
ACAT Code of Ethics and Practice

Published 1995

www.acat.me.uk | admin@acad.me.uk | 0844 800 9496

INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines are intended to regulate the professional conduct of members and trainees of the Association of Cognitive Analytic Therapists (ACAT). It is also intended to inform members of the public seeking and using services of the standards of conduct they can expect.

Purpose of Cognitive Analytic Therapy

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) aims to relieve psychological distress through enabling clients to develop a shared understanding of the patterns of thought, feeling and activity which maintain that distress. Where self limiting patterns can be identified the possibility of alternative new patterns opens up. The therapeutic relationship established between therapist and client is fundamental to the building up of a shared understanding.

Guiding principle

The primary guiding principle of this Code is that the psychotherapist's central professional concern is the client's well-being. In her work, the therapist acts impartially, putting aside personal considerations and demonstrating a respect for the client's autonomy. The psychotherapist should be guided in her work by an awareness of the **Equal Opportunities Policy of ACAT**.

The Code offers additional protection to that offered by the legal structure to all citizens and assumes that the psychotherapist will be acting in a lawful manner towards her client. It aims to provide a framework for addressing the complex issues arising out of the psychotherapeutic relationship. It aims to protect the client from harm and also to provide standards of what constitutes harm. The Code also aims to offer protection to the psychotherapist from unjust allegations of harm.

Additional obligations

Psychotherapists have obligations not only to her clients but also to her profession. This Code addresses the relationship between the psychotherapist and her colleagues, her profession and the other helping professions. The Code gives consideration to issues to do with advertising of services, research and publication.

Structure, purpose and limits of the Code

The Code embodies the experience of the profession in establishing areas where harm to the client is possible or where conflicts between principles make assessment of the most advantageous course of action complex. This experience is distilled in an interconnected system of distinct principles. Each principle is followed by a more detailed description of some of its practical consequences.

The practical consequences outlined cannot be comprehensive and address all situations but are intended as guidance to help psychotherapists to balance out competing demands. It should not be interpreted as a restrictive rule book but rather as a method for establishing a safe and effective place for creative psychotherapy to take place.

Breaches of the Code

Psychotherapists have an obligation to be acquainted with and to act in accordance with these principles. Where a breach of this Code is perceived by either a client or a fellow member of ACAT, the Association has a Complaints Procedure in order to investigate such a breach and take appropriate action should it be found that a breach has occurred.

Who the Code applies to

Membership of ACAT is gained after successful completion of a Practitioner Training. Additional training is required in order to be recognized as a Psychotherapist and registered by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. This Code of Ethics imposes the same obligations on Psychotherapist members, Practitioner members and trainees of ACAT.

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Terminology

Where the feminine pronoun is used it is intended to cover both male and female

The term "Psychotherapist" is used in this instance to cover psychotherapists, practitioner members and trainees.

The word "client" stands for both patient and client.

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

1. The well-being of the client

The first and most basic principle of this Code is that the well-being of the client is the central concern of the psychotherapist.

- a) The psychotherapist should not exploit her client sexually, financially or emotionally or cause physical harm.

2. Boundaries

It is essential to be aware of the boundaries of therapy and to limit relationships with clients to the therapeutic setting.

- a) Social contact with clients should be avoided wherever possible. The psychotherapist should not take on as clients members of her own family, friends or colleagues.
- b) The psychotherapist should never enter into a sexual relationship with her current client or past clients.

3. Contractual arrangements

Psychotherapists should ensure as far as is possible that the client is aware of the contractual boundaries of the relationship.

- a) This includes, day and times of meetings, arrangements for holidays, method of termination of therapy. The right of the client and of the therapist to terminate, subject to contractual arrangements, should be acknowledged.
- b) Where the client is paying for the service, financial arrangements need to be clearly established.

4. Confidentiality

The therapist-client relationship is one in which the client should feel confident that both the fact of the meeting and the content of that meeting is private and confidential.

