



Code of Ethics for NLP Practitioners

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Introduction

Ethics may be a boring subject, but it is definitely an important one for therapists.

This code of ethics is adapted from models of major organizations representing licensed psychotherapists. However, it is written specifically for coaches and consultants who are not necessarily members of such an organization. It is necessary to understand the following guidelines in order to function in a truly professional manner. This is because these guidelines can help to protect your reputation and safety, help you avoid trouble, help to protect the public, and help protect the reputation of NLP coaching and consulting as professions.

These guidelines won't cover every situation you encounter, but they are very well rounded, representing millions of person-years of professional practice.

Although these guidelines are not intended as legal advice, the codes that they are modeled after have evolved hand-in-hand with the evolution of laws intended to protect the public and ensure the usefulness of the practitioners those laws regulate. Following these guidelines can help you avoid problems such as practicing medicine or psychotherapy without a license, or violating the boundaries of clients.

Do not hesitate to contact a lawyer and review relevant laws and liability issues when potential legal issues arise. When there is any doubt, it is always better to call sooner than later. Compared to the attitudes of many coaches, these guidelines

may seem strict. In fact, where success coaching between peers is involved, and mental health issues are not being treated, you may find that the guidelines concerning dual relationships can be relaxed without creating an ethical breach. However, it is very easy to err in this area, so we recommend having additional consultation and training specifically in this area for all coaches. Another good example is name-dropping and client testimonials. In psychotherapy, this is considered unethical. Getting a client to agree to this is considered imposing on a client in a manner that is not in the client's best interest, because it means publicly acknowledging a mental health problem.

As you know, mental health problems are subject to a great deal of social stigma and discrimination in areas as serious as employment and health insurance coverage in countries that do not provide national coverage. In coaching for success, a client testimonial might not be of much concern, because there is no admission of having a disability or disorder.

My advice is to always put the welfare of your client first, making sure that any testimonials do not convey any traits that could result in stigma or discrimination.

I hope you'll adhere to it and keep yourself out of troubles while you're doing your best to help our fellow human beings.

Best of luck,

Shlomo Vaknin, C.Ht
Master Trainer of NLP

www.NLPkb.com

Code of Ethics for NLP Practitioners and Coaches

I. Basic Responsibilities

NLP practitioners support client welfare and rights, and the ethical and constructive use of their services. When clients are not physically present during sessions, as in phone sessions, NLP practitioners take extra measures to meet their responsibilities to clients as needed.

1. NLP practitioners support **non-discrimination**, and provide equal consideration regardless of race, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic, or marital status. NLP practitioners take reasonable measures to accommodate clients with physical disabilities.

2. NLP practitioners understand that their clients trust them, and so they **refrain from exploiting** that trust. They also understand that dual relationships can become more complicated than expected and result in bad outcomes or the perception of an ethical breach. NLP practitioners **avoid creating any relationships with their clients that are at all likely to impair their judgment** or tempt them to exploit the client. This is especially important where there are ongoing sessions, as opposed to one or a few sessions that are not highly personal.

3. It is questionable to have a **"dual relationship,"** meaning one in which the practitioner and client engage in a different relationship at the same time, such as by also being business partners. Before considering an additional relationship, the practitioner should allow a reasonable amount of time to elapse after the sessions are complete.

When you cannot avoid a dual relationship, as may occur in a small town, the practitioner will take precautions and create limits for that relationship to ensure that they maintain good judgment and refrain from any exploitation. In any case, sex and dating are inadvisable when in a practitioner-client relationship, and for a reasonable amount of time afterwards.

Where there is significant likelihood of a dual relationship, the practitioner will consider referring the person to another practitioner.

Examples of dual relationship actions include borrowing money, hiring, engaging in a business venture with, or engaging in a close personal relationship with a client. This may also apply to the client's spouse, partner or family members.

4. NLP practitioners honor their **professional commitment** to clients. This includes refraining from abandoning or neglecting clients whose sessions are not complete. To this end, NLP practitioners maintain procedures to support this, such as providing contact information and instructions as to what to do in case of an emergency or in case the NLP practitioner is away, and by terminating sessions properly. This should include a professional will with instructions as to how to transfer, maintain or properly dispose of any confidential or important records.

