

TCA Guidelines of Professional and Ethical Best Practice

Section I – Adherence to the Vision, Mission, and Values of the TCA

TCA Members are expected to conduct their business, and the interactions, in accordance with the Vision, Mission, and Values of the TCA.

Section II – A Client-Focused Profession

As Referring Professionals, all TCA Members are expected to operate their business and practices in a manner which is consistent with a clients-and-families first paradigm, where in the best interest of the client and their family are considered to be the primary reason for the relationship, and reasonable efforts are made to provide relevant and professional support to the individuals and the family system as a whole, within the bounds of the client-member relationship. Therapeutic Consultants and Referring Professionals do not, themselves, place clients, but rather they work in concert with the family system to provide resources, support, and guidance to families, who own the final decisions.

TCA Members may not practice discriminatory screening of potential clients, and are expected to provide service to clients regardless of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, physical capabilities or handicaps, age, gender, sexual preference, or marital status, within the scope of their practice, nor are discriminatory actions tolerated in dealings with other Referring Professionals, schools, programs, or ancillary service providers.

Section III – Confidentiality

All members of the TCA Members are expected to protect client confidentiality. In addition, this confidentiality extends to all students and patients who fall within the scope of their practice, including non-client students in programs or subjects of formal or informal professional consultations.

Members are expected to maintain either blanket or specific Release of Information files for active clients, in order to facilitate professional communication.

Members are expected to protect all files, including electronic data, to maintain client confidentiality, as well as take appropriate and reasonable measures to protect sensitive information on mobile or wireless devices.

TCA Members are expected to extend their professional conduct and protection of client confidentiality to the virtual environment, including the responsible use of social media.

While collaboration is a core value of the TCA, the expectation is that collaboration or consultation does not breach the confidentiality of clients.

Section IV – Compassion and Professionalism

Clients and their families reach out to Therapeutic Consultants and Referring Professionals in what are often the most trying times in their lives. TCA Members are expected to interact with families in a professional and respectful manner, in which the dignity of the family is both honored and supported, regardless of the challenges they are facing.

TCA Members are expected to stay current in their field of expertise, participate in on-going professional development and training, and operate within their scope of practice. This includes regularly visiting schools and programs, staying current with and participating in research, and maintaining a working knowledge of school and/or program sites.

Members of the TCA are expected to seek consultation for, or refer out, cases or aspects of cases which are beyond their area of expertise. This is in accordance with not only best-practice, but also the explicitly collaborative nature of the TCA.

Members of the TCA are expected to treat other referring professionals, program personnel, ancillary service providers, parents, and clients with professional respect. Dealing with difficult, stressful, and time-dependent situations is often the nature of therapeutic consulting, and yet it is through professional and mutually respectful communication between all parties involved that clients are best-served, and it is often incumbent on the referring professional to facilitate that process. When faced with challenges, TCA Members are expected to, whenever possible, be active members of the solution, and not exacerbate the presenting problem.

TCA Members are expected to conduct themselves as professionals, and as positive and ethical representatives of the field of behavioral health and specialized education. Additionally, the role of the consultant results in a unique power dynamic between consultants, families, and programs. Members of the TCA are expected to treat their role with ethical integrity at all times.

TCA Members are expected to follow all Federal, State, and Local laws and statutes which pertain to their practice, as well as the ethical guidelines which may be dictated by currently held licensure or certification from other associations, agencies, or boards.

Section V – Ethical Contracting and Transparency

TCA Members are expected to have a clear contract with clients which defines services, pricing structures, billable costs, and length or terms of service. TCA Members are expected to disclose all costs to a client and have a signed contract before the client can accrue costs, and billable hours or costs or fees that are additional to the original contract will be pre-approved by clients before they assume financial liability for such costs.

TCA Members are expected to provide, upon request, a sanitized version of their service contract to programs or schools where clients are placed, outlining the length, nature, and services inherent to the contract.

It is the responsibility of the TCA Member to explicitly outline their communication and collaboration expectations and needs to schools and programs upon placement of the client.

Section VI – Ethical Dual Relationships and Self Reporting

TCA Members who have a dual relationship (ie a financial relationship with a school, program, ancillary service provider, Board, or other organization) are expected to clearly disclose that relationship within their service contract, including a specific section of the contract in which clients explicitly acknowledge that they've been informed of the dual relationship. TCA Members are required to disclose the information on their website, as well. While these dual relationships can, in fact, strengthen and support TCA Member's service to clients, it is the open

and active self-reporting which helps mitigate or remove opportunities for the appearance of impropriety.

