

Lithuanian Psychological Association

**CODE OF  
PROFESSIONAL  
ETHICS FOR  
PSYCHOLOGISTS  
(2017)**

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## Preamble

The profession of psychology is underpinned by ethical values, provided for in the European Convention on Human Rights, which are shared by psychologists across Europe and internationally. The shared values include justice, equality, and respect for the autonomy and dignity of the individual and their communities. These values are implemented through ethical principles that seek to improve the quality of life of citizens and act in their best interests.

The psychologist works with people, delves deeper into their inner world and often encounters extremely vulnerable individuals in their professional relationship and has a great impact on their lives, so they must use their expertise exclusively for the well-being of the individual and society as a whole and adhere to the norms of professional ethics when engaging in professional practice. The psychologist must also respect the principles of human rights as defined by international treaties and conventions on human rights, norms of public life, and understand that failure to do so may adversely affect their professional practice and professional dignity. Since psychology and the psychological profession are in a continuous process of development, producing new and more complex knowledge and methods, and social change continuously brings forth new problematic situations, it is important that psychologists pay attention to and expand their competence. What is more, the psychologist must be familiar with and take due account of national and international legislation governing the professional practice of psychologist. However, part of psychologists' professional practice cannot be formally regulated. In such cases the ethical awareness, the responsibility and the professional competence of individual psychologists play a crucial role. This Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists seeks to establish the concept of values and to provide principles and guidelines by which psychologists can inform the practice of psychology, enhance professional competence and guarantee that their professional practice is ethical.

Context. The European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (hereinafter – EFPA) adopted its European Meta-Code of Ethics at its General Assembly, Athens, July 1995, as guidance for the content of the Ethical Codes of its Member Associations (hereinafter – Meta-Code). This Meta-Code sets out fundamental ethical principles that reflect the general philosophy and guidelines to cover various situations encountered by professional psychologists. Member Associations also undertook to produce procedures for investigation of complaints and decision-making in relation to ethical violations. Model Code of Ethics was created on the basis of Meta-Code and approved at General Assembly of EFPA in Milan, 2015. This Code seeks to converge the structure of ethical codes of Member Associations and to create a common evaluation system of professional psychological conduct.

In Lithuania, the main document used by psychologists to guide their professional practice was the Code of Ethics (compiled by Prof. A. Gučas, Assoc. Prof. E. Rimkutė, Assoc. Prof. D. Gailienė), approved at the Congress of the Lithuanian Psychological Association (hereinafter – LPA) on 23 November 1996. It was to be revised and adapted in the light of political, economic and social developments. To this end, the LPA Ethics Committee initiated a commission, which prepared this new edition of the Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists.

The new edition of the Lithuanian Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists was prepared in accordance with the EFPA Meta-Code of Professional Ethics for Psychologists, EFPA Model Code of Ethics, LPA Code of Ethics 1996 and ethical codes of other countries (US, Canada, Australia, etc.).

## Aims of the Code

The Code of Ethics (hereinafter – the Code) provides a deeper understanding of the values and ethical principles that the psychologist must apply in their professional practice, touches on

the most important ethical dilemmas, and offers guidelines for ethical conduct to the professional psychologist. General aims of the Code are as follows:

1. to support psychologists in situations of professional practice which require them to make decisions;
2. to pursue the wellbeing of the clients and to protect them against potential harm;
3. support cooperation amongst psychologists and between psychologists and other professionals;
4. to enhance the public's trust in the practice of professional psychologists.

## Key definitions

**Psychologist.** In this Code, the psychologist refers a person who has the diploma of a psychologist recognised by the laws and regulations of the Republic of Lithuania and is engaged in professional practice of a psychologist.

**Client.** In this Code, “client” refers to any person or persons with whom a psychologist interacts on a professional basis. A client may be an individual (such as a patient, a student, or a research participant), a couple of spouses or partners, a family group, an institution or organisation.