5. NLP practitioners **stop seeing clients for appropriate reasons only**, and do so in an ethical manner. These reasons may include the client not benefiting adequately, there is not a good reason to continue, the NLP practitioner is experiencing some kind of impairment such as mental illness, or the

relationship has developed a significant ethical problem. for clinically sound reasons and in an appropriate manner. When ending sessions, the NLP practitioner makes sure that any referrals for services or other arrangements are made promptly.

6. NLP practitioners **do not continue sessions with clients purely for their own financial gain**, but it is ethical to discontinue when fees are not paid.

7. NLP practitioners **are not gurus, and are not adamant about any advice they offer** except where safety and emergencies are concerned. NLP practitioners respect the right of their clients to make their own decisions in all areas of their lives, including personal relationships. At the same time, the practitioner will help clients understand the consequences of their decisions, and will give them enough information that clients can make informed decisions about NLP. This information includes the potential risks and benefits of NLP based on the client's situation and capacities.

8. NLP practitioners **inform clients all key policies in advance**. These include the extent of their availability for emergencies and for other contacts between sessions, as well as issues such as fees, no show charges and other fee-related policies. These include whether extended sessions cost more, and how the client will be enabled to decide on whether to accept an extended session.

9. NLP practitioners **obtain written consent before making any kind of media recording** of sessions. The consent will include the conditions in which the recording can be played and who will experience it.

10. NLP practitioners will explain to their client that the content of their sessions will be kept **confidential**, and the practitioner will honor this into perpetuity. In the event of a court order or safety issue, the practitioner is not required to maintain confidentiality. The client should understand this in advance.

11. NLP practitioners inform clients of their **qualifications and experience** prior to providing services. This can be in the form of a written summary.

12. If there are to be **electronic communications**, NLP practitioners inform their clients of the potential risks to confidentiality, what to do if there is no response (there may have been a technical problem) and how emergencies communicated electronically will be handled.

13. **If the client sees another practitioner** of some kind, such as a mental health provider, the NLP practitioner will provide all useful information when requested by the client. The practitioner will not withhold this information because fees have not been paid. The NLP practitioner will collaborate with practitioners as needed for the welfare of the client, when given permission by the client.

II. Scope of Practice and Referrals

NLP practitioners do not work with clients who have problems that the practitioner does not have **qualifications and skills** to work with, and they **refer** to appropriate professionals as needed.

1. The NLP practitioner will **refer clients** to appropriate medical or psychotherapy treatment providers when there is a concern that **assessment or**

treatment of symptoms of medical or mental disorders may be needed.

2. The NLP practitioner is as **aware of the limits of his or her skills** as they are of their abilities. This is called **scope of practice**. As a result, the practitioner **prevents harm by knowing when and how to refer** clients for treatment of possible medical or psychological disorders.

3. The NLP practitioner **learns to recognize symptoms** that may indicate medical and psychological disorders so that they will be effective and timely in making referrals.

III. Confidentiality

NLP practitioners take their clients' privacy seriously. They understand that clients may divulge personal information that they would not want shared with anyone else. Personal information can harm peoples' careers, relationships, and other important life areas. Except for urgent safety concerns, NLP practitioners do not make moral decisions that would lead them to violate the privacy of their clients, and they never indulge in gossip. Practitioners have unique confidentiality responsibilities because the "patient" in a therapeutic relationship may be more than one person. The overriding principle is that NLP practitioners respect the confidences of their patient(s).

1. NLP practitioners are best known for providing coaching that enhances success and well being, and do not treat mental illnesses, therefore, so long as no coercion is involved, the practitioner may solicit permission to use client's recommendations and

names in communications and advertising, and in teaching or presenting. **The client must clearly understand the potential consequences and nature of the use of their name, and give permission in advance and in writing** on a form that includes this information. This can prevent serious misunderstandings later. **The NLP practitioner avoids this practice if there is any doubt about the client's objectivity**, such as occurs if the client feels dependent upon the NLP practitioner or confers authority to the NLP practitioner in some manner.

