

**THE
NATIONAL CHRISTIAN
COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION**



CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS

February 1, 2004 Edition

*Copyright©
N.C.C.A.
Sarasota, Florida*

**THE
NATIONAL CHRISTIAN
COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION**

CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS

PREAMBLE

The National Christian Counselors Association shall practice and maintain the highest standards of professional conduct and ethics in the ministry of Christian and Pastoral Counseling. The N.C.C.A. is committed to the Judeo-Christian principles of Biblical ethics. Members of this association are advocates of those in need, recognizing that we are servants of God, submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We hold ourselves as accountable for our God-given ministries. The location and setting has no bearing on our accountability. The accountability that we refer to is our professional relationship to: counselees, colleagues, students, faith communities, denominations and through the voluntary acceptance and practice of the principles and procedures expressed in this *Code of Ethical Standards*. The N.C.C.A. recognizes that pastoral counselors may function in a wide variety of settings including, but not limited to: churches, clinics, hospitals, educational facilities, schools, colleges, seminaries, social service agencies, etc.

The *Code of Ethical Standards* herein expresses Christian and biblical distinctives. The primary focus of these ethical standards is to promote a therapeutic approach, according to the scope and limitations of a Pastoral Counselor's Ministry, designed for reconciliation, restoration and transformation, rather than being punitive in nature.

FOUNDATION OF THIS ASSOCIATION

The National Christian Counselors Association (N.C.C.A.) espouses a belief in the following doctrinal statement:

STATEMENT OF FAITH

ARTICLE ONE:

We believe the Bible is the inerrant, inspired Word of the Living God. The Bible is the final authority on all matters of life, faith and practice.

ARTICLE TWO:

We believe in the Trinitarian God of the Bible, one in substance, three in persons, consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

ARTICLE THREE

We believe that the Son of God, the second person of the God-head, took upon Himself the form of man, becoming the God-man, with two distinct natures, and by His atoning work through His death, burial and resurrection has made salvation possible for man by His free grace.

ARTICLE FOUR:

We believe that salvation is an act of God's saving grace by the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and converting the hearts of men by His free gift of saving faith.

ARTICLE FIVE:

We believe in the personal return of Jesus Christ, in eternal damnation in a literal hell for the wicked, and in everlasting life, in heaven, with the living God for the righteous.

ARTICLE SIX:

We believe that there is but one Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the responsibility of the church and its institutions to maintain His Lordship over their activities, and not to submit that right to any individual, corporate body, governmental agency or head of state, as long as we conduct ourselves as ambassadors of Christ and live as lawful citizens.

ARTICLE SEVEN:

We believe that every area of life is to be subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We adhere to a world and life view which seeks to make the Lord Jesus Christ preeminent in all things.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

We further express that God the Father is our Creator and our Sustainer in life; that Jesus Christ the Holy Son of God, is our Redeemer, and we submit to His Lordship; that the Holy Spirit is One who reveals and guides us personally and professionally in our ministries; and that the Holy Bible is the infallible authority in matters of faith and conduct.

These biblical standards guide us as we apply the life-giving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our pastoral counseling ministry. The application of these standards of faith and conduct indicates that we demonstrate a respect for, and value of, every person as a being created in the image of God and deserving of His love.

These standards are **guiding** principles for each N.C.C.A. member. There is no attempt to impede the God-given privilege of every subscriber to these standards, or to prevent them from interpreting these scriptural foundations according to their denomination, faith group, or personal perspective.

STANDARDS TO BE APPLIED

The *Code of Ethical Standards* is to be applied to all levels of N.C.C.A. membership and certification, regardless of their current professional membership standing. These standards are not intended to be weighty and oppressive measures, but the highest standards that each member can aspire to, in ethics and professionalism.

