

CHAPTER 1

A Code of Ethics for Psychology

How Did We Get Here?

In a field so complex, where individual and social values are yet but ill defined, the desire to play fairly must be given direction and consistency by some rules of the game. These rules should do much more than help the unethical psychologist keep out of trouble; they should be of palpable aid to the ethical psychologist in making daily decisions.

—Hobbs (1948, p. 81)

Beginnings

The American Psychological Association (APA) has had more than five decades of experience constructing and revising an ethics code that strives to reflect both the aspirations and practical aspects of ethical decisions made by members of the profession. The creation and each subsequent revision of the APA Ethics Code has been driven by the desire for standards that would encourage the highest endeavors of psychologists, ensure public welfare, promote sound relationships with allied professions, and promote the professional standing of the discipline (Hobbs, 1948).

Discussions within APA regarding the need for an ethics code in psychology arose in response to an increase in professional activity and public visibility of its members before and after World War II. During this period, the societal value of the still young discipline of psychology was evidenced as psychologists developed group tests to help the armed services quickly determine the draft eligibility of young men in wartime and provided mental health services to hospitalized soldiers when they returned home. In 1947, the first APA Committee on Ethical Standards for Psychologists was appointed. The committee, chaired by Edward Tolman,

wanted to create a code of ethics for psychologists that would be more than a document with an imposing title (Hobbs, 1948). The members were committed to producing professional standards that would provide psychologists with a set of values and practical techniques for identifying and resolving moral problems.

To achieve these goals, the committee decided to draw on the knowledge of the field to create a process of developing a code that would “be effective in modifying human behavior” (Hobbs, 1948, p. 82). According to Hobbs, “This is an old and familiar task to psychologists, their very stock in trade, in fact. The only difference here is that human behavior means specifically the behavior of psychologists” (p. 82). Drawing on the knowledge of group processes during that period, the committee conceived the task of developing ethical standards as one of group dynamics (Hobbs, 1948). The process chosen was the critical incident method (Flanagan, 1954), a technique that involved asking the members of the APA to describe a situation they knew of firsthand, in which a psychologist made a decision having ethical implications, and to indicate the ethical issues involved.

A second committee, chaired by Nicholas Hobbs, reviewed more than 1,000 such incidents submitted by APA members. The committee identified major ethical themes emerging from the incidents that focused on psychologists’ relationships with and responsibilities to others, including patients, students, research participants, and other professionals. Many of the incidents reflected the political climate of the postwar period, including confrontations between academic freedom and McCarthyism and dilemmas faced by psychologists working in industry asked to design tests for the purpose of maintaining racial segregation in the workforce. As different segments of the code were created, drafts were submitted to the membership for critique and revision. A final draft was adopted by the APA in 1952 and published in 1953.

Revisions Preceding the 2010 Ethics Code

At the time of the adoption of the first Ethics Code, continual review and revision based on the experience and perspectives of members was seen as integral to maintaining the value of the Ethics Code for both the profession and the public (Adkins, 1952). As a result, the Ethics Code of the APA has undergone eleven revisions since 1953. The 1953 version was more than 170 pages long and included case examples illustrating each ethical standard. The standards themselves were written broadly, using aspirational rather than narrow legalistic language. Subsequent revisions eliminated the cases from the text itself and moved toward more specific language.

From the beginning of its more than 50-year history, each revision of the APA’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct has been guided by the following objectives (Hobbs, 1948):

- To express the best ethical practices in the field as judged by a large representative sample of members of the APA
- To reflect an explicit value system as well as clearly articulated decisional and behavioral rules

- To be applicable to the full range of activities and role relationships encountered in the work of psychologists
- To have the broadest possible participation among psychologists in its development and revisions
- To influence the ethical conduct of psychologists by meriting widespread identification and acceptance among members of the discipline

Aspirational Principles and Enforceable Standards

At its heart, an ethics code should reflect the moral principles underlying the values of the profession. For most professions, ethical behaviors are generally those that fulfill the fundamental moral obligations to do good, to do no harm, to respect others, and to treat all individuals honestly and fairly. For some, statements of general principles are sufficient to guide the ethical behavior of persons devoted to the ideals of their profession. For others, however, statements describing specific types of behaviors that meet these ideals are necessary to maximize the code's utility and to provide a means of evaluating its efficacy (Schur, 1982).

The form in which ethical guidelines are written will determine whether an ethics code is an aspirational or enforceable document. Although all codes should have a foundation in moral principles, the document can take one of three forms. An aspirational code is composed of statements of broadly worded ideals and principles that do not attempt to define with any precision right and wrong behaviors. An educational code combines ethical principles with more explicit interpretations that can help individual professionals make informed decisions in morally ambiguous contexts. An enforceable code includes a set of standards that specifically describes behaviors required and proscribed by the profession and is designed to serve as a basis for adjudicating grievances (Frankel, 1996).

The original APA Ethics Code, and seven revisions that followed up to 1990, gradually combined statements of aspirational principles with general guidelines and enforceable standards for ethical behavior. During this period the increasing legalistic reaction of consumers and psychologists involved in charges of ethical violations by psychologists raised concerns about the fairness of subjective interpretations of such broadly worded principles and standards. Moreover, a rise in the number of appeals to decisions made by the APA Ethics Committee and regulatory bodies (e.g., state licensing boards) that relied on the APA Ethics Code for their disciplinary procedures suggested that adjudicatory decisions based on this type of format would be increasingly difficult to enforce and thus a disservice to the APA membership (Bersoff, 1994). Accordingly, to strengthen both the enforceability and credibility of APA ethical guidelines, crafters of the 1992 APA Ethics Code separated the enforceable standards from the aspirational principles to make the standards simple, behaviorally focused, and representative of unitary concepts (Canter, Bennett, Jones, & Nagy, 1994).

During the revision process leading to the 1992 Ethics Code, some psychologists argued that adjudication based on specific ethical standards rather than general principles would diminish the moral foundation on which the APA Ethics

Committee charged with adjudicating ethics complaints could base its decisions. Others supported the move toward separate enforceable standards, arguing that in practice, limiting the standards to legally and procedurally unenforceable wording would dilute the ethical goals intended by the foundational principles (Fisher & Younggren, 1997).

The 1992 Ethics Code represented a radical change from its predecessors in both structure and content. For the first time, clear distinctions were made between aspirational principles that articulated foundational values of the discipline and specific decision rules articulated in 180 distinct ethical standards that would be subject to enforcement by the APA, other organizations, and licensing boards that adopted them (Canter, Bennett, Jones, & Nagy, 1994).

The Process of Developing the 2002 Ethics Code

Since its inception in 1953, each revision of the APA Ethics Code has been driven by the evolving roles and responsibilities of psychologists within a constantly changing sociocultural, economic, political, and legal landscape. As discussed later in this chapter, with two exceptions, the 2010 Ethics Code is identical to the version adopted by the APA in 2002. Major trends influencing revisions leading to the 2002 Ethics Code included (a) the growth and influence of health maintenance organizations (HMOs) on the provision of health services, (b) the advent of Internet-mediated research and practice and the use of other electronic media, (c) greater sensitivity to the needs of culturally and language-diverse populations in research and practice, (d) increasing participation of psychologists in the legal system, and (e) the sea change from paternalistic to autonomy-based public attitudes and federal regulations affecting industries, organizations, health care, research, and educational institutions.

In 1996, the APA Ethics Committee appointed the Ethics Code Task Force (ECTF), a 14-member committee whose membership reflected the scientific, educational, professional, gender, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the discipline. Over the 5-year period, members included Celia B. Fisher (Chair), Peter Appleby, Bruce Bennett, Laura Brown, Linda F. Campbell, Nabil ElGhoroury, Dennis J. Grill, Jessica Henderson Daniel, Samuel J. Knapp, Gerald P. Koocher, Marcia Moody, Peter E. Nathan, Thomas D. Oakland, Mary H. Quigley, Julia M. RamosGrenier, Abigail Sivan, Steven N. Sparta, Elizabeth Swenson, Melba J. T. Vasquez, and Brian Wilcox.

