



AFT

Code of Ethics and Practice

Policy Document

December 2000

INTRODUCTION

A. The Association for Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (AFT) is the only organisation for family therapy and systemic practice which covers the whole of the United Kingdom. It has members from all the main helping professions, and seeks to improve the standards of professional practice with family and other systems, by promoting family therapy ideas in practice, teaching, supervision and research. AFT also has an increasing number of members who are employed in designated posts as family therapists, to whom it provides the services of a professional body. AFT accredits family therapy training courses at various levels in the United Kingdom.

B. AFT is a full member of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), and is responsible for the registration of individual members. In accordance with UKCP requirements, registered family therapists are subject to AFT's formal complaints and disciplinary procedures. There may be a range of sanctions including de-registration of the therapist. Non-registered members of AFT (either qualified family therapist who have not registered or other professionals using family therapy ideas, e.g. systemic practitioners) who bring the organisation into disrepute are subject to discipline by the AFT Board who may suspend or terminate membership of AFT.

C. AFT is a member of the Family, Marital, Sexual and Systemic Therapy Section of the UKCP whose flag statement is:

'Organisations within this Section have in common an understanding that symptoms, problems and difficulties arise in the context of relationships, and are to be understood in terms of interactive and systemic processes. The main focus of intervention emerges from these patterns of interaction and the meanings given to them. Given this focus, the members may work with individuals, couples, families or parts of them, and other significant relationship networks.'

D. 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.

E. In addition to the ethical requirements of family therapists in their relationships with families and individual clients, there are crucial contextual issues which all family therapists have to address in order to be effective in their work. These include:

- i. Making satisfactory arrangements with their employing agencies, particularly when it comes to:
 - setting priorities in their work,
 - having a systemic approach accepted as a viable way of working,
 - receiving adequate support and supervision, and
 - being provided with at least the minimum facilities to practice as a family therapist.
- ii. Consideration of how far they should promote greater public awareness of and information about issues to do with the emotional health of family life, and information about family therapy.
- iii. Consideration of how far they should seek to influence public policy in relation to the family and to therapy.
- iv. Familiarising themselves with any local inter-agency procedures in relation to child protection and mental health.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The purpose of family therapy and systemic practice is to promote greater well being and/or understanding in those with whom family therapists and systemic practitioners are concerned.
2. Family therapists and systemic practitioners must promote the welfare of families and individuals. Relationships with clients must be based on honesty and integrity.
3. When faced with an ethical dilemma the family therapist/systemic practitioner should adopt the course of action which 'maximises the good' and

does the 'least harm'. The therapist/practitioner should attach particular weight to the rights of those who have the least power.

4. Family therapists/systemic practitioners are required to refrain from any behaviour that may be detrimental to the profession, to colleagues or to trainees.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF THE THERAPIST

5. You must not use professional relationships to further personal, religious, political or other non-professional interests. Therapy should continue only so long as it is beneficial to the client(s).

6. You must not refuse to offer professional services nor exercise discrimination on the basis of race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, political orientation, disability or age.

7. You should be willing and able to discuss the therapist's/practitioner's relationship to contextual issues such as racism and homophobia and the way these might affect therapy, when requested by the client or thought appropriate by the therapist/practitioner.

8. Sexual intimacy with clients is always unethical. Sexual intimacy with former clients is prohibited for two years following the termination of therapy.

9. You must disclose your qualifications if requested and must not mislead clients into believing that you have qualifications or experience which you do not possess. Membership of AFT should not be presented as a qualification. Titles, such as 'family therapist' or 'systemic practitioner', may not be used unless you have completed accredited training and/or have UKCP registration.

10. You should operate only within the parameters of your competence and cease to practice if your competence becomes impaired for any reason. This may include ensuring that the services of other professionals, whether for assessment or treatment, are made available.

11. You should ensure that you maintain your level of competence through continuing training/continuing professional development.

12. You must ensure that you have made appropriate arrangements for the supervision of and/or consultation to your own practice.

13. You need to ensure that your professional work is adequately covered by appropriate indemnity insurance.

14. You need to address personal and psychological issues that may hinder the therapeutic process and must take into account the importance of self-awareness in your training and practice. This must include taking responsibility to address any current limitations, such as factors in your personal background and mental/physical health, which affect

your suitability for any aspects of the work you are carrying out. This should include taking steps to care for yourself and your own family in so far as this could affect your work.