COVENANT OF STANDARDS

We, as N.C.C.A. members, in order to maintain the highest *Code of Ethical Standards* in professional pastoral counseling, do covenant to abide by the following foundations. We are:

1. Committed to maintain current, responsible affiliation with a faith group or denomination with which we are Ordained, Licensed or Commissioned Minister.
2. Committed to a non-discrimination policy with regard to employment, professional help, or educational opportunity on the basis of race, gender, national origin, or religious affiliation.
3. Committed to continued education and professional achievement through new developments in our professional arenas and clinical experiences. Every level of membership will continue personal and professional growth through participation in: counselor education programs, continuing education units, consultations, clinical supervision, conferences and seminars of this association, and/or other appropriate agencies.

4. Committed to developing professional and educational relationships in various related disciplines, in our churches, communities, and agencies.
5. Committed to personal spiritual, physical and emotional health. We will seek assistance from appropriate resources for our own inner and inter-personal conflicts, when necessary.
6. Committed to providing pastoral or Biblical counseling services for those issues and problems within the sphere of our training and competence.
7. Committed to maintain professional relationships in various counseling disciplines for counselee referral, if necessary.
8. Committed to the welfare of any counselee under our care as the primary goal.
9. Committed to adhering to this *Code of Ethical Standards* as responsible, professional pastoral care-givers.
10. Committed to representing this association with an awareness that we are servants and co-laborers of the Lord Jesus Christ. We covenant together to be His representatives in the communities that we serve. We take full and complete responsibility for our own individual behavior in personal, social, ministerial and professional arenas.

STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

N.C.C.A. members will uphold the welfare and protection of the counselee as the main priority in their ministry. N.C.C.A. members will only represent themselves to the public with their correct level of membership, education, and certification/license. The following standards of professional practices are to be adhered to by N.C.C.A. members.

1. Members will apply their knowledge and training for the benefit and edification of the persons they serve.
2. Members will not use their unique position of trust for personal gain or unfair advantage at the expense of those they counsel.
3. Members will only advertise and refer to themselves by professional terms that identify them as pastoral, clergy, or biblical counselors, and make full disclosure of this to each counselee.
4. All financial arrangements and fees, will be discussed clearly, professionally and ethically with any potential counselee.
5. An inability to pay for counseling services, crisis intervention or emergencies will not be an appropriate reason to deny service as a pastoral care-giver.

6. N.C.C.A. members will not, and should not, make unprofessional and non-Christian remarks about other professionals, colleagues, or counselees.
7. Members will be open, truthful and factual to counselees, sources of referrals, third-party payers, and/or insurance companies with regard to credentials and services rendered. Members will correct any and all misrepresentations of our professional and educational qualifications.
8. Members will ensure that they will engage in the practice of INFORMED consent. Informed consent consists of three elements: disclosure, competence, and voluntarism. The Christian counselor has a duty to fully and fairly disclose all pertinent, professional information as well as the expected benefits, risks, and possible alternatives to counseling to a competent counselee so that he or she can make a voluntary decision to engage in the process of counseling.

N.C.C.A. STANDARDS OF ETHICAL GUIDELINES

STANDARDS FOR COUNSELEE RELATIONSHIPS

N.C.C.A. members will maintain professional and respectful relationships with their counselee. The following are representative standards of the professional counselor/counselee relationship:

