

# Code of Ethics

## INTRODUCTION

Every profession is expected to have uniform and recognized principles and standards that serve the needs of the profession, clients, legal bodies, and institutions. This Code of Ethics describes the ethical principles and standards of conduct of the International School Psychology Association (ISPA).

### *General purposes of a code of ethics*

Reciprocal relationships exist between society and school psychology. Society provides human and financial resources that allow school psychologists to function effectively as a profession. These resources support its ability to select those who aspire to become school psychologists, to prepare them academically and professionally, to conduct research that fosters good practices, to credential school psychologists, to fund school psychology services, and to foster the creation of the specialty of school psychology in other ways. In turn, school psychologists are expected to provide quality services to children, parents<sup>1</sup>, schools, institutions, and communities through their teaching, research, and service. The ethical principles and standards of conduct discussed below constitute a statement to society of the professional behavior expected of school psychologists who are ISPA members. They apply to all fields of school psychology and include methods that use computer-assisted technology for assessment or telehealth intervention.

As professional organizations mature, they need to develop, adopt, and implement their codes of ethics. While the development of an international code of ethics is particularly difficult in light of national, cultural, and political differences, there are numerous similarities in standards within the specialty of school psychology. For the most part, acceptable standards governing professional behavior span geographic and national boundaries. This code of ethics endeavors to capture and highlight these commonalities.

Nonetheless, the translation and manifestation of ethical principles and standards important to this code may vary somewhat between countries as a reflection of each country's norms, values, traditions, and laws.

This code is not intended to supersede codes governing ethical and professional behaviors adopted nationally, by other organizations with which school psychologists may affiliate, or by educational authorities. When codes of ethics differ, members should seek to resolve such differences by attempting to clarify the ethical principle or standard from the respective organizations and by taking reasonable steps to resolve the difference through changes in the codes. School psychologists aspire to the highest ethical standards in their service to children, families, schools, and society.

## PREVAILING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

School psychologists are expected to exemplify the principles of the profession. These include overcoming narrow personal, social, and cultural values and attitudes, and acting in ways that are in the best interest of children and youth, educators, parents, institutions, communities, and the profession. Children's rights are to be respected. Should conflicts occur between the interests of these individuals or organizations, members should seek to resolve such differences by attempting to clarify the ethical principle or standard from the respective individual or organization with which they are affiliated and work toward resolving the conflicts, recognizing the particular vulnerability that children present across cultures. As such, the following six principles constitute aspirational behaviors that underscore the professional standards.

### ***Caring for Well-Being and Avoiding Harm***

School psychologists promote sustainable well-being and the mental health of individuals in their schools, families, institutions, and communities. Sustainable well-being recognizes the reciprocal relationship between one's personal well-being and the well-being of others within the broader community and the world.

School psychologists strive to promote the beneficial development of students in an inclusive society and in a sustainable environment. They support efforts that contribute to the individual, community and global well-being without the exploitation of other people, the environment, or future generations.

School psychologists are aware of possible professional and personal conditions that may limit their ability to help others. Minimally, they strive to do no harm.

### ***Competence***

Services provided by school psychologists reflect their areas of expertise established through their initial preparation and their continued academic and professional training. School psychologists strive to provide services at a high level of competence. When requested or needed to provide services for which they may be less qualified, school psychologists either refer to other professionals or acquire needed training and work under consultation and/or supervision.

### ***Fidelity and Responsibility***

School psychologists acknowledge that trust provides a foundation for professional service. To establish and maintain trustworthiness is essential for them and for their profession. They are knowledgeable of and uphold professional standards of conduct. They describe and clarify their professional roles, obligations, and professional limitations. They accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior. They manage conflicts of interest and act collaboratively to resolve any ethical dilemmas.

### ***Integrity***

School psychologists display integrity, including consistency in the expression of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They are committed to the expression and promotion of accuracy, honesty and truthfulness through their scholarship, teaching, and clinical practices. They address misconduct and conflicts of interest, and uphold their integrity also when collaborating with school personnel, parents, and other professionals.

### ***Respect for the Rights and Dignity of Persons***

School psychologists promote and respect the dignity and worth of all people. They acknowledge individual rights to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination. They value the diversity of individuals with respect to attributes such as age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, ability, health condition, language, socioeconomic, refugee, or immigrant status.