15. You must inform AFT if any complaint is upheld against you by any professional association, if you are convicted of any notifiable/relevant criminal offence, or if successful civil proceedings are brought against you in relation to your work as a therapist/systemic practitioner.

16. You must be able to explain your practice and the theoretical basis underpinning your work as a family therapist/systemic practitioner.

CONFIDENTIALITY

17. Permission must always be obtained from clients before audio- or videotape recordings are made of a therapy session. The uses to which such recordings may be put must be fully specified. Specific consent must be obtained from clients to use tapes in research or teaching.

18. Specific consent forms must be signed by each client, including children where appropriate, and in only exceptional circumstances should parental permission overrule the wishes of a child. It is not sufficient to record consent on audio- or videotape.

19. Permission from clients to keep and use a tape must have a limited duration (maximum five years). Recordings must be erased after the time agreed with clients, unless further consent is obtained.

20. You must ensure anonymity and confidentiality when presenting cases for training and audit, and when using clinical material in research and publication. Consent from clients should be obtained whenever possible.

21. When engaged in research, you must make sure that the difference between research and therapy is clear to all concerned, and that all necessary steps are taken to ensure that the therapeutic process, and therapist-client relationship, are not adversely affected by any research involved.

22. Clients' records, including notes and tapes, must be stored securely. Any personal data stored in any form, including electronically, must be completely safe and confidential, in accordance with legislation.

THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

23. You must ensure that clients are enabled to make informed decisions and choices about the nature and course of therapy, and the confidentiality rules applicable to your agency. Before therapy begins you should provide an appropriate explanation about the nature of the therapy being offered.

24. Where relevant you should recommend alternative treatment to your clients and help them obtain such alternatives from appropriately qualified practitioners.

25. If you are working in private practice, any financial arrangements with clients must be clear and explicit. Payment must not be accepted by referrers for clients referred.

26. At the outset of therapy, you should clearly explain the confidential nature of your work to clients. This includes acknowledging that circumstances involving actual or potential risk of harm to family members or others would constitute an exception to this.

27. Whenever possible you must gain agreement from clients to maintain liaison and close co-operation with other professional agencies in situations where this is appropriate.

28. If your professional role also involves responsibility to take statutory action (e.g. under the mental health act or child protection legislation) you must inform the family of this situation.

29. You have a duty to recognise, protect and promote the particular rights and needs of all individuals in families. You should consider the needs of individuals within families and be prepared to respond to requests for individuals to be seen separately if appropriate.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES, TRAINEES AND JUNIOR STAFF

30. You must address ethical issues in training and supervision, and should be satisfied with the ethical standards of your students, trainees and any junior staff for whom you are responsible. You must also consider whether they are suitable for the particular clients to whom they have been allocated.

31. When working as part of a therapeutic or an agency team (whether in a supportive, consultative or supervisory capacity), you must be aware of your continued ethical responsibilities, both to your client and to your colleagues.

32. If you are concerned that a colleague's conduct may be unprofessional or that their competence is impaired/may become impaired, you should take appropriate action, which could include initiating the relevant complaint and disciplinary procedures.

33. Relationships with students, trainees or colleagues outside a professional context will always have an effect. You must ensure that such relationships do not compromise your effectiveness as therapist, consultant or trainer, or interfere with the standard of service offered to clients.

34. Sexual intimacy between supervisors/trainers and trainees should be actively discouraged during the time of the course and any possibility of attraction should be discussed with the appropriate superior (e.g. head of department) and alternative training arrangements made.

COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

- Anyone who has any concerns about the ethical conduct of an AFT member should bring this to the attention of the AFT's Ethics Committee, who will investigate the complaint.
- You may initiate the AFT complaint procedure by contacting the AFT Chairperson or the Chair of the Ethics Committee, c/o The AFT Executive Officer, at the address below.

The Chair of the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC) welcomes general feedback and suggestions on Information Sheets and can be contacted via: Sue Kennedy, AFT Executive Officer, 7 Executive Suite, St James Court, Wilderspool Causeway, Warrington WA4 6PS. Tel: 01925 444414
Email: s.kennedy@aft.org.uk

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Registered office is the administrative office, as above.