1. Members will demonstrate respect, love, and value to each counselee, regardless of race, religion, gender, income, educational level or social status. If any of the above issues would interfere with your ability to render pastoral counseling services, then it is the responsibility of the counselor or therapist to make a professional referral in the best interest of the counselee.
2. Counselee neglect or an inability to provide reasonable service, even for appropriate reason, is unethical and unprofessional. Every responsible effort should be made to refer to another professional for continued counseling and care.
3. Each counselee has the personal freedom to make informed choices. **Counselees are responsible to make their own life choices.** The counselor **will not** make life choices or decisions for the counselee. The only permissible exception to this criteria is when the counselee is unable to do so, because his and his or her physical, emotional, or spiritual safety is endangered (professionally determined).
4. Pastoral counselors will conduct themselves in a professional Christ-like manner toward counselees. Emotional pressure, exploitation, and inappropriate language shall never be any part of the counselor's behavior.
5. Sexual contact, exploitation or harassment **on any level** is unethical. All forms of sexual behavior, even when a counselee invites or consents to such activities, is strictly forbidden. Sexual activity is defined as, but not limited to, all forms of overt and covert seductive speech, gestures and behavior, as well as inappropriate physical contact. Harassment is defined as, but not limited to, inappropriate comments, gestures, etc.
6. The counselor/counselee relationship places the counselor in a trust and power relationship. In recognition of this, sexual behavior and harassment with any and all counselees is to be avoided.
7. Unrealistic statements to counselees as to the outcome of the counseling process is unethical and unprofessional. Goals and outcomes of counseling will be ethically and professionally stated within the scope and limitation of the counseling process.
8. Given the complexity of some pastoral relationships, counselors are required to avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of counselees and/or parishioners.
9. Counselors should try to avoid dual relationships with counselees (business or close personal

relationships) which could impair judgment and compromise the integrity of the counseling process. Caution is advised.

STANDARDS OF COUNSELEE CONFIDENTIALITY

N.C.C.A. pastoral counselors are required, as a matter of privileged communications between them and the persons with whom they provide counsel, to safeguard any and all information obtained by them in a care-giving relationship.

1. A counselee's confidential information, obtained during the pastoral counseling relationship, may be shared with another professional by the pastoral counselor only, with a counselee written consent.
2. Duly credentialed pastoral counselors of the National Christian Counselors Association will, at times, have conversations that shall be regarded as **EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL**. This shall be **PROTECTED, PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION. AN ACT OF CONFESSION** made by a penitent to a confessor (pastoral counselor) may be personal, liturgical, devotional or sacramental. This is **PRIVILEGED COMMUNICATION** and, as such, is intended only for the counselor and is expected to remain in this one-to-one relationship of trust. It can be released only with the written consent of the one who confessed or revealed it. This grows out of a religious orientation and seals the counselor from releasing any information to anyone.
3. A duly credentialed pastoral counselor of the National Christian Counselors Association who knowingly violates confidentiality or discloses information as described in the above paragraph is subject to revocation of his/her N.C.C.A. membership/affiliation.
4. When a counselee or other person receiving pastoral care makes a statement to a pastoral counselor in the presence of a third party, that statement is not protected by confidentiality privilege. The presence of a third party negates any inference that the statement was intended to be privileged communication or an act of confession, and the pastoral counselor shall document same.
5. All members of this association will carefully protect the privacy and identity of their counsees and their situations. The counselor will avoid revealing information about counsees, whether publicly or privately, unless the counselor has been freely given informed consent of the adult counselee or legal holder of confidentiality privilege for minor counsees, in the form of express written permission, and the release of such information would be appropriate to the situation.
6. All records of persons receiving pastoral counseling care are to be stored, handled, or disposed of in a way that assures security and confidentiality of those counsees and their situations.

7. In the event that a situation would require the disclosure of the counselee's identity in order to understand the case fully, only the first name will be used during consultation or supervision. Written permission of the counselee must be obtained prior to that consultation. Situations where more than one counselee (i.e.; couple, family or group therapy) is involved, written permission from all legally accountable persons who have been present during counseling must be obtained before any disclosure can be made. It is the primary counselor's responsibility to impress upon the other consulting or supervising professionals the importance of confidentiality in the case.
8. Written consent forms will be obtained from counselees before any audio or videotape recording, or permitting third-party observation of their sessions.
9. The counselor will take every precaution necessary to safeguard, and protect, current or former counselees' identities, particularly when using references to them within the publication of an article in a professional journal, giving classroom examples, or in a public presentation.
10. These standards of counselee confidentiality are not designed to be used to avoid appropriate intervention when it is necessary: i.e., when there is evidence of child abuse or abuse of minors, the elderly, the disabled, or the physically and mentally incompetent. It is the legal responsibility of each pastoral counseling professional to be aware and informed about the laws on mandatory reporting and other related matters in the state where he or she provides pastoral counseling.
11. THE LIMITATIONS OF CONFIDENTIALITY, SUCH AS THOSE BASED ON THE CIVIL LAWS OF EACH STATE, REGULATIONS AND JUDICIAL PRECEDENT WILL BE EXPLAINED TO EACH COUNSELEE AS PART OF THE INTAKE PROCESS PRIOR TO ANY PASTORAL COUNSELING SERVICES BEING PROVIDED. Examples of limitation or exceptions to confidentiality include, but are not limited to, such situations as:
 - a. Legal mandate, where child abuse or elder abuse is suspected or apparent.
 - b. When revealing the information to someone else would prevent a clear and immediate danger to a person or persons.
 - c. Legal proceedings in which the member, pastoral counselor, care-giver, or minister does not have the privilege.
12. When counseling a counselee under eighteen years of age, the specific content of communications with the pastoral counselor is confidential; however, the minor's guardian(s) may have a right to receive general information on the process of the counseling or methodology used.

STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The N.C.C.A. Board of Directors has an ethical concern for their students and supervision candidates. The welfare and integrity of both student and candidate are of great concern. Supervisors and members of authority who train students have an influential position with both previous and current

students. Supervisors will avoid exploitation of their trust and dependency. It is the responsibility of the supervisor and the training member to avoid dual relationships with their students that may impair clear decisions or judgment, or increase the risk factor of personal or financial exploitation. These standards include but are not limited to:

1. Current supervision candidates, pastoral counseling students, or persons in our employ are prohibited from ongoing counseling relationships between each other.
2. Inappropriate sexual or other forms of harassment that violate these standards of ethical behavior and biblical standards of relationships, between supervision candidates, pastoral counseling students and employees are prohibited.
3. All types of sexual behavior, as defined under the Standards of the Confidentiality section, are not to be engaged in with supervision candidates, pastoral counseling students, research subjects or colleagues. Those engaged in such activity are considered as performing unethical behavior, with the exception of married partners.
4. N.C.C.A. supervisors, candidates, students and employees are advised against engaging in, or holding themselves out to the public, church, or private involvements as competent to engage in professional services beyond their training level of experience and professional competence.

STANDARDS FOR INTER-PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As members of N.C.C.A., it is our intent to communicate and cooperate with other professionals in the communities we serve and beyond. Each member is encouraged to develop and maintain a network of interdisciplinary and inter-professional relationships with health-care professionals. These standards include but are not limited to:

1. Providing counseling ministry services or clinical pastoral services to persons currently receiving counseling from another professional without prior knowledge or consent of the other counselor. The other professional must be consulted or communicated with, even if the counselee has presented an “informed consent” form. A counselor who professionally engages in services with a counselee under treatment by another professional is considered unethical by this professional association.
2. Inter-professional communications. When a counselee seeks our professional services, and in our judgment they appear to have terminated services or treatment with another counselor, then inter-professional communication and courtesy is advised.
3. N.C.C.A. members will resist the perspective that implies the superiority of our discipline to the negation of other disciplines. It is our desire to present a holistic, cooperative approach with other counseling and mental health professionals.

STANDARDS FOR PRESENTATION OF SERVICES

Members of this association shall present, promote, or advertise in such a manner that the public can make “informed choices” regarding our pastoral counseling services.

1. This association expects all members to advertise their ministries and services with integrity and clarity. Members must clearly identify their ministry services as Christian professionals in their level of competence.
2. Advertising shall not mislead persons seeking these services as to professional affiliations, qualifications, certifications, educational levels, training, and specific areas of competence.
3. Members may use the following items of information to describe themselves and the services or ministries they provide:
 - Your name, clearly and completely
 - Your academic degrees
 - The institution from which you received your academic degrees
 - Certification level or licensure type
 - Source of licensure, if used, name of organization etc.
 - N.C.C.A., membership, certification level
 - Indication of status as minister, ordained pastoral counselor, etc.
 - Address of office, ministry, church
 - Telephone number
 - Office business hours
 - Review of services offered
 - Fee information, sliding scale, etc.
 - Policy regarding third party payments and insurance if used
 - Additional, relevant information not prohibited by this code of ethical standards.
4. Any and all forms of advertising shall be clear, understandable, and free from “all appearance of evil” or deception. **Christian integrity is vital.**
5. Brochures should clearly describe your ministry and services offered in a professional manner, in agreement with the above stated standards.
6. Statements in any advertising format which violate the following are considered unethical and unprofessional by this association.
 - Statements which lead to incorrect conclusions such as: being vague, using half-truths or partial disclosures.
 - Statements which may become true in the future, but are not true at the present.
 - Statements implying exaggeration of services offered.
 - Statements that may play on the counselee’s anxieties and phobias.

- Statements which require supporting evidence to substantiate a claim, and none is offered.
- Statements of sensationalism or uniqueness, such as: “I am the only one who can” statements.

Any of the above may constitute fraudulent statements and may not be in the best interest and welfare of the public.

STANDARDS FOR LIABILITY OR MALPRACTICE INSURANCE

1. Each pastoral counselor, clinical pastoral counselor, or Professional Clinical Member of the N.C.C.A. in the professional ministry and practice of pastoral counseling should carefully consider the value of professional liability insurance, as the N.C.C.A. will NOT accept responsibility or liability, for any actions or misconduct of any member.
2. Members may contact the N.C.C.A. headquarters for recommended carriers and providers of liability insurance.
3. A lawsuit, whether justified or not, could drain the financial resources of your ministry. Be aware that individual misconduct is the sole responsibility of the pastoral counselor, clinical pastoral counselor, or Professional Clinical Member of the N.C.C.A.. Membership in the N.C.C.A. does not, in any way, imply culpability or liability on the part of the N.C.C.A. for any individual’s misconduct, unethical behavior, or criminal actions.

GENERAL DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

**GENERAL DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES
AND
REVOCATION POLICY
FOR
MEMBERSHIP / CERTIFICATION / LICENSE**

The following are the general procedures, currently in place, for filing a formal complaint with the N.C.C.A. regarding a member of the N.C.C.A. who is held to be a member in good standing. These procedures may be modified from time to time, and it is incumbent upon the complainant to review the process and the procedures of the N.C.C.A. to determine if the action of complaint to the N.C.C.A. is the proper forum for filing the type of grievance held by the complainant.

Disclosure notice: Any formal complaints submitted against N.C.C.A. members in good standing must be pertinent to sanction or censure membership in this organization. The N.C.C.A. has no duty, ability, liability, or culpability, to police or chaperone, any of its members in their personal private pastoral ministries, churches, or pastoral counseling practices. The N.C.C.A. is a credentialing body that licenses the proficiency of its' members. Such licensure speaks to a certain acceptable level of demonstrated proficiency in the course work completed. The N.C.C.A. does not hold out any guarantees or promises to the general public that any N.C.C.A. member or licensee, will honorably uphold the member's personal obligation to their agreement of the N.C.C.A. Code of Ethical Standards.

Should a fellow member of the N.C.C.A., or a member of the general public, believe a member of the N.C.C.A. is in violation of the N.C.C.A. Code of Ethical Standards as agreed to by the member, then the following is the generally accepted, and Biblically-based process:

1. Complaints regarding the actions and behaviors of a member of the N.C.C.A. must be sent to the N.C.C.A. in writing, and must be signed by the individual submitting the complaint. Additionally, the individual who is filing the complaint must provide the N.C.C.A. with their address and telephone number(s). Anonymous complaints are not accepted and the complaint must be submitted to the N.C.C.A. within 180 days (six months) of the member's alleged failure and/or unethical action/behavior.
2. The complainant should provide certain minimum elements of fact and documentation as support of the written complaint, and attach corroborating materials to the complaint. Complaints regarding the actions and behaviors of a member of the N.C.C.A. must address only those actions and behaviors which would bring reproach on the member's professional standing in the N.C.C.A. and might be determined to be in violation of certain ethical codes, or behavior standards, as espoused by the N.C.C.A. and agreed to by the member.
3. Complainants understand that the N.C.C.A. may be the proper organization with which to file a complaint against the professional conduct, actions, or certain behaviors of N.C.C.A. members as applies to the N.C.C.A. Code of Ethical Standards. The N.C.C.A. **is not** the proper organization with which a person should file a complaint seeking certain recourse against a member for a matter that may be civil, or criminal, in nature. The N.C.C.A. reserves the specific

right to advise the complainant that the nature of the complaint as submitted, is beyond the scope and extent of the N.C.C.A. policy for disciplinary procedures as pertains to member correction, sanction, disciplinary action, and/or licensure revocation.

4. The N.C.C.A. will forward a copy of the signed complaint, via Certified Mail, to the N.C.C.A. member (subject of the complaint) along with notification that a written complaint has been received and that the matter will be investigated by an Ethics Committee and/or the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors. The member must respond back to the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors, in writing, within 30 days of receipt of the certified letter notification of a filed complaint.
5. Upon receipt of the written complaint, the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors will, if determined necessary, appoint a multi-member committee to serve as the Ethics Committee. This committee will receive and gather information regarding the complaint by any means deemed necessary. Upon review of the matter, the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors will make a determination regarding the necessary action. The member, and the complainant (or a legal representative), will be notified by Certified Mail as to the final decision/action that has been determined, which will be consistent with N.C.C.A. policies and membership standards.
6. The member, against whom the complaint was filed, is expected to provide full and honest cooperation with any and all members of the appointed Ethics Committee and/or the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors. Failure to do so will result in immediate revocation of all N.C.C.A. credentials held by the individual who is being investigated. The member, as subject of the complaint, must submit, within 30 days, a written response directly to the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors and/or Ethics Committee, limiting the response to address **only** the scope and content of the original complaint.
7. During any time in the process of investigation of any complaint against an N.C.C.A. credentialed member, the member may elect to resign their membership and relinquish any and all held credentials. The action of resignation, as elected by a member, and put in writing to the N.C.C.A., would not be construed as an admission or denial of guilt. The N.C.C.A. will send notification to the member, Certified Mail, of acceptance of the resignation, and will render the case "Closed By Member Resignation." As such, the matter will be mutually resolved. Member election of resignation is considered a permanent status and, under no circumstances, will the individual's membership and/or credentials ever be restored. All N.C.C.A. certifications held by the member must be immediately returned to the N.C.C.A. as an attachment to the resignation letter, for the matter to be concluded. Additionally, the member is required to immediately cease any advertising or inference of affiliation, or relationship, with the N.C.C.A.
8. Should discipline necessitate revocation of a member's license, certifications and/or membership, the N.C.C.A. shall notify the member by Certified Mail. Upon receipt of this notification, the member is **immediately** required to return to the N.C.C.A., any and all certificates or licenses awarded by the N.C.C.A. Additionally, the member is required to immediately cease any advertising, or inference of any affiliation, or relationship, with the N.C.C.A.

NOTICE

Acceptance of membership in the N.C.C.A. is a pledge to abide by this and all N.C.C.A. policies, and members covenant to hold harmless the N.C.C.A., and its' staff, members, and Board of Directors, etc., regarding any disciplinary actions taken against members by the N.C.C.A. The N.C.C.A. Board of Directors reserves the right to deny membership, certification and/or licensure to any individual without providing reason or cause. Additionally, the N.C.C.A. Board of Directors reserves the right to revoke membership, certification and/or license without providing reason or cause. The National Christian Counselors Association, Inc., it's Board of Directors, Licensing Board of Examiners, Advisors, Employees and/or Corporate Officers are not liable for the actions or behaviors of its members, (personally or professionally), or any schools or institutions, which uses its training program and/or curriculum.

