

# AASP CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

*(Current as at 10 May 2009)*

## **Preamble**

This code applies to and is accepted by members and associate members of the Australian Association of Somatic Psychotherapists as a binding guide to their professional conduct. The code establishes minimum standards of ethical practice and conduct for the protection of the clients, students and supervisees of Somatic Psychotherapists affiliated with the AASP.

## **Ethical Principles**

Somatic Psychotherapists:

- a) Respect the essential humanity, worth and dignity of all people and promote this value in their work.
- b) Recognise and respect diversity among people and oppose discrimination and oppressive behaviour.
- c) Respect the privacy of their clients and preserve the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of their work.
- d) Protect the rights of their clients, including the right to informed consent.
- e) Actively maintain and develop their competence throughout their professional lives.
- f) Value rigorous and respectful debate of issues, theories, methods and clinical practices.

## **1. General Responsibilities**

1.1 Somatic Psychotherapists are personally responsible for their professional decisions. They make every effort to use their skills appropriately and take all reasonable steps to do no harm to the client as a result of the therapy process.

1.2 It is unethical for Somatic Psychotherapists to misrepresent their qualifications, training, experience or their area of expertise. They do not undertake work outside their current area of competence without appropriate supervision.

1.3 If a client presents with a medical problem or condition which may require intervention beyond the scope of psychotherapy, it is the responsibility of the Somatic Psychotherapist to support the client to seek appropriate specialist professional opinion.

1.4 Ethical conduct requires that the Somatic Psychotherapist explains treatment and method procedures to the client so that the client understands, where appropriate, that working directly with the body, in the form of touch, massage, exercises or movement, may be part of the therapeutic procedure.

1.5 Ethical conduct requires that the client be free to reject any therapeutic procedure.

1.6 Somatic Psychotherapists have a responsibility to maintain their own effectiveness, resilience and ability to help clients. They are expected to monitor their own personal functioning and to seek supervisory or other professional help and, where necessary, to withdraw from psychotherapeutic practice when their functioning is significantly impaired for any reason.

1.7 Somatic Psychotherapists take all due care in relation to the termination of therapy. After termination, restraint should continue to be exercised by the therapist with regard to social contact with the client.

1.8 To enable clients to be contacted and supported in the event of the unexpected serious illness or death of the therapist, it is the responsibility of the Somatic Psychotherapist to maintain an up to date record of client names and contact phone numbers.

## **2. Confidentiality**

2.1 It is essential, at all times, for Somatic Psychotherapists to maintain strict confidentiality about information obtained from clients during the course of their work, unless the specific consent of the client to do otherwise is obtained. This can only be set aside if there are good grounds for believing that for the therapist to maintain confidentiality would endanger the client, the therapist or other persons. When appropriate it is necessary to inform clients of legal or other contractual limits of confidentiality.

2.2 Contact with third parties (for example; relatives, friends or the client's medical practitioner) should only occur with the informed consent of the client.

2.3 If working with minors or others unable to give voluntary, informed consent, the responsibility of Somatic Psychotherapists is to protect their client, while being aware that there are legal formulae that may require them to be also responsible to the next of kin or guardian.

2.4 Disclosure by the therapist of criminal acts may only take place when not to do so would violate legal requirements and when there is an overriding legal or social obligation. Wherever possible, this should first be discussed in supervision / with a senior colleague and with the client.

2.5 Somatic Psychotherapists should store records, whether in written or any other form, so that they are secure and confidential.

2.6 Arrangements should be made to ensure that the confidentiality of client records is safeguarded in the event of the therapist's death.

2.7 When Somatic Psychotherapists use case material in professional discussions with colleagues for educational, consultative or research purposes, or in reports or publications, great care should be exercised to ensure that the material is presented in such a way that the client is not identifiable. The client's informed consent should be obtained if there is any possibility of identification of the client.

2.8 Agreements about confidentiality continue after the client's death unless there legal considerations.

### **3. Exploitation**

3.1 It is unethical for Somatic Psychotherapists to use their professional relationship for the purpose of exploiting clients, trainees or supervisees, past or present, in a financial, sexual, emotional or any other way.

