

Professional Guidelines for Psychologists

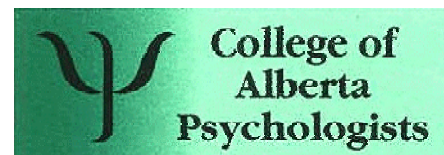
Advertising and Other Public Communication

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COLLEGE OF ALBERTA PSYCHOLOGISTS
Advertising and Other Public Communication

INTRODUCTION

Professional ethics place the welfare of the consumer/public above self-interest of individual professionals and professional organizations. Regulatory bodies have traditionally placed restrictions on advertising for fear that it diminishes the dignity of the profession and allows unscrupulous practitioners to succeed over more principled colleagues.

However, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that advertising by professionals conveys valuable information to the public and as a means of expression is protected by the Charter. The court also ruled that in cases where the consuming public would be vulnerable to unregulated advertising from professionals, some advertising restrictions would be justified provided they meet the test of reasonableness.

These guidelines emphasize responsibility to provide accurate information and to avoid exploitation of clients and the public.

DEFINITIONS

Advertising and other public communication includes but is not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curricula vitae, interviews or comments for use in media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures, public presentations, professional correspondence, and published materials.

PART I
GENERAL GUIDELINES

Reference: Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, Third Edition, Standards III.1, III.2, III.3, III.5, III.18

The maintenance of public confidence in the discipline of psychology requires that psychologists meet certain expectations of integrity. These expectations include: accuracy and honesty; straightforwardness and openness; prohibitions of fraud or misrepresentation; and, avoidance of conflicts of interest.

Advertising and other public communications of psychologists serve the purpose of helping the public make informed decisions. *Communications* which serve this purpose are acceptable if they are truthful, clear, complete, and in good taste.

Psychologists represent accurately and objectively their professional qualifications, affiliations, and functions, as well as those of the institutions or organizations with which they may be associated.

Psychologists craft their opinions in such a manner as to minimize the potential for misinterpretation or misuse. Therefore, any professional opinion provided, verbally or in writing, is addressed to some identifiable audience.

A Advertising and Other Business Communication

1. Psychologists ensure that advertisements and publications, whether in directories, professional cards, newspapers, web-sites or on radio or television, are accurate and not misleading.
2. Psychologists do not use any professional identification (such as a professional card, office sign, letterhead, signature block or directory listing) that includes a statement or claim which is false, fraudulent, misleading, or deceptive.
3. Psychologists, in representing their credentials to the public, use only those credentials that have been earned through required training, educational, and/or evaluated experience. Membership in associations without such requirements may not be used as evidence of skill in psychology or psychological procedures (e.g. in signature blocks).
4. Psychologists, wherever possible, correct false, misleading, or inaccurate information and presentations made by others concerning the psychologist's qualifications, services, or products.
5. Psychologists make certain that the qualifications of persons in their employ are represented in a manner that is not false, misleading, or deceptive.
6. Psychologists may represent themselves as specializing within their areas of competence, but they may only do so if they are able to provide evidence of training, education, or relevant experience in those areas.
7. Psychologists do not make exaggerated claims for the effectiveness of services which they offer, make claims of professional superiority, make invidious claims respecting other practitioners, or make claims guaranteeing successful outcome.
8. Psychologists do not use testimonials of current or previous clients.

B Public Lectures and Media Presentations

When psychologists provide advice or comment by means of public lectures, demonstrations, radio or television programs, prerecorded tapes, printed articles, mailed material, or other media, they take reasonable precautions to ensure that:

- statements are based on appropriate psychological literature and practice;
- statements provide general educational information, advice or opinion on identified topics but that diagnosis of individuals and the provision of specific treatment plans are avoided.

C Addressing Professional Letters and Reports

1. Psychologists properly address all professional letters and reports to identifiable individuals or corporate bodies.

2. In cases where clients or others request a general letter of recommendation, referral, statement of fact, or professional opinion for their later use, such letters are not addressed "To Whom It May Concern" but rather, are addressed to the individual or corporate body requesting the letter. In this case, the psychologist's opinion is clearly addressed to the individual or corporate body requesting the letter and is appropriately crafted for this audience.
3. In cases where the psychologist is asked for a general letter by a client or other party that may be given to some unknown third party at a later date, the psychologist includes statements that indicate who requested the letter, and for what purpose.