**Professional practice.** It refers to activities, during which the psychologist provides the client with psychological services, such as psychological assessment and psychological interventions, and performs other professional duties such as psychological education, training, professional supervision, and research.

**Professional relationship.** It refers to any formal situation when the psychologist engages in professional practice though interaction with the client.

**Concerned party.** It refers to any other person or persons related with the client, with whom the psychologist is indirectly related (for example, the client's parents, guardians, spouse or other professionals working with the client).

## Core principles of professional ethics of the psychologist

This Code further distinguishes and describes four core principles of ethics of professional practice of the psychologist:

- Respect for individual rights and dignity;
- Professional competence;
- Responsibility;
- Professional dignity.

## 1. Respect for individual rights and dignity

### *1.1. General provisions:*

1. The psychologist shows respect for the peoples' fundamental rights, dignity and value, and works in such a way that their professional practice will not be used to harm.
2. The psychologist respects the knowledge, views, experience and expertise of clients and other concerned parties. The psychologist also respects the special expertise, obligations, and responsibilities of their colleagues and other professionals.
3. The psychologist takes into consideration individual and cultural peculiarities that are based on the individual's gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or national identity, age, religion, language, social status and level of functioning.
4. The psychologist has a duty to pursue psychological wellbeing of vulnerable groups and persons.

### *1.2. Confidentiality:*

1. The psychologist maintains professional secrecy and ensures confidentiality of information they that they receive from the client and concerned parties.
2. The psychologist may disclose confidential information only when there is a serious threat to the public, to health or life of the client or other persons, and harm cannot be prevented without breach of confidentiality, and if disclosure of confidential information by the psychologist is required by laws and other legislation of the Republic of Lithuania. In the latter case, the psychologist is only required to provide confidential information directly related to the case.

3. The psychologist will inform the client and his/her legal representative, if any, on first contact of the limitations of confidentiality defined by law and that they may be obliged by law to reveal confidential information.
4. Informed consent and freedom of choice:
  - a. The psychologist informs the client of the professional activities that are planned and discusses their specific professional actions, their aims and nature, mutual responsibilities, possible benefits and risks, the right to self-determination to refuse the service or to cancel the service at any time. In this way the psychologist meets the requirements of informed consent: the client will have the necessary information on the basis of which they can decide whether to agree to the professional practice planned by the psychologist or not. Professional practice may be started by the psychologist only upon receipt of informed consent of the client (in writing or orally), which is duly recorded in documents, i.e. the psychologist encloses written informed consent signed by the client to the client's documents, or records in documents the nature of the informed consent and the client's oral agreement to start a professional relationship.
  - b. The psychologist must respect the client's autonomy and freedom of choice even if the client lacks capacity to give consent or is a minor.
  - c. Scientific and applied research requires the informed consent of the study participants, which provides information on the study and its potential consequences.

5. Respecting the rights and dignity of others, the psychologist only collects information that is relevant to the purpose for which the informed consent was obtained and uses it only for the purpose for which it was collected.
6. The psychologist takes care of proper storage, preservation and destruction of the data collected.
7. The psychologist obtains the consent of the client and their legal representative, if any, before starting to collect information on the client.

### *1.3. Right to self-determination:*

1. The psychologist defends the client's autonomy and right to self-determination. The client has the right to begin or end the professional relationship with the psychologist.
2. When working with children or clients that have been referred to the psychologist against their will, including the court order, or in a critical situation requiring immediate psychological assistance, the psychologist informs the person about the nature of services to be provided and limitations to confidentiality before starting the professional relationship, and seeks cooperation with the client.

