

Safeguarding in Practice: A statement of commitment by counsellors

TLC as an agency offering therapeutic services has a commitment and mission to uphold and safeguard the wellbeing of both clients and practitioners, and to maintain the highest standards of quality of care in practice.

In order to maintain these standards, we offer below a statement of commitment on the part of all TLC counsellors, This Statement is based upon and closely aligned to the guidelines laid out in the *Ethical Framework of the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP)*

In reading TLC's statement of commitment, and signing below, I recognise that I am formally undertaking to abide by and be accountable to the agency for upholding this commitment

1. My commitment in working with TLC

1.1 Trust and confidentiality

I recognise that in order to work towards their desired goals, our clients need to be able to experience an atmosphere of *trust* and *confidentiality* within TLC. Specifically, this means being able to trust that their therapist and others in the TLC administration will as far as possible care for their well-being, and aim to safeguard sensitive personal information.

1.2 Ethical commitment

My own *ethical commitment* is to be trustworthy and transparent in relation to my clients. This includes:

- ensuring that I am working within my competence
- showing commitment to updating my skills and knowledge through regular and relevant CPD
- working with other colleagues to ensure the quality of what is being offered to clients
- safeguarding my own wellbeing
- ensuring that my personal resources are sufficient to sustain the quality of my work
- maintaining accurate and confidential records

1.3 Respect

In addition, I will show my *respect* of the therapist-client alliance in:

- valuing each client as a unique person
- protecting client confidentiality and privacy

- agreeing with clients on how we will work together
- listening out for how clients experience our working together
- communicating clearly what clients have a right to expect from therapy
- communicating any costs and commitments that clients may reasonably expect to undertake in the process
- respecting the boundaries between my work with clients and what lies outside that work
- refraining from exploiting or abusing clients

1.4 Integrity

I undertake to show *integrity* in:

- being honest about the work
- communicating accurately my qualifications, level of experience and working methods
- working with careful consideration of the law and undertaking to seek further guidance where necessary

1.5 Accountability and honesty

I aim to demonstrate *accountability and honesty* in:

- being willing to discuss with clients how best to work towards their desired outcomes but also to flag up any known risks which may arise in the work
- ensuring that clients are promptly informed about anything important that has gone wrong in our work together, whether or not clients are aware of it, and quickly taking action to limit or repair any harm as far as possible reviewing honestly my work with clients in supervision
- monitoring how clients experience our work together and the effects of my work with them

1.6 Commitment to accountability

As a member of TLC with a commitment to observing the principles and values set out in this TLC *Statement of Commitment*, I acknowledge that my membership may be at risk if I fail to fulfil my commitment to being openly accountable. This includes being willing to explain how I may have implemented my obligations to those people who have a valid interest in my work.

In order to fully understand what is being undertaken in the statements above, it is useful to read through the following 2 sections provided below:

The TLC Ethical Guidelines (2)

The TLC Guidelines for Good Practice (3)

2. Understanding of Ethics

I understand that the ethics of TLC are modelled on those of the BACP and are based on the values and principles which underpin good contemporary therapy practice. I understand that these ethics also relate to my personal moral qualities and how I see these as informing my commitment to clients

2.1 Ethical values

I understand that the purpose and goals of my own actions in dealing with TLC clients should reflect the underlying values fundamental to the profession's understanding of good practice. I agree that such values should include a commitment to:

- respecting human rights and dignity
- seeking to alleviate distress and suffering in my clients
- seeking to strengthen their wellbeing and sense of agency
- enhancing the quality of relationships between people
- increasing personal resilience and effectiveness
- respecting the clients' sense of self as meaningful within their personal and cultural context
- appreciating the complexity of human experiences and cultures
- protecting the safety of clients
- striving for the fair and adequate provision of services

2.2 Ethical Principles

The values we hold also inform our principles, which in turn direct attention to important ethical responsibilities.

I understand that the core principles which underpin my profession are:

- being trustworthy: and honouring the trust placed in my role as therapist
- observing autonomy: respecting the client's right to be self-governing
- practicing beneficence: being committed to promoting the client's wellbeing
- observing non-maleficence in avoiding harm to the client
- upholding justice: treating all clients with fairness and impartiality in the provision of our services
- committing to self-respect: fostering my self-knowledge, integrity and self-care.

