

Counseling & Psychological Services Guidelines Regarding Multiple Relationships

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) has multiple functions including service delivery, training, research, and teaching. It is expected that individuals within CAPS will be involved in multiple roles with each other. Because individuals have multiple roles in CAPS, it is important that they continually be aware of, monitor, and clarify the implications of these multiple roles within CAPS. Supervisors of trainees and employees should make special efforts to alert and dialogue with their supervisees about the issues associated with multiple roles in CAPS. Multiple roles, per se, are not unethical or problematic, and are unavoidable in counseling centers with many functions. APA's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2002) define a multiple relationship.

STANDARD 3.05 MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

(a) A multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist is in a professional role with a person and (1) at the same time is in another role with the same person, (2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the psychologist has the professional relationship, or (3) promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person.

Multiple relationships at CAPS might be formed from any of the following multiple role possibilities: therapist, co-therapist, supervisor, supervisee, employer, employee, consultant, presenter, mentor, student, colleague, friend, partner, or relative. Multiple relationships can become problematic and/or unethical when functioning in one role or relationship, (A) has potential for maximizing and/or abusing a power differential which may exist between the individuals involved, (B) has implication and/or potential influence on the nature or course of the other relationship with that same person, and/or (C) makes it likely that objectivity will be compromised in the other relationship with that same person when evaluation is an important part of the other relationship.

CAPS holds staff members responsible for monitoring their multiple relationships and refraining from developing problematic and/or unethical multiple relationships. Staff members are encouraged to consult with each other whenever questions arise about multiple relationships. When in a multiple relationship or when considering entering into a multiple relationship, it is incumbent upon the person in the more powerful position to take special care to set appropriate limits and monitor the relationship. In addition, each person has the responsibility to refuse to enter into or remain in a multiple relationship at CAPS if she or he believes the relationship is or would become problematic.

Staff members will follow applicable professional ethical codes (including those of the American Psychological Association), state laws (including the Rules and Regulations of the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, and Texas A&M University rules and regulations which pertain to multiple relationships).

Because certain multiple relationships have a high probability of becoming problematic, the following guidelines are established in order to directly address the issue of multiple roles and to avoid possible problematic multiple relationships within CAPS:

1. All staff are prohibited from entering into sexual, romantic, social, employer, employee, or business associate relationships with current clients of CAPS.
2. Staff who have entered into a professional relationship with a client are prohibited from engaging in a sexual, romantic, social, employer, employee, or business associate relationship while employed at CAPS.
3. CAPS employees and practicum students are prohibited from receiving ongoing counseling services from CAPS staff members concurrently with the period of employment/training at CAPS.
4. Employees (including interns) who request psychotherapy, professional assistance with a personal crisis, remediation of dysfunctional behavior, or academic, career, or personal growth counseling will be referred to the TAMU Employee Assistance Program, other campus agencies, or community resources.
5. In the event that a practicum student desires crisis intervention from CAPS, a counselor not directly involved with the practicum student's training may see the student to help the student gain stability and support. The counselor will refer the student to other campus or community resources for ongoing services as needed.
6. Applications from current or former CAPS clients to become CAPS trainees will be processed in the same manner as applications from non-clients. A trainee applicant's current or former counselor shall not communicate with any staff member about the trainee applicant in any way that would divulge privileged information.
7. A CAPS trainee may not be supervised by his or her former CAPS counselor or the counselor's supervisor.
8. Counseling records of a trainee who was a previous CAPS client will be protected from access by staff that are or could become involved in the supervision/training of the trainee. Paper records will be stored separately from SCS general client files and kept by the CAPS Custodian of Records, the Director. Electronic records will be protected through access restrictions based on "need to know."
9. Clients who may become future trainees may request that documentation of services provided be restricted as stated in the paragraph 8 above.
10. Former CAPS trainees who become CAPS clients shall not be counseled by anyone who was involved in their supervision.
11. At the beginning of each semester, a roster of new HelpLine volunteers, student workers, and trainees will be checked against the CAPS's client files. Client files that are identified will be given restricted access according to paragraph 5 above.
12. It is unethical, and therefore prohibited, for a CAPS professional staff member or trainee to develop a romantic relationship with a potential or current supervisee/supervisor. The Ethics Code of the American Psychological Association states; "Psychologists do not engage in sexual relationships with students or supervisees who are in their department, agency, or training center or over whom psychologists have or are likely to have evaluative authority" (7.07 Sexual Relationships With Students and Supervisees)..
13. HelpLine workers may receive counseling services, but not concurrently from staff that have major involvement in the training, supervision, or administration of HelpLine.

14. Test interpretation by CAPS staff for personal use is not permitted. Academic, career, and non-clinical instruments may be given as part of training, team building, or continuing education. Employees and trainees are permitted to use the resources of CAPS, such as reading materials and computerized educational programs. However, they may not enter into counseling relationships with one other.
15. It is recognized that multiple relationship problems can develop when a close friend, significant other, or family member of a CAPS staff member or trainee receives counseling at CAPS. A primary concern is protecting confidential information. If any person anticipates or experiences such problems, the person should consult with the Director so that arrangements can be made to prevent or resolve the problem. Counseling records of close friends, significant others, and family members of CAPS staff members or trainees will be protected as described in paragraph 8.
16. If a staff member anticipates or experiences a problem from a multiple relationship at CAPS, the staff member should attempt to deal with the problem by following APA ethical guidelines. The staff member should use discretion and attempt to resolve the issue by communicating directly with the other individual involved. If this is not successful, the staff member should attempt to gain resolution by consulting with his/her immediate supervisor or a higher supervisor if the problem is with the immediate supervisor.
17. CAPS trainees should not engage in social media relationships with senior staff members or clients of CAPS.
18. If a staff member believes a multiple relationship between two other people at CAPS is problematic, the staff member should attempt to deal with the problem by following APA ethical guidelines. In this case, the staff member should use discretion and first attempt to resolve the issue by communicating directly with the individual involved in the questionable relationship who holds the more senior position at CAPS. If the issue is not resolved at this level, the staff member should consult with the Director about the matter.
19. Exceptions to these guidelines may be made only by the approval of the CAPS Director.