## 2. Professional competence

### 2.1. *General provisions:*

1. One of the preconditions for high professional competence is that the psychologist is aware of the principles of professional ethics and applies them in their professional practice, therefore, the psychologist seeks the knowledge of professional ethics and remains vigilant in respect of ethical issues and dilemmas in their professional practice.
2. The psychologist seeks to develop their professional competence and to maintain it on a high level.
3. The psychologist strives towards awareness of their professional and personal strengths and weaknesses in order to be able to realistically evaluate their competence when engaging in their professional practice.
4. The psychologist works only with such clients and client groups, accepts such assignments, provides such services and uses such methods for which they are competent on the basis of their professional training (education, supervised practice, enhancement of qualification) and professional experience.
5. In their professional practice, the psychologist uses methods, techniques and procedures based on science, theory and evidence, and takes into consideration their limitations. With the development of psychology as a science and as a profession, there appear new fields of practice and new methods, which, when gathering evidence for empirical justification, must be tested in practice. Therefore, the psychologist exercises special caution when using methods, techniques and procedures that are experimental and may lack a robust evidence base in order to protect the client from possible harm.

## *2.2. Ethical awareness and ethical conduct*

1. The psychologist must have comprehensive knowledge of professional ethics and undertake ongoing efforts to develop knowledge of professional ethics.
2. The psychologist recognises the inevitability of professional ethical dilemmas, seeks to anticipate the ethical dilemmas that may arise in their professional practice, and, when confronted with them, relies on models for solving ethical dilemmas.
3. The psychologist is able to justify their his professional actions on the basis of professional ethics.
4. In the event of a conflict between legislation and the principles of professional ethics, the psychologist must analyse them in great detail and, to the extent possible, adhere to the principles of professional ethics, including compliance with legal requirements.

## *2.3. Competence and continuing professional development*

The work of the psychologist is based on science and professional experience, and in order to ensure a high level of professional competence, the psychologist constantly strives for continuous professional development as follows:

- a. actively follows the latest discoveries in the field of psychology related to their professional practice;
- b. is interested in professional practice-related changes in the broader political, social and organisational context;
- c. is actively involved in the development of psychology as a science and as a profession.

## *2.4. Limits of competence*

### *2.4.1. Limits of professional competence:*

1. The psychologist works within the limits of their professional competence, formed by education, professional supervision, enhancement of qualification, professional experience and personal abilities and seeks professional help and support in difficult situations.
2. When faced with situations beyond professional competence, the psychologist seeks research-based knowledge, training, professional supervision, consultation necessary to ensure their competence or make appropriate referrals for the clients to receive such services:
  - a. Where scientific or professional knowledge in the discipline of psychology establishes that an understanding of factors associated with age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status is essential for effective implementation of their professional practice, the psychologist seeks to obtain the training, consultation, or professional supervision necessary to ensure their professional competence, or they make appropriate referrals for the clients to receive such services.
  - b. When the psychologist is asked to provide services to individuals for whom psychological services are not available elsewhere and for which the psychologist has not obtained the competence necessary, the psychologist, in pursuit of expanding their professional competence (by engaging in relevant scientific and professional literature, participating in training, consultation and seeking professional supervision) and having warned the

client about limits of their competence, may provide such services until it is guaranteed that the individuals will receive the required help.

- c. In emergencies, when the psychologist provides services to individuals for whom other mental health services are not available and for which the psychologist has not obtained the necessary professional competence, the psychologist may provide such services within the limits of their competence until the emergency has ended or appropriate services are available.
3. The psychologist who delegates work to employees, supervisees, or research or teaching assistants or to professionals of other areas (for example, interpreters, lawyers, mediators) takes reasonable steps to (a) avoid delegating such work to persons who have a multiple relationship with the client; (b) authorise only those responsibilities that such persons can be expected to perform competently either independently or with the level of supervision being provided; and (3) see that such persons perform these services competently.

#### *2.4.2. Limits of personal competence:*

1. The psychologist seeks to know their personal traits, values, attitudes and beliefs, constantly monitors and supervises their own personal and professional life and psychological functioning to remain alert to signs of deterioration in their physical and mental health and other factors that may adversely affect their professional competence.
2. When the psychologist becomes aware of personal problems that may interfere with their competent performance of professional practice, the psychologist takes appropriate measures (for example, obtaining professional consultation or assistance) in order to control the impact of

problems on professional competence, and determines whether to limit, suspend, or terminate their professional practice.

