyone whom credit is due, adhering closely to copyright laws and citation guidelines in order to avoid plagiarism.</p>	<p>Integrity Respectfulness Trustworthiness</p>

## REFERENCES

Sections of ACCS's code of ethics are influenced by or adapted from the following:

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