



Code of Ethics

of the
Association for Education and Rehabilitation
of the Blind and Visually Impaired: A Guide for Professionals

A code of ethics is designed to represent best ethical practice by stating an agreed upon set of values and principles that can guide behavior. It is recognized that AER members often belong to professional groups that have their own Codes of Ethics or professional practice guidelines. The AER Code of Ethics is not intended to replace those codes. It is instead intended as a general guide that reflects the commitment of professionals within this field to act ethically. In cases where there may be conflicts between the AER code and a member's disciplinary code, the member should adhere to the requirements of his or her own disciplinary code. Members who do not have their own disciplinary code should use the AER Code as a guide to ethical behavior. While there are key principles upon which we agree, at times those principles may prove to be in opposition to one another. In those situations of conflict, the member must select a course of action that does the most good and has the least potential for harm.

Key Principles

There are several principles that make up the basis of the AER Code of Ethics. They include respect, dignity, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, fidelity, and integrity.

Respect for Personal Rights and Dignity – Professionals are expected to respect the personal worth of each individual and his or her right to make autonomous decisions. The opinions and choices of individuals must be considered when planning education and rehabilitation programs. Only when choices may be harmful will alternative interventions be considered. When working with persons who have reduced autonomy or diminished capacity there is an obligation to be sure that they have adequate protection.

Beneficence and Non-maleficence – Professionals ensure a consumer's safety and avoid imposing or inflicting harm upon that person. Beneficence is often defined as providing acts of kindness or charity but for the purposes of this code it is an obligation to do good to the consumer, and to maximize possible benefits as a result of services provided. Professionals strive to facilitate experiences that will be positive for consumers and ensure their rights. It is the duty of the practitioner to avoid personal, financial, social, or organizational conflicts that might be detrimental to the consumer.

Justice – Professionals are obligated to provide consumers with all the services and benefits to which they are entitled. It is an injustice when entitled benefits are withheld without good cause. People are treated equally and favoritism will not be tolerated.

Fidelity and Integrity – Professionals are loyal, honest, truthful, and keep their promises to consumers. They establish and maintain trusting relationships with their

consumers. They maintain ethical standards of behavior and manage conflicts of interest. They also engage in ethical behavior with colleagues, and employers. Honesty and truthfulness extend into their teaching and research. They accurately represent themselves and their abilities to the consumers they serve.

Definition of Terms - These may be found – at the end of this document

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

COMPETENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.01 AER Members will provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations in areas only within their scope of practice, based on their education, training, consultation, study, and professional experience.

1.02 AER Members will provide services only within the scope of practice as identified by their professional discipline.

1.03 AER Members who delegate work to employees, supervisees, assistants or who use the services of others, will take reasonable steps to authorize only those responsibilities that such persons can be expected to perform competently on the basis of their education, training, or experience, either independently or with the level of supervision being provided.

1.04 AER Members will claim or will imply only professional credentials possessed and are responsible for correcting any known misrepresentations of their credentials by others. Professional credentials include baccalaureate degrees, graduate degrees, accreditation of graduate programs, national voluntary certifications, government-issued certifications or licenses, or any other credential that might indicate to the public specialized knowledge or expertise in their field of study. AER Members who do not hold specialized credentials in the disciplines specific to blindness and low vision will not misrepresent themselves as having knowledge specific to the disciplines for which they have no credential.

1.05 AER Members will not attribute more to their credentials than the credentials represent.

1.06 AER Members will refer consumers to other specialists as the needs of the consumer dictate.

1.07 AER Members will take reasonable steps to consult with other professionals when they have questions concerning ethical obligations or practice issues.

ADVOCACY

2.01 AER Members will strive to eliminate attitudinal barriers, including stereotyping and discrimination, toward individuals with disabilities and to increase their own awareness and sensitivity to such individuals.

2.02 AER Members will remain aware of actions taken by cooperating agencies on behalf of their consumers and will act as advocates of such consumers to ensure effective service delivery.

2.03 AER Members will provide consumers with appropriate information and will support their efforts at self-advocacy both on an individual and an organizational level.

ACCESSIBILITY

3.01 AER Members will demonstrate an appreciation of the need to provide necessary access to information and accommodations, including full ability to access information about their services and programs, participation in program access, and accessible facilities and services, to individuals with disabilities.

3.02 AER Members will identify physical, communication, and transportation barriers to consumers and will communicate information on barriers to public and private authorities to facilitate removal of said barriers to access.

