



Ohio Administrative Code

Rule 4757-5-03 Standards of ethical practice and professional conduct: multiple relationships.

Effective: July 1, 2024

(A) Counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists shall avoid multiple relationships and conflicts of interest with any client/consumer-of-services, ex-clients, family members of clients or ex-clients, or other persons encountered in professional or non-professional setting, which are not in the best interest of the client and might impair professional judgment or which increases the risk of client/consumer-of-services exploitation.

(1) When a multiple relationship is first recognized or cannot be avoided, licensees and registrants shall take the following appropriate professional precautions:

(a) All potential multiple relationship and/or conflicts of interest shall be discussed with the client as soon as possible after being first recognized and shall continue only with both parties agreement;

(b) All multiple relationships and/or conflicts of interest shall be noted in the client record with reasoning as to why it is in the best interest of the client and/or not harmful;

(c) Such notation shall be continually reassessed and justified in the record;

(d) Issues such as informed consent, consultation, and supervision shall be considered to ensure that judgment is not impaired and that no exploitation occurs.

(2) A client of the agency is considered a client of each licensee or registrant employed or contracted by the agency for purposes of ethics under the multiple relationships rule of this chapter.

(3) The licensed professional shall not undertake or continue a professional relationship with a client/consumer-of-services when the objectivity or competency of the licensee or registrant is, or could reasonably be expected to be, impaired or where the relationship with the client/consumer-of-services is exploitative.



(4) Examples of multiple relationships that shall be avoided include but are not limited to those listed below.

(a) Familial relationships;

(b) Social relationships;

(c) Emotional relationships;

(d) Business and financial relationships;

(e) Supervisory relationships;

(f) Political relationships;

(g) Administrative relationships; and/or

(h) Legal relationships.

(i) Social media/personal virtual relationships, including online communities.

(5) The list of relationships in paragraph (A)(4) of this rule as well as others require careful consideration to ensure that impaired judgment or exploitation is not involved and that the best interest of the client is served at all times.

(6) Licensees and registrants should decline gifts. Gifts from a client may be considered as establishing a multiple relationship. Examples of gifts may include but are not limited to food, material goods, gift certificate/gift card, artwork or products resulting from treatment. A licensee may accept a gift of nominal value if the licensee determines that for treatment reasons not accepting the gift will result in diminishing the licensee's ability to provide appropriate client care. In accepting a gift of nominal value, the licensee must discuss with the client the ethical limitations of accepting gifts. The licensee shall have the burden of proof to explain why a gift was accepted.



(B) Licensees and registrants shall avoid potentially harmful effects of non-client contacts on their practice that would reasonably impair the professional's objectivity or otherwise interfere with the professional's effectiveness as a licensee or registrant or would reasonably harm or exploit the other party. The standard to be used shall be what an ordinary, reasonable professional with similar education and training would have considered in similar circumstances.

(C) Licensees and registrants should adhere to paragraph (B)(6) of rule 4757-5-13 of the Administrative Code regarding internet searches for information about current or prospective clients.

(D) When licensees and registrants provide services to two or more people who have a relationship with each other (for example couples, family members), licensees and registrants shall clarify with all parties which individuals shall be considered clients and the nature of the licensee's professional obligations to the various individuals who are receiving services. Licensees and registrants, who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals receiving services or who anticipate having to perform in potentially conflicting roles (for example, a licensee who is asked or ordered to testify in a child custody dispute or divorce proceeding involving clients), shall clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest. If a licensee is asked to testify in a child custody case, they should review rule 4757-6-01 of the Administrative Code prior to any court appearance for guidance as to their role in these circumstances.