I understand that in my practice, I may encounter situations where I find it impossible to reconcile all the applicable principles, leaving me with difficult choices as to which principles to prioritise. In such circumstances, I commit to considering all the circumstances relevant to the context with as much care as possible, and to be appropriately accountable for decisions made.

I understand that a decision or course of action does not necessarily become unethical merely because it is controversial or because other practitioners would have reached different conclusions in similar circumstances.

2.3 The role of personal moral qualities in Ethics

I understand that personal moral qualities are internalised values that shape how I relate to others and my environment, even if unexamined, or operating unconsciously. The energy driving my personal moral qualities is ethically directed when I examine my actions, motivations and practices from time to time, alone or in supervision. This quality of awareness may be used to motivate my ethical development or shape how I work towards a good society.

I understand that the perceived presence or absence of my personal and relational moral qualities may have a strong influence on how relationships with clients and colleagues develop. Thus I undertake to engage in reflection as to whether my moral values are of sufficient quality and resilience to support the work.

I understand that the key personal qualities to which members and registrants are strongly encouraged to aspire include:

- **care:** benevolent, responsible and competent attentiveness to someone's needs, wellbeing and personal agency
- **diligence:** the conscientious application of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a beneficial outcome
- **courage:** the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty
- **empathy:** the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective
- **identity:** sense of self in relationship to others that forms the basis of responsibility, resilience and motivation
- **humility:** the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's personal strengths and weaknesses
- **integrity:** commitment to being moral in dealings with others, including personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence
- **resilience:** the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished
- **respect:** showing appropriate esteem for people and their understanding of themselves
- **sincerity:** a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done
- **wisdom:** possession of sound judgement that informs practice

2.4. Conclusion

I understand that the challenge of working ethically means that I or my colleagues may encounter situations that require responses to unexpected issues, resolution of dilemmas, and solutions to problems. I accept that a good understanding of the ethics that underpin our work is a valuable resource in making significant decisions, and that the use of an ethical problem-solving model and discussion about ethics are essential to good practice.

I understand that these Ethical guidelines will help to direct my attention to the variety of ethical factors needing consideration in dealing with clients. However, I understand that no statement of ethical commitment can eliminate the difficulty of making professional judgements in circumstances that may be constantly changing and full of uncertainties.

Recognising this, as a member of TLC I agree to commit myself to engaging with the challenge of striving to be ethical, even when this calls for me to act with courage, and make difficult decisions.

3. Guidelines for Good practice

As members of TLC we are committed to sustaining and advancing good practice. The following guidelines consider in more detail the implications of our ethics and principles in ensuring good practice, whether in counselling, administrative pastoral care, supervision, training, or management.

3.1. Putting clients first

I agree to position my clients as the primary focus of my attention and work during our sessions together.

I understand that if I become aware that a professional or personal interest is coming into conflict with my client's interests, it is my responsibility to take this into supervision. If this is not available in the moment, I undertake to speak to an experienced colleague or, when appropriate, to discuss the issue with my affected client before continuing to offer any service.

I undertake to protect the confidentiality and privacy of my clients. However, I also recognise that there may be times when my duty of care requires me to manage a situation where my client or another appears to need protection from serious harm.

In such instances, I understand that compliance with the law may require me to override a client's explicit wishes or to breach confidentiality. For this reason it is very important that in advance of working with clients, I am prepared to inform them of any reasonably foreseeable limitations of privacy or confidentiality that may arise in the work.

I understand that when the safeguarding of our clients or others from serious harm does take priority over our commitment to putting our clients' wishes and confidentiality first, it is usually best practice to consult with the client affected, if this is legally permitted and ethically desirable. In this, I will continue to work towards maintaining any safeguarding responsibilities in respect of a client's known wishes and interests.

As a counsellor working within an agency, I am ready to share the responsibility with all other members for the safety and wellbeing of all clients and their protection from exploitation or unsafe practice. I am prepared to take action to prevent harm caused by another practitioner to any client, even if this involves challenging a colleague or others whose views appear to be unfairly discriminatory. I undertake to take further

action to protect clients, if necessary, in order to fulfil our promise to do everything we can to develop and protect my clients' trust.

3.2 Working to professional standards

3.2.1 I undertake to sustain my competence in delivering my best professional service to TLC. This will include keeping my skills and knowledge up to date by:

- reading professional journals, books and/or reliable electronic resources to stay informed on relevant research and evidence-based guidance
- discussing arising questions in my supervision groups to learn with and from colleagues working with similar issues
- reviewing my knowledge and skills in supervision and discussion with experienced practitioners
- engaging in regular continuing professional development to update knowledge and skills
- keeping up to date with the law, regulations and any other requirements, including guidance from TLC in relation to its work and mission.

3.2.2 I undertake to keep accurate records of my supervision and my work, appropriate to the service being provided.

Where consistent with client consent, I will collaborate with and support colleagues to improve services. Where relevant, in regard to overlaps of work with specific clients, I will maintain confidentiality and act within the client's best interests.

I undertake to resource myself appropriately in order to maintain my own physical and psychological health at a level that enables me to work effectively with our clients.

I will ensure to be covered by adequate insurance when providing services directly or indirectly to the public.

I agree to fulfil the ethical principles and values set out in these Guidelines regardless of whether working online, face to face or using any other methods of communication.

3.3 Demonstrating respect for clients

3.3.1 I undertake to respect my clients' privacy and dignity. This includes:

- demonstrating equality, respect for diversity in human values, and ensuring inclusion of the client
- being mindful of any possibility of unfair discrimination against a client or colleague
- accepting that both therapist and client are equally vulnerable to prejudice
- recognising the importance of self-inquiry, personal feedback and professional development in addressing personal vulnerabilities

- working with issues of identity in an open-minded way, that respect the client's autonomy, whether individual or relational
- being aware of possible barriers to accessibility, and as far as is reasonably possible, overcoming obstacles for clients of any ability wishing to engage with a service
- recognising when my knowledge of key aspects of a client's background, identity or lifestyle is inadequate and taking steps to inform myself from other sources where available and appropriate, rather than expecting the client to teach me
- being open-minded with clients who appear similar to myself or possess familiar characteristics so that I do not suppress or neglect what is distinctive in their lives
- being informed on the law concerning equality, diversity and inclusion and taking this into careful consideration and striving for a higher standard than the legal minimum.
- being ready to challenge colleagues or others involved in delivering related services if I believe their views appear to be unfairly discriminatory, and to take action to protect clients, if necessary

3.3.2 I undertake to protect the confidentiality and privacy of clients by actively protecting information about them from unauthorised access or disclosure informing clients about any reasonably foreseeable limitations of privacy or confidentiality in advance of our work together

3.3.3 I will do all that I reasonably can to ensure that my clients are participating on a voluntary basis, including hesitant clients, or clients who feel under pressure from other people or agencies to work with us. I will acknowledge such reservations, and take them into account in how I offer the service to such clients.

3.3.4 I undertake to work with clients on the basis of their informed consent and agreement.

3.3.5 In the instance of working with children and young people, I undertake to consider their capacity to give informed consent, and explore from the perspective of their best interests whether it is appropriate to seek the consent of others who have parental responsibility for the young person. I will demonstrate knowledge and skills about ways of working that are appropriate to the young person's maturity and understanding.

3.3.6 I will give careful consideration to obtaining and respecting the consent of vulnerable adult clients, wherever they have the capacity to give consent, or involving anyone who provides care for these clients when appropriate.

3.3.7 My work with clients will be based on professional partnerships with them that aim to increase their wellbeing, capability and/or performance.

3. 4 Building an appropriate relationship

3.4.1 I will provide clients with all information they need to know in advance in order to make an informed decision about the services they want to receive and how these services will be delivered.

3.4.2. I will give careful consideration to how I reach agreement with clients and contract with them about the terms on which TLC's services will be provided. This includes:

- reaching an agreement or contract that respects each client's expressed needs and choices
- communicating terms and conditions of the agreement or contract in ways easily understood by the client and appropriate to their context
- stating any reasonably foreseeable limitations to a client's confidentiality or privacy
- providing the client with a record or easy access to a record of what has been agreed
- keeping a record of what has been agreed and of any changes or clarifications when they occur

3. 4.3. I undertake to establish and maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries in my relationships with clients. I will do this by:

