

Ethical Code and Principles in Work with Children, Adolescents and Their Families

The purpose of the ethical code is to define general principles and establish standards of professional conduct for psychotherapists/counselors/supervisors in their work, and to inform and protect those members of the public who seek services: children, young people, their families and where applicable, others.

Each member organization of the European Association for Integrative Psychotherapy will include and elaborate the following principles in its Ethical Code.

It is expected that all psychotherapists/counselors/supervisors will approach their work with the aim of alleviating suffering and promoting their clients' wellbeing, using their abilities and skills for the greatest benefit of clients without prejudice and discrimination*, while recognizing the values and dignity of every human being.

Discrimination will be considered any exclusion, restriction or giving of preference based on real or assumed grounds toward any person or group of persons on the basis of their race, color, language, religion, ethnicity, disability, age, national or social origin, political or other belief, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other circumstance that has the purpose or consequence of preventing or endangering the equal recognition, enjoyment or realization of rights and freedoms. (Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Within the ethical principles related to professions that participate in diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, attention is directed to taking responsibility for performing the profession for which an individual is qualified. The basis of ethical principles consists of principles of the medical profession defined by Hippocrates, which apply to related and cooperating professions providing various types of help (diagnostics, treatment, rehabilitation, prevention, etc.) to children who need it. The basic ethical principles, according to Hippocrates, are:

- a) The health of the patient, in this case the child, is the supreme law (*Salus aegroti suprema lex*). Today this approach is most often described as the wellbeing of the patient which is always in the first place. In work with children this means the wellbeing of the child; the principle of the best interest of the child is in the first place.
- b) The will of the client/patient is the supreme law (*Voluntas aegroti suprema lex*). Today the respect for the will of the client is the basis of informed consent for undertaking certain diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. In work with children this means informing the child and parents/guardians about the problem and goals of treatment and obtaining consent for the same, which is a condition for active participation in treatment and affects the outcome.
- c) Do not harm the patient/client, in this case the child (*Primum nil nocere*), which some experts consider the basic ethical principle. Considering the sensitivity of deciding between the benefit of the client or not doing harm requires high professionalism of experts which includes professional knowledge and skills, knowledge of legal regulations, communication skills, etc.
- d) Justice (*Iustitia*) implies the obligation and duty of the doctor, psychotherapist, every expert, regardless of basic profession, to leave certain therapeutic interventions to them

- a) therapists who perform it best or are additionally trained for performing certain diagnostic or therapeutic procedures. Justice also implies aligning the entire procedure with the benefit of the client. (Kozarić Kvačić, Frančiskov, 2014).

The majority of principles of contemporary developmental psychotherapy, as a form of treatment and often the first choice in treating children (or in combination with medication), are derived from the previously stated basic principles, which is a consequence of the development of the profession and increasing demands and expectations of clients and their family members regarding the implementation of certain therapeutic processes.

In the context of psychotherapy as a form of treatment, protecting the rights of children, professional standards and ethical codes (which regulate the field of developmental psychotherapy in developed countries), there are three basic ethical issues that have their specificities in the treatment of children: 1. the issue of psychotherapist competencies, 2. the issue of giving consent for treatment, and 3. the issue of confidentiality.

The application of modalities and methods of adult psychotherapy in work with children is considered not only inadequate but also unethical. Therefore, the ethical code stipulates that therapists who work with children, young people and their families must be specially trained for that work.

The issues of giving consent stipulate that it is unethical to conduct therapy without the child's consent, without informed consent of their parents/guardians (which was earlier practice, for example, at the request of school or court). Additionally, it is ethical that the child itself be informed about the treatment planned for them, the dynamics of sessions, the goal that is defined together, that they be included in the decision-making process, that is, giving consent for treatment. Professional discussions are held around age, cognitive and emotional maturity, when the child is considered developmentally ready enough to participate in these processes. Some consider this to be the age of seven years, while others move this boundary to the age between 11 and 13 years. (Bojanin & Popović, Deušić, 2012).

The next ethical issue is: should children have the same right to privacy and confidentiality in counseling/psychotherapy/treatment as adults? The ethical code in work with children is in accordance with the Child Protection Policy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in their best interest, and clearly specifies limitations of this right in cases of suspected abuse and neglect of the child, expressed intention to harm oneself and others. In this case, the health worker and associate is obliged and responsible, without delay, to inform the competent institutions (and to previously inform the child and parents about this): the guardianship body according to the child's place of residence, the police administration, the health institution (hospital), and in some cases the competent prosecutor's office.

Careful attention is paid to protecting the privacy of children and their families in storing and keeping documentation.

All professionals are obliged to respect the ethical principles of their profession, as well as the ethical principles of research with children.

All professionals are obliged to be well familiar with the use of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.