

Play Therapy United Kingdom (PTUK)

Ethical Framework for Play Therapy and Filial Play and  
Professional Conduct Procedure

This document, which PTUK members are required to observe as practitioners and Registrants, together with PTUK's Register of Certified Members, the Profession Structure Model (PSM) and the Principles of Clinical Governance make up PTUK's Ethical System – the most comprehensive basis that exists for professional self-regulation and the protection of the public.

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## Ethical Framework for Play Therapy and Filial Play

### *Introduction*

The Ethical Framework for Play, Creative Arts and Filial Therapies, is based upon Play Therapy UK's version published on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2002. It is also applicable to play therapy and filial play research, the use of therapeutic play skills and the management of the delivery of these services within organisations. It is intended to inform the practice of each member of PTUK.

The framework is closely based upon the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework, adapted and extended by PTUK for the special needs of working with children. In using much of the text of the BACP Ethical Framework PTUK acknowledges BACP's authorship and copyright properties under the Berne Convention and expresses thanks for BACP's permission and help.

The framework has also been developed in conjunction with Play Therapy International (PTI) to encourage unified standards of practice in all countries.

In this statement the term 'practitioner' is used generically to refer to anyone with responsibility for the provision of therapeutic play, play therapy, creative arts therapies and filial play for children and adolescents - persons under the age of 16. 'Practitioner' includes anyone undertaking the role(s) of therapist, filial play coach/mentor, counsellor, psychotherapist, trainer, educator, supervisor, researcher, provider of counselling skills or manager of any of these services. The term 'client' is used as a generic term to refer to the recipient of any of these services. The client may be an individual child, parent/carer, couple, family, group, organisation or other specifiable social unit. Alternative names may be substituted for 'practitioner' and 'client' in the practice setting, according to custom and context.

The framework reflects this ethical diversity by considering:

- ◆ Values
- ◆ Principles
- ◆ Personal moral qualities

## ***Values for Play Therapy and Filial Play***

The fundamental values of Play Therapy and Filial Play include a commitment to:

- ◆ Respecting human rights and dignity
- ◆ Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
- ◆ Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application
- ◆ Enabling children to develop emotionally, socially and academically to their full potential
- ◆ Alleviating personal distress and suffering
- ◆ Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned
- ◆ Increasing personal effectiveness
- ◆ Enhancing the quality of relationships between children and children and adults
- ◆ Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture
- ◆ Promoting the need for the equitable and adequate provision of therapeutic Play Therapy and Filial Play for children
- ◆ Consciously applying quality management and clinical governance principles in all therapeutic work

*Values inform principles.*

*They represent an important way of expressing a general ethical commitment that becomes more precisely defined and action-orientated when expressed as a principle.*

## ***Ethical Principles of Play, Creative Arts and Filial Therapies***

Principles direct attention to important ethical responsibilities. Each principle is described below and is followed by examples of good practice that have been developed in response to that principle.

Ethical decisions that are strongly supported by one or more of these principles without any contradiction from others may be regarded as reasonably well founded. However, practitioners will encounter circumstances in which it is impossible to reconcile all the applicable principles and choosing between principles may be required. A decision or course of action does not necessarily become unethical merely because it is contentious or other practitioners would have reached different conclusions in similar circumstances.

The challenge of working ethically means that practitioners will inevitably encounter situations where there are competing obligations. In such situations it is tempting to retreat from all ethical analysis in order to escape a sense of what may appear to be un-resolvable ethical tension. The framework is intended to be of assistance in such circumstances by directing attention to the variety of ethical factors that may need to be taken into consideration and to alternative ways of approaching ethics that may prove more useful.

### **Accountability**

*A practitioner's obligation is to consider all the relevant circumstances with as much care as is reasonably possible and to be appropriately accountable for decisions made.*

No statement of ethics can totally alleviate the difficulty of making professional judgements in circumstances that may be constantly changing and full of uncertainties. By accepting the ethical framework, members of PTUK are committing themselves to engaging with the challenge of striving to be ethical, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously.

### **Fidelity: honouring the trust placed in the practitioner**

**Being trustworthy is regarded as fundamental to understanding and** resolving ethical issues. Practitioners who adopt this principle: act in accordance with the trust placed in them; regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client's trust; restrict any disclosure of confidential information about clients to furthering the purposes for which it was originally disclosed.