- ensuring that relationship boundaries are consistent with the aims of working together and beneficial to the client
- avoiding any dual or multiple relationships where the risks of harm to the client outweigh any benefits to the client
- establishing and maintaining a distinction between my personal and professional presence on social media where this could result in harmful dual relationships with clients
- reviewing the impact of any dual or multiple relationships in supervision, and discussing with clients when appropriate. I understand that such dual relationships may also be discussed with any colleagues or managers in order to enhance the integrity of the work being undertaken, while safeguarding the client's confidentiality.
- I will not have sexual relationships with or behave sexually towards my clients, supervisor, supervisees or trainees.
- I will avoid having sexual relationships with or behaving sexually towards people whom I know to be close to my clients in order to avoid undermining my client's trust in me.
- I will not exploit or abuse my clients in any way: financially, emotionally, physically, sexually or spiritually.

3.4.4. I recognise that conflicts of interest and issues of power or dependence may continue after my working relationship with a client, supervisor, supervisee or trainee has formally ended. I will exercise caution before entering into personal or business relationships with former clients and expect to be professionally accountable if the

relationship becomes detrimental to the former client or to the standing of the profession.

I will periodically review each client's progress and, when practicable, seek my client's views on how we are working together.

3.5 Demonstrating integrity with clients

3.5.1 I undertake to maintain high standards of honesty and probity in all aspects of my work. This includes being as open and as communicative with my clients, colleagues and others as is consistent with the purpose, methods and confidentiality of the service.

Whenever I communicate my qualifications, professional experience and working methods, I will do so accurately and honestly, and answer all reasonable requests for this information promptly.

3.5.2. I will give conscientious consideration to the law and any legal requirements concerning my work and take responsibility and advice when needed as to how they are implemented

I will promptly notify TLC of any criminal charges, disciplinary procedures or civil claims brought against me. I will also notify TLC if I am declared bankrupt or have entered into other types of debt relief or insolvency arrangements.

I will avoid any actions that will bring my profession into disrepute.

3.6 Exercising accountability and candour

3.6.1 I will take responsibility for how I offer my clients opportunities to work towards their desired outcomes and the safety of the services TLC provides.

I will discuss with clients how best to work towards their desired outcomes and any known risks involved in the work.

I will ensure candour by promptly informing my clients of anything important that has gone wrong in our work together. This includes taking immediate action to prevent or limit any harm, repair any harm caused, and, so far as possible, offering an apology when this is appropriate. I understand candour also includes notifying and discussing with my supervisor and/or manager what has occurred, as well as investigating and taking action to avoid whatever has gone wrong being repeated.

I will review in supervision how I work with clients and monitor how clients experience our work together and the effects of the work with them, in ways appropriate to the type of service being offered.

4. The importance of practitioner self-care in good practice

4.1 Responsibility for my own wellbeing

I undertake to be responsible for my own wellbeing as this is essential to sustaining good practice by:

- taking precautions to protect my own physical safety
- monitoring my own psychological and physical health
- seeking professional support and services as the need arises
- keeping a healthy balance between my work and other aspects of life

4.2 Good practice in responding to ethical dilemmas and issues

I recognise that professional and ethical issues, problems and dilemmas will arise from time to time and are an unavoidable part of my practice. In such situations, I undertake to use my supervision and any other available professional resources to support and challenge how I respond to such situations. I will give careful consideration to the best approaches to ethical problem-solving.

I will take responsibility for considering how best to act in such situations and will be ready to explain why I decided to respond in the way I did.

5. Understanding the role of supervision in good practice

5.1 I recognise that supervision is essential to how practitioners sustain good practice throughout their working life. I will undertake to use supervision as a regular and ongoing opportunity to reflect in depth about all aspects of my practice. I will use supervision to support my goal in working as effectively, safely and ethically as possible. I will also use supervision as a resource to sustain the personal resourcefulness I will require to undertake the work.

I understand that good supervision is much more than case management, and that it will help me work in depth on the relationship between practitioner and client in order to work towards desired outcomes and positive effects. This requires adequate levels of privacy, safety and containment for the supervisee to undertake this work. I understand therefore that a substantial part or preferably all of supervision needs to be independent of line management.

I have read and understood the TLC Ethical Framework and agree to abide by its principles.

Counsellor Signature.....Date.....

Counsellor Name.....