• Participate in setting goals and evaluating progress toward meeting them.
• Be informed of how to contact the counselor in an emergency situation.
• Request referral for a second opinion at any time.
• Request copies of records and reports to be used by other counseling professionals.
• Receive a copy of the code of ethics to which your counselor adheres.
• Contact the appropriate professional organization if you have doubts or complaints relative to the counselor’s conduct.
• Terminate the relationship at any time.

Your Responsibilities as a Client

• Set and keep appointments with your counselor. Let him or her know as soon as possible if you cannot keep an appointment.
• Pay your fees in accordance with the schedule you pre-established with the counselor.
• Help plan your goals.
• Follow through with agreed upon goals.
• Keep your counselor informed of your progress towards meeting your goals.
• Terminate your counseling relationship before entering into arrangement with another counselor.”

Notice that the consumer/client responsibilities require the counselor to have provided the client with informed consent at the beginning of therapy. Also note that the client cannot behave unethically—only counselors can make that mistake.

Summary

Unethical treatment causes harm to clients and leaves the counselor open to malpractice suits and loss of credibility. This may leave the counselor and client in vulnerable positions which minimize or negate the benefits of counseling and damage the credibility of counselors and the counseling profession. A counselor’s best defense is to behave as ethically as possible while doing everything to promote the best interests of clients.

Most have entered this profession in order to help others while also earning a living and reaping the fruits of a rewarding career. For both to occur, counselors must keep the ethical codes in mind at all times; must strive to be as mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically healthy as possible; must obtain a thorough graduate education that emphasizes both knowledge and practice; and must seek continuing education, advanced training and supervision when in the “real world.”

Useful Websites

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists’ (Ethical and legal information page):  http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/MFT_Resources/Legal_and_Ethics/Content/Legal_Ethics/Legal_Ethics.aspx?hkey=2e3ddf7–9ddf–45f6–9344–a8f152c91681
American Psychological Association (Ethics page): http://www.apa.org/ethics/
American School Counselor Association (Ethics page): http://www.schoolcounselor.org/
content.asp?pl=325&sl=136&contentid=136
Association of Specialist in Group Work (Best practices page): http://www.asgw.org/best.htm
National Board for Certified Counselors (Client rights and ethics page): http://www.nbcc.org/About/Advocacy
National Center on Elder Abuse-state laws page: http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/NCEARoot/Main_Site/Find_Help/APS/Analysis_State_Laws.aspx

References