Section VII – Ethical Touring, Remuneration, and Relationships with Programs and Schools

Regularly interacting with and visiting programs and schools is a vital element to therapeutic consulting, and a key component of all TCA Member's practice. TCA Members will abide by the following ethical guidelines, as it relates to schools, programs, and ancillary service providers:

- TCA Members may request, but may not demand, visitation to a school or program.
- TCA Members may not solicit programs to pay for travel or associated costs, and may only accept or bill travel reimbursements which are related to the visit and are agreed upon by both the program(s) and the member in advance. While it may be customary for some programs to pay for travel, lodging, or meals – either during program visits or professional visits with a referring professional off-site from the program, coverage of these costs are not, by default, the responsibility of the program. Ancillary travel expenses incurred in the course of travel (ie parking, taxi fare, coffee, etc) are not considered reimbursable travel costs, and it is the responsibility of TCA Members to openly discuss and agree upon cost-sharing prior to visits.
- Even when negotiated, TCA Members are expected to keep costs reasonable and relevant to the professional nature of their visit. Members may not make demands of specific travel arrangements (ie a preferred air carrier or hotel chain), request that programs incur the costs of non-professional travel partners (ie children or spouse).
- When accepting travel support and/or travel reimbursement from programs, TCA members are expected to work within the bounds and schedule of the visit, as organized by the program.
- TCA Members may not accept or solicit payment from schools or programs for the placement or referral of clients.
 - “Payment” is meant to include an explicit or implied quid pro quo referral relationship, in which TCA Members get direct referrals from programs in order to encourage future or reward past referrals and placements.
 - “Payment” is meant to include secured or preferential access to placement space in a school or program.
 - “Payment” is meant to include preferential luxury travel accommodations, invitations for pay for family member's travel or expenses, or gifts or services in excess of \$100 in a calendar year.
- TCA Members are expected to remain cognizant of the unique power dynamic which exists between programs and referring professionals, and are expected to treat this relationship with ethical integrity, and in keeping with the spirit of this document.

Section VIII – Collaboration, Honest Reflection, Feedback

Membership in the TCA affords Referring Professionals unique access to a collaborative association dedicated, in part, to fostering and supporting collaboration among therapeutic consultants. Members are expected to participate in collaborative supervision groups, as outlined in the TCA Membership Rights and Responsibilities, for the purpose of exchanging expertise, support, perspective, and feedback with other members of the TCA.

Participation in collaborative enterprises does not imply or infer that Members will disclose confidential information, consult on cases or aspects of cases for remuneration, or in any way interfere with unique client-consultant relationships. These collaborative enterprises are for the sole purpose of mutual support, education, and professional guidance, and are conducted in keeping with the general Vision, Mission, and Values of the TCA.

In addition to participating in collaborative supervision groups, members of the TCA are expected to seek relevant and timely feedback from clients, colleagues, and program personnel. Feedback is a vital element in all of the settings in which we place our clients, and the purpose of this guideline is to support and facilitate healthy and productive feedback for Referring Professionals, as well. When asking for, and receiving feedback, TCA Members are expected to also keep in mind the unique power dynamic which is created between consultants, families, and programs. TCA Members are expected to participate in honest self reflection, as well as create meaningful and authentic feedback loops in their practice, for the purpose of improving their own service to kids and families, as well as furthering the field of behavioral health and specialized education.

Section IX – Topics Not Explicitly Covered

While every effort has been made to address both typical and atypical elements of the professionalism and ethics related to therapeutic consulting, we recognize that this document is neither exclusive nor exhaustive. In instances where an ethical question is not clearly addressed by the previous sections, TCA Members are expected to act professionally, exercise good judgement, and act within the spirit of the TCA.

Section X – Accountability and Reporting

The Ethics Board of the TCA has been formed to review and address ethical issues, both proactively, as a TCA Member resource to support referring professionals dealing with ethical quandaries, and also in response to issues brought before the Ethics Board for review.

The Ethics Board is a confidential forum, designed to help serve TCA Members by providing ethical guidance and support, and also to protect and defend the quality of the TCA brand for the benefit of the membership. All ethical violations that come to the attention of the Ethics Board will be treated with professional sensitivity, and every effort will be made to understand all sides of an issue before decisions are made. The Ethics Board reserves the right to censure members or revoke TCA Membership, if it is the opinion of the Ethics Board that a Breach of Ethics warrants such action to protect the overall health and reputation of the TCA as a whole.

It should be noted that in all cases of an accusation, both the reporter and the TCA Member in question will be notified of actions and decisions, but the anonymity of reporters is not guaranteed. In keeping with the TCA's ethic of open feedback and communication, ethical breaches may be reported by TCA Members, other Referring Professionals, Clients, Ancillary Service Providers, or Program and School Personnel. Additionally, TCA Members accused of a Breach of Ethics will participate in a call or meeting with the Ethics Committee, in which they will have the opportunity to disclose and describe their actions, as the TCA believes that peer accountability is an important element of maintaining the highest ethical standards among members.

If addressing issues not expressly or explicitly addressed in the previous sections, the Ethics Board will act in a way which is in keeping with the Vision, Mission, Values, and spirit of the TCA, and will rule on issues in a way which protects the professional and ethical integrity of the TCA for the benefit of the membership as a whole.