### ***Social Justice and Equity***

Consistent with the reciprocal commitment between their profession and society, school psychologists are committed to the principle that the contributions of school psychology need to be available to everyone. School psychologists facilitate free access to educational, social, and psychological services. They advocate for changes in schools or other educational practice settings that are beneficial to children and families as well as educational staff, and minimize biases.

## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

### *I. Professional Responsibilities*

A. School psychologists acquire knowledge about laws, judicial decisions, regulations and guidelines pertaining to their work. They act in good faith when these regulations conflict with ethical principles. They seek supervision or consultation with those knowledgeable if there is an area of concern. When codes of ethics differ from laws and regulations, school psychologists seek to resolve such differences by attempting to clarify the ethical principle or standard. They take reasonable steps to resolve the difference through changes in laws or regulations whenever possible.

B. School psychologists do not engage in discriminatory procedures or practices based on attributes such as age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, ability, health condition, language, socioeconomic, refugee, or immigrant status.

C. School psychologists respect the cultural environment within which they work. They are sensitive to cultural differences, and knowledgeable of appropriate ways to provide services within multi-cultural settings.

D. School psychologists are committed to protect the welfare and to act in the best interests of children and youth, their families, educators, colleagues, and employees. They promote inclusion and participation in the community, and condemn all forms of violence or humiliation such as bullying or cyber-bullying.

E. School psychologists are aware of the influence of social media on children and youth and guard against their potential misuse.

F. School psychologists combat the negative effects of drugs and alcohol on students, as well as schools and communities.

G. School psychologists familiarize themselves with the goals and philosophy of the educational system and of organizations within which they work, and engage effectively within their organizational structures.

H. School psychologists take the age into account at which a country legally defines an individual as being able to act and judge independently, as well as the level of the student's mental development. An exception to this policy exists when school psychologists believe that children or young people are in immediate danger to themselves or to others, in which case school psychologists must take steps to protect them, or those who might be threatened.

I. When working with families, school psychologists respect their goals and philosophies.

J. School psychologists reflect on their professional conduct and do not allow personal prejudices or biases to interfere with their decision-making. They avoid situations that would present a conflict of interest due to economic, political, social, religious, or personal issues. When conflicts of interest arise, school psychologists' first concern is to serve the best interests of children and youth and of adults who seek their advice.

K. School psychologists involved in training or supervision ensure that information conveyed during the preparation of students or psychologists in their early career is accurate, timely, and relevant.

L. School psychology trainers promote the importance of the adherence to ethical standards in their students and colleagues. They provide a range of appropriate professional experiences and offer constructive and timely consultation, feedback, and evaluation.

## **II. Confidentiality**

- A. School psychologists take precautions to protect the confidential information obtained through or stored in any location and by any medium. They recognize that the extent and limits of confidentiality may be governed by law or established by institutional rules.
- B. School psychologists discuss with persons and organizations with whom they establish a scientific or professional relationship the relevant limits of confidentiality and foreseeable uses of the information generated through their professional activities. This discussion, when feasible, occurs at the outset of the relationship and thereafter as new circumstances warrant.
- C. School psychologists use professional judgment in accord with laws to safeguard confidential information obtained in their practice, including consultation, teaching, or research. Safeguards include, but are not limited to, ensuring that electronically stored information is secure and accessible only to persons who have legitimate rights to access such information.
- D. School psychologists are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of client information. When writing or transmitting records, and when practicing online assessment, consultation or intervention, they apply the highest possible standards of confidentiality and storage involving measures such as encryption and password protection.
- E. In written and oral reports and consultations, school psychologists minimize intrusion into privacy. They only provide information that is adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes of the communication.
- F. When discussing cases in training, supervision or other settings, sufficient precautions are taken to protect the identity of persons. Confidential information is discussed only for professional purposes and only with persons who have a right to be informed.
- G. Informed consent is obtained from parents in accordance with the law before releasing confidential student information. Under certain circumstances, assent (informal agreement) or consent should be obtained from children and youth before releasing information to parents or professionals in other agencies.

## **III. Professional Growth**

- A. School psychologists recognize the need for and participate in continuing professional development.
- B. School psychologists maintain knowledge of current scientific and professional information by reading current research and other forms of scholarship, attending workshops and conferences, and becoming active in professional organizations.
- C. School psychologists are expected to have the appropriate and up-to-date credentials to practice.