3. If before starting their professional practice, the psychologist becomes aware of own personal peculiarities or mental health factors (for example, unresolved emotional conflicts of the psychologist, antipathy or very strong attraction to the client) that may interfere with their competent performance of professional practice in respect of the client, the psychologist does not start their professional practice and takes care of appropriate referral of the client.
4. If the psychologist notices that problems of another psychologist related to their physical or mental health prevent them from competent performance of their work, the psychologist encourages another psychologist to take appropriate measures (for example, obtaining professional consultation or assistance) and if the latter refuses to acknowledge their problems, the psychologist must notify persons and/or authorities responsible for regulation of professional practice of a psychologist.

#### *2.4.3. Limits of procedures*

1. The psychologist must be aware of the limitations of psychological methods and conclusions drawn from them.
2. The psychologist exercises special caution when using methods, devices and techniques that may lack a robust evidence base or lack evidence of efficacy, which do not meet the standard requirements set for methods or which they do not thoroughly master.
3. If, however, the psychologist begins to use experimental or newly developed methods in their professional practice, they must take into account the experimental nature of these methods, properly inform clients, and ensure that they are protected from harm, and not to make conclusions that are

not guaranteed by the said methods.

4. The psychologist always takes into account the relationship between the problems being solved and the methods known to them, chooses the most appropriate methods and does not apply methods that are not suitable for solving the problem.

## 3. Responsibility

### *3.1. General provisions:*

1. The psychologist is aware of their social responsibility, i.e. the psychologist does not abuse their knowledge and applies it to promoting the psychological wellbeing of the society and individuals.
2. The psychologist must be insightful and anticipate the possible consequences of their work. The psychologist is aware of the professional and scientific responsibilities they have toward their clients, research participants, and toward the organisation and society. The psychologist always seeks to ensure that psychological services are not used to deliberately cause harm to the client.
3. The psychologist is responsible for their work results and conclusions made.
4. The psychologist is personally responsible for the quality and consequences of their professional practice, but they are also aware that they are perceived by others as a representative of the entire profession.

### *3.2. Preventing harm*

1. The psychologist never misuses psychological knowledge or interventions, i.e. the psychologist must not participate in, or support actions by threatening to use physical or psychological force that aim at
  - a. extorting information or a confession from someone;
  - b. persuading someone to reveal, deny or change their personal or some other person's world view or political, religious or ethical convictions.
2. The psychologist ensures that in their professional practice psychological knowledge will not be used for

the purpose of causing harm to another person.

3. The psychologist refuses to engage in professional practice when the conditions necessary for the exercise of the professional practice cannot be guaranteed.

### *3.3. Managing ethical dilemmas*

1. The psychologist is aware of the existence of ethical dilemmas in the professional practice. The psychologist is responsible for seeking solutions to solve such problems and discussing them with colleagues, supervisors and/or professional associations.
2. In cases of ethical dilemmas, the psychologist should also inform other concerned parties of the principles of professional ethics outlined in this Code.
3. In situations where the rules of procedure of the organisation in which the psychologist works are in conflict with the psychologist's ethical principles, the psychologist must clarify the nature of the contradiction, familiarise concerned parties with their ethical obligations and take all necessary measures without prejudice to the ethical and legal obligations to eliminate the emerging contradictions.

### *3.4. Continuing responsibilities*

1. Following the end of a professional relationship with a client, the psychologist still has to adhere to the principle of confidentiality.
2. Following the end of a professional relationship with a client, with whom the relationship was started for the purpose of providing psychological help, the psychologist must observe the principle of not crossing professional boundaries for 2 years.
3. If, within 2 years following the end of a professional relationship with a client, the psychologist is faced with

a situation which causes (there is no possibility of avoiding) crossing the boundaries of a professional relationship with a former client, the psychologist should consider the potential harm and benefits of crossing the boundaries and take appropriate actions that best ensure the client's psychological wellbeing.