The Purpose of an Ethics Code

The mission of the task force was to develop and implement a plan for revision of the 1992 Ethics Code. In its deliberations, the ECTF considered the importance of both the purpose and process of ethics code development, recognizing that such consideration would determine the content and format of the code and, ultimately, whether psychologists would support it.

The many goals identified by the ECTF to guide the Ethics Code revision process included the professional, educational, public, and enforcement values of a code of ethics. These values guided decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion of ethical requirements and prohibitions and the language used to craft the General Principles and Ethical Standards.

Establishing the Integrity of a Profession

One purpose of an ethics code is to help establish and maintain the viability of a profession. An ethics code reflects a collective decision that a profession is better off when ethical standards are not based solely on individual assessments of what is or what is not morally acceptable. Adoption of a set of core values that reflect consensus among members of a discipline distinguishes psychology as a “community of common purpose” and enhances public confidence in individuals who have been trained to meet the profession’s ethical standards (Callahan, 1982; Frankel, 1996; Seitz & O’Neill, 1996). Acceptance of an identified set of core values by individual psychologists across the broad spectrum of psychological activities also helps protect the integrity of the profession by focusing the attention of individual psychologists on their responsibilities and duties to others and expectations that all members of the profession have a stake in behaving by the rules.

A core value of the discipline of psychology, as articulated in the Preamble of the current Ethics Code, is the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom psychologists work.

Education and Professional Socialization

A second purpose of an ethics code is its professional socialization function. A document reflecting the profession’s values and standards provides a guide to what psychologists should reasonably expect of themselves and one another. A code can be conceived as an enabling document that acts as a support and guide to individual psychologists in their efforts to resolve ethical dilemmas (Frankel, 1996; Sinclair, Poizner, Gilmour-Barrett, & Randall, 1987). A code of ethics also serves to deter psychologists from engaging in unethical conduct before a problem develops by specifically proscribing what the profession has identified as unethical behaviors (Fisher & Younggren, 1997). In addition, it assists faculty and supervisors in communicating the values of the profession to graduate students and to new Ph.D.s with limited professional experience.

Public Trust

A third purpose of an ethics code is to gain public trust by demonstrating that psychologists are members of a responsible and substantial profession with high standards. A code can serve a public relations value by being seen as a contract with society to act in consumers’ best interest. A professional ethics code also provides standards against which the public can hold psychologists accountable. It thus

offers a means by which members of the public can draw on norms prescribed by the profession itself to evaluate the conduct of scientists, educators, consultants, and practitioners with whom they interact.

Enforcement Value

A profession that demonstrates it can monitor itself is less vulnerable to external regulation. A fourth purpose of an ethics code is to provide a clear statement of the types of behaviors considered ethical violations to guide psychologists in avoiding such behaviors, to assist consumers in making ethical complaints, and to ensure that such complaints can be adjudicated clearly and fairly by the APA and other organizations (Fisher & Younggren, 1997). The APA Ethics Code also serves as a guide for licensing boards, courts, and other institutions for the evaluation of the responsible conduct of psychology and is thus a means of avoiding capricious standards set by nonpsychologists. The Ethics Code can also help psychologists defend their decisions to courts, institutions, or government agencies that would encourage them to go against the values of the profession.

The Revision Process and Approval of the 2002 Ethics Code

The ECTF was committed to an open and collaborative revision process that would be guided by the objectives articulated by the first ethics code committee (Hobbs, 1948).

In response to the continually evolving legal landscape of ethics adjudication and federal regulation of science and health practices, the ECTF also concluded that although law should not dictