UK Society for Behaviour Analysis

UK-SBA Code of Ethical & Professional Conduct

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UK Society for Behaviour Analysis

Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct

Introduction

The UK Society for Behaviour Analysis (UK-SBA) is the professional body for practitioners of Behaviour Analysis, those studying or preparing to practice Behaviour Analysis and professionals teaching or otherwise promoting Behaviour Analysis for the benefit of the public.

The UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct provides a set of standards the public can expect to be met by members of the Society. Its primary goal is to protect consumers of behaviour analytic services from any form of harm, discrimination, unwarranted disclosure of information, or otherwise unethical or unprofessional conduct.

The Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct specifies principles and practices that must be adhered to by members of the Society, in all aspects of their professional career—for example, including but not limited to currently practicing Behaviour Analysis, supervising others in the practice of Behaviour Analysis, undertaking training in Behaviour Analysis, conducting research in Behaviour Analysis, and/or within any public engagement or public communication about behaviour analysis.

Professionals and students who are members of the Society's Register of Behaviour Analysts – hereafter referred to as Registered Members – have signed a declaration that they will adhere to this Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct, recognising that reported infringement of any aspect of the Code may result in investigation via the UK-SBA Complaints Procedure.

In this document, the "client" refers to the primary person who is in receipt of behaviour analytic practice, regardless of who commissioned services. "Stakeholders" refer to anyone who might have interest in that behaviour change.

1. Principle: Do No Harm

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

1.1. Identify targets in collaboration with the individual and, where appropriate, relevant stakeholders, ensuring that targets are meaningful to the individual, socially significant, and aim to improve the individual's quality of life.

1.2. Avoid engaging in or condoning harmful, degrading, painful or dehumanising practices, and take reasonable steps to guard against financial, social, organisational, political, emotional, personal or sexual factors that may lead to misuse of their expertise or exploitation of those they work with or for.

1.3. Ensure that professional conduct, including public and digital communications, does not compromise the dignity, privacy, or wellbeing of those worked with or for.

1.4. Consider both immediate and remote variables that may impact on a client's experience of behaviour analytic support received and choose the least restrictive alternatives to accomplish agreed goals that improve quality of life.

1.5. Refrain from providing services while unfit to do so or under circumstances where professional judgement or practice may be impaired, such as physical or mental illness, adverse personal events, or substance addiction.

1.6. Refuse to support efforts to suppress self-regulatory behaviours except in rare cases when the behaviour poses harm or a significant risk to wellbeing. In such cases, first ensure that the risk cannot be ameliorated by reasonable changes to the environment, acknowledge the function of the self-regulatory behaviour, and always prioritise the wellbeing of the client by ensuring that functionally equivalent alternative behaviours are supported and encouraged.

2. Principle: Ensure Safety

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

2.1. Protect clients, colleagues and organisations at all times from risk of harm presented by another person's conduct, performance or health.

2.2. Avoid engaging in behaviours that would delay effective services for clients or potential clients (e.g., maintaining waiting lists without providing referrals for other behaviour analytic providers).

2.3. Ensure practices pose no physical or emotional threat to the safety of clients, colleagues or staff. Evaluate environments presenting risk of harm and inform relevant persons of measures necessary to reduce such risks.

2.4. Report any concerns about the safety or wellbeing of clients promptly to appropriate personnel. Support and encourage others to report concerns and do not impede anyone raising concerns about safety, malpractice or risk of harm.

2.5. Ensure that the safety and wellbeing of clients takes precedence over professional or other loyalties.

2.6. Obtain and maintain appropriate professional indemnity insurance where required for their role or scope of practice.

2.7. Obtain and maintain the appropriate DBS check (or equivalent background check), where required by law, regulation, or the nature of their role, and undertake safeguarding training appropriate to their role, scope of practice, and the individuals with whom they work, in accordance with current statutory, regulatory, or organisational requirements.

2.8. Ensure stakeholders understand the importance of DBS checks and safeguarding training relevant to the client or client group.

2.9. Consider whether medical or physiological factors may contribute to behaviour prior to implementing behaviour support and, where appropriate, seek relevant information and/or make referrals to suitably qualified professionals.

2.10. Monitor client responses to behaviour analytic support and remove any components that appear to cause emotional or physical distress.

2.11. Comply with all relevant legislation applicable to their professional practice.

2.12. Take reasonable steps to maintain wellbeing and fitness to practise.

3. Principle: Respect Values and Diversity

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

3.1. Prioritise the values of the client to inform goals and behaviour change procedures.

3.2. Identify relevant stakeholders when working with clients and invite input from those stakeholders where appropriate. Prioritise the rights, values, preferences, and wellbeing of the client where these differ from stakeholder priorities.

3.3. Promote the inclusion and participation of clients across all aspects of the behaviour analytic process, prioritising client choice and promotion of self-advocacy.

3.4. Commit to understanding and embracing culture as central to effective practice, and demonstrate self-awareness, cultural responsiveness, humility, and sensitivity.

3.5. Refrain from engaging in or condoning discrimination against individuals or groups based on age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, culture, ethnicity, national origin, religion or belief, disability, language, or socioeconomic status.

Avoid behaviour that is harassing, demeaning, or discriminatory towards colleagues, supervisees, students, clients, representatives of organisations, or other persons with whom they work.

3.6. Translate behaviour analytic terminology in a way that is appropriate to the audience with whom they are communicating.

3.7. Respect and value neurodivergent identities, and advocate for acceptance and understanding of neurodiversity.

4. Principle: Use Scientific Evidence

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

4.1. Conduct assessments prior to making recommendations or developing behaviour support or skill development plans.

4.2. Explain assessment results to clients using plain language and, where appropriate, graphic or visual displays of data.

4.3. Be guided by current scientific evidence, conceptual analysis, and technical practices derived from the field of Behaviour Analysis, applying this knowledge to assessment, recommendations, behaviour-change procedures, and evaluation of outcomes.

4.4. Collect and analyse data throughout behaviour support and skills development plans, using data to inform judgements about the progress of behaviour change, the suitability of procedures for individual clients and environments, the efficacy of behaviour-change procedures, and the necessity of adjustments or revisions based on outcomes.

4.5. Advocate for the clients' right to effective support based on current scientific knowledge and their unique requirements.

4.6. Advocate for scientifically supported, effective and ethical procedures, and inform clients and the public about such procedures.

4.7. Ensure that behaviour-change procedures are conceptually consistent with behaviour analytic principles and scientific knowledge.

4.8. Refrain from promising specific outcomes, but share data to show progress toward achieving specific, operationalised goals.

4.9. Ensure those overseen in the provision of services are skilled in reliable and valid data collection.

4.10. Refrain from soliciting testimonials from current clients, and only solicit testimonials after all services have been terminated.

4.11. Ensure that the use of testimonials does not compromise confidentiality, privacy, or dignity, and that informed, written consent has been obtained where any identifying information is included.

4.12. State whether testimonials have been solicited or unsolicited when advertising services.

5. Principle: Prioritise Positive and Proactive Strategies

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

5.1. Consider and plan for long-term outcomes that improve quality of life when designing behaviour-change strategies.

5.2. Refrain from seeking to change or suppress aspects of an individual's identity or individual differences, including, but not limited to, gender, sexuality, and neurodiversity. Support may be provided in relation to these areas where requested by, meaningful to, and consistent with the preferences and goals of the individual, prioritising individual choice and the promotion of self-advocacy.

5.3. Support clients to develop functionally equivalent alternatives to behaviours targeted for change (e.g., developing functional communication) that promote autonomy and success across a range of environments.

5.4. Prioritise proactive and preventative strategies that promote safety and reduce risk and may preclude the need for further behaviour analytic services.

5.5. Actively plan for the maintenance and generalisation of skills to produce long-term, meaningful outcomes.

5.6. Prioritise reinforcement strategies when using consequence-based support plans.

5.7. Ensure that those tasked with implementing support plans have sufficient training and support to implement those services with integrity.

5.8. Actively identify obstacles in the environment that may negatively impact service outcomes and take reasonable measures to remove those obstacles.

6. Principle: Ensure Consent

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

6.1. Obtain informed, written consent prior to conducting assessments; implementing or amending behaviour-change procedures; sharing identifiable client information with third parties; creating or using recordings, including audio, video or images; using client information for training, publication or dissemination; and using client information for testimonials.

6.2. Ensure consent is specific to the activity and method of use, based on clear and accessible information, and given voluntarily and without coercion.

6.3. Obtain consent from a legally authorised decision-maker (where one exists) or act in accordance with the relevant legal framework where a client lacks capacity to provide informed consent.

6.4. Prioritise and continuously monitor client consent and assent and adapt or discontinue procedures where consent is withdrawn or assent is not present.

6.5. Obtain consent for electronic communication methods, recording and subsequent use of recordings, and use of client data for training or dissemination separately from general consent to assessment or service provision.

7. Principle: Maintain Sufficient Records & Service Documentation

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

7.1. Maintain honesty, openness, and clarity in relation to any and all financial matters concerning clients, service delivery, training, and provision of supervision.

7.2. Provide full and clear explanations of fee levels and structure, terms and methods of payment, and any charges that might be imposed (e.g., non-attendance or cancelled appointments) before providing services. Clarify the terms on which services are offered in advance of clients incurring any financial cost or obligation, or other reasonably foreseen costs or liabilities.

7.3. Prepare a written contract after consultation with potential service recipients outlining responsibilities of all parties, the scope and nature of services to be provided, fees, conditions of contract termination and notice period, commitment to the UK-SBA Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct, and the right to complain about ethical or professional behaviour. Ensure the contract is agreed and signed by all relevant parties before service provision begins.

7.4. Establish a plan for terminating services (including supervision) from the outset and share this plan with clients/supervisees. Regularly review data with a plan to terminate services when objectives have been met.

7.5. Provide services for a duration of time appropriate to the targets set.

7.6. Review data and implement appropriate changes to support plans in a timely manner.

7.7. Thoroughly and contemporaneously document professional work for purposes of review with clients and other relevant parties, accurately informing service provision by the member, supervisees, and trainees, and facilitating handover if needed. Records include assessments and outcomes, support plans and revisions, case notes, and any data pertinent to the case.

7.8. Maintain records in accordance with applicable legal, professional, and organisational requirements.

8. Principle: Protect Confidentiality

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

8.1. Protect the confidentiality of all information relating to clients, supervisees, colleagues, and organisations, and refrain from disclosing such information without appropriate consent or lawful justification.

8.2. Recognise that confidentiality is not absolute, and share information without consent only where there is a legal obligation to do so or a risk of harm to the client or others, disclosing only the minimum necessary information to appropriate parties.

8.3. Ensure that all data and records are stored, accessed, retained, and transferred securely, in accordance with applicable data protection legislation, including the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

8.4. Share information only with appropriate consent or where there is a lawful or justifiable professional reason to do so in accordance with this Code, ensuring that only minimum necessary information is disclosed.

8.5. Ensure that all individuals involved in service delivery understand and maintain confidentiality requirements.

8.6. Ensure the use of electronic communication platforms (including messaging apps or text) complies with data protection legislation, obtaining informed consent, sharing sensitive information only over secure platforms, maintaining appropriate records of relevant communications, and using professional judgement to switch to more secure methods when required.

8.7. Refrain from sharing, posting, or distributing identifying information about clients or supervisees in any public or semi-public forum (including social media or digital content) without prior informed, written consent.

8.8. Ensure that content is necessary and appropriate where consent is obtained for sharing identifying information, maintaining dignity and privacy, keeping consent specific to the platform/format, and revisiting consent if content is reused or reshared.

8.9. Remain responsible for content associated with them, including tagged content, and refrain from resharing such content without ensuring compliance with this Code.

9. Principle: Maintain Professional Integrity

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.1. Reflect on the impact of caseload on capability to deliver services effectively and make appropriate changes where necessary.

9.2. Ensure any use of AI, emerging technologies, or automated tools does not compromise confidentiality, data protection, or professional integrity. Avoid inputting identifiable client data into AI systems unless secure and compliant, retain full responsibility for AI-assisted outputs, and maintain transparency regarding AI use where appropriate.

9.3. Maintain objectivity, honesty, and accuracy in verbal and written accounts of client needs and recommendations. Declare relevant conflicts of interest, remain open to other viewpoints, ground positions in available data, and refrain from altering professional opinions due to external pressure.

9.4. Maintain accurate and contemporaneous records, refraining from retrospectively altering clinical records, reports, data, or opinions in a manner that misrepresents original findings.

9.5. Identify, date, and record any post-completion record amendments as an addendum or revision, ensuring original content remains identifiable.

9.6. Obtain appropriate ethics approval before commencing research where required, without precluding practitioners from disseminating individual casework results with consent.

Maintaining professional boundaries

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.7. Recognise the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries and take steps to ensure relationships with recipients of services remain professional.

9.8. Maintain awareness of potential risks associated with multiple relationships, taking reasonable steps to avoid, manage, or mitigate conflicts of interest, loss of objectivity, exploitation, or harm.

9.9. Declare any conflicts of interest in professional relationships or roles, recusing oneself from decision-making where conflicts might result in bias or perceived bias.

9.10. Refrain from providing professional services to family members or close personal relations. Manage risks and maintain boundaries/objectivity where other multiple relationships cannot reasonably be avoided.

9.11. Refrain from exploiting persons over whom supervisory, evaluative, or authoritative responsibility is held (e.g., supervisees, students, employees, clients).

9.12. Refrain from engaging in sexual relationships with persons over whom supervisory or authoritative responsibility is held, recognising that such relationships impair judgment and are potentially exploitative.

Ensuring continuity of services

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.13. Avoid interruption or disruption to agreed services, making reasonable and timely efforts to facilitate continuation of services in the event of unplanned disruption.

9.14. Ensure suitable arrangements are in place to cover roles during absences, including detailed handover of relevant case notes, reports, and plans to competent colleagues.

9.15. Involve affected clients, obtain consent, and maintain confidentiality when transferring client information as part of a handover.

9.16. Avoid discontinuing services without sufficient notice and transition planning. Provide pre-termination advice, suggest alternative providers, and facilitate timely documentation transfer with consent if discontinuation is necessary.

Working with behaviour analytic colleagues and other professionals

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.17. Conduct professional relationships on the basis of mutual respect, both within Behaviour Analysis and across other professions.

9.18. Actively foster positive, trusting, and non-judgemental professional relationships with clients, stakeholders, and other professionals.

9.19. Communicate about the work of colleagues in a respectful, accurate, and professional manner, refraining from maligning, harassing, or obstructing others (while remaining free to engage in evidence-based professional critique).

9.20. Avoid unnecessary professional jargon when communicating with individuals unfamiliar with Behaviour Analysis.

Supervising and training others

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.21. Identify professional development needs of those managed, supervised, or trained.

9.22. Manage supervision caseloads to ensure sufficient time and capacity for effective supervision, support, and coaching.

9.23. Rely on behaviour analytic principles and scientific literature to develop skills required for safe practice, using evidence-based management and training approaches where possible.

9.24. Maintain fairness, honesty, and accuracy in assessing those managed, supervised, and trained.

9.25. Model expected professional conduct standards when managing, supervising, or delivering training.

9.26. Adhere to UK-SBA supervisory standards when overseeing individuals pursuing certification pathways.

Challenging bad practice and the right to complain

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.27. Challenge suspected incompetence, malpractice, or misconduct, raising concerns directly when safe or escalating through formal organisational, regulatory, or UK-SBA procedures.

Use of intellectual property

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.28. Respect intellectual property rights and use trademarked or copyrighted materials in compliance with applicable law and licensing requirements.

9.29. Avoid presenting the work of others as their own during training, obtaining appropriate permissions and giving due acknowledgement to sources.

9.30. Refrain from using UK-SBA intellectual property, including logo, without explicit authorisation.

9.31. Use the “UK-SBA Registered” membership badge only when membership is approved and current, recognising it applies to the individual rather than any employer.

9.32. Inform the UK-SBA of any known unauthorised use of the Society’s intellectual property.

Maintaining accurate Registered Member information

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

9.33. Inform the Society in writing of changes to contact information, name, practice name, or relocation outside the UK/Channel Islands and UK territories.

9.34. Inform the Society within 7 days of professional conduct complaints or serious code breaches.

9.35. Inform the Society within 7 days of any employer/professional body disciplinary action or practice restrictions.

9.36. Inform the Society within 7 days of any arrest, caution, charge, or criminal conviction relevant to professional practice.

10. Principle: Work Within Boundaries of Competence and Expertise

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

10.1. Work only within the limits of their own competence, training, and experience.

10.2. Communicate competence limits clearly when client needs fall outside personal expertise, declining service and referring elsewhere or obtaining appropriate training/supervision with full client transparency.

10.3. Maintain openness and honesty regarding credentials and expertise, providing proof upon request.

10.4. Provide professional references or referee contact details upon request.

10.5. Ensure all advertising and display of credentials accurately and truthfully represent expertise without deception.

10.6. Represent qualifications as behaviour analytic only if primarily focused on Behaviour Analysis.

10.7. Distinguish clearly in practice and public statements between roles as a Behaviour Analyst and non-behaviour analytic roles.

10.8. Provide accurate descriptions of qualifications and roles in service contracts, including supervisor details if on a supervised pathway.

11. Principle: Maintain and Improve Competence, Pursue Excellence

In accordance with this code, Registered Members must:

11.1. Continually update scientific and professional knowledge through literature, professional development, and acquiring required APD/CEU credits.

11.2. Stay informed on the latest research in relevant application areas and use it to guide practice.

11.3. Regularly seek supervision and/or peer review from qualified Behaviour Analysts in line with UK-SBA requirements.

Concluding Statement

Central to UK-SBA's aim of promoting and providing Behaviour Analysis services in its many forms and to many populations is the safeguarding of consumers from breaches of ethical and professional conduct as they are defined in this Code. All UK-SBA Registered Members have confirmed they will adhere to the principles and practices described herein. In doing so, they have committed to the protection of the public and agreed to uphold the high professional standards of the UK-SBA and the wider profession of Behaviour Analysis.