

Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) Meeting Summary – May 22, 2021

The Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF) met May 22, 2021 to continue its work on revising the APA Ethics Code.

Discussion of Topic Areas for Possible Standards: During the May 2021 meeting, the ECTF continued its discussion and review of the possible topic areas that may result in standard sections of the Code. The all-day May meeting provided an opportunity for Task Force members to review the work done to-date during its virtual meetings related to the language that will be reflected in possible standards. Specifically, the May 2021 meeting, provided members an opportunity to discuss and provide input related to the informed consent section that will be reflected in the standards. During the discussion, the following areas were reviewed and discussed: a) a paragraph that introduces the how specific principles relate to the concept of informed consent (i.e. Human and Civil Rights, Social Justice, Integrity, Interrelatedness of People, Systems and the Environment, and Professionalism and Responsibility); b) current applicable standards that will continue to be included in the revised Code; and, c) recommendations on revisions to several current standards. In addition, there was discussion that centered on the need to expand on terms related to proxy decision-making and the use of substituted judgement when engaged in proxy decision-making. During the discussion, several members also noted the need to further define and consider the broadness of terms currently used in the Code related to informed consent (i.e. incapacity).

Discussion of the Structure of the Standards: Following the discussion related to the standard section on informed consent, the Task Force briefly discussed the structure of the standards, specifically, how to reflect language that might relate to one standard, but which may be included/mentioned in multiple standards. During this discussion, several of the Task Force members noted that concepts related to informed consent are included in the outline of several standards previously discussed. The members discussed the advantageous and disadvantageous of incorporating all concepts related to informed consent within the standard section on informed consent. During the meeting, the members made a preliminary decision that all language related to the concept of informed consent should be included within the standard section labeled, “Informed Consent.” In addition, the Task Force determined that additional concepts that might be included/mentioned in multiple standards would be addressed on a case by case basis.

Topics for Discussion and Determination: During its past discussions Task Force members developed an ongoing listing of topics for further discussion and specifically how to address these topics within the Code. As a reminder, the following topics are included in the listing: 1) Professional v. Personal/Private Activities and Behavior; 2) Inclusion or exclusion of Advocacy and Activism; 3) Inclusion of forensics, integrate health, and other distinct domains; 4) Integration of social justice and civil rights into the sections; 5) Presence of the subject of environment in the Code; 6) Recognition of various work settings; 7) Reinstatement of justice, autonomy, and fidelity under integrity; 8) Human rights within standards or remaining only as principle; and, 9) Length of time for sexual contact with former client/patients.

During its May meeting, the Task Force addressed the topic of Professional v. Personal/Private Activities and Behavior and determined that the following draft statement would be included in the Code:

The Ethics Code applies to the professional behavior of psychologists. Psychologists also consider whether their personal behavior may impact those with whom they work as well as the trust and perception of the profession and the discipline.

Virtual Open Meeting Sessions – 4:00- 5:00 pm (eastern time) on May 22, 2021: Prior to the ECTF meeting, various groups were invited to appoint one liaison to join a pre-scheduled virtual meeting discussion of the Task Force. Appointed liaisons were invited to register to participate in the virtual open meeting discussion that occurred from 4:00 – 5:00 pm (eastern time).

Review of the Task Force Meeting Discussions with Liaisons: Following the introduction of the liaisons and Task Force members, Task Force Chair, Linda Campbell, PhD, provided a brief overview of the work and the issues discussed by the Task Force members during its meeting. Various Task Force members reviewed the discussions during the day, specifically the discussions that centered on outlining a standard section related to informed consent and the draft language prepared by the Task Force related to Professional v. Personal/Private Activities and Behavior. During the virtual meeting, liaisons asked and requested information on the following areas of interest: a) concerns related to issues of how specialized practice will be addressed in the Code; b) education of psychologists related to the implementation of the Code; c) inclusion of specific actions that will be taken by the APA if a psychologist is found in violation of the Code; d) requirements of accredited programs related to teaching in ethics; e) discussion of the types of decision-making models to be outlined in the Code; f) how concepts related to telepsychology will be incorporated into the Code; and, d) additional information/direction in the Code referencing the procedures for implementing the Code.