2. NLP practitioners **maintain the total privacy of their clients**, including their names or any information that could identify them. **The only exceptions** to this are a) any legal requirements, such as a court order, b) the need to use specific information to defend themselves in a court action (and the release of information is limited to what is necessary only), c) as needed in order to pursue fees in a legal action (and this is limited to the name of the client, the dates of the sessions, the amount owed, a signed form showing that the client has agreed to fees or policies but that does not contain information about the client's problems, and the service provided, d) as permitted by the client.

3. NLP practitioners **maintain client records in a safe and secure manner**. They are aware of the risks and limitations of any technology used, and take appropriate steps to prevent breaches. They take extra cautions when transmitting or receiving client information. They dispose of records, including any hardware containing them, such as computer memory devices, in a manner that fully protects confidentiality.

4. NLP practitioners ensure that their **employees, contractors or other personnel maintain confidentiality**, and that they only have access to information that is necessary for the conduct of business and in a manner that the client understands and accepts.

IV. Professional Competence and Integrity

NLP practitioners **maintain high standards** of professional competence and integrity.

1. NLP practitioners **maintain records** of their sessions as needed for competent practice, for maintenance of any signed agreements, for reference in case there is a time lag between sessions, for consulting with other helping professionals, billing, and for any other purposes as needed.

2. NLP practitioners **seek professional assistance as needed** for any problems that may interfere with their performance or judgment.

3. NLP practitioners as teachers or presenters, **present accurate information** from reputable sources.

4. NLP practitioners develop the understanding necessary to work with **people of other cultures**. They identify the cultural and ethnic background and related needs of their clients so that they may provide effective services.

5. NLP practitioners **stay up-to-date in their field** through ongoing educational experiences. They also get ongoing continuing education that expands their

knowledge pertaining to psychology and health, because of the diverse issues that clients bring.

6. NLP practitioners **maintain a reputation for honesty, fairness and ethics** in their lives. They refrain from any kind of harassment, exploitation or illegal activity.

7. NLP practitioners **do not provide any services that are outside of their abilities and legal scope** of practice. Unless qualified and legally sanctioned, NLP practitioners do not treat or offer to treat mental or physical illnesses. While people may improve in these areas as a result of NLP, the practitioner does not promote his or her services as a form of treatment. Promoted services may include training on NLP, including self-NLP, stress management, coaching, and stress management, (barring any legal or ethical concerns).

8. NLP practitioners make sure that **any new types of clients they see or skills they use are appropriate from a legal and ethical point of view**, and will be performed competently as a result of having the proper training, supervision, consultation or experience as needed.

9. NLP practitioners **do not provide services that will conflict with a person's psychotherapy**. The practitioner uses special caution and consideration with a potential client who is receiving psychotherapy. This is because the person may have a mental disorder that places special needs upon any relationship that may result in focusing on memories or goals, or that may induce emotional awareness or deep relaxation. Generally, the practitioner is advised

to consult with the psychotherapist before starting sessions. It may be appropriate to proceed when the client is fully able to indicate that they are stable and can tolerate the activities listed in this section, such as experiencing increased awareness.

10. NLP practitioners take reasonable steps to **prevent the distortion or misuse of their approach** and knowledge, particularly by the media and influential persons. This includes steps such as letters to the editor, personal communications, and collective communication from practitioners.

11. NLP practitioners want to **affect people and their community in the most positive way possible**, and they want to generate and preserve respect for their approach, so they **exercise care in their public statements**, live or in any medium. As part of their ongoing education, NLP practitioners learn how to recognize and engage in rational and ethical rhetoric, debate and public discourse. This includes understanding and avoiding logical fallacies.

12. NLP practitioners **only engage in research when they have adequate support, skills and knowledge** to do so. NLP practitioners do not make public statements as to the results of their research unless they are adequately trained and competent to carry out reliable research. NLP practitioners gain the knowledge pertaining to research, and will only talk about the results of others' research when they can do so competently and credibly.

V. Responsibility to Students

As with clients, NLP practitioners **do not exploit the trust** of their students.

1. NLP practitioners apply the **ethical guidelines in their conduct with students** as with clients. This refers to exploitation, dual relationships that may impair judgment, sexual contact, and sexual harassment.

2. NLP practitioners take reasonable measures to **prevent their students from holding themselves out as able to perform services and skills that are beyond their actual skills and experience**. This is reflected in the standards and testing related to any certifications or references provided.

