

QGCA Code of ethics

CODE OF ETHICS

QUEENSLAND GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION INC.

(UPDATED 21/3/94)

INTRODUCTION

This code of ethics for members of the Queensland Guidance and Counselling Association Inc (QGCA) is based on the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) code of ethics. The ISPA code of ethics was endorsed as a basis for the Australian Guidance and Counselling Association (AGCA) code of ethics at its Annual General Meeting in Melbourne in 1991.

The QGCA recognises that the nomenclature, role definitions and work settings of its members varies according to institutional or agency arrangements. For the purpose of this code the term guidance counsellor has been used to represent titles such as guidance officer, school counsellor or student counsellor.

This specification of ethical standards serves to stimulate greater concern for members for their own professional functioning and for the conduct of fellow professionals in this field. It enables QGCA to clarify to present and future members and those served by this profession, the nature of acceptable practices and ethical responsibilities held in common by its members. The intent of this code is not to condemn or to control but to encourage members to strive for higher levels of ethical conduct. Guidance counsellors do not accede to lower ethical standards arbitrarily imposed upon them by others.

Reciprocal relationships exist between our profession of guidance and counselling and society. As professionals, we strive to have our clients trust our judgements and skills. In return, our clients rightly expect us to exercise levels of judgement and skills of the highest order. This code is provided to help clarify and promote these relationships.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The development of this code was guided by the belief that guidance counsellors are expected to exemplify the profession's values and principles. These include transcending narrow personal, social and cultural values and attitudes; adopting positions that benefit professional-client relationships and acting in ways that are consistent with the best interests of children, youths, educators, parents, institutions, the community, and the profession.

Guidance counsellors respect the dignity and worth of individuals and place the highest esteem on promoting and maintaining human rights. They believe each person has the right to self-direction, self-development, self-choice and self-responsibility for decisions reached. They endeavour to protect and promote the welfare of children and youth and the quality of their development through educational, psychological and related services.

Guidance counsellors work within their professional competencies and continually seek to

upgrade their academic and professional abilities. They also strive to acquire and maintain the highest standards of professional competence and ethical behaviour.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

I Professional Responsibilities

A. Guidance counsellors familiarise themselves with the goals and philosophy of the school system and other organisations within which they work, and work effectively within the organisational structure.

B. Guidance counsellors, when working with families, attempt to familiarise themselves with the goals and philosophies of the families and to work effectively within their structure.

C. Guidance counsellors are knowledgeable about educational law and guidelines. When administrative codes and regulations conflict with ethical principles, good faith efforts are instituted to resolve problems and discrepancies. Should these efforts prove ineffective, ethical principles take precedent.

D. Guidance counsellors should not allow personal prejudices or biases to interfere in their decision making. They should not engage in discriminatory procedures or practices based on social and economic background, race, disability, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, national origin.

E. Guidance counsellors protect the welfare and act in the best interests of students, their parents, educators, colleagues and employers. Protecting the welfare of students, their parents, and educators is of utmost concern and takes precedence over self-serving actions by guidance counsellors. When conflicts of interest arise, guidance counsellors' first priority is to serve the best interests of students.

F. Parental consent to provide services to students is required where a student is not considered mentally or morally competent or is not legally independent in age. The need to obtain consent from clients should consider the age at which a country legally defines one as being independent as well as the level of the student's mental and moral development. An exception to the need for particular parental consent prior to service exists in a crisis situation (e.g. when the students may be a danger to themselves or to others).

G. Preparation and Supervision

1. Educators of guidance counsellors ensure that all information conveyed during their presentation is accurate and timely.

2. Educators of guidance counsellors promote an awareness of an adherence to ethical standards.

3. Educators of guidance counsellors and internship supervisors provide a wide range of appropriate professional experiences and offer constructive consultation and evaluation.

II Confidentiality

A. Guidance counsellors have an obligation to safeguard confidential client information that has been obtained in the course of their practice, teaching or research.

B. Client records are kept in a secure place in order to maintain confidentiality.

C. Guidance counsellors obtain consent forms from parents before releasing confidential student information to professionals in other agencies. Under some circumstances they may obtain consent from students before releasing information to parents or professionals in other agencies. The need to obtain consent from clients should consider the age at which a country legally defines one as being independent as well as the level of the student's mental and moral development. An exception to this policy exists when the guidance counsellor believes clients are in immediate danger to themselves or others.

D. Confidential information obtained on children and youth is discussed only for professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with the case.