### **Autonomy: respect for the client's right to be self-governing**

This principle emphasizes the importance of recognizing at all times that a child/young person is an individual in their own right who has the capacity to enable their own healing and development through the therapeutic process.

Although the use of therapy may be prescribed or requested by an adult responsible for the child's well-being the practitioner must regard the interests of the child as being paramount.

Practitioners who respect their clients' autonomy: ensure accuracy in any advertising or information given in advance of services offered; seek freely given and adequately informed consent from the child or, when the child is not competent to give valid consent from the person legally responsible for the child; engage in explicit contracting in advance of any commitment by the client; protect privacy; protect confidentiality; normally make any disclosures of confidential information conditional on the consent of the client/carer concerned; and inform the client and their carer(s) or those persons legally responsible for the child in advance of foreseeable conflicts of interest or as soon as possible after such conflicts become apparent.

## **Beneficence: a commitment to promoting the client's well-being**

The principle of beneficence means acting in the best interests of the client based on professional assessment. It directs attention to working strictly within one's limits of competence and providing services on the basis of adequate training or experience.

Ensuring that the client's best interests are achieved requires systematic monitoring of practice and outcomes by the best available means. It is considered important that research and systematic reflection inform practice.

### **Supervision & CPD**

*There is an obligation to use regular and on-going supervision to enhance the quality of the services provided and to commit to updating practice by continuing professional development.*

An obligation to act in the best interests of a client may become paramount when working with clients whose capacity for autonomy is diminished because of immaturity, lack of understanding, extreme distress, serious disturbance or other significant personal constraints.

## **Non-maleficence: a commitment to avoiding harm to the client**

Non-maleficence involves avoiding sexual, financial, and emotional or any other form of client exploitation; avoiding incompetence or malpractice; not providing services when unfit to do so due to illness, personal circumstances or intoxication.

The practitioner has an ethical responsibility to strive to mitigate any harm caused to a client even when the harm is unavoidable or unintended. Holding appropriate insurance may assist in restitution.

Practitioners have a personal responsibility to challenge, where appropriate, the incompetence or malpractice of others; and to contribute to any investigation and/or adjudication concerning professional practice which falls below that of a reasonably competent practitioner and/or risks bringing discredit upon the profession.

## **Justice: the fair and impartial treatment of all clients and the provision of adequate services**

The principle of justice requires being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity. It directs attention to considering conscientiously any legal requirements and obligations, and *remaining alert to potential conflicts between legal and ethical obligations*.

Justice in the distribution of services requires the ability to determine impartially the provision of services for clients and the allocation of services between clients. A commitment to fairness requires the ability to appreciate differences between people and to be committed to equality of opportunity,



and avoiding discrimination against people or groups contrary to their legitimate personal or social characteristics. Practitioners have a duty to strive to ensure a fair provision of therapeutic services, accessible and appropriate to the needs of potential clients.

### **Self-respect: fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge and care for self**

The principle of self-respect means that the practitioner appropriately applies all the above principles as entitlements for self. This includes seeking counselling or therapy and other opportunities for personal development as required.

There is an ethical responsibility to use supervision for appropriate personal and professional support and development, and to seek training and other opportunities for continuing professional development. Guarding against financial liabilities arising from work undertaken usually requires obtaining appropriate insurance. The principle of self-respect encourages active engagement in life-enhancing activities and relationships that are independent of relationships in therapeutic work.

### ***Personal Qualities***

The practitioner's personal qualities are of the utmost importance to clients. Many of the personal qualities considered important in the provision of services have an ethical or moral component and are therefore considered as virtues or good personal qualities.

It is inappropriate to prescribe that all practitioners possess these qualities, since it is fundamental that these personal qualities are deeply rooted in the person concerned and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority. Personal qualities to which practitioners are strongly encouraged to aspire include:

Empathy with children, adolescents and their carers:	the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective. 'Carers' is used generically to include anyone who looks after a child at any time and includes for example nurses, teachers and social workers
Sincerity:	a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
Integrity:	commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence.
Resilience:	the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished.

Respect:	showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves - not to patronize
Humility:	the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses and to show this to clients.
Competence:	the effective deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to do what is required given the resources available
Fairness:	the consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform decisions and actions.
Wisdom:	possession of sound judgement that informs practice.
Courage:	the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty.

