



Traveller Counselling Service

1.4 TCS Code of Conduct for Contracted and Volunteer Counsellors

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1 Purpose

The purpose of the Code of Conduct for contracted and volunteer counsellors is to set out standards of behaviour expected from those who work for or on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service by way of providing counselling to our clients. All contracted and volunteer counsellors should read and comply with this Code of Conduct.

2 Scope

The scope of this policy document is to make clear to contracted and volunteer counsellors, the specific standards of conduct that they are required to abide by while seeing clients on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service. This policy applies not only to counsellors in their work with clients but also pertains to all dealings and work undertaken on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service, both in the workplace (the Traveller Counselling Service) and at events associated with the TCS and its work (training, meetings, conferences and social events).

The Traveller Counselling Service has devised this code of conduct for contracted and volunteer counsellors. For ease of reference, from here on in, the term 'counsellor' will be used to denote both contracted and volunteer counsellors.

- 2.1 **Counsellors** : This policy is intended for contracted and volunteer counsellors seeing clients and working on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service
- 2.2 **Clients** : The clients that are referred to in this policy are Travellers that are aged 18+ that are attending our service, in any of our counselling locations, over the telephone or online for the purpose of getting counselling.

3 Objective(s)

The objective(s) of this policy are to ensure that all counsellors contracted or volunteering on behalf of the TCS are fully aware of what is meant by the Code of Conduct and the work practice and behavioural standards that they are required to maintain when dealing with clients, other counsellors, staff, Board of Management, contracted workers and all those they engage with through their work with the TCS.

3.1 What is a Code of Conduct?

This document details all that is expected and required of counsellors in terms of behaviour and conduct and all that counsellors can expect of the TCS in terms of dealing with issues that relate to behaviour and conduct.

The object of this policy is to indicate:-

- (i) What type of behaviour is expected
- (ii) What type of behaviour is unacceptable
- (iii) What constitutes harassment, bullying and sexual harassment
- (iv) What actions the Traveller Counselling Service will take in dealing with offences of this nature.

The Traveller Counselling Service is committed to providing its counsellors with a work and service-delivery environment free from harassment, bullying or sexual harassment that affirms their dignity as human beings.

The TCS will not tolerate any counsellor treating another person, using or working in or on behalf of the TCS, in a manner that affronts their dignity.

The Traveller Counselling Service acknowledges the right of all counsellors and clients to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Everyone in the TCS has the responsibility to prevent harassment, bullying or sexual harassment and to report any instances that they witness or are a party to. The reports in the first instance should be made to the Manager or failing that to a member of the Board of Management.

3.2 The standard of behaviour that is Expected

All counsellors should maintain the highest standards of behaviour in the performance of their duties by:

- Fulfilling their role as outlined in their contract of employment and job description to a satisfactory standard;
- Performing their duties to the best of their ability in a safe, efficient and competent way;
- Following the organisation's policies and procedures as well as any instructions and directions reasonably given to them;
- Acting honestly, responsibly and with integrity;
- Treating others with fairness, equality, dignity and respect;
- Acting in a way that is in line with the purpose and values of the organisation and that enhances the work of the charity;
- Communicating respectfully and honestly at all times with colleagues and all persons who interact with the Traveller Counselling Service.
- Observing safety procedures, including obligations concerning the safety, health and welfare of other people, in line with training provided to them;
- Reporting any health and safety concerns even if it is not within their area of responsibility;
- Raising concerns about possible wrongdoing in the workplace

- Directing any questions regarding TCS policies, procedures, support or supervision to the Manager
- Addressing any issues or difficulties about any aspect of their role or how they are managed in line with the TCS grievance procedures;
- Keeping confidential matters confidential;
- Exercising caution and care with any documents, material or devices containing confidential information and, at the end of their employment with TCS returning any such documents, material or devices in their possession;
- Seeking authorisation before communicating externally on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service;
- Complying with TCS Information Technology Policy;
- Declaring any interests that may conflict with their work or the work of the organisation (e.g. other business interests or employment). If any doubt arises as to what constitutes a conflict of interest, counsellors may seek guidance from the Manager
- Undertaking relevant training to maintain and improve knowledge, skills and work practices;
- Maintaining an appropriate standard of dress and personal hygiene;
- Disclosing the fact that they have been charged with, or convicted of, a criminal offence by prosecuting authorities (or given the benefit of the Probation of Offenders Act 1907 as amended) to the Manager. This may have implications for their employment. For the avoidance of doubt, employees are not required to disclose the fact or details of 'spent convictions' under the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 (as amended) to the Traveller Counselling Service

3.3 The type of behaviour that is Unacceptable

Employees are expected NOT to:

- Bring the organisation into disrepute (including through the use of email, social media and other internet sites, engaging with media etc.);
- Engage in any activity which may cause physical or mental harm or distress to another person (such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, assault, bullying, or discrimination or harassment on the grounds of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community);
- Be affected by alcohol, drugs, or medication which will affect their ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities during working hours;
- Provide a false or misleading statement, declaration, document, record or claim in respect of the TCS, its volunteers, employees or charity trustees;

- Engage in any activity that may damage property;
- Take unauthorised possession of property that does not belong to them;
- Engage in illegal activity in the workplace;
- Improperly disclose, during or after their employment with the TCS confidential information gained in the course of their work;
- Seek or accept gifts, rewards, benefits or hospitality from a third party in the course of their work, which might reasonably be seen to compromise their integrity or personal judgement. (NOTE: Any gift other than a modest token of nominal value should be courteously but firmly declined, and should be reported to the Manager. Gifts or hospitality that are generally considered as common business or social courtesies are acceptable only as long as they are reasonable in type, frequency and value.
- All counsellors need to adhere to the codes of ethics issued by their accrediting body
- Any or all other behaviour that is seen to damage their ability to work for or the reputation of the Traveller Counselling Service in any way.

Where an employee is found to be in breach of the standards outlined in this Code of Conduct, this may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal in accordance with the Traveller Counselling Service's disciplinary procedure.

The Board of Management will review the Code of Conduct for employees at 3-year intervals or as appropriate. The Manager is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented effectively. All other staff and volunteers, including charity trustees, are expected to facilitate this process.

3.3.1 What Constitutes Harrassment

The Traveller Counselling Service defines harassment as "any inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise conducted by one or more persons against another or others at the place of work or at events associated with the TCS and its work, which could be reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work because of their membership of one of the nine categories specified within the anti-harassment legislation:-

- marital status
- family status
- sexual orientation
- religion
- gender
- age
- disability
- race
- membership of the Travelling Community

This behaviour, may consist of a single incident or repeated inappropriate behaviour, is unwelcomed and could be reasonably regarded as offensive, humiliating or intimidating and can include:

- Non verbal actions, i.e. looks, gestures, isolation and exclusion
- Verbal, i.e. jokes, comments, shouting, unfair and excessive criticism
- Written harassment, i.e. e-mails, notices, letters, text messages or any messaging on social media
- Physical harassment, i.e. abusive behaviour, the production or display or circulation of written words, pictures and other material, persistent negative body language

3.3.2 What Constitutes Bullying

The Traveller Counselling Service defines bullying as:

Repeated inappropriate behaviour direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity at work but as a once off incident is not considered to be bullying.

The following are the types of behaviour, which have as their goal to undermine the dignity of another or others, considered as bullying and as such are prohibited by the TCS:

- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Unfair or excessive criticism
- Unnecessary work interference
- Public or private humiliation
- Posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, displaying of emblems
- Isolation or exclusion
- Repeated impossible or unattainable targets
- Spreading rumours
- Not giving credit for work contribution
- Withholding necessary information
- Vandalism of personal property
- Intimidation and threats in general

It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive. In essence, bullying is unwanted behaviour of a physical or verbal nature which unfairly discriminates, humiliates, embarrasses, or intimidates a person working on behalf of the service or results in that person feeling threatened, offended or compromised in any way.

3.3.3 What Constitutes Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined in the Equality Act 2004 as any form of verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

Sexual harassment may include acts of physical intimacy, any requests for sexual favours, or any other acts or conduct including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material. Sexual harassment can take the following forms:

- Non-verbal: this may include the display of pornographic or sexually suggestive pictures, objects, written material, e-mails, text messages, faxes and any shared social media content. It may also include leering or making sexually suggestive gestures.
- Verbal conduct – this includes sexual advances, propositions or pressure for sexual activity, continued suggestions for social activity outside the workplace / service delivery place after it has been clear that such suggestions are unwelcomed, unwanted or offensive flirtations, suggestive remarks, innuendos or lewd comments.
- Physical conduct – this may include unwanted physical contact such as touching, patting, pinching, or brushing against another worker's or client's body, assault and coercive sexual intercourse
- Derogatory or unwanted comments about dress or appearance

The above are not exhaustive and only serve as guidelines.

3.4 Roles and Responsibilities

The counsellors, volunteers and staff all share responsibility for ensuring that dignity at work is adhered to.

3.4.1 The Employer

The employer i.e. the Board of Management must ensure that adequate resources are in place to promote dignity at work. Communication, providing information, appointment of support contact persons, training and monitoring of the implementation and effectiveness of this Code of Conduct should be provided by the employer, as the need arises.

3.4.2 The Counsellor

The counsellor must comply with this Code of Conduct. They should inform the Manager or a member of the Board of Management if they have concerns that they, or a colleague is being bullied, harassed or mistreated in any way.

3.4.3 The Manager

The Manager must ensure the implementation of the policy. This means that they must be proactive in the explanation, monitoring, promoting awareness, setting good example, responding to requests from employees, keeping records; and adhering to the principles of this Code of Conduct Policy.

3.5 Reporting Concerns

If an individual believes that they are the victim of harassment, bullying, sexual harassment or any other form of mistreatment, they should take account of the following key points:

- The person should remain as calm and collected as possible
- They should record the incident including days, dates, times and what was said or done during the time and if there were any witnesses
- They should write down how the incident made them feel at the time
- They should try and confront the person who instigated the incident and inform her/him that they find their behaviour unacceptable and ask her/him to stop immediately
- They should talk to a colleague, support person, the Manager or member of the Management Committee about the incident
- They should keep copies of any materials received from the alleged perpetrator as these may be needed at a later stage
- They should not feel that they encouraged this behaviour or brought it on themselves

3.6 Complaints Policy and Procedure

All Staff have a right to make a complaint if they feel they have been mistreated, harassed, bullied or sexually harassed.

They should make full use of the TCS 2.4 Complaints Policy and Procedures to do this.

The Traveller Counselling Service will carefully monitor the implementation of this Policy and its Procedures and provide relevant training and awareness raising to counsellors as appropriate

3.7 Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

The Traveller Counselling Service has a right and responsibility to protect its staff from mistreatment, harassment, bullying and sexual harassment. To this end, the TCS may at times need to engage with the TCS 2.14 Disciplinary Policy and Procedure in order to address a breach of the Code of Conduct as laid out in this document.

Each case will be taken on in isolation and dealt with in an appropriate manner as outlined TCS 2.4 Complaints Policy and Procedures and 2.14 TCS Disciplinary Policy and Procedures.

4 Outcome(s)

4.1 Outcomes for Counsellors

It is anticipated that by adhering to this code of conduct, that counsellors who are providing a service on behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service, will be working to their highest standards with the maximum supports and safeguards in place to ensure their own well-being, professional integrity, safety and dignity is safe-guarded and maintained.

4.2 Outcomes for the Organisation

It is anticipated that through adherence to this code of conduct, that all those that work and volunteer with and for the Traveller Counselling Service will be treated in a dignified manner that will respect their rights and dignity.

5 Policy Development/Governance Group

5.1 Membership of the Policy/Governance Group.

Membership of the policy/governance group that has responsibility for this policy will be made up of members of the Board of Management, the Manager of the Counselling Service and the Administrator of the Counselling Service.

5.2 Conflict of Interest/Conflict of Loyalty

Expressions of conflict of interest and conflict of loyalty will be assessed and noted in the minutes each time this group meets to discuss policy.

6 Supporting Evidence

6.1 List relevant legislation

- Probation of Offenders Act 1907 (as amended))
- Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016 (as amended)
- Data Protection Act (2018)
- Misuse of Drugs Act (1977)
- The Equality Act (2004)

6.2 List of policies that are being replaced by this policy

This policy is replacing the combined document, TCS Code of Conduct for Contracted Counsellors, Volunteers, Staff and Members of the Board of Management.

6.3 List related policies.

Policies that are referred to or are relevant to this policy are as follows:-

- GDPR Data Protection Commission [www.gdprandyou.ie]
- Code of Ethics and Practice: Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Code of Ethics and Practice for Psychotherapists: Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative psychotherapy.
- Code of Ethics Family Therapist Association of Ireland
- TCS5. Discliplinary Procedures for Staff, Counsellors and Volunteers

6.4 List of Relevant Governing Bodies

- Irish Association of Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy (IAHIP)
- Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP)
- Family Therapy Association of Ireland (FTAI)
- Association for Agency-based Counselling and Psychotherapy in Ireland (AACPI)
- Workplace Relations Commission
- Employment Rights Ireland
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- An Garda Siochana

7 Glossary of Terms

No terms were felt to warrant inclusion in the Glossary of Terms.

8 Approval and Review

This policy document was circulated to the GSG for review and once approved by the GSG it is forwarded to the Board of Management for review and ratification. Once signed off, this policy is circulated to the counselling team and included in the induction packs for new counsellors. This policy was signed-off by the Board of Management at the date inserted below and is due for review three years from this date.

Chairperson : _____ Date : _____
Chris McDonagh

Review Due : _____