3.03 AER Members, as advocates for individuals with disabilities, will ensure, prior to referring consumers to programs, facilities, or employment settings, that they are appropriately accessible.

3.04 AER Members will ensure that all instructional materials are not only accessible but also usable to ensure complete functionality.

RELATIONSHIPS

4.01 AER Members' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of consumers. In general, consumers' interests are primary and their concerns and those of their families must always be treated with respect. In addition, AER Members will treat colleagues with respect and will represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of consumers and colleagues.

4.02 AER Members will not engage in unfair discrimination or knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis prohibited by law.

4.03 All forms of harassment and discrimination are not acceptable.

4.04 AER Members will take reasonable steps to avoid harming their consumers, supervisees, research participants, colleagues, organizational consumers, and others with whom they work, and minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.

4.05 AER Members will avoid conflicts of interest. They refrain whenever possible from taking on a professional role when personal, scientific, professional, legal, financial, or other interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to (1) impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their functions, (2) expose a person or organization to harm or exploitation, or (3) where there is a personal advantage at the expense of others in their line of duties.

4.06 When working with consumers, AER members will promote and provide a safe, positive learning environment. They will abide by government regulations concerning mandatory reporting of suspected abuse and neglect.

4.07 Whenever possible AER Members will avoid conflicts of interest, and where they do exist will disclose them and treat consumers and students in a manner reflecting their professional commitments and ethics.

4.08 AER Members will avoid providing direct service to accepting as consumers any person with whom they have had prior intimate relationships. If, this is not possible because of the unavailability of other professionals, the nature of any prior relationship will be made known to supervisor(s) for consumer protection and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

4.09 Unless otherwise covered by contract, AER Members will make reasonable efforts to plan for facilitating services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as the practitioner's illness, death, unavailability, relocation, or retirement or by the consumer's relocation or financial limitations or by natural disasters or civic emergencies.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

5.01 AER Members have a primary obligation and will take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium, recognizing that the extent and limits of confidentiality may be regulated by law or established by institutional rules or professional or scientific relationship.

5.02 Before initiating personal data collection for the purposes of providing services or programs, AER Members will discuss with persons (including, to the extent feasible, persons who are legally incapable of giving informed consent or assent and their legal representatives) and organizations with whom they establish a scientific or professional relationship (1) the relevant limits of confidentiality and (2) the foreseeable uses of the information generated through their services.

5.03 Before recording the voices or images of individuals to whom they provide services, AER Members will obtain permission from all such persons or their legal representatives.

5.04 AER Members will disclose confidential information without the consent of the individual only as mandated by law, or where permitted by law for a valid purpose such as to (1) provide needed professional services; (2) obtain appropriate professional consultations; (3) protect the consumer, the professionals themselves or others from harm; or (4) obtain payment for services from a consumer in which instance disclosure is limited to the minimum that is necessary to achieve the purpose.

5.05 Education and rehabilitation professions will maintain up-to-date knowledge of individual laws relative to privacy, confidentiality and privileged communication and strive to protect the anonymity of the consumer as much as possible.

5.06 When releasing information on a consumer to a requesting agency or individual, the AER Member will obtain fully informed, written permission from the consumer to release the information.

5.07 AER Members will remain mindful of the confidentiality limits of electronic communications such as email, FAX machines, voice mail and social media, and they will ensure that consumers are notified of these limits so that proper safeguards may be utilized to protect consumer records.

COMMUNICATION

6.01 AER Members will be held to the same level of expected behavior and confidentiality as defined by the AER Code of Ethics regardless of the form of communication they choose to use (i.e., cellular phones, electronic mail, facsimile, video, audio-visual).

6.02 When consumers request language interpretation or communication is unclear, AER Members will provide qualified interpreters.

6.03 AER Members will request use, when appropriate, of augmentative communication technology when working with persons with speech difficulties and will make every effort to understand consumers' attempts to communicate even when said communication uses non-verbal/behavioral means rather than verbal language.

ADVERTISING AND OTHER PUBLIC STATEMENTS

7.01 AER Members will not make public statements that are false, deceptive, or fraudulent concerning their research, practice, or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated.

7.02 AER Members will not make statements on behalf of AER without the express consent of the organization.

7.03 AER Members will not solicit testimonials from current consumers or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence.

7.04 AER Members will not exploit the presence of a disability or in any way diminish the respect and dignity due consumers for the purposes of agency fundraising or personal gain.

ASSESSMENT

8.01 Whenever possible AER Members will use assessment instruments whose validity and reliability have been established for use with members of the population tested. When other instruments without such validity or reliability are used, professionals describe the strengths and limitations of test results and interpretation.

8.02 AER Members will base the opinions contained in their recommendations, reports, and diagnostic or evaluative statements on information and techniques sufficient to substantiate their findings.

8.03 AER Members will provide opinions of the functioning of individuals only after they have conducted an assessment of the individual adequate to support their statements or conclusions. When, despite reasonable efforts, such an examination is not practical, professionals document the efforts they made and the result of those efforts, clarify the probable impact of their limited information on the reliability and validity of their opinions, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions or recommendations.

PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS PRACTICES

9.01 When setting fees, AER Members will ensure that the fees are fair, reasonable, and commensurate with the services performed, and will be mindful of antitrust laws in setting those fees to avoid price fixing.

9.02 AER Members will avoid accepting goods or services from consumers in exchange for professional services. Bartering arrangements, particularly involving services, create the potential for conflicts of interest, exploitation, and inappropriate boundaries.

9.03 AER Members will not accept personal gifts of significance from consumers of their services.

9.04 As early as is feasible in a professional or scientific relationship, AER Members and consumers of services will reach an agreement specifying payment and billing arrangements.

9.05 When AER Members agree to provide services to a person or entity at the request of a third party, they will attempt to clarify at the outset of the service the nature of the relationship with all individuals or organizations involved. This clarification includes the role of the practitioner, identification of who is the consumer, the probable uses of the services provided or the information obtained, and the fact that there may be limits to confidentiality.

9.06 AER Members will create, and, to the extent the records are under their control, maintain, disseminate, store, retain, and dispose of records and data relating to their professional and scientific work in order to (1) facilitate provision of services later by them or by other professionals, (2) allow for replication of research design and analyses, (3) meet institutional requirements, (4) ensure accuracy of billing and payments, and (5) ensure compliance with law.

9.07 AER Members in private practice will maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of records under their control, whether these are written, electronic, or in any other medium.

9.08 In their reports to payers for services or sources of research funding, AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure the honest and accurate reporting of the nature of the service provided, the fees, charges, or payments, and where applicable, the identity of the provider, and the findings.

9.09 AER Members will terminate services when it becomes reasonably clear that the consumer no longer needs the service, is not likely to benefit, or is being harmed by continued service. Except where precluded by the actions of consumers or third-party

payers, prior to termination, AER Members will provide predetermination advising and suggest alternative service providers as appropriate.

UNIVERSITY-BASED EDUCATION

10.01 AER Members responsible for education and professional preparation programs will take reasonable steps to ensure that the programs are designed to provide the appropriate knowledge and proper experiences for students, and to meet the requirements for licensure, certification, or other goals for which claims are made by the program.

10.02 AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure that course syllabi and other materials accurately reflect the subject matter and the plan for evaluation.

10.03 AER Members do not require students to disclose personal information in course or program-related activities.

10.04 AER Members will consider all communication with students confidential, except in the event that the student suggests a harmful act has been committed or when a student suggests that actions may be taken that could inflict harm to the student and or others. In the event that communication with the student raises concern, the professional must comply with the reporting laws in his or her jurisdiction.

10.05 AER Members will not endorse students for certification, licensure, employment, or completion of an academic or training program if they believe students or supervisees are not qualified for the endorsement. They will take reasonable steps to assist students who are not qualified for endorsement to become qualified. They will seek professional consultation and document their decision to dismiss or to refer students or supervisees for assistance. AER Members will advise students of appeals processes as appropriate.

10.06 In academic and supervisory relationships, AER Members will establish a timely and specific process for providing feedback to students. Information regarding the process is provided to the student at the beginning of supervision. AER Members will evaluate students on the basis of their actual performance on relevant and established program requirements.

10.07 AER Members will clearly define and maintain ethical, professional, and social relationship boundaries with their students. They will be aware of the differential in power that exists and the student's possible lack of understanding of that power differential.

10.08 AER Members will supervise only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience.

10.09 AER Members who function as onsite supervisors will perform direct supervision sufficient to ensure that services provided to consumers are adequate, respectful, and do not cause harm or unnecessary discomfort. Those who are serving as practicum or

internship supervisors will be adequately prepared and supervised by the training program.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

11.01 When conducting research every effort will be made to fully inform the participant of the risks of participation and their ability to withdraw at any time without consequences.

11.02 When conducting research, every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the participant, and to obtain informed consent to have their information used for research purposes.

11.03 When conducting research AER Members will follow IRB standards that protect research participants.

11.04 AER Members will not plagiarize by presenting portions of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally. AER Members will observe all copyright and fair use laws.

11.05 AER members conducting research will insure that participants understand that participation is voluntary and without any penalty for participation, refusal to participate, or opinions expressed.

11.06 After data are collected, AER Members will provide participants with full clarification of the nature of the study to remove any misconceptions. Where scientific or human values justify delaying or withholding information, AER Members will take reasonable measures to avoid causing harm.

11.07 AER members who are university faculty will appropriately credit students as principle authors on articles produced as a result of a thesis or dissertation. Faculty advisors will discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process.

11.08 AER Members will take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed. AER Members will give credit through joint authorship, acknowledgment, footnote statements, or other appropriate means to those who have contributed significantly to research or concept development in accordance with such contributions.

11.09 AER Members who are reviewers of presentations, publications, grants, or research proposals respect the privacy and confidentiality and the proprietary rights of such information and of those who submitted it. When asked to be a reviewer, AER members will disclose if there is a conflict of interest.

ADMINISTRATION

12.01 AER members will be honest, fair, and transparent regarding financial management and accounting practices.

12.02 AER members will advocate for adequate resources to meet consumer needs. They will insure that resource allocation procedures are open, fair, and equitable.

12.03 AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure that organizational resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision.

12.04 AER members who are administrators will stay current on research and will utilize best practice and evidence-based practice in designing effective rehabilitation and education programs and services.

12.05 AER members who have responsibility for evaluating the performance of others will fulfill such responsibility in a fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria.

12.06 AER members will endeavor to hire credentialed professionals who have the education and training necessary to provide the highest quality services.

12.07 AER Members will make every effort to ensure that service providers have reasonable workload responsibilities sufficient to meet consumer needs.

12.08 AER members will encourage participation in professional development.

12.09 AER Members who are administrators will take reasonable steps to ensure that the working environment for which they are responsible is consistent with and encourages compliance with this AER Code of Ethics. Professionals and administrators will take reasonable steps to eliminate any conditions in their organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with this Code.

RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

13.01 AER Members will encourage ethical behavior and facilitate discussion regarding ethics.

13.02 AER Members will take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues.

13.03 AER Members will be knowledgeable about this code and any code that defines practice in their profession.

13.04 When uncertain as to whether a particular situation or course of action may be in violation of the AER Code of Ethics, AER Members will consult with other AER professionals who are knowledgeable about ethics with colleagues, and/or with appropriate authorities.

13.05 When AER Members have reasonable cause to believe that another professional is violating an ethical standard, they will attempt to resolve the issue informally with the other practitioner if feasible, providing that such action does not violate confidentiality rights that may be involved.

13.06 When necessary, AER Members who believe that a colleague has acted unethically and after being confronted but not responding appropriately, will take action through formal channels such as contacting a certification or licensing board or regulatory body, or other professional ethics committees as available through their specific profession.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

AER Members: all those individuals who have paid their current dues to AER and belong to any of the professions serving people who are blind or visually impaired.

Consumers: the children and adults with blindness and visual impairment, and their families, who are receiving professional services.

Students: individuals who are under the guidance or are supervised by faculty members from a college or university.

Accountability: professionals being held accountable for their ethical behavior to consumers, credentialing bodies, employers and fellow professionals.

Codes of Ethics: are adopted by organizations to assist members in understanding the difference between “right” and “wrong” and applying that understanding to their decisions.

Public statements: include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, product endorsements, grant applications, licensing applications, other credentialing applications, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curricula vitae, or comments for use in media such as print, electronic transmission, or social media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials.

Harassment: covers a wide range of behaviors of an offensive nature. It is commonly understood as behavior intended to disturb or upset, and it is characteristically repetitive. In the legal sense, it is intentional behavior which is found threatening or disturbing. Sexual harassment includes: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that tends to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or learning environment, and is potentially disadvantageous to the victim.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired wishes to thank the following organizations the use of elements from their codes of ethics in this document:

The Belmont Report

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html>

American Counseling Association

<http://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>

Counseling Psychology
<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>

Rehabilitation Counseling
<http://www.crc certification.com/>

Social Work
<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp>