

College of Occupational Therapists
of British Columbia

Code of Ethics



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Registrant Information and Resources Binder

Purpose of the Code of Ethics

Under the *Health Professions Act*, the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC) is required to establish a Code of Ethics for its registrants. The Code of Ethics recognizes that occupational therapists have obligations and responsibilities to their clients, to the profession and to the general public. Occupational therapists are committed to providing compassionate, safe, competent and ethical care to their clients. The purpose of the code is to:

1. encourage reflection and assist decision making among occupational therapists with the expectation that the client's welfare is always the primary concern in any ethical decision;
2. provide the public, including clients, with information about the basic ethical care and services that are expected from a registered occupational therapist; and
3. guide the establishment of standards of practice and guidelines for regulatory responsibilities and activities.

Occupational therapists are expected to be familiar with this code and to integrate it into their day-to-day practice. The values and expectations are not intended to be inclusive; they are general statements intended for interpretation and application in specific situations.

Acknowledgements

The College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia (COTBC) wishes to acknowledge the codes of ethics of many health professional groups that were reviewed during the process of revising our code. Many common values and principles were identified, and when possible these were written and expressed in the steering panel's own words.

The college also wishes to recognize the assistance of Dr. Janet Storch, Professor Emeritus in the School of Nursing at the University of Victoria, whose wise and insightful guidance helped to create a comprehensive Code of Ethics that is relevant and meaningful to everyday practice.

COTBC Code of Ethics

Occupational Therapy Values

1 Dignity and Worth

Every client is unique and has intrinsic worth.

2 Individual Autonomy

Every client has the right and capacity for self-determination.

3 Safe, Competent and Ethical Care

Every client has the right to safe, competent and ethical occupational therapy services.

4 Accountability

Occupational therapists are fully responsible for their practice and are obligated to account for their actions.

5 Confidentiality

Occupational therapists safeguard the confidentiality of information acquired in the context of professional relationships, to protect their clients' rights to privacy.

6 Fairness

Every client has the right to quality occupational therapy services in accordance with individual needs.

7 Honesty and Transparency

Occupational therapists communicate openly and honestly in a clear and caring manner, and respect the client's right to comprehensive information regarding occupational therapy services.

8 Trusting and Respectful Work Environment

Occupational therapists perform their professional duties in a manner that promotes a trusting and respectful working environment that supports safe and competent care.

1

Dignity and Worth

Every client is unique and has intrinsic worth.

Occupational therapists:

1. Provide services in a manner that upholds the dignity of clients.
2. Respect the client's race, culture, gender, social status, language, sexual orientation, age or ability in the delivery of occupational therapy services.
3. Respect the client's self-determination and choice.
4. Assist clients to achieve optimum quality of life in all states of health.
5. Recognize the power imbalance inherent in professional therapeutic relationships, and maintain appropriate professional boundaries.
6. Act in the best interest of the client to maintain trust, and do not exploit the professional relationship for any personal, physical, emotional, financial, social or sexual gain.

2

Individual Autonomy

Every client has the right and capacity for self-determination.

Occupational therapists:

1. Advocate for the client's right to determine and participate in meaningful occupations for his or her health and well-being.
2. Provide complete and accurate information to enable the client to make an informed decision regarding the need for, and nature of, occupational therapy services, including information about the anticipated benefits and risks of accepting or refusing such services.
3. Obtain and document informed consent for occupational therapy services. Consent can be established orally, or in writing, or where this is not possible it may be implied.
4. Obtain informed consent for occupational therapy services provided by those under the occupational therapist's supervision, such as students and support personnel.
5. Recognize client's support network, and where appropriate include their participation in occupational therapy services.
6. Inform and involve the client as much as possible in the process of giving informed consent even if the client does not have the capacity to do so.
7. Confirm the scope and authority of alternative decision makers.

3

Safe, Competent and Ethical Care

Every client has the right to safe, competent and ethical occupational therapy services.

Occupational therapists:

1. Practise within the scope of the profession, with knowledge of, and adherence to, national and provincial legislation, regulations, standards of practice and policies relevant to the practice of occupational therapy.
2. Provide service in areas of professional competence, and practise within the limits of their knowledge and skills.
3. Regularly conduct self-assessments of their practice and participate in professional development to maintain currency and competence.
4. Seek support and additional training when changing area of practice.
5. Integrate current evidence-based practices relevant to occupational therapy service delivery.
6. Request consultation or refer clients to colleagues or other health care professionals when such actions are in the best interest of the client.
7. Strive to participate in activities that contribute to the body of knowledge and the skills of the profession.

4

Accountability

Occupational therapists are fully responsible for their practice and are obligated to account for their actions.

Occupational therapists:

1. Act in the client's best interest and in a manner consistent with the occupational therapists' professional responsibilities.
2. Retain responsibility for all occupational therapy services provided to the client by others under their supervision.
3. Limit or discontinue the provision of professional services if their physical or mental health is compromised by illness, injury or substance use that will affect their work. Where possible, occupational therapists provide the client with information regarding alternative services and assist with referrals.
4. Recognize that professional obligations override management policies, and take all reasonable steps to resolve situations where management policies and professional obligations are in conflict.
5. Report unsafe, incompetent or unethical care, including boundary violations, to the appropriate authorities.
6. Act in a manner that maintains respect for the profession and its members.

5

Confidentiality

Occupational therapists safeguard the confidentiality of information acquired in the context of professional relationships, to protect their clients' rights to privacy.

Occupational therapists:

1. Comply with all provincial legislation and professional regulations regarding confidentiality.
2. Collect and use only that information which is relevant and necessary for quality service delivery.
3. Take action to safeguard personal information while collecting, recording, releasing, securing and destroying information.
4. Maintain confidentiality indefinitely.
5. Share personal information with others only with the authorized consent of the client, or where failure to disclose would cause significant harm, or if legally required.

6

Fairness

Every client has the right to quality occupational therapy services in accordance with individual needs.

Occupational therapists:

1. Provide services to all clients in a respectful, fair and unbiased manner regardless of race, culture, gender, social status, language, sexual orientation, age or ability.
2. Advocate for sufficient human and material resources to provide safe and competent care.
3. Advocate for the fair and equitable provision of occupational therapy services.

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Honesty and Transparency

Occupational therapists communicate openly and honestly in a clear and caring manner, and respect the client's right to comprehensive information regarding occupational therapy services.

Occupational therapists:

1. Represent their knowledge, skills and abilities in a manner appropriate for the intended audience.
2. Provide qualifications and credentials to clients on request, including the means of contacting the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia.
3. Communicate openly, not withholding any relevant information.
4. Provide clients with access to their occupational therapy information in accordance with provincial legislation and professional regulations.
5. Avoid situations that create a conflict of interest.
6. Identify any competing interests and expectations of all stakeholders, including themselves, and in situations of real or perceived conflict of interest take appropriate action in the best interest of the client.
7. Explain to the client the nature and extent of the occupational therapists' responsibility to the fee payer.
8. Use clear, accurate, verifiable information in any advertising, which must conform to legal, social and professional norms that support the integrity and dignity of the profession.

8

Trusting and Respectful Work Environment

Occupational therapists perform their professional duties in a manner that promotes a trusting and respectful working environment and supports safe and competent care.

Occupational therapists:

1. Assist their colleagues to develop their knowledge and skills by providing timely and accurate feedback regarding safe, competent and ethical care.
2. Assist their colleagues to recognize and address potential professional boundary violations.
3. Assist their colleagues to recognize and take corrective action to address potential unsafe, incompetent or unethical care.
4. Provide mentorship and guidance to assist in the professional development of students.
5. Foster work environments in which occupational therapists and other health care workers are treated with respect.
6. Respect the skills and knowledge of other team members, and seek to collaborate with them.
7. Receive and act upon feedback given by colleagues regarding the provision of safe, competent and ethical care.

Glossary

Client

Clients may be individuals, families and/or groups, agencies or organizations receiving care and/or services from a registered occupational therapist. 'Client' is synonymous with 'patient' or 'consumer', and means a recipient of occupational therapy services.

Health Professions Act

The governing legislation that delegates the authority of the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia to regulate the practice of occupational therapy in B.C.

Informed consent

The client's agreement to authorize occupational therapy services on a full disclosure of the facts required to make an informed decision. The obligation to obtain informed consent is a legal and professional duty.

Occupational therapy service

Occupational therapy service may include direct care, research, education, consultation, care coordination, program development, administration or a combination thereof.

Personal information

Any recorded information, collected by an occupational therapist, that would identify an individual is considered personal information in the context of occupational therapy practice.

Professional boundary

A professional boundary is the limit of what constitutes appropriate professional conduct. Boundaries make relationships professional and safe for the clients.



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