4.3 NLP practitioners who act as teachers or who supervise students that are gaining experience **maintain and enhance their teaching or supervision skills, and get consultation** as needed.

VI. Responsibility to Colleagues and Other Professionals

NLP practitioners **treat colleagues and other professionals with courtesy, respect and fairness**. They cooperate with their colleagues in order to support the well being of their clients and community.

1. NLP practitioners **respect their colleagues privacy**, and maintain any confidences that their colleagues share with them, except where a clear ethical or legal need requires disclosure.

2. NLP practitioners make reasonable efforts to **help colleagues who are impaired** by problems such as substance abuse or mental illness.

VII. Responsibility to NLP

NLP practitioners work to **advance the goals of NLP and respect for the professionals involved** in NLP.

1. NLP practitioners continue to act in accordance with the ethics of their profession, **without being compromised by their employment or membership** in an organization.
2. NLP practitioners **give credit** to people who contribute to their publications in proportion to the contribution and according to traditional publication practices. This includes giving attribution to the people who came up with original ideas and contributions.
3. NLP practitioners **take responsibility for the marketing and promotion** of their work, training offerings, and publications, ensuring that it is done accurately and honestly.
4. NLP practitioners recognize the importance of **contributing to a better community and society**. They engage in practices that support this, such as devoting a portion of their professional activity to services for which there is little or no financial return.
5. NLP practitioners recognize the importance of **supporting laws and regulations that pertain to NLP and that serve the public interest**, and of fighting or altering laws and regulations that do not.

VIII. Responsibility to the Legal System

NLP practitioners recognize and understand their **role in the legal system** and their duty to remain objective and honest.

1. NLP practitioners who have questions or concerns about a case or practice that may have legal repercussions consult a qualified attorney in order to

ensure that their conduct is in compliance with the law. They never assume that they know the law through using common sense, their impression of what is fair, or information that is not from a legal authority or that they do not fully understand.

2. NLP practitioners who give testimony in legal proceedings **testify truthfully** and avoid making misleading statements.

3. NLP practitioners **understand laws that have a bearing** upon their practices, directly or indirectly, and comply with those laws.

4. NLP practitioners **do not publicly express professional opinions about an individual's mental or emotional condition**, unless they clearly state the limitations of their knowledge of the situation and that they are offering a personal opinion. This is to help ensure legally appropriate testimony, and to avoid making statements that may legally compromise the practitioner or other people.

IX. Financial Arrangements

NLP practitioners make **financial arrangements** with clients and students that are understandable, and conform to accepted professional practices and legal requirements.

1. NLP practitioners **do not offer or accept payment for referrals**. This prevents a loss of objectivity in making referrals that could exploit and bring harm to clients or divert them from a more appropriate referral.

2. NLP practitioners **do not financially exploit** their clients.

3. NLP practitioners **disclose in advance** their fees and how they will be computed. They make sure their clients understand matters such as charges for canceled or missed appointments and any interest to be charged on unpaid balances, at the beginning of treatment. They **give reasonable notice** of any changes in these policies or amounts.

4. NLP practitioners give **reasonable notice** to clients with unpaid balances of their intent to sue, or to refer for collection. Whenever legal action is taken, therapists will **avoid disclosure of clients' personal information** such as their problems. If the practitioner refers to a collection agency, they avoid disclosure of clinical information and select an ethical agency.

5. NLP practitioners **normally don't accept non-monetary remuneration** such as goods or services for their services. This is because it can create conflicts of interest and lead the client to feel exploited. This can harm the therapist-client relationship.

X. Advertising

NLP practitioners enable potential clients to **make informed choices** regarding their services.

1. NLP practitioners are **honest about the current nature** of their skills, training and experience.

2. NLP practitioners **advertise honestly**.

3. NLP practitioners display their name, credentials and business name in a way that **does not mislead**

potential clients in any way or create any unjustified expectation.

4. NLP practitioners **correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information** about their qualifications, services, or products.

5. NLP practitioners **use great care in using any testimonials** in a manner that is in compliance with their existing agreement with the client or ex-client, and refrain from soliciting or using testimonials in any way that interferes with the best interests of that person.

6. NLP practitioners don't use NLP or other initials after their names to give the impression of a license or academic degree that they do not have.