

# CODE OF ETHICS

of

## THE EUROPEAN FAMILY THERAPY ASSOCIATION (EFTA)

### 1. Introduction

1.1 This code of ethics is binding on every member of the European Family Therapy Association (EFTA) - as an individual member belonging to EFTA-CIM (Chamber of Individuals), through a training institute belonging to EFTA-TIC (Training Institutes Chamber) or as a member of a National Association for Family Therapy belonging to EFTA-NFTO. It should be read in conjunction with the codes of ethics of the National Associations and the relevant professional body(s) but does not supersede them.

1.2 It is applicable to the relationships of members with respect to their clients, their students and supervisees, and their colleagues.

1.3 It also covers the responsibilities of EFTA members with regard to the demands and requirements of their profession.

1.4 The ethical standards for family therapists\* require personal commitment and lifelong effort to act ethically.

1.5 In choosing to join, and to remain a member of EFTA, each member agrees to conduct his or her work according to the EFTA code of ethics currently in operation, and to accept any decision made by EFTA in accordance with this code.

*\*The terms 'family therapy' and 'family therapist' in this Code are to be understood as referring to systemic work not only by therapists/practitioners working with families, but also to people engaged in consultation, publication, research, supervision, training and a variety of direct forms of work with clients other than as part of a family.*

### 2. General Principles

2.1 Family therapy should promote greater wellbeing and/or understanding in those with whom family therapists are concerned. The relationship with clients must be based on honesty and integrity.

2.2 Family therapists should recognise the need for ethical vigilance and the need for

sensitivity to issues of culture, class, race, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, health and disability in interpreting and applying this code. Therapists should avoid all kinds of discrimination.

2.3 Family therapists should make every effort to avoid multiple relationships with their clients and students when these might impair their professional judgement and increase the risk of abuse, e.g. close personal, business and/or sexual relations.

2.4 Family therapists should take reasonable steps to clarify to all parties the rights and responsibilities of each party within each relationship.

2.5 Family therapists should inform EFTA if any conviction that is relevant to their work as family therapist is upheld against them by a court of justice.

### **3. Responsibility to clients\***

3.1 Family therapists are putting their competence and knowledge at the service of their clients. Therefore they should take care to cultivate awareness of the limits of their own competence and to act within those boundaries.

3.2 Family therapists should maintain their level of competence through continuing training/professional development.

*\*'Clients' is understood to include individuals, couples, families, teams, agencies and consultation groups, and participants in research.*

3.3 Family therapists are required to take full account of the possible effects of their own physical and mental health on their capacity to provide an ethical, professional service.

3.4 Family therapists must be aware of the influential nature of their relationship with their clients, and must avoid exploiting the trust of their clients for their own personal gain.

3.5 The family therapist must not use professional relationships to further personal, sexual, religious, political or economic gain or other non-professional interests.

3.6 Therapy should continue only so long as it is beneficial to the clients.

3.7 Before therapy begins family therapists must provide an appropriate explanation about the nature of the therapy being offered, ensuring that clients are enabled to make informed decisions and choices about the nature and course of therapy.

3.8 The therapeutic relationship is confidential, whether it involves an individual, a

couple or a family. Family therapists must commit themselves to respecting the confidentiality of their clients.

3.9 In case of harm, or risk of harm to self or others, confidentiality must be subjugated to the duty of care according to the laws and practices of each country.

3.10 Written permission must always be obtained from clients before (audio or video tape, etc.) recordings are made of a therapy session. The uses to which such recordings may be put must be specified in writing.

3.11 All research carried out by family therapists that involves clients must be done in careful consideration of the ethical implication for all parties, and should be subjected to outside scrutiny, where possible through local ethical committees.

3.12 Family therapists must ensure anonymity when presenting cases for training and audit and when using clinical material in research and publication.

3.13 Clients' records, including notes and tapes, must be stored securely. Any personal data stored in any form, including electronically, must be safe and confidential, according to the laws and practices of each country.

#### **4. Responsibility to Students**

4.1 Family therapy trainers and supervisors should be aware of the fact that they may hold considerable authority over their students and supervisees and must respect the supervisory relationship. The supervisee's trust and confidentiality must not be exploited by the supervisor in any way.

#### **5. Responsibility to Colleagues**

5.1 Family therapists must attempt to collaborate fruitfully and effectively with their colleagues, particularly as regards the welfare of their clients and trainees.

5.2 Family therapists must acknowledge the contributions of colleagues to their own research and ideas by the appropriate credits and citations.

5.3 Family therapists cannot announce the participation of a colleague in a scientific event without his/her explicit permission.

5.4 If a family therapist is concerned that a colleague's conduct may be unprofessional or that their competence is impaired they should take appropriate action which may include initiating an appropriate dialogue with the therapist or

organisation in question and then, if necessary, initiating the relevant complaint and disciplinary procedures.

## **6. Professional Responsibilities**

6.1 Family therapists try to maximise benefits and minimise harm. Cases that fall outside their domain of competence should be referred to the relevant professionals.

6.2 Family therapists should strive to remain up to date with the latest developments in family therapy research and practice and engage in educational activities when possible.

## **7. Responsibilities to the media**

7.1 The family therapist should ensure the suitable representation of Family Therapy in the media and/or the public domain (e.g. the internet, 'reality TV' programmes, etc.).

7.2 When advertising a family therapist should show accurately and objectively their professional qualifications and functions.

7.3 When a family therapist is interviewed by the media to comment on an event, she/he must do her/his best to remain in the field of hypothesis and not judge the participants of the situation.

7.4 If a family therapist is participating professionally in a media event that addresses human relationships, she/he must take all precautions to respect and to protect the participant(s) who are in relationship with the family.

## **8. Responsibilities to EFTA**

8.1 An EFTA member should represent EFTA with respect and support fully EFTA's work, programmes and congresses.

## **9. Violations of the Code of Ethics**

9.1 In cases in which a member, whether a person, an institute or an organisation has been found by a responsible body such as their national family therapy organisation, their professional body or a court to have committed a serious ethical violation the

ethical committee may propose to have their membership of EFTA withdrawn.

9.2 The board of the European Family Therapy Association will create two committees responsible for applying this code of ethics. One will deal with cases of suspected violation of the code of ethics, while the other will rule in cases of appeal.

9.4 The first committee shall have the right to sanction any member violating these rules by initiating sanctions increasing in severity as follows: 1) a written warning, 2) suspension for a fixed length of time from membership of EFTA, 3) expulsion from EFTA.

9.5 Before making any decision to sanction a member the committee is obliged to make contact with the member so that the person or member organisation can make provision for defending themselves. If the person, institute or organisation chooses to be absent from the disciplinary meeting than the committee may decide against them in their absence.

9.6 The member or organisation has the right to appeal. An appeals committee will operate according to the same guidelines as the disciplinary committee. This committee will be made up of different members to the disciplinary committee and have at its disposal the same three sanctions as the disciplinary committee – i.e. warning, suspension and expulsion.

This Code was provisionally approved by the Board of EFTA at its meeting in Florence on Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 subject to legal scrutiny and endorsement.

After legal endorsement in Brussels further amendments were introduced at the EFTA General Assembly in Oslo on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The General Assembly gave formal approval to the Code of Ethics.