

STANDARDS IN WORKING WITH MINORS

ART.1. Context of practice

Psychotherapy work with children and adolescents requires different skills, knowledge and competencies. All these elements are achieved within a training course that includes content and assessment components related to working with children.

Psychotherapists working with minors need to demonstrate competence in taking into account the development of the child's brain, the different domains in that development and how those domains present, the impact of attachment issues and trauma on developing brain, the systemic world for the child and family, the impact of specific learning difficulties, different abilities and working with differently abled children, and the impact of the wider social world on children's emotional and social development. This document intends to set standards that must be met in order to practice therapeutic work with clients who are under 18 years of age in a safe, congruent and responsible way. These standards are designed to ensure that practitioners who work with children and adolescents possess the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies to engage ethically, professionally and effectively with such clients.

ART.2. Consent and contracting

Therapist must obtain case appropriate consent before commencing therapy with a minor.

ACCPI's Code of Ethics mentions that psychotherapists must obtain written permission from both parents /legal guardians before commencing psychotherapy with a minor or, if it is not possible to obtain written permission from both parents / legal guardians, then written permission must be obtained from at least one parent / legal guardian prior to the commencement of psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy is a formal activity where both parties explicitly agree a contract about participation and procedure. The contract must be signed between the parent/ guardian and the psychotherapist. The parent / guardian should receive a copy of the contract.

Psychotherapists take responsibility for making a clear contract with the parent / guardian to include issues such as availability, fees, and cancelled appointments.

Practitioners ensure that the contract is agreed, if feasible, before work commences. Any subsequent revisions of the contract shall be agreed with the parent / guardian before they take effect.

ART.3. Competencies framework

Core competencies for work with minors:

- Knowledge of child and adolescent psychotherapy
- Knowledge of developmental psychology and of family development and transitions and the ability to match interventions to the appropriate developmental stage
- Knowledge and understanding of developmental issues and mental health problems of children and adolescents
- Knowledge of the law related to working with minors
- Ability to operate within professional and ethical guidelines
- Ability to work with issues of confidentiality and consent, including ability to develop a contract with the guardians/ parents
- Ability to work with agencies
- Ability to work in culturally diverse environments
- Ability to engage and work with children and adolescents and their systemic world
- Ability to communicate with children and adolescents with consideration of different developmental levels and backgrounds

- Knowledge of psychopharmacology used in work with children and young people, including side effects
- Knowledge of when and how to refer
- Ability to foster and maintain a good therapeutic alliance and to grasp the client's perspective
- Ability to conclude psychotherapeutic relationships.

Generic therapeutic competencies:

- Knowledge of models of intervention, and their employment in practice
- Ability to work with the emotional content of the session
- Ability to manage endings and service transitions
- Ability to work with groups of children or young people and/or parents/ carers
- Ability to make use of measures (including monitoring of outcomes)
- Ability to make use of supervision specific for this type of work
- Reflective practice

Assessment competencies

- Ability to conduct a collaborative assessment
- Ability to conceptualise and formulate the case
- Ability to identify situations of concern and manage them appropriately

Required standard of qualifications

It is essential that all those who are working with underage clients, completed a course that has been designed to work with this specific population.

Grandparenting

There is a need to acknowledge the years of experience for practitioners who didn't attain formal qualification in working with children but have completed multiple short courses to date and substantial experience of working with minors. Professionals who fall under this category of practitioners must meet and be able to demonstrate required competencies for working with clients who are under 18 years of age.

ART.4. The child's autonomy and rights

Children's rights include the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm. Children's rights cover their developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time as a child grows up.

There are four general principles that underpin all children's rights:

- Non-discrimination
- The best interests of the child
- The right to survival and development
- The views of the child

The full list of rights for children and young people under the age of 18 is set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most accepted standard on children's rights in the world.

ART.5. Family as a system, social and cultural context

Psychotherapists must respect and work with the systemic world of the child and work with the child in the context of their systemic world.

ART.6. Legal requirements and reporting

Working with minors places within specific legal and statutory requirements of Romanian and EU law. It is incumbent on all who engage in this work to maintain an up to date knowledge base in regard to child protection and relevant legislation.

ACCPI members qualified to work with minors, are expected to have a competent knowledge of all legal requirements which govern children's lives and the competencies for those working with children in a professional context.

ART.7. Supervision, CPD and self care

Psychotherapists who work with children and young people must comply with all ethical and practice requirements in relation to clinical practice, supervision and continuing professional development.

Also, all psychotherapists must be aware of the importance of self-care and take responsibility to protect and monitor their own physical, emotional, mental and psychological wellbeing at a level that enables them to work effectively with their clients:

- Taking precautions to protect their own physical safety
- Monitoring their own psychological and physical health
- Seeking professional support and services as the need arises
- Keeping a healthy balance between work and other aspects of life

Members should monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems. Practitioners refrain from offering or providing professional services when their professional functioning is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties including illness, bereavement, trauma, alcohol or drug misuse or dependency, or any other significant distress.

Members should take responsibility to seek appropriate professional assistance for problems that reach the level of professional impairment, Practitioners also take responsibility to inform and consult with their supervisor in relation to such issues, and when necessary, for the safety of their clients, and their own wellbeing, limit, suspend or terminate their professional responsibilities until it is determined with their supervisor that they may safely resume their work.

Members should provide consultation and assistance when warranted with colleagues showing signs of professional impairment and intervene as appropriate to prevent imminent harm to clients.

ART.8. Data protection and record keeping

The GDPR emphasises transparency, security and accountability by data controllers, while at the same time standardising and strengthening the right of European citizens to data privacy. All psychotherapists must comply with the GDPR requirements around data protection, storage, especially when dealing with different types of technology:

- Store, handle, transfer and dispose of all records including written, electronic, audio and video in a way that safeguards the client's right to privacy.
- If requested, inform the client of the length of time records are held.
- Acknowledge and respect client's rights to access their notes and records
- Obtain parents' / legal guardians'/ consent before making audio or video recordings of sessions, making them aware of the purpose, storage and disposal of same
- Maintain and safely store records appropriately.
- Take responsibility to securely dispose of records in an appropriate timeframe after the termination of therapy.