# ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISION IN PSYCHOLOGY: TEACHING, RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND ADMINISTRATION[1]

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[1] Approved by the Board of Directors of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) in 2009 (Updated 2017). *Ethical Guidelines for Supervision in Psychology: Teaching, Research, Practice, and Administration* was adopted by the Canadian Psychological Association on 7 February 2009. The document was prepared by the CPA Committee on Ethics Supervision Guidelines Sub-Committee consisting of Jean Pettifor (Chair), Michelle McCarron, Greg Schoepp, Cannie Stark, and Don Stewart.

# Contents

# PREAMBLE

Psychologists have a responsibility to engage in ethical conduct in all aspects of their work. A number of inter-related documents serve as a foundation for supporting psychologists in maintaining ethical standards and good professional judgment when carrying out their psychological activities.

Ethical principles (Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples, Responsible Caring, Integrity in Relationships, and Responsibility to Society) and corresponding values and standards are articulated in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017). This *Code* serves as a guide for all work undertaken by psychologists and has been adopted by the majority of Canadian regulatory jurisdictions and voluntary associations. Included in the *Code* is an ethical decision-making process that is helpful for psychologists in resolving ethical dilemmas that may arise in all aspects of their work. Further assistance for psychologists on the use of the *Code* and on ethical decision making is found in the *Companion Manual to the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2017), which contains elaborations on the principles described in the *Code* as well as vignettes of ethical dilemmas that demonstrate conflicts between ethical principles or values and examples of using the decision-making process in resolving such dilemmas.

Codes of conduct have been developed in many North American jurisdictions. Such codes (sometimes called "standards of professional conduct" or "standards of conduct") serve as vehicles for the translation of relevant pieces of legislation and the profession's ethical principles and values into more specific definitions of behaviour. From a regulatory perspective, such codes constitute enforceable rules to be used in adjudicating disciplinary complaints. Rules tend to constitute minimally acceptable behaviours for registered psychologists providing services in a jurisdiction, whereas ethical principles provide a framework for ethical attitudes and behaviours that go beyond the minimally acceptable, and apply to all psychologists in all of their activities.

From time to time, further elaboration of the application of the principles and values underlying a code of ethics is needed to help guide psychologists in a particular area of activity. The current *Guidelines* provide such an elaboration to the practice of supervision. Unlike government legislation or codes of conduct of regulatory bodies, these *Guidelines* do not have the force of law. Rather, they provide advice on the applications or interpretations of ethical principles and values to a specialized area of psychological activity.

In Canada, guidelines often are cross-referenced to reflect the four ethical principles of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017). The current *Ethical Guidelines for Supervision in Psychology: Teaching Research, Practice, and Administration* are primarily aspirational and facilitative, and may require professional judgment in applying them in specific situations. The *Guidelines* are intended to support ethical decision making when ethical principles or the interests of different parties appear to be in conflict. The *Guidelines* should be read in conjunction with relevant sections of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017) and other guidelines that pertain to the reader's area of specialization.

As guidelines, they demonstrate how the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists for Psychologists* may be applied to supervision as a special area of activity.

# INTRODUCTION

Psychologists recognize that supervision is a specialized area of psychological activity that has its own foundation of knowledge and skills that are enhanced by education and training. Supervisors have an ethical responsibility to pursue available opportunities and resources to continuously improve their ability as supervisors. This could include formal mechanisms, such as workshops and supervision training, as well as informal mechanisms, such as reading, peer discussion, and mentoring.

The application of ethical principles by both supervisor and supervisee is important in maintaining a positive learning situation that will maximize benefits for all concerned. The supervisory process is interactive, with both supervisors and supervisees being responsible for adhering to ethical guidelines in their relationships. Therefore, wherever possible in this document, ethical guidelines are presented as shared responsibilities. However, the supervisor, because of the higher status, power, and knowledge, has the greater responsibility, and recognizes that the supervisee is more vulnerable when problems arise. Many psychology supervisors and supervisees find supervision to be a rewarding experience. However, some supervisees complain of perceived incompetence or neglect, or of exploitation and abuse on the part of supervisors, and some supervisors complain of a lack of awareness by the supervisee of his/her appropriate supervisee role, or the supervisee's lack of adequate prior learning and/or openness to new learning.

The purpose of these *Guidelines* is to provide an ethical framework for maintaining an effective and mutually respectful working alliance between supervisor and supervisee. Such a positive relationship enhances learning, which in turn results in the supervisee working to a higher standard of performance that protects from harm those who are affected by their work (e.g., students, clients, research participants, supervisees, supervisors, and relevant organizations). The supervisor has a special responsibility to address fluctuations and possible ruptures in the supervisory relationship in ways that are respectful, constructive and open.

Supervision occurs in a variety of settings (e.g., clinical, educational, organizational, research, and administrative). Supervision may be educational in contributing to skill development in a variety of different areas and, at the same time, may serve an evaluative gatekeeper role in determining who graduates from a training program or who is admitted to practice in the profession by the provincial/territorial regulatory body. Supervision may serve an administrative or management function that emphasizes quality control. Supervision may be formal or informal, contractual or implied, and subject to change over time. Therefore, the required content knowledge of each area of activity varies, but the ethical nature of the supervisory relationship is similar across all the areas of activity. In addition, there may be a gradation in supervisory roles, for example, the immediate supervisor may be accountable to a senior supervisor who is accountable to the Director or administrative head of a service or academic program. All levels of supervision are complementary. Where differences, conflicts or problems arise, the senior levels of supervisors have greater responsibility for resolving them in ways that are respectful, collaborative and positive. A key issue in supervision is the management and resolution of multiple responsibilities.

Most of the literature on supervision as a special area of activity relates to clinical psychology. However, psychologists provide supervision in research, practice, and

administration across a variety of domains, including counselling, clinical, school, organizations, and social policy. The ethical issues are similar. All forms of supervision involve learning and ensuring the safety, effectiveness, and quality of psychological performance.

There are various definitions and models of supervision, but all seem to include the following skills for supervisors: maintaining a working alliance; observing, evaluating, and gatekeeping; supporting; providing constructive feedback; facilitating self-evaluation; instructing; modelling; mentoring; and mutual problem solving.

Education in and training for these skills often has been minimal or absent from the psychologist's professional preparation. Complementary to the skills for supervisors, skills for supervisees include: understanding the tasks, purpose, roles, and boundaries of supervision; maintaining a working alliance; preparing adequately for supervision sessions; remaining open to feedback; and taking initiative in discussing innovative ideas.

The supervisor and supervisee recognize the power differential that exists between their respective roles and the potential for conflict between the interests of the supervisee and the evaluations that the supervisor as gatekeeper may make regarding the supervisee's graduation from the training program, entrance to the profession, or advancement in an organization. Special skills are required in managing these potentially different roles in a positive constructive manner.

These *Guidelines* do not specifically address situations in which psychologists supervise non-psychologists, or where psychologists are supervised by non- psychologists. However, clarification and agreement on roles, expectations and required competencies are especially important in these situations to maintaining positive supervisory relationships.

## Definitions

The content of the following three definitions of supervision appear relevant to all contexts for supervision, despite the fact that they are selected from sources in which the focus is primarily on clinical practice.

Definition of supervision from the *Mutual Recognition Agreement* (2001, p. 10): *[Supervision is] a kind of management that involves responsibility for the services provided under one's supervision and may involve teaching in the context of a relationship focused on developing or enhancing the competence of the person being supervised. Supervision is a preferred vehicle for the integration of practice, theory and research, with the supervisor as role model.*

Definition of supervision from Falender and Shafranske (2004, p. 3)

*Supervision is a distinct professional activity in which education and training aimed at developing science-informed practice are facilitated through a collaborative interpersonal process. It involves observation, evaluation, feedback, the facilitation of supervisee self-assessment, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills by instruction, modeling, and mutual problem solving. In addition, by building on the recognition of the strengths and talents of the supervisee, supervision encourages self-efficacy. Supervision ... is conducted in a competent manner in which ethical standards, legal*