### ***Good Practice***

PTUK & PTI are committed to sustaining and advancing good practice. This guidance on the essential elements of good practice has been written to take into account the changing circumstances in which Play Therapy and Filial Play are now being delivered, in particular:

- changes in the range of issues and levels of need presented by clients
- the growth in levels of expertise available from practitioners with the expansion in the availability of training and consultative support/supervision
- the accumulated experience of members of PTUK and PTI

The diversity of settings within which therapies for children and adolescents are delivered has also been carefully considered. These services may be provided by:

- An independent practitioner working alone
- One or more practitioners working to provide a service within an agency or organisation
- Specialists working in multidisciplinary teams
- Specialist teams of therapists

All practitioners encounter the challenge of responding to the diversity of their clients and finding ways of working effectively with them.

## *Principles of Good Quality of Care*

1. Good quality of care requires competently delivered services that meet the client's needs by practitioners who are appropriately supported and accountable.
2. Practitioners should give careful consideration to the limitations of their training and experience and work within these limits, taking advantage of available professional support. If work with clients requires the provision of additional services operating in parallel with play, creative Arts and filial therapies, the availability of such services ought to be taken into account, as their absence may constitute a significant limitation.
3. Good practice involves clarifying and agreeing the rights and responsibilities of both the practitioner, the client, the client's carer(s) or those legally responsible, the referrer and the commissioner (provider of funds for the service) at appropriate points in the working relationship.
4. Multiple relationships arise when the practitioner has two or more kinds of relationship concurrently with a client, for example client, carer and trainee, acquaintance and client, colleague and supervisee. The existence of a multiple relationship with a client is seldom neutral and can have a powerful beneficial or detrimental impact that may not always be easily foreseeable. For these reasons practitioners are required to consider the implications of entering into multiple relationships with clients, to avoid entering into relationships that are likely to be detrimental to clients, and to be readily accountable to clients and colleagues for any multiple relationships that occur.
5. Practitioners are encouraged to keep appropriate records of their work with clients unless there are adequate reasons for not keeping any records. All records should be accurate, respectful of clients and colleagues and protected from unauthorized disclosure. Clients and those legally responsible for them should be appropriately informed about the implications of any potential legal proceedings.
6. Clients are entitled to competently delivered services that are periodically reviewed by the practitioner. These reviews may be conducted, when appropriate, in consultation with clients, carers, supervisors, managers or other practitioners with relevant expertise.
7. The quality of outcomes of the therapy provided should, wherever practical, be monitored using pre and post treatment measures that are appropriate to the environment, emotional age, condition of the client and systemic factors.

### Data Protection

*Practitioners should take into account their responsibilities and their clients' rights under data protection legislation and any other legal requirements.*

## Keeping Trust

The practice of play and creative arts therapies depends on gaining and honouring the trust of clients. Keeping trust requires:

- Attentiveness to the quality of listening and respect offered to clients
- Culturally appropriate ways of communicating that are courteous and clear · respect for privacy and dignity
- Respect for privacy and dignity
- Careful attention to client consent and confidentiality

## Informing Clients

Clients and their carers should be adequately informed about the nature of the services being offered. Practitioners should obtain adequately informed consent from the carers or those legally responsible for the child and clients and respect their right to choose whether to continue or withdraw from therapy.

## Consent

Practitioners should ensure that services are normally delivered on the basis of the client's explicit consent. Reliance on implicit consent is more vulnerable to misunderstandings and is best avoided unless there are sound reasons for doing so. Overriding a client's known wishes or consent is a serious matter that requires commensurate justification. Practitioners should be prepared to be readily accountable to clients, carers, colleagues and their professional body, such as PTUK, if they override a client's known wishes.

## Risk Situations

Situations in which clients pose a risk of causing serious harm to themselves or others are particularly challenging for the practitioner. These are situations in which the practitioner should be alert to the possibility of conflicting responsibilities between those concerning their client, other people who may be significantly affected, and society generally. Resolving

conflicting responsibilities may require due consideration of the context in which the service is being provided.

### *Consultation on Risk*

*Consultation with a supervisor or experienced practitioner is strongly recommended, whenever this would not cause undue delay.*

In all cases, the aim should be to ensure for the client a good quality of care that is as respectful of the client's capacity for self-determination and their trust as circumstances permit.

## Special Considerations in Working with Children

Working with young people requires specific ethical awareness and competence. The practitioner is required to consider and assess the balance between young peoples' dependence on adults and carers and their progressive development towards acting independently.

Working with children and young people requires careful consideration of issues concerning their capacity to give consent to receiving any service independently of someone with parental or legal responsibilities and the management of confidences disclosed by clients.

## Confidentiality

Respecting client confidentiality is a fundamental requirement for keeping trust. The professional management of confidentiality concerns the protection of personally identifiable and sensitive information from unauthorized disclosure. Disclosure may be

*Any disclosures should be undertaken in ways that best protect the client's trust.*

authorized by client consent or the law. Practitioners should be willing to be accountable to their clients and to their profession for their management of confidentiality in general and particularly for any disclosures made without their client's consent.

## Providing Information to Clients & Carers

Practitioners should normally be willing to respond to their client's and carers' requests for information about the way that they are working and any assessment that they may have made. This professional requirement does not apply if it is considered that imparting this information would be detrimental to the client or inconsistent with the therapeutic approach previously agreed with the client. Clients and those legally responsible for them may have legal rights to this information and these need to be taken into account.

## Protection Against Abuse

Practitioners must not abuse their client's trust in order to gain sexual, emotional, financial or any other kind of personal advantage. Sexual relations with clients and carers are prohibited. 'Sexual relations include intercourse, any other type of sexual activity or sexualized behaviour. Practitioners should think carefully about, and exercise considerable caution before, entering into personal or business relationships with former clients, their carers or those legally responsible for them and should expect to be professionally accountable if the relationship becomes detrimental to the client or the standing of the profession.

**Intrusion of Personal Views**

Practitioners should not allow their professional relationships with clients to be prejudiced by any personal views they may hold about lifestyle, gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, beliefs or culture.

**Commitments**

Practitioners should be clear about any commitment to be available to clients and colleagues and honour these commitments.

## Teaching and Training

All practitioners are encouraged to share their professional knowledge and practice in order to benefit their clients and the public.

### *Using Case Data*

*Prior consent is required from clients and/or carers if they are to be observed, recorded or if their personally identifiable disclosures are to be used for training purposes.*

Practitioners who provide education and training should acquire the skills, attitudes and knowledge required to become competent teachers and facilitators of learning.

Trainers of practitioners are required to be fair, accurate and honest in their assessments of their students.

## **Supervising and Managing**

Practitioners are responsible for clarifying who holds responsibility for the work with the client.

There is a general obligation for all play, creative arts and filial therapists, supervisors and trainers to receive supervision/consultative support independently of any managerial relationships.

Supervisors and managers have a responsibility to maintain and enhance good practice by practitioners, to protect clients from poor practice and to acquire the attitudes, skills and knowledge required by their role.

## **Research**

PTUK is committed to fostering research that will inform and develop practice. All practitioners are encouraged to support research undertaken on behalf of the profession and to participate actively in research work to provide practice-based evidence.

All research should be undertaken with rigorous attentiveness to the quality and integrity both of the research itself and of the dissemination of the results of the research.

The rights of all research participants should be carefully considered and protected. The minimum rights include the right to freely given and informed consent, and the right to withdraw at any point. Individuals must not be identified outside the confidential research group and then only for verification and validation purposes.

The research methods used should comply with the standards of good practice in psychological methods and must not adversely affect clients.

## ***Fitness to Practise***

Practitioners have a responsibility to monitor and maintain their fitness to practise at a level that enables them to provide an effective service. If their effectiveness becomes impaired for any reason, including health or personal circumstances, they should seek the advice of their supervisor, experienced colleagues or line manager and, if necessary, withdraw from practice until their fitness to practise returns. Suitable arrangements should be made for clients who are adversely affected.



## ***When Things Go Wrong***

Practitioners should respond promptly and appropriately to any complaint received from their clients or carers. An appropriate response in agency-based services would take account of any agency policy and procedures. Practitioners should endeavour to remedy any harm they may have caused to their clients and to prevent any further harm. An apology may be the appropriate response.

Practitioners should discuss, with their supervisor, manager or other experienced practitioner(s), the circumstances in which they may have harmed a client in order to ensure that the appropriate steps have been taken to mitigate any harm and to prevent any repetition.

*Practitioners are required to ensure that their work is adequately covered by insurance for professional indemnity and liability.*

If practitioners consider that they have acted in accordance with good practice, but their client or carer is not satisfied that this is the case, they may wish to use independent dispute resolution, for example: seeking a second professional opinion, mediation, or conciliation where this is both appropriate and practical.

Carers and, if appropriate, clients should be informed about the existence of the Professional Conduct Procedure of PTUK and any other applicable complaints or disciplinary procedures.

If requested to do so, practitioners should inform clients, their carers and those legally responsible for them about how they may obtain further information concerning these procedures.

## ***Responsibilities to All Clients***

Practitioners have a responsibility to protect clients and carers when they have good reason for believing that other practitioners are placing them at risk of harm.

They should raise their concerns with the practitioner concerned in the first instance, unless it is inappropriate to do so. If the matter cannot be resolved, they should review the grounds for their concern and the evidence available to them and, when appropriate, raise their concerns with the practitioner's manager, agency or professional body.

If they are uncertain what to do, their concerns should be discussed with an experienced colleague, a supervisor or raised with PTUK.

All members of PTUK share a responsibility to take part in its professional conduct procedures whether as the person complained against or as the provider of relevant information.

### Projecting a Positive Image

The increasing availability of Play Therapy and Filial Play means that most practitioners have other practitioners working in their locality or may be working closely with colleagues within specialized or multidisciplinary teams.

The quality of the interactions between practitioners can enhance or undermine the claim that play, and creative arts therapies enable children to fulfil their potential. This is particularly true for practitioners who work in agencies or teams.

### Professional Relationships

Professional relationships should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect.

Practitioners should endeavour to attain good working relationships and systems of communication that enhance services to clients at all times. It is essential to respect members of other professional bodies working in related fields.

Practitioners should treat all colleagues fairly and foster equality of opportunity.

*It is not ethical to make overt or implied derogatory remarks about other organisations, methods of training or about the professionalism of their members unless they are founded on evidence and the practitioner is willing to justify them.*

They should not allow their professional relationships with colleagues to be prejudiced by their own personal views about a colleague's lifestyle, gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, beliefs or culture. It is unacceptable and unethical to discriminate against colleagues on any of these grounds. Practitioners must not undermine a colleague's relationships with clients, carers, referrers or commissioners by making unjustified or unsustainable comments.

All communications between colleagues about clients should be on a professional basis and thus purposeful, respectful and consistent with the management of confidences as declared to clients.

## **Context**

The practitioner is responsible for learning about and taking account of the different protocols, conventions and customs that can pertain to different working contexts and cultures.

## **Making and Receiving Referrals**

All routine referrals to colleagues and other services should be discussed with the carer and if at all feasible with the client in advance. The carer's/person legally responsible and/or client's consent should be obtained both to making the referral and also to disclosing information to accompany the referral. Reasonable care should be taken to ensure that:

- the recipient of the referral is able to provide the required service
- any confidential information disclosed during the referral process will be adequately protected;
- the referral will be likely to benefit the client.

Prior to accepting a referral, the practitioner should give careful consideration to:

- the appropriateness of the referral;
- the likelihood that the referral will be beneficial to the client;
- the adequacy of the carer/client's consent for the referral.

If the referrer is professionally required to retain overall responsibility for the work with the client, it is considered to be professionally appropriate to provide the referrer with brief progress reports. Such reports should be made in consultation with clients and carers and not normally against their explicit wishes.

## ***Probity of Practice***

Ensuring the probity of practice is important both to those who are directly affected but also to the standing of the profession as a whole.

## **Providing Clients with Adequate Information**

Practitioners are responsible for clarifying the terms on which their services are being offered in advance of the person legally responsible for the client incurring any financial obligation or other reasonably foreseeable costs or liabilities.

All information about services should be honest, accurate, avoid unjustifiable claims, and be consistent with maintaining the good standing of the profession.

*Particular care should be taken over the integrity of presenting qualifications, accreditation and professional standing.*

## **Financial Arrangements**

Practitioners are required to be honest, straightforward and accountable in all financial matters concerning their clients and other professional relationships.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

Conflicts of interest are best avoided, provided they can be reasonably foreseen in the first instance and prevented from arising. In deciding how to respond to conflicts of interest, the protection of the client's interests and maintaining trust in the practitioner should be paramount.

## **Care of Self as a Practitioner**

Attending to the practitioner's well-being is essential to sustaining good practice.

Practitioners have a responsibility to themselves to ensure that their work does not become detrimental to their health or well-being by ensuring that the way that they undertake their work is as safe as possible and that they seek appropriate professional support and services as the need arises.

Practitioners are entitled to be treated with proper consideration and respect that is consistent with this Guidance.