3.2 Somatic Psychotherapists will not accept or offer payments or other advantages for referrals, or engage in any financial transactions for psychotherapy sessions, other than the ordinary fee scale charged to clients.

3.3 Somatic Psychotherapists should not undertake individual psychotherapy with friends, family, employees, supervisees or with their own students. They should not undertake psychotherapy or supervision with anyone closely associated with a current or previous client nor with someone with whom they come into regular contact, without careful consideration and, where appropriate, consultation with a supervisor or senior colleague.

3.4 Sexual relationships between therapist and client, trainer and trainee or supervisor and supervisee are unethical. Sexual relationships are not restricted to sexual intercourse. The behaviour of the Somatic Psychotherapist should not be sexually seductive or create ambiguity or confusion about sexual boundaries. Physical touch is used by Somatic Psychotherapists for therapeutic purposes only. Physical contact, whether initiated by the client or Somatic Psychotherapist, which has as its purpose some form of sexual gratification, or could be reasonably construed by Somatic Psychotherapists as having that purpose, is unethical.

3.5 If an attraction on the part of the therapist develops to a degree that may impair therapeutic judgment, or could lead to sexual relations occurring, it is the therapist's responsibility to immediately seek supervision / consult with a senior colleague and, where necessary, to terminate therapy and refer the client elsewhere.

3.6 It is unethical for a Somatic Psychotherapist to terminate a therapeutic relationship with his or her client in order to commence a sexual relationship with that client.

3.7 It is also unethical for a Somatic Psychotherapist to engage in a sexual relationship with a former psychotherapy client.

#### **4. Supervision**

4.1 Somatic Psychotherapists who are trainers or supervisors have a responsibility to promote awareness of and adherence to the Code of Ethics of this Association.

4.2 Clinical and Associate members must undertake their required supervision hours with a supervisor who has a minimum of five years post accreditation experience, be engaged in ongoing clinical supervision and a member of a relevant professional association.

4.3 Supervisors and supervisees are free to discuss clients within the supervisory relationship. They must both ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the client are maintained outside the supervisory relationship.

4.4 If a trainer considers that in his/her professional opinion it is inappropriate for an individual student to undergo a particular experience or demonstration, then that student should not be taken into that experience for training purposes. The trainee must also be free to refuse to participate.

#### **5. Public Statements**

5.1 It is unethical for public statements, advertising or any published material by Somatic Psychotherapists, including information about education or training programs, to contain false, fraudulent, misleading or deceptive information. Statements should set out in a clear direct manner the type of service offered and not create false or unjustified expectations of benefit.

5.2 In public statements a Somatic Psychotherapist may not claim superiority over any or all other members of the AASP.

5.3 Public statements may not claim to offer superior methods to other forms of Psychotherapy.

5.4. Public statements must not play on fears in prospective clients regarding the possible results of not taking up the offered services.

5.5 Associate members of the AASP may not use their associate membership with the AASP for advertising purposes in any promotional or business material.

#### **6. Professional Relationships**

6.1 It is unethical for the Somatic Psychotherapist to actively promote his/her services directly to a person already receiving services from another therapist.

6.2 If approached by a person already in therapy, it is the responsibility of the Somatic Psychotherapist to make clear to the person that they should discuss with their current therapist the implications of their proposed actions and decisions.

6.3 The Association encourages professional debate. However, it is unethical for members and associate members to publicly represent professional differences of opinion in a manner that could bring discredit to the other colleague's professional reputation, or in a manner that claims superiority over the other.

6.4 It is unethical for Somatic Psychotherapists to behave in any way that would bring their profession or the Association into disrepute.

6.5 It is the responsibility of members and associate members of the AASP to promote and maintain an awareness within the organisation of ethical responsibilities.

6.6 Somatic Psychotherapists who have grounds for suspecting professional misconduct by another Somatic Psychotherapist, which cannot be resolved or remedied through discussion with the psychotherapist concerned, should approach the Executive of the AASP to investigate according to the established procedures of the Association.

6.7 Members and associate members of the AASP are committed to abiding by the provisions of this code of ethical conduct and, when necessary, the procedures for the suspension or withdrawal of membership for unethical practices.

6.8 Where there is an appeal against a decision of the Ethics committee, a person who is not a member of the AASP will be included on the ethics committee.

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