*prescriptions, and professional practices are used to promote and protect the welfare of the client, the profession, and society at large.*

Definition of supervision from Bernard and Goodyear (2004, p. 8)

*Supervision is an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member or members of that same profession. This relationship is evaluative, extends over time, and has the simultaneous purposes of enhancing the professional functioning of the more junior person(s), monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients that she, he, or they see, and serving as a gatekeeper for those who are to enter the particular profession.*

With respect to the gatekeeper function mentioned in this third definition, supervisors have an obligation to ensure that successful supervisees meet at least minimal standards of competence for their level of training in their area of activity by the end of supervision; moreover, supervisors assume responsibility for addressing problematic areas of concern identified during the supervisory relationship and for not passing or certifying supervisees who are not meeting developmentally appropriate standards.

There are two major categories of supervision; viz., developmental supervision and administrative supervision. For developmental supervision, the focus is on educating/training/mentoring supervisees to improve their skills in some way.

Administrative supervision reflects a type of accountability or quality control that serves more as a management function than an educational one. Both forms of supervision involve monitoring for safety and effectiveness, and both involve some form of evaluation (e.g., meeting departmental practice guidelines for a hospital- based psychologist; expectations for progress in skill development for a psychology practicum student; meeting standards for conducting research).

## GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL SUPERVISION

### Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples

The principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples requires supervisors and supervisees to demonstrate respect for each other as well as for all other persons and peoples with whom they relate in their psychological activities. Respect involves valuing the innate worth of persons and not using them solely as a means to an end. Respect is an essential characteristic in the relationship between supervisors and supervisees. The supervisee shares the responsibility for respect, even though the supervisor has the greater responsibility for modelling and maintaining a respectful relationship and for addressing problems that may arise. The power differential adds to the complexity of the supervisory relationship.

Supervisors and supervisees should:

1. Demonstrate respect, courtesy, and understanding for each other in their respective roles.

2. Be vigilant in all situations to prevent discrimination on the basis of personal

characteristics, e.g., ethnicity, race, religion, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status, age, and socioeconomic status.

3. Share in defining the goals and role expectations for the supervisory relationship.

4. When establishing a supervisory relationship, disclose preferences for theories and practices, as well as strive to disclose personal biases, beliefs, and personal characteristics that may affect the supervisory process.

5. Address professional and interpersonal differences between supervisor and supervisee in as open, amicable, and constructive a way as possible. If appropriate, they should consider third party consultation or mediation.

6. Clearly define the parameters of supervisee and supervisor confidentiality of personal information shared during supervision, including stated limitations relevant to reasonable curricular and educational planning for the enhancement of learning, evaluations of competency for independent practice as required by regulatory bodies, and legal requirements to prevent serious and imminent harm.

7. Make reasonable accommodations for valid crises or unexpected events in the life of the supervisee or supervisor that may temporarily interfere with supervision.

## Principle II: Responsible Caring

The principle of Responsible Caring requires supervisors and supervisees to care for the well-being and best interests of individuals who, and groups that, benefit directly from their work and, where the benefit is indirect, to take care that their work meets expected standards of performance. Responsible caring also involves self-awareness and self-exploration of personal attitudes and beliefs that may influence how they conduct their psychological activities. Knowledge regarding, and attitudes toward a range of population diversities are especially important. The supervisee shares these responsibilities even though the supervisor has the greater responsibility for maintaining a level of caring that benefits concerned parties.

Supervisors and supervisees should:

1. Share, under the leadership of the supervisor, a clarification and understanding of their respective roles and how to use them to enhance learning and performance in psychology. They should be well prepared, make efficient use of time, and be receptive to mutual learning.