## **IV. Professional Limitations**

- A. School psychologists offer only services within their areas of professional competence. They do not misrepresent their competence, qualifications, training, or experience.
- B. School psychologists are aware of their professional limitations and enlist the assistance of other professionals in a collaborative, consultative, or referral role when appropriate. Implicit in this referral process is knowledge of the expertise and competence commonly held by other professionals.

## **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES**

### ***I. Professional Relationships***

#### ***A. Behaviors and Attitudes***

1. School psychologists seek to develop high-quality supportive relationships in their work and do not exploit their professional relationships with children and youth, parents, other clients, interns, or research participants for personal gains.
2. School psychologists do not engage in harassment and/or physical relations of a sexual nature with clients, children and youth, trainees, or others under their supervision.
3. School psychologists discuss and interpret the nature of any assessment or professional interactions with children and youth to them and to relevant others. They make sure their wording is appropriate and understandable.
4. School psychologists attempt to communicate with persons in their primary language. If this is not possible, they seek the services of an interpreter to facilitate communication. They take steps to ensure he or she is appropriately trained to assist in this work, commits to maintaining the accuracy in the translation, and keeps all client-related information confidential.
5. School psychologists discuss their evaluation and recommendations with children and youth and/or persons who seek their advice, including various alternatives and the potential benefits and risks of services.
6. School psychologists always speak to and about children, youth, parents, staff and/or colleagues in a respectful manner. They refrain from any demeaning or derogatory remarks. In situations of disagreement or conflict, they express their objections with respect.
7. School psychologists generally avoid dual or multiple relationships, namely in situations where personal relationships or personal gain may occur. Consultation with a colleague is appropriate to determine the best course of action in the event of a personal relationship or potential personal gain.

#### ***B. Children and Youth***

1. School psychologists consider the welfare of children and youth to be of high importance. They value the perspectives of parents, teachers, and other persons to whom the children are connected.
2. School psychologists strive to ensure that children and youth understand the nature and purpose of any assessment, intervention or treatment to the best of their abilities, and encourage their active participation in decision-making.
3. School psychologists generally obtain the assent of children and youth prior to providing their services. They explain their proceedings in child-friendly language.

#### ***C. Colleagues and School Staff***

1. School psychologists strive to develop collaborative working relationships with school staff and other colleagues. They recognize the need to function as a member of a team within schools, educational settings, other institutions, and communities.
2. When school psychologists become aware of possible unethical practices by another psychologist, they informally attempt to resolve the issue by bringing the behavior of concern to the attention of that col-

league 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. Procedures outlined by ISPA or one's national association of school psychology or psychology are to be followed when available.

#### *D. Interprofessional*

1. School psychologists strive to establish collaborative working relationships with other professionals, decision makers, and policy makers.
2. School psychologists strive to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of information conveyed to professionals who have a right to know.
3. School psychologists understand the areas of personal and professional competence and limitations of other professionals and cater their services accordingly.
4. School psychologists use sound professional judgment when making referrals to other professionals.
5. School psychologists generally avoid offering professional services to a person who is receiving similar assistance from another professional, except by agreement of the other professional or after termination of the person's relationship with him or her. However, such dual services may be warranted when mandated by law or administrative decisions. Where services are provided simultaneously, school psychologists have a responsibility to ensure distinct and separate goals for their services.
6. School psychologists make evidence-based recommendations and take informed decisions in a thoughtful and deliberative manner.
7. School psychologists refrain from practice when their professional judgment or ability to benefit and not harm others is seriously impaired by a physical or psychological condition. When they become aware of problems that may affect their competence, they seek professional assistance to determine whether they should limit, suspend or terminate their professional activity.