- a) In general, and subject to the requirements of law, the psychotherapist must take care to prevent the identity of individuals being revealed deliberately or inadvertently, without their expressed permission. The client should be informed at the outset of therapy of the limits of and exceptions to confidentiality.
- b) Psychotherapists should take all reasonable steps to ensure that colleagues, staff and trainees with whom they work understand and respect the need for confidentiality regarding any information obtained.
- c) In exceptional circumstances, where there is sufficient evidence to raise serious concern about the safety or interests of clients, or about others who may be threatened by the client's behaviour, the psychotherapist may take such steps as are judged necessary to inform appropriate third parties without prior consent - although wherever possible prior consent should be sought - after first consulting an experienced and disinterested colleague, unless the delay caused by seeking this advice would involve a significant risk to life or health. The client should be informed of this action.
- d) This confidentiality is further limited by the requirements stated elsewhere in this Code for the need for the psychotherapist to have supervision and to liaise appropriately with other helping professionals. Discussion of the client in these contexts is subject to the same rules of confidentiality.
- e) Research and publication. The psychotherapist is required to safeguard the welfare and anonymity of clients when any form of publication of clinical material is being considered and to obtain their consent. Any written or verbal presentation of clinical material must preserve the anonymity of the client.

5. Supervision

The psychotherapist should arrange for supervision or consultation on her clinical work as appropriate.

- a) The purpose of supervision - amongst others - is to ensure the efficacy of the work with the client and that the high standards of ACAT are maintained.

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- b) Knowledge gained in the course of giving supervision or professional support is subject to the same rules of confidentiality

6. Limitations on effectiveness

The psychotherapist should be aware of the limitations on her ability to offer an effective service.

This includes:

- a) The scope of psychotherapy as a method of relieving distress - where there are clear grounds that other interventions would be of benefit to the client the therapist should normally discuss this with the client.
- b) The extent of her professional competence - a psychotherapist should be involved in regular practice, in training and should ensure that she maintains awareness of developments in the field and has periodic refresher training.
- c) The psychotherapist must not make false claims as to her competence or training. The psychotherapist should not claim qualifications she does not possess.
- d) The level of her personal functioning - the psychotherapist must actively monitor her own personal functioning and, if in doubt, seek help in assessing where the balance between the demands/needs of the client for a service conflict with her day to day capacity to deliver that service.

7. Appropriate environment

Psychotherapists have a responsibility to ensure that they are working within an appropriate environment.

- a) Clients should be seen in appropriate surroundings providing privacy, security and comfort.
- b) Psychotherapists must satisfy themselves that they are covered by indemnity arrangements against claims for damages from alleged negligence or accidental injury whether in her private practice or in the work which they undertake for an employer.

8. Professional relationships

Psychotherapists act within a network of services and need to act with respect for these services.

- a) Psychotherapists should discuss with clients what contact the clients have had with other helping professions. Psychotherapists need to consider where the service they offer may conflict with the help offered by other professionals. Permission should be sought to contact other professionals where appropriate and the psychotherapist should then proceed to make such contact

9. Research

Psychotherapists are required to clarify with clients the nature purpose and conditions of any research in which the clients are to be involved and to ensure that informed and verifiable consent is given before commencement.

It is good practice to have this in writing.

10. Obligations to the profession

Psychotherapists have an obligation to act in accordance with an awareness of the standing of her profession.

- a) The psychotherapist should not have been refused membership of or have been struck off the register of the appropriate body of her core profession.
- b) The psychotherapist should not behave within her therapy related activities in ways which undermine public confidence in either her role as a therapist or in the work of other therapists.
- c) Where a psychotherapist perceives a colleague acting in breach of this Code of Ethics, she has an obligation to raise the matter with the person and/or notify the appropriate professional body.

11. Publicity

In making her services publicly known, the psychotherapist should not make unwarranted claims

- a) Advertising should be confined to a statement of name, relevant qualifications, address, hours available, fees etc. Descriptions of the service offered should be brief and should not be evaluative as to their quality or uniqueness. The psychotherapist shall refrain from making exaggerated, sensational and unjustifiable claims for the effectiveness of her methods, from advertising services in a way likely to encourage unrealistic

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expectations about the effectiveness of the services offered, or from misleading those to whom services are offered about the nature and likely consequences of any interventions to be undertaken.

Amended & accepted by members present at ACAT AGM 4/11/95