2. Keep up to date with the standards, guidelines, codes, laws, and regulations that are specific to the work undertaken or to the workplace, and which support supervisor-supervisee learning. They should commit themselves to long term continuing-competence activities.

3. Establish their current levels of competence in the relevant areas as a basis for defining supervision goals, procedures, and conditions.

4. Aspire to the same standard of work by supervisees as would be required of competent psychologists not receiving supervision.

5. Keep up to date with current knowledge and competencies in supervision, as

appropriate to your role expectations.

6. Be aware of professional and personal limitations that may affect working relationships, be open to and elicit feedback regarding issues, and manage limitations in ways that support a positive supervisory relationship.

7. Maintain records to a standard required by the nature of the psychological activity and setting, and to the extent needed to maintain an effective supervisory relationship.

8. Ensure availability for supervision at all regular times and ensure that there are special arrangements for communication in the event of unanticipated circumstances or emergencies.

9. Ensure that articulated plans are in place to address emergencies or other serious events.

10. Maintain supervision on site where appropriate and possible, and where inappropriate or not possible, maintain the quality of supervision through creative use of distance technology.

11. Seek clarification of the respective responsibilities of supervisees and supervisors when supervision is provided concurrently from more than one supervisor (e.g., university supervisor and field supervisors, supervisors in different specialty areas, cross-disciplinary supervision).

## Principle III: Integrity in Relationships

The principle of Integrity in Relationships requires openness, objectivity, honesty, straightforwardness, and avoidance of conflict of interest in keeping with respect and caring for others. Any exceptions need to be justified by the ethical principles of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* and are not permitted only as a matter of convenience. The supervisee shares these responsibilities even though the supervisor has the greater responsibility for maintaining an open trusting relationship and for addressing problems that may arise.

Supervisors and supervisees should:

1. Identify and address conflict in the supervisory relationship in open, honest, and beneficial ways.

2. Explore personal values as they are relevant to maintaining adequate objectivity to the work under supervision or to the supervisory process.

3. Respect each other's substantive contributions to research findings and to publications, give credit as earned, and avoid any distortion of results for personal, political, or other reasons.

4. Avoid all forms of exploitation, or actions that harm the supervisor or supervisee (e.g., financial, sexual, gossip, blackmail, false allegations, and coercion in the supervisory and the work relationships).

5. Strive for the highest level of competence consistent with the supervisee's developmental level, training and experience.

6.  On an ongoing basis, be open in sharing information with each other about the supervisee's level of professional development.

7.  Avoid dual or multiple relationships that may be harmful to themselves, to others, or that interfere with the learning objectives of the supervisory process.

8.  Be aware of professional boundaries in the supervisory relationship, and manage additional roles (e.g., social relationships) in a manner that does not compromise the supervisory relationship. Intimate sexual relationships, however, are prohibited.

9.  Ensure that relevant parties (e.g., clients, guardians, and research participants) are informed that the services/activities are being performed by an individual who is under supervision, are discussed with a supervisor, and that these parties if they wish may request a meeting with the supervisor.

10. Present accurate evaluations in providing direct feedback and in providing references.

## Principle IV: Responsibility to Society

The principle of Responsibility to Society requires that psychologists have a responsibility to promote the collective wellbeing of society. There are many ways from a foundation of teaching, research, practice, and administration that supervisors and supervisees can contribute to the welfare of society. Psychologists who practice their discipline with high standards serve the public interest, as do those who advocate for change in social policies. There is a wide range of ways in which psychologists may contribute to the greater good of society. The supervisee and supervisor need to be aware of the responsibility to promote the collective wellbeing of society.

Supervisors and supervisees should:

1.  Be open to considering appropriate roles for psychologists in promoting social advocacy or social justice.

2.  Take into account systemic issues that apply to the particular area of work that is being supervised and in the management of conflicting interests.

3.  Ensure that issues of ethics and standards, and the legal and regulatory requirements that apply to the particular area of work are addressed.

4.  Strive to achieve the highest quality of learning from the supervisory relationship in order to use their combined competence to serve the public interest.

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