## **II. Assessment**

- A. School psychologists use tests or other assessment instruments only after being appropriately prepared and thus qualified in their application, and use them in the manner in which they were developed and intended. They limit their assessments to procedures that are expected to provide adequate information about the competencies, the situation or the mental health of the child or youth who is being assessed.
- B. School psychologists administer standardized tests according to published directions in order to obtain valid results. However, when administrative modifications are made or the validity of a test is questioned, these aspects are noted in the assessment report along with a discussion of their possible effects.
- C. School psychologists make reasonable efforts to maintain the security and integrity of test materials (e.g. manuals, instruments, protocols, test questions, and test materials) and guard against access to tests by unqualified persons.
- D. School psychologists interpret tests in light of the appropriateness of their norms or other well-established standards as well as the reliability and validity estimates for the purposes for which they are used.
- E. School psychologists remain alert to and guard against misinterpretation or misuse of assessment data.
- F. School psychologists are accountable for assessment techniques they use and are able to defend their use.

- G. School psychologists discourage use of psychological assessment instruments by inappropriately trained or otherwise unqualified persons.
- H. When using tests originally developed in another country, school psychologists encourage and possibly participate in studies that lead to suitable test adaptations as well as ensure the test is appropriately normed and validated based on professional test construction standards.
- I. School psychologists report limitations in their assessments due to the use of tests that are not developed for the populations with whom they are working, or for the purposes of their assessment. Whenever possible, they avoid the use of such instruments.
- J. Reports are written in a way that reflects the ethical principles of this Code: School psychologists strive to do no harm, display assessment results in a competent, truthful, and responsible way, and respect people's rights and dignity.
- K. Strengths and resources are most relevant for the beneficial development of young people. They are a primary consideration of competent assessments and are addressed in reports as much as deficits and difficulties.

### **III. Research**

#### **A. General Guidelines**

1. School psychologists engage in or support research that enhances educational and psychological practices and scholarship.
2. School psychologists maintain high standards of professional competence by undertaking research only after obtaining applicable skills and knowledge.
3. School psychologists strive to avoid bias in their research.
4. School psychologists inform children, youth, and their parents of the nature and purpose of the research.
5. School psychologists obtain permission from parents for their children to participate in research projects in accordance with institutional, professional, ethical, and legal standards.
6. School psychologists obtain assent from children and youth to participate in a research project in accordance with institutional, professional, ethical, and legal standards.
7. School psychologists respect the right to decline participation in a research study or to withdraw from it at any time. Parents can decline in the name of their children.
8. School psychologists strive to ensure that children and youth participating in research do not suffer mental or physical distress from the procedures.
9. School psychologists warrant the accuracy of their published results and state the limitations of their findings.
10. When requested, school psychologists report the research results to all warranted parties.
11. School psychologists give credit to those persons who have participated in conducting the research. Principal authorship and other publication credits accurately reflect the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their relative status. Mere possession of an institutional position, such as department chair, does not justify authorship credit. Minor contributions to the research or to writing for publications are acknowledged appropriately, such as in footnotes or in an intro-

ductory statement. Except under exceptional circumstances, a student is listed as principal author on any multiple-authored article that is substantially based on the student's doctoral dissertation. Faculty advisors discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process as appropriate.

12. School psychologists strive to establish and maintain productive communication processes with the individuals and organizations involved in their research studies.

13. School psychologists respect students' rights and strive to protect the welfare and dignity of those participating in their research studies.

14. School psychologists strive to enrich and benefit the individuals, host institutions, and/or communities involved in their research studies.

15. School psychologists reflect the possibility of unintended negative consequences of research activities for all affected parties and strive to avoid them.

16. School psychologists conduct research in accord with international or other recognized university, institutional, or professional research standards.

#### *B. Cross-Cultural and International Research*

1. School psychologists conducting cross-cultural and international research abide by the codes of ethics of their professional associations, as well as by the legal standards of each country in which they are conducting their research.

2. School psychologists demonstrate a respect for the host culture by avoiding actions that violate cultural expectations or reveal culturally biased perspectives during the research process or in the dissemination of findings.

3. School psychologists undertaking international research are knowledgeable of cross-cultural methodology and familiar with the cultural context of the research settings. They select measures with appropriate adaptations, particularly when these measures are to be used for cross-cultural comparisons and when interpreting cultural differences.



Approved by the ISPA General Assembly<sup>2</sup>  
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<sup>1</sup> In this document, the term „parent” stands for biological and adoptive parent(s) and legal guardians.

<sup>2</sup> The ISPA Code of Ethics and its revisions are informed by the ethical standards of other associations such as the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS), the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA), the American Psychological Association (APA), the British Psychological Society (BPS), the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), and the Swiss Federation of Psychologists (FSP).