E. When case studies are utilised in lectures or publications the guidance counsellors ensure that the identities of all persons are adequately disguised.

III Professional Growth

A. Guidance counsellors recognise the need for and participate in continuing professional development and supervision.

B. Guidance counsellors seek supervision and collaboration when working on issues with which they are less knowledgeable.

C. Guidance counsellors maintain knowledge of current scientific and professional information in the field by reading current research, attending workshops and conferences, and becoming active in professional organisations.

IV Professional Limitations

A. Guidance counsellors offer only those services which are within their area of professional competence and do not misrepresent their competence, qualifications, training and experience.

B. Guidance counsellors are aware of their professional limitations and enlist the assistance of other professionals in a consultative or referral role (when appropriate). Implicit in their referral process is knowledge of the expertise and competence commonly held by other professionals.

V Multicultural/Cross-Cultural Counselling

A. Guidance counsellors endeavour to become aware of their own cultural background and of how it impacts on the counselling relationship, to value cultural differences, and to

understand the limits of their competencies when working with different cultural groups or individuals.

B. Guidance counsellors undertake to learn as much as possible about the cultures of the groups with which they work, primarily from the group itself, so they have a better understanding of specific cultural worldviews.

C. Guidance counsellors, while endeavouring to obtain culturally specific information, do not use this information to stereotype individual clients.

D. Guidance counsellors understand how oppression, racism, discrimination and stereotyping can influence them personally and impact on the counselling process.

E. Guidance counsellors seek to participate in training programs which will enhance their skills to work effectively with culturally different groups and individuals.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

I Professional Relationships

A. Generally

1. Guidance counsellors do not exploit their professional relationships with children and youth, parents, teachers or other clients or research subjects for personal gains. This includes refraining from engaging in harassment and physical relations of a sexual nature and using one's employment affiliation to recruit clients for one's private practice.

2. Guidance counsellors attempt to interpret the nature of any assessment or professional interactions with children and youth, to teachers and parents.

3. Guidance counsellors attempt to discuss with children and youth, teachers and parents, their plans for assisting in the student's development, including various alternatives. Conflicts should not be avoided when their avoidance may result in a lowering of service to students.

4. Guidance counsellors refrain from making demeaning or derogatory remarks about students, parents, staff and colleagues.

B. Students

1. Guidance counsellors consider the welfare of the children and youth to be of primary importance.

2. Guidance counsellors ensure that children and youth understand the nature and purpose of any assessment or intervention to the best of their abilities.

3. Inform individuals, orally or in writing, of the purposes, goals techniques, policies, and ethical standards as appropriate to the service being provided.

4. Accept the right of the individual to make independent choices and to take responsibility for those choices and their consequences.

C. Colleagues and School Staffs

1. Guidance counsellors strive to develop harmonious and cooperative working relationships with colleagues and school staffs. They recognise the need to function as a member of a team within schools, other institutions and communities.

2. Attempts to develop harmonious and cooperative relationships should not result in the lowering of standards for services provided to students.

3. When guidance counsellors are aware of possible unethical practices by another guidance counsellor, they should informally attempt to resolve the issue by bringing the behaviour of concern to the attention of the guidance counsellor in a constructive manner. If such informal efforts to resolve the issue are not productive, other steps to resolve alleged unethical practices should be taken.

4. Unethical Practices may be referred in writing to the QGCA President. At such time an Ethical Conduct Sub-committee will be formed to review the ethical breach. If a breach of the Code of Ethics is determined educative processes will be implemented where appropriate by the sub-committee to remedy the behaviour of the guidance counsellor concerned. Where the breach is extreme and/or cannot be resolved through educative processes, the guidance counsellor's membership of the QGCA will be terminated. All breaches of the Code of Ethics will be treated in a confidential manner by the Executive and the sub-committee.

D. Inter-professional

1. Guidance counsellors strive to establish cooperative working relationships with professionals from related fields, community agencies, with community leaders and others holding positions of respect.

2. Guidance counsellors strive to insure the integrity of information given in confidence.

3. Guidance counsellors understand the areas of competence and limitations of professionals in related fields.

4. Guidance counsellors use their best professional judgement when making referrals to other professionals.

5. Guidance counsellors do not offer professional services to a person who is receiving similar assistance from another professional except by agreement or after termination of the relationship with the other professional.

