



PRINCIPLE III: **RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS**

College members ensure that professional services are provided responsibly to those persons, groups, communities or organizations seeking their assistance.

Interpretation

- 3.1 College members provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature, and limitations of any services available to them. (See also Principle VII: Advertising.)
- 3.2 College members deliver client services and respond to client queries, concerns, and/or complaints in a timely and reasonable manner.
- 3.3 College members do not solicit their employers' clients for private practice.^{1,2}
- 3.4 College members do not discriminate against anyone based on race, ethnicity, language, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, economic status, political affiliation or national origin.³
- 3.5 College members assist potential clients to obtain other services if members are unable or unwilling, for appropriate reasons, to provide the requested professional help.^{4,5}
- 3.6 College members inform clients of foreseeable risks as well as rights, opportunities, and obligations associated with the provision of professional services.
- 3.7 In a situation where a personal relationship does occur between the member and a client or former client, it is the member, not the client or former client, who assumes full responsibility for demonstrating that the client or former client has not been exploited, coerced or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.
- 3.8 College members may provide services and/or products so long as the provision of these services and/or products are relevant and conform to College standards. College members do not provide a service and/or product that the member knows or ought reasonably to know is not likely to benefit the client.
- 3.9 College members terminate professional services to clients when such services are no longer required or requested. It is professional misconduct to discontinue professional services that are needed unless:



- i) the client requests the discontinuation,
- ii) the client withdraws from the service,
- iii) reasonable efforts are made to arrange alternative or replacement services,
- iv) the client is given a reasonable opportunity to arrange alternative or replacement services, or
- v) continuing to provide the services would place the member at serious risk of harm,

and in the circumstances described in subparagraph i, ii, iii, or iv, the member makes reasonable efforts to hold a termination session with the client.

- 3.10 College members who anticipate the termination or interruption of service to clients notify clients promptly and arrange the termination, transfer, referral, or continuation of service in accordance with clients' needs and preferences.
- 3.11 Where appropriate, College members advocate for and/or with clients and inform clients of any action taken and its outcome. Members adhere to Principle V: Confidentiality of this *Standards of Practice Handbook* when providing advocacy services.⁶
- 3.12 Members may provide appropriate services as a courtesy without remuneration, so long as these services adhere to College standards and do not constitute a conflict of interest.

FOOTNOTES

1. The term employer also includes a person or organization with whom the member has an independent service contract.
2. College members may accept referrals from their employers.
3. College members adhere to the Ontario *Human Rights Code* and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the provision of services.
4. Appropriate reasons for refusing to provide service include but are not limited to:
 - i) complying with the potential client's request for service would require the member to violate ethical and legal requirements including, but not limited to: *the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics*; the *Standards of Practice Handbook*; the *Criminal Code of Canada*; the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*,



- ii) complying with the potential client's request would violate the member's values, beliefs and traditions to the extent that the member would not be able to provide appropriate professional service;
- iii) the member is aware of extenuating circumstances (e.g. a planned absence from the office, serious health problems, relocation of practice, etc.) that would make compliance with the potential client's request for service impossible and/or not in the potential client's best interests;
- iv) the potential client is unable or unwilling to reimburse the member or the member's employer for services rendered, wherever such reimbursement is both appropriate and required as a condition of providing service;
- v) the potential client has repeatedly, and without adequate explanation, cancelled or changed the interview or meeting time to the extent that the member experiences or believes that financial hardship and/or service disruption will occur; and
- vi) the potential client behaves in a threatening or abusive manner such that the member believes that the safety of the member or anyone with whom the member has a personal or professional relationship would be in jeopardy.
- 5 When a client is refused further service, the client should be provided with an explanation.
6. "Advocacy" is defined as, "The act of directly representing or defending others; in social work, championing the rights of individuals or communities through direct intervention or through empowerment. According to the *NASW Code of Ethics*, it is a basic obligation to the profession and its members." The *Social Work Dictionary* 2nd edition, Robert L. Barker, 1991. This definition applies equally to social service work.