



THE ASSOCIATION OF
COUNSELLING THERAPY
OF ALBERTA

ADVICE TO THE PROFESSION

Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta (CCTA) provides advice to the professions (ATTP) to support our members in implementing the CCTA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics within their practice. ATTP documents provide examples and outline the current recommended practices. They are intended to assist professionals in their striving for excellence in their field.

Although this advice aligns with our Standard of Practice, ATTP documents are dynamic and may be edited or updated for clarity at any time. ATTP should not be interpreted as legal advice. Please refer back to these articles regularly to ensure you are aware of the most current advice. Major changes will be communicated to our members; however, minor edits may only be noted within the documents.

Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Related Standard:

Standard of Practice

"Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

8.4 *Members shall provide services that are respectful of sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions, and diversity of their clients."*

A. Background:

The *Affirming Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* standard applies to **all** Regulated Members. The College affirms that there are diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and that all persons have the right to access safe, inclusive, and respectful counselling services. Additionally, the *Alberta Human Rights Act* prohibits any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

B. Providing Services:

1. In providing services, it is considered current recommended practice for Regulated Members to:
 - Use a client's chosen names in documentation and discussion*;
 - Use a client's identified pronouns*;



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- Ask questions to clarify a client's pronouns and refrain from making assumptions or judgments regarding a client's sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Include options on intake/assessment forms for a diversity of genders and sexual orientations;
- Use inclusive language and non-binary examples in the therapeutic context;
- Create a safe and compassionate space;
- Acknowledge and apologize to the client when an error is made (for example, when a person is accidentally misgendered or incorrect pronouns are used);
- Acknowledge and work with the power differential in therapy;
- Collaborate with clients as the experts in their own experience; and, Sexual orientation and gender identity should always be treated as confidential information and protected from unwarranted disclosure.

* In rare circumstances, the Regulated Member may be required to use the birth/legal name and gender assigned at birth (e.g., birth certificate, guardian request) of a client. When this is the case, and the information is not the client's chosen name/pronoun, the Regulated Member should inform the client if and when they will include this information (e.g., legal records or proceedings). In some limited cases, the Regulated Member may need to use both the birth and chosen name and gender assigned at birth on forms or case notes.

Standard of Practice

"Gender and Sexual Orientation Competence

10.5 Members shall ensure they have adequate training, experience, and supervision to provide services relating to an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Members shall obtain informed consent to work with a client on issues relating to sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, and shall provide services that are safe, compassionate, and collaborate with clients as the experts in their own experience."

2. Members ensure they have appropriate training and will seek out clinical supervision as needed when providing services relating to a client's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.
3. Members will obtain informed consent to work with a client on issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.



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4. Members will not provide services such as conversion or reparative therapy, which seek to change, modify, suppress or direct a person's sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.
5. Communication is paramount to competent care. Discussions with clients about sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, as related to the therapeutic services, including client goals and progress, shall be documented.

SEE ALSO

For further information please see the related areas of the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Standards of Practice:

- 15.0 Consent
- 14.0 Referral
- 10.0 Professional Limits
- 10.8 Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Competency

Code of Ethics:

- A1. Respect the worth and dignity of all clients.
- A2. Use language that conveys respect for the dignity of persons and peoples as much as possible in all spoken, written, electronic, or printed communication.
- A3. Respect the rights of all clients and do not refuse care or treatment to any client on the prohibited grounds of discrimination as specified in the Canadian Human Rights Act as well as on the grounds of social or health status.
- A11. Acknowledge and respect the power imbalance inherent in the therapeutic relationship and take necessary measures and care to keep clients free from undue influence or harm.



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A12. Honour clients' rights to self-determination and collaborate with clients to improve, support, or maintain the client's health and wellbeing.

A13. Act in the best interest of the client at all times. Take all reasonable steps to reduce harm within therapeutic environments and relationships including interactions between clients, group settings, and within client-counsellor relationships.

A20. Refuse to perform any intervention or services which may cause harm to the client.

B4. Respect diversity and provide care and service that is both culturally sensitive and appropriate.

D7. Act with humility and seek to promote dignity in their interactions.