6. Guidance counsellors avoid making expedient decisions.

II Assessment

- A. Guidance counsellors maintain the physical security of test and assessment techniques within the limits of legal mandates in order to maintain the validity of tests.
- B. Guidance counsellors typically administer tests according to publisher guidelines in order to maintain the validity of the results. However, when modifications are made or the validity of a test is questioned, these aspects are noted in the assessment report along with interpretation of possible effects of these factors.
- C. Guidance counsellors interpret tests in light of the appropriateness of their norms or other well established standards as well as the ability and validity estimates for the purpose for which they are used.
- D. Guidance counsellors guard against misinterpretation or misuse of assessment data.
- E. Guidance counsellors are accountable for assessment techniques they use and are able to defend their use.
- F. Guidance counsellors discourage utilisation of psychological assessment instruments by inappropriately trained or otherwise unqualified persons.
- G. When using tests developed in other countries, school psychologists conduct studies that help ensure the test is suitably formed and has adequate reliability and validity.

III Research

- A. Guidance counsellors fully inform their clients of the nature and purpose of the investigation and respect the right of parents in particular, to decline for their child to participate in a research study or to withdraw from it at any time.
- B. Guidance counsellors inform parents when their children are participating in research projects.
- C. Guidance Counsellors seek permission from their employing authorities and in particular, the administrators of the agencies and institutions involved before proceeding with research.
- D. Guidance counsellors follow the accepted procedures for good research e.g. clients are not distressed, credit is given to participants, feedback is provided, results are reported with exactness, and the limitations of the research are recognised and acknowledged.

IV Career Guidance and Counselling

- A. Guidance counsellors' practice is underpinned by a sound knowledge of career development theory.
- B. Guidance counsellors perform only career guidance and counselling tasks for which they

have appropriate training and skills.

C. Guidance counsellors provide accurate and up-to-date career and course information to clients.

D. Guidance counsellors are responsible to ensure that materials and resources held for client use are stored and maintained in an accessible manner and are regularly updated.

E. Guidance counsellors place the career counselling needs of clients within the context of the client's life.

F. Guidance counsellors select career guidance and counselling assessment instruments appropriate to the client.

G. Guidance counsellors ensure that other school personnel involved in career education are appropriately trained and supported to the level of functioning required by the program.

V Computer- Assisted Counselling

When computer applications are used as a component of guidance and counselling services, the guidance counsellor ensures that:

A. The client is intellectually, emotionally and physically capable of using the computer application;

B. The computer application is appropriate for the needs of the client;

C. The client understands the purpose and operation of the computer application;

D. A follow-up of client use of computer applications is provided to address possible problems (misconception or inappropriate use) and to assess subsequent needs; and

E. Members of various ethnic, racial, religious, disability and socio-economic groups have equal access to computer applications used to support guidance and counselling services and that the content of available computer applications does not discriminate against these groups.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

II Knowledge, skills and approaches

Guidance counsellors are characterised by having:

A. a knowledge of theories, breadth of options, and range of resources which are applicable to their work;

B. counselling and consulting skills at initial, basic, advanced and training levels;

- C. approaches which focus on empowering others, self-management and problem solving;
- D. training to tackle difficult situations or cases recognising their own personal limitations and the need to develop referrals and networks;
- E. a capacity to conceptualise and respond to complex situations;
- F. training to use assessment devices which are restricted to use by specifically trained personnel; and
- G. a capacity to take a whole-school or systematic approach to issues and concerns.

II Tasks

Guidance counsellors undertake a range of tasks to assist clients in situations which may be:

- A. high in emotional intensity;
- B. enduring;
- C. difficult to manage
- D. impacting on life roles and schooling;
- E. associated with a high level of risk taking and consequences which are often critical; and
- F. coordinated within the school or with outside agencies.

III Requirements

Guidance counsellors are required to have

- A. personal suitability;
- B. demonstrated skill as a teacher with appropriate teaching experience;
- C. possession of an appropriate degree from a recognised tertiary institution;
- D. completion of an appropriate post-graduate qualification in guidance and counselling; and
- E. supervision of practical work by experienced guidance counsellors.

IV Specialisation

- A. Developmental guidance counsellors work mainly with students in the 0-12 age range with some involvement with lower secondary age students. These students will usually be located



in preschools, primary schools and lower secondary schools. Developmental guidance counsellors also work with children attending special schools. The age range of these children may extend to 18 years. Developmental guidance counsellors are allocated responsibility for guidance in specific schools and may be located in a base school or a district centre office.

B. Secondary/Post-compulsory guidance counsellors work mainly with students attending secondary schools. Also, they are expected to work with special needs adolescents. Most secondary guidance counsellors are usually located in one secondary school while others are responsible for guidance in two or more schools.