4. The psychologist is responsible for the necessary continuation of professional care for clients, including collaboration with other professionals and appropriate action when the psychologist is required to suspend or terminate professional relationship.

### *3.5. Extended responsibility in professional supervision, education and research*

1. The psychologist has an extended responsibility if they engage into scientific and professional practice; in such a case, the psychologist is responsible for the standards of professional ethics of their assistants and people under their supervision or training, or research subjects;
2. When teaching psychological methods the psychologist is also responsible for critically evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the methods.

## 4. Professional integrity

### 4.1. *General provisions:*

1. Professional integrity of the psychologist is essential in order to avoid multiple professional relationships and conflicts of interest which could damage the reputation of the profession of psychologist in the society.
2. The psychologist, in practising its profession, strives to be honest and to provide correct information.
3. The psychologist strives to be impartial and respectful towards clients or groups of clients, i.e. the psychologist does not allow any racial, linguistic, religious or other similar factors to influence their relationship with the client.
4. The psychologist strives to make their role as transparent as possible in any context of the psychologist's work.
5. In the event of a controversy with colleagues, the psychologist makes criticism of them in a constructive manner and bases the criticism on facts.

### 4.2. *Openness and clarity*

1. The psychologist provides adequate information on their abilities, professional experience, competence and commitment to the profession; the psychologist should only use professional titles for which they have the right on the basis of their professional training, license and employment.
2. The psychologist uses scientific knowledge of psychology and precision when giving statements as a psychologist.
3. The psychologist provides information on psychology and the professional practice of psychologists in such a way as to avoid misconceptions or harm to psychology as a science or as a profession.

4. The psychologist informs the client in advance of the financial conditions of the professional relationship and is aware of the consequences that could result from the psychologist accepting, in addition to the official fee, other rewards; for example, accepting gifts from the client.
5. Upon commencement of the professional relationship, the psychologist seeks to make the client understand what kind of services the psychologist's competence allows to offer and does not allow the client to expect assistance other than that which the psychologist provides or can offer.
6. In conducting research, the psychologist strives to create conditions in which the client feels that professional relationship is in their best interests and that they participate in the research voluntarily.
7. The psychologist takes into account the ethical conduct of both themselves and their colleagues and undertakes to report to the authority responsible for professional ethics about any justified misconduct on the part of their colleagues that may harm their clients, the psychologist's profession. The psychologist cooperates with professional associations.
8. When conducting research and publishing its results, the psychologist strives to be a fair and impartial researcher.
9. The psychologist follows the provisions of research ethics, academic ethics and copyright when publishing the results of scientific research.
10. The psychologist avoids deceit in the course of their professional practice and research. If deceit is imminent, the psychologist, before deciding to proceed, seeks an independent and appropriate ethical evaluation of the risk to the public or individuals, by contacting an institution that can carry out such an assessment.

#### *4.3. Conflicts of interest and exploitation*

1. The psychologist strives towards an awareness of their

- personal needs, attitudes and values and their role in the professional relationship. In conducting their professional practice, the psychologist recognises and does not impose their ethical and value norms or attitudes.
2. The psychologist does not misuse their power and status by abusing the client's dependence and trust nor misuse them for their own interests or personal benefit.
  3. The psychologist refrains from professional practice if personal, scientific, legal, financial or other interests could be expected to impair the psychologist's objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their functions as a psychologist. The psychologist should also refrain from professional practice than there is a risk of exploitation or harm to the person or organisation with whom the professional relationship exists.
  4. The psychologist avoids having a multiple relationship with clients (for example, trainees, students, research participants, etc.) during the period of a professional relationship. The psychologist is aware of the direct and indirect ways in which intimacy or sexuality can affect the relationship between the psychologist and the client or concerned parties. The psychologist avoids letting the relationship become private or sexual in nature.
  5. If it turns out that the psychologist's relationship with the client cannot be of a professional nature, the psychologist suggests the client to apply to another competent professional.



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