

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES
of the German Psychological Society (DGP)
and the Association of German Professional Psychologists (BDP)

(and Code of Conduct of the Association of German Professional Psychologists)

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ETHICAL PRINCIPLES of the DGP and BDP

*ETHICAL PRINCIPLES
of the German Psychological Society (DGP)
and the Association of German Professional Psychologists (BDP)**

*(*and Code of Conduct of the Association of German Professional Psychologists)*

A. Preamble

The task of psychologists is to increase scientific and professional knowledge of people and their behaviour and to apply their knowledge and skills to enhance the welfare of individuals and society as a whole. Psychologists respect the dignity and integrity of the individual and are committed to promoting and protecting fundamental human rights. By its very nature, psychology is a liberal profession.

Regardless of the various roles performed by psychologists – as educators or researchers, diagnosticians, therapists, supervisors, consultants, expert witnesses or in any other function – their professional practice is grounded in and characterized by the special responsibility they owe to the people with whom they work. Psychologists must establish relationships of trust if they are to provide effective help. The primary objective of these ethical principles is to protect and promote the welfare of the people with whom psychologists work.

Psychologists must strive at all times to ensure that their professional conduct complies with the very highest standards of ethical responsibility. They are not only committed to respecting the rights of those with whom they work, but also, whenever appropriate, to intervening actively to protect such rights.

Psychologists recognize the self-determination of individuals and their right to live in accordance with their own convictions. In their professional practice, psychologists endeavour to achieve objectivity and impartiality and are alert to personal, social, institutional, economic and political factors which may lead to the abuse or misuse of their knowledge and skills.

Psychologists work on the basis of a reliable and valid understanding of an established body of scientific knowledge. Their psychological knowledge is used in a variety of professional contexts. Responsible professional conduct demands a high level of specialist competence.

Psychologists are committed to their own continuing professional development and to ensuring that they are familiar with the latest developments and current status of the discipline. Psychologists only offer services within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, or professional experience. In areas in which generally recognized standards do not yet exist, psychologists must act in accordance with the principle of scientific integrity and must regularly review the outcome of their interventions. At the same time, they take all appropriate action to protect the welfare of those with whom they work.

The ethical principles of the German Psychological Society and the Association of German Professional Psychologists represent a binding code of professional conduct for psychologists. The binding nature of these standards is not restricted to the activities of psychologists in professional contexts alone, but also extends to the conduct of members of the profession in their capacity as psychologists in all aspects of their lives.

The profession of psychology today enjoys a very positive public image. It is essential that the high standing of the profession is safeguarded by establishing a differentiated mesh of ethical and legal provisions. The joint ethical principles of the German Psychological Society and the Association of German Professional Psychologists are an expression of the profession's identity; they provide members of the profession with a valid orientation aid in their practical work and set standards for the public assessment of psychological activities. In this respect, the rules set down in the following serve the internal discipline of the profession and enable corresponding sanctions to be taken in the event of their infringement.

Laws or legal standards which may restrict the applicability of these ethical principles in specific areas of practice shall have precedence.

B. General Principles

B.I. Use of professional titles

B.I.1. Professional titles

1. Only persons who have majored in psychology and have obtained an academic degree in the same subject may use the professional title "psychologist". The title "Diplom-Psychologin/Diplom-Psychologe" (Dipl.-Psych.) may only be used by persons who have legitimately obtained such title by completing a university degree in psychology.

2. Graduates who have majored in psychology and who have thus obtained a German degree (Diplom) or equivalent academic degree must comply with the legal regulations regulating the use of an academic title in the state in which they work.

3. Diplomas/degrees in psychology obtained on the basis of a course of study in a member state of the European Union and which fulfil the requirements stated in the EU Council Directive 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC are recognized as members of the regulated profession of psychologists.

B.I.2. Academic degrees

Academic degrees may only be used if they have been legitimately obtained on the basis of a course of university-level study in accordance with the law of the state in which such degree is taken. Academic degrees obtained outside of Germany may only be used in compliance with the stipulations of German law.

B.I.3. Reference to membership

Reference may be made to membership of the German Psychological Society and/or the Association of German Professional Psychologists.

B.II. Colleagues and other professional groups

B.II.1. Loyalty to the profession

Psychologists are expected to act loyally towards their own profession. They shall conduct themselves in accordance with professional standards and promote the status of psychology as a professional discipline.

B.II.2. Conduct towards colleagues

1. Psychologists are expected to treat their professional colleagues with respect and shall not exercise biased criticism of their professional work.

2. Psychologists shall not act in an unfair manner designed to displace colleagues from their field of professional practice or to prevent colleagues from obtaining work from clients.

3. Psychologists concerned that a colleague may be acting in violation of professional standards and principles should initially, and in confidence, draw the colleague's attention to such conduct.

4. Psychologists shall have recourse to and endeavour to obtain a ruling from the disciplinary tribunal of the German Psychological Society and/or the Association of German Professional Psychologists before instituting an action for libel or slander or serving notice of a civil action or injunction proceedings against a colleague who is a member of either of these organisations.

5. If psychologists employ colleagues in salaried positions or as freelance professionals, such colleagues must be offered work which complies with the agreed tasks and which is commensurate with their professional status.

B.II.3. Relationships with members of other professions

Psychologists shall show themselves as loyal, tolerant and willing to provide assistance in their dealings with members of other professions.

1. Employees in civil services and other settings must, upon entering employment, make explicit the independent professional nature of their work and, in particular, their legal duty to maintain confidentiality.

2. Such employees must explicitly point out that their personal responsibility for patients and clients may entail restrictions on the scope of the institutional and professional monitoring of their work; such employees shall also strive to ensure that – particularly in the field of therapeutic clinical psychological interventions – the psychologist is exempt from instructions in a core area of his or her work.

3. Such employees shall strive to ensure that they are not required to perform tasks which cannot be undertaken in a manner commensurate with professional standards and which contravene ethical requirements.

4. A copy of these ethical principles shall be submitted to the employer.

B.II.4. Psychologists and staff

1. If psychologists employ general and auxiliary staff, such staff shall be given suitable working conditions and written contracts of employment appropriate to the tasks assigned to such staff.

2. Trainees or students on placement must be given an adequate amount of training which adequately prepares them for their later entry into professional practice. It is therefore unacceptable to require such staff to carry out monotonous or low-skilled activities.

3. Psychologists shall always issue a qualified testimonial to staff upon request, in particular upon termination of their employment relationship.

B.III.1. Confidentiality

1. Pursuant to §203 of the German Criminal Code (StGB), psychologists are required to protect the confidentiality of all information confided to them in the course of exercising their professional activities except in those exceptional instances defined by law or in the event that other higher-ranking legal interests are in jeopardy. Psychologists are also required to maintain confidentiality in relation to the members of the families of persons in psychologists' care and with regard to their colleagues and seniors.

2. If several psychologists or psychologists and doctors are advising or treating the same clients/patients at the same time, professional colleagues working on the same cases are exempt from the duty to maintain confidentiality among each other unless otherwise stipulated by their clients/patients. The duty to maintain confidentiality does not apply with regard to members of general and auxiliary staff necessarily involved in preparing or supporting the work of the psychologist. In all other instances, the duty to maintain confidentiality may only be waived at the discretion of the person receiving care.

3. Matters, findings, or the outcomes of consultations or treatment may be used in anonymous form provided that such information is not used in a form which might enable patients/clients to be identified.

4. Staff employed by psychologists must be instructed with regard to their duty to maintain confidentiality – such instructions must be given in writing.

B.III.2. Records, data collection and storage

Psychologists must obtain permission from their clients/patients before recording their voices or images during a consultation or during treatment or before allowing third parties to listen to/view such material. Psychologists may only collect, store and use data about clients/patients which is relevant to the services provided to their clients/patients. This also applies to telephone conversations.

Steps must be taken to safeguard all forms of records – particularly those stored on data media – from misuse. Original and derivative material must be stored for the period stipulated by the payer of the services, or for at least 10 years.

B.IV. Expert opinions and assessments

B.IV.1. Duty to take due care

Psychologists shall at all times and to the highest degree possible base their expert opinions and assessments on scientifically sound premises and prepare such reports with the utmost care and conscientiousness. Expert opinions and assessments must be drafted in good time and comply with formal requirements and the guidelines on drafting expert opinions issued by professional bodies.

B.IV.2. Transparency

The contents of expert opinions and assessments must be understandable for all those persons by whom such reports are designed to be read.

B.IV.3. Inspection

If an expert opinion is commissioned by a third party payer, such expert opinion or assessment may only be made available to the subject of such opinion or assessment with the permission of the third-party payer. Psychologists shall endeavour to ensure that the subjects of expert opinions or assessments are able to inspect their expert opinion or assessment on request provided that this is not likely to represent a danger to such person's health. Should the task presented to the psychologist exclude such inspection from the very beginning, the subjects of such expert opinions or assessments must be informed in advance accordingly.

B.IV.4. Courtesy assessments

Courtesy opinions or assessments may not be drafted, nor may expert opinions be submitted which have been drafted on behalf of the psychologist by a third party without the involvement of the psychologist her or himself.

B.IV.5. Submission of views on the expert opinion of colleagues

Views may be submitted on the expert opinion of colleagues taking account in particular of the contents of Section B.II.2 (1) of these ethical principles.

B.V. Advertising and other public statements

BV.1. General

As practitioners of a liberal profession, psychologists offer their services in a professional rather than commercial context.

B.V.2. Advertising principles

1. Psychologists may provide information about their services and their personal credentials to the extent that such information is objective in nature and professionally relevant.
2. Provided that they do not infringe customary professional practice by publishing turnover figures or outcome statistics, psychologists may work with practice-related brochures, circulars, information sites on the internet and other comparable information media within the framework outlined in Section D.II. References may be made to clients and commissions with the approval of the party paying for the services. References may not be made to the psychologist's own patients, expert witness or expert opinions.
3. Psychologists providing therapeutic services may only provide information in accordance with (2) to their own patients. This does not apply to information provided on the internet or other electronic data communication networks about the practice itself, its opening hours, or about available therapeutic services. Psychologists may be entered in directories, provided that the purpose of such entries is solely to inform patients about treatment options and provided that no drawings or photographs are used for advertising purposes.
4. Psychologists must strive to ensure that third parties do not engage, on their behalf, in advertising activities which they are prohibited from engaging in themselves. Psychologists must also strive to ensure that these advertising rules are adhered to by the institutions in which they work.

B.V.3. Reference to special qualifications and specialisms

1. Psychologists may make reference to further and advanced psychological training or certificates which they have undertaken or obtained, as well as to specialisms, target groups, and language skills. Psychologists may make reference to a maximum of six such differentiating factors.
2. Specialisms and target groups may only be referred to if the psychologist has acquired at least two years of sustained experience in such areas or with such groups.
3. Psychologists are prohibited from advertising on the basis of therapeutic outcomes nor may they advertise for scientifically unsubstantiated or inadequately developed techniques.

B.V.4. Reference to collaboration

1. Reference may only be made to team practice if the psychologist is a member of a professional firm, a business partnership or associated in any other way (in an employment relationship, as a freelancer) with persons entitled to set up a professional firm as defined by Section D.III of these ethical principles. Abbreviations for a collaborative practice may not be used by psychological therapists.
2. If several psychological therapists exercise their profession in the legal form of a non-trading partnership under the Civil Code, this must be indicated by employing the term "Joint Practice".
3. The names of all the partners must be indicated in full on the letter paper used by professional firms or other business associations. In the case of multidisciplinary practices involving members of other professions the respective professional titles of all participants must be indicated.

B.V.5. Direct solicitation of clients/patients

Psychologists working as therapists may not directly solicit potential patients. References of an advertising nature to a psychologist's own practice during public discussions of procedures, techniques and other methods, or in the form of lectures and talks, or at events, is also deemed to be direct solicitation. The same applies if such advertisement is undertaken by a third party in agreement with or with the acquiescence of the psychologist.

B.V.6. Publications

Psychologists may publish scientific reports which make reference to their own name in journals and may inform other psychologists about special procedures, techniques and other methods which may be performed by the publishing psychologist on behalf of others.

B.V.7. Public presentations

If psychologists engage in consultative activities or offer professional comments in public in the context of lectures, radio or television programmes, in newspaper or magazine articles, on pre-recorded cassettes or CDs, by sending materials by post, via the internet, or via any other media, they shall adhere to the following rules:

1. Their statements and advice must be based on reliable, valid, and scientifically established knowledge and generally recognized psychological practice.
2. Their statements must be restricted to providing objective information; neither the psychologist nor his or her practice shall be emphasized in a manner tantamount to advertising.
3. The recipients of statements made by psychologists in public must not be encouraged to believe that they have established a personal relationship with the psychologist.

C. PSYCHOLOGY IN RESEARCH AND TEACHING

C.I. Free scientific inquiry and responsibilities to society

1. The basic right enshrined in Article 5(3) of the German constitution (Grundgesetz) to free scientific inquiry imposes a responsibility on psychologists active in the fields of research and teaching to determine the form and content of their scientific activities.

The basic right guaranteeing freedom of science is formally unqualified, but is however limited to the extent that scientific pursuits violate other basic rights. Psychologists conducting research or engaged in teaching are bound to their ethical responsibility to their fellow men and women and to the natural environment.

2. The right to freedom of science and teaching imposes an ethical responsibility on psychologists working in this area to ensure that research and teaching is not influenced by financial or other external partisan interests.

This implies that psychologists engaged in research are responsible for the aims of their research, research design and principles, interpretation of research results, and the dissemination of research results, and are not only entitled, but also duty bound, to prevent unconstitutional interference in this area of responsibility.

Recognition of the scientific achievements of those holding dissenting opinions or other beliefs, members of other age groups and of the opposite sex, other social classes and cultures, and a willingness to correct one's own errors on the basis of convincing arguments – regardless of the source of such arguments – are all key hallmarks of the professional ethos of psychologists engaged in research and teaching.

3. The constitutional guarantee protecting the freedom of research from outside influences must also be understood as imposing a moral responsibility on psychologists engaged in research and teaching to promote democratic working methods within the scientific community. New research agendas, intellectual approaches, and methods must all be subject to disinterested review regardless of their origin.

4. The above principles also apply to psychologists engaged in research in positions in which they are subject to instruction from senior staff and to psychologists conducting research on behalf of third parties.
5. Regardless of the responsibility of members of other professional groups for individual measures taken by them in the context of a research project, psychologists acting as research project managers bear overall responsibility for the work undertaken in the context of such projects.

C.II. Principles guiding good scientific practice

1. Professional practice in research and teaching is characterized by uncompromising honesty in the search for and transfer of scientific findings. In order to obtain reliable scientific findings, psychologists engaged in research and teaching commit themselves to the following principles:
2. Psychologists ensure that their research work is conducted in compliance with generally recognized methodological procedures and that their results are amenable to testing and verification.
3. Psychologists are at all times willing to present, substantiate, and submit their scientific procedures to rational criticism according to the pursued research goal.
4. If research projects are undertaken independently of personal or institutional structures – usually in the context of financial support – which safeguard good scientific practice, it is the responsibility of researchers themselves to ensure that such projects are conducted in conformance with the scientific, professional and ethical principles set down here. Psychologists engaged in research and teaching shall endeavour to take adequate account in the research process of all available information and counterarguments. Psychologists are open to criticism and willing to adopt a critical attitude towards their own findings. Psychologists engaged in research and teaching are duty bound to document their research results. They are willing to make scientific outcomes fully and unconditionally available and to guarantee that they may be assimilated in the accumulative process of research and teaching. This self-imposed duty also applies in principle to research results which contradict the researcher's own theory or hypotheses as well as in instances in which the researcher may, for other reasons, regard it as inopportune to publish such results. The contributions of partners, colleagues, students and previous researchers who have contributed work to the researcher's own research topic must be explicitly and clearly referenced.

C.III. Principles guiding research with human participants

1. Psychological research depends on the participation of people as experimental subjects. In their capacity as scientists, psychologists are aware of the special relationship between the experimenter and the experimental subject and the responsibility which rests on the experimenter as a result. Psychologists ensure that research does not threaten the dignity and integrity of participants in psychological research and take every measure appropriate to guarantee the safety and well-being of their experimental subjects and must also attempt to exclude the risk of harm.
2. The responsibility borne by researchers is particularly high if experimental subjects are vulnerable or not in a position to take responsibility for their own actions or if the research situation may be such as to threaten the capacity of experimental subjects to be responsible for their own actions.
3. People must take part in psychological experiments on a voluntary basis (regardless of provisions in examination regulations which may prescribe participation in psychological experiments). Experimental subjects must be informed using language that is reasonably understandable about all the objectives and details of the experiment, as well as about the discomfort and risks associated with their participation, all of which may have a decisive influence on their decision to participate in the experiment or not. Participants must be informed about concealed observers.

In exceptional cases in which providing comprehensive information prior to the experiment would be incompatible with the objectives of the experiment, special measures must be taken to ensure that experimental subjects are in no way endangered by their participation. In such cases, experimental subjects must be informed in general terms about the reasons for not putting them entirely in the picture. Test persons must be debriefed in full about the nature of the experiment upon its conclusion. The same applies in instances of concealed observation.

In cases in which people are unable to provide consent themselves, consent must be obtained from such person's legal representatives.

4. If experimental subjects are students or other persons in a dependent relationship with the psychologist managing the project, the latter must ensure that should such subjects refuse or cease to participate they will not suffer any disadvantages as a consequence.
5. Psychologists must not subject test persons to any kind of influences which may endanger their mental or physical well-being. Experiments must be terminated immediately if experimental subjects respond in an unexpectedly adverse manner to the experiment. Should participation in an experiment result in undesirable consequences for the experimental subject, the psychologist must rectify such consequences or arrange for such consequences to be rectified by others.
6. Psychologists are also responsible for ensuring that research work on people conducted by persons under their supervision or other forms of control and monitoring is ethically sound. Tasks involved in research with human participants may only be assigned to persons who have been appropriately trained and prepared for such work. Psychological experiments may only be conducted in appropriate institutional settings.

C. IV. Animals in research and teaching

1. Experiments involving animals are indispensable in the context of certain fields of psychological research and teaching. However, in this case too psychologists must in all cases show respect for life. Experiments may only be conducted in this field of work by persons with expertise in animal experiments and with actual and legal knowledge of the issues involved in the care of animals.
2. Research and teaching involving animals requires an unusually high degree of sensitivity to ethical issues and special knowledge about how to prevent as far as possible the discomfort, suffering and pain which may be experienced by animal subjects. Psychologists who conduct animal experiments make reasonable efforts to minimize the discomfort, suffering, and pain of animal subjects.
3. When deciding whether or not it is essential to perform experiments on animals in the context of a psychological project, particular consideration must be given to the current state of scientific knowledge and to whether the aim of the research could be achieved by employing alternative methods or procedures.
4. Animal experiments must only be performed with the intention of increasing scientific knowledge. Careful consideration must be given to whether the selected experimental procedure is appropriate for use with the animal species and the number of animals used.
5. In the case of experiments which are subject to notification and approval duties stipulated by animal welfare legislation – as well, however, in the case of animal experiments focusing solely on behaviour to the exclusion of physical interventions or the imposition of pain – the latest version of Communication IV issued by the Senate Commission for Animal Research of the German Society for the Promotion of Research (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) is binding on psychologists performing animal experiments.
6. Steps must be taken to ensure that general and auxiliary staff who perform animal experiments in the context of research and teaching and who are under the supervision of psychologists are adequately briefed on the experimental procedure and the care and use of animals in a manner commensurate with the tasks assigned to them.

C.V. Publication of research results

1. The results of psychological research must be made available to the scientific community. Results must be presented correctly, comprehensively and clearly in order to avoid misinterpretations.
2. Data which may be used to identify individuals must be anonymized.
3. Internal discussion and criticism within the discipline are conducive to the development of the science and may not be prevented.
4. Credit must be explicitly and clearly given to key staff in joint publications. The order in which authorship is credited must do justice to the actual weight of each person's contribution to the work.
5. Psychologists who subsequently detect significant errors in their published data must take reasonable steps to correct such errors in a correction, erratum, or other appropriate publication means.
6. Psychologists to whom planning projects, final reports, or other unpublished scientific texts are made available in their capacity as expert assessors for publications, research applications, etc. shall safeguard the confidentiality and authorship rights of those by whom such materials have been submitted.

C.VI. Teaching, continuing professional development and training, supervision

The task of psychologists working as educators is to teach students about the current status of the science of psychology in an objective and understandable manner. Personal views and opinions must be explicitly declared as such. It is essential to ensure that announcements for courses and public lectures, and their provision, do not arouse false expectations. Psychologists active as educators must be aware of the special role which exists between teachers and students and do not exploit this relationship for their own personal benefit. The personal information acquired about students during the course of a psychologist's teaching activities must be handled with the same degree of confidentiality as information on clients / patients and experimental subjects. In the case of case demonstrations, particular care must be taken to safeguard the dignity and the well-being of the presented persons. These rules also apply to relationships with patients. Students attending the demonstration of case studies must be instructed in their duty to maintain confidentiality with regard to the anonymity of any persons who may be presented and to safeguard the private lives of the same.

Psychologists active as educators shall only urge their students to take part in psychological experiments to the extent that such experiments are necessary in a training and research context. In such cases, account must be taken of the special responsibility owed to dependent persons acting as experimental subjects. If staff or students act in the function of experimenters themselves – in the application of diagnostic procedures, for example – steps must be taken, notwithstanding the responsibility borne by the experimenters themselves, to ensure that such experimenters act in a manner which complies with these ethical principle. Psychologists must not provide paid consultation or treatment to students who they teach or for whose academic examination they are responsible. Psychologists involved in a teaching or organizational capacity in training programmes, of whatever type, must ensure that information published about such programmes is correct. In the framework of teaching for training courses or continuing professional development and advanced training, or as part of supervision, relationships with students and those taking part in postgraduate training courses must be arranged in such a way that such students can be provided with ongoing and sufficient feedback on the quality of their work. Psychologists active as educators must evaluate the work performed by trainees and students on the basis of relevant criteria specified in the training programme.

Psychologists who supervise the postgraduate, practical activities of trainees or junior colleagues must ensure that such persons are familiar with, and monitor their compliance with, these ethical principles. Psychologists who provide teaching in the framework of continuing professional development, advanced or specialist training courses, or supervision must not, either directly or indirectly, require trainees to reveal personal information. If the disclosure of personal information has been clearly identified as a requirement for the training procedure, such disclosures may only be obtained voluntarily and the consent of the participant obtained prior to the relevant exercise.

Psychologists active as educators may not provide psychotherapeutic or any other form of treatment to postgraduate trainees or junior colleagues who are in a dependent relationship with the psychologist. In exceptional circumstances such treatment or therapy may be given if the explicit consent of the training candidate is given and if such treatment or therapy is provided solely for the purposes of, and is embedded in, the training procedure.

D. PSYCHOLOGY IN PRACTICE

D.I. Special nature of the responsibility owed to clients/ patients

I.1. Confidentiality

The relationship of psychologists to their clients / patients is peculiarly and necessarily of a confidential nature. As a result, psychologists can in all cases turn down or terminate work if confidentiality is no longer ensured. In cases involving third-party payers – as is frequently the case in forensic psychology and industrial psychology – psychologists are subject to a special duty to safeguard the properly understood interests of all those with whom they are involved.

D.I.2. Information and consent

Psychologists must inform their clients / patients about all key measures taken and the course of treatment provided and must ensure that they have obtained such persons' consent. If therapeutic treatment is provided, psychologists must draw people's attention to the risks involved and the alternative treatments available. This duty to inform also encompasses issues relating to fees and the reimbursement of costs.

D.I.3. Maintenance of independence

Therapeutic and clinical psychologists may not enter into personal relationships with their patients during the therapeutic relationship. Psychologists do not, for example, engage in sexual intimacies with patients.

D.I.4. Right to individual consultation / treatment

Clients / patients are entitled to receive consultation or treatment from a psychologist without the presence of a third party.

D.I.5. Special duty to take care incumbent on psychological therapists

Psychotherapists treat disorders using the best possible therapeutic procedures available. Patients have a right to receive the best possible treatment based on the discipline's latest scientific developments. Where the psychologist is in doubt, a joint medical assessment may, at the request of the patient, be obtained or team-based psychological or medical treatment initiated at the beginning of the psychotherapeutic treatment. Psychologists who recognize that therapeutic treatment will not lead to a further improvement in the patient's health or might even represent a threat to the same must terminate treatment. If therapists wish to terminate treatment before the originally agreed date and should such termination represent a potential threat to the health of the patient, the therapist must, to the best of his or her ability, ensure that it is possible for the patient to receive ongoing treatment.

D.I.6. Records

Psychologists must keep informative records of the consultations and treatment they provide. Psychological records of therapeutic activities must be retained for a minimum period of 10 years. The retention period for all other records is 5 years. If a psychologist gives up his or her practice or ceases to work as a psychologist, records must be destroyed in conformance with the retention periods. Records may only be passed on to a psychologist who may take over the practice with the consent of the clients / patients. Therapists must pass on relevant records or summaries of the same to colleagues planning to continue to provide consultation or treatment to the patient, provided the consent of the patient is forthcoming. With regard to non-therapeutic records, psychologists may make the transfer on records contingent on their financial value. In clinics or other institutions in which treatment may be continued following the departure of a therapist, records must be transferred to the new psychological or medical professionals or sealed and transferred to the employer bound to the condition that such records may only be passed on to such successor professionals. Upon termination of therapy, psychologists must allow clients / patients to inspect the relevant records if they so wish, unless such inspection would infringe other overriding rights.

D.II. Private practice psychologists

DII.1. Designation of a private psychological practice

Psychological practices may not be described in a manner which may arouse inappropriate expectations. In the field of psychological therapy, the practice may not be referred to in any way which may illegitimately suggest that such a practice enjoys or is able to provide preferential treatment; this applies in particular to descriptions such as "advice centre", "head office", "centre" or similar terms. The term "institute" or similarly grandiose terms (cf. sentence (2)) may only be used in the field of psychological therapy if the personnel employed and the equipment and working methods used in such a setting genuinely warrant such a description.

II.2. Use and design of nameplates

The purpose of nameplates is to draw the public's attention to the existence of a practice. Nameplates may only be affixed or erected to the extent permitted by local customary practice. Graduate psychologists (Diplom-Psychologen) providing therapeutic services must use nameplates which indicate the location of their work and how they can be reached.

D.II.3. Notification of the opening and running of a new practice

Psychologists may advertise the opening and running of their psychological practice and may also provide information to the public accordingly. Such information must not arouse inappropriate or erroneous expectations about the services offered or the personnel or other resources available to such a practice. Advertisements which correspond with local customary practice may be placed in regional daily newspapers to draw attention to therapeutic practices within the framework stipulated in Section D.II. In each case a maximum of two references may be made to the opening of a new practice, any changes which may have occurred, absence and return, changes in consulting hours and telephone numbers, or to special events. If the location of the practice is moved, the nameplate may be retained at the original location with a reference to the new location for a period of six months. The names of deceased or retired colleagues may be retained in practice names for up to twelve months and, provided attention is drawn to the circumstances which apply, may continue to be used, with the consent of the persons concerned.

D.II.4. Permissible information on nameplates

As well as indicating the names of practitioners and how they may be reached, as permitted by Section II (1.3), nameplates may also indicate legitimate titles, consulting hours and telephone numbers. Psychologists providing therapeutic services should, where possible, desist from indicating their particular areas of professional competence / specialisms. A maximum of six professional competence / specialisms may be indicated. Such information must be formulated in terms of specific patient groups or a specific clientele, in terms of specific symptoms or problems areas, specific forms of therapy or methods.

D.II.5. Use of letter paper, forms, stamps

The above provisions regarding nameplates apply likewise to the use of letter paper, forms, and stamps (cf. Section II.4.). All forms of hyperbolic expression must be avoided.

D.II.6. Entries in telephone directories

Psychologists working as therapists must take particular care to ensure that entries in telephone directories and classified directories are designed as modestly as possible in accordance with the rules set down in B.V.2 and B.V.3.

D.III. Joint professional practice

Psychologists may also work together with members of other liberal professions in the framework of a business partnership for the purpose of pursuing each partner's respective professions, making shared use of rooms and equipment or similar, and for employing shared staff. Partnership agreements must be made in writing and must in particular contain provisions governing modifications, the distribution of expenses and income, and the dissolution of the partnership.

Members of a business partnership must be clearly identified to outside parties and referred to in advertisements, on letter paper, or in any other documents used, unless the partners have joined together or committed capital to form a registered company.

The following applies to psychologists working as therapists in the framework of a partnership:

- Whatever the form of association, the patient's/client's free choice of therapist must be guaranteed.
- In relation to third parties, the right to charge fees must be retained by the psychologists providing treatment
- Treatment documents and records may only be made available to professional / business partners and inspected by such persons if a corresponding written declaration has been obtained in advance from the patient.
- Patients must be informed before treatment commences that the joint and several liability of the partners not providing treatment is excluded.

Steps must be taken in a business partnership to ensure that psychotherapeutic decisions – particularly those regarding diagnosis and therapy – are the sole preserve of the psychologist, except in those instances in which professional law allows the psychologist to transfer such decisions to self-employed members of other liberal professions working in the partnership.

If graduate psychologists working as therapists employ colleagues in salaried positions or as freelance professionals, treatment may only be transferred to such colleagues with the consent of the patient.

E. Final provisions

E.I. Violations

Regardless of any legal sanctions imposed by courts of law, violations of the above principles shall be brought before the disciplinary tribunal of the German Psychological Society and/or the Association of German Professional Psychologists. This provision is governed in detail for the Association of German Professional Psychologists in the association's arbitration and disciplinary tribunal rules.

E.II. Effective date

The joint ethical principles of the German Psychological Society (DGP) and the Association of German Professional Psychologists (BDP) were adopted on 25 April 1999 at the BDP delegates conference and on 29 September 1998 at the annual general meeting of the DGP and supersede the "Guidelines on professional ethics" published by the Federation of Associations of German Psychologists in 1967 and the "Vocational regulations for psychologists" published by the Association of German Professional Psychologists published on 1 April 1986.

These ethical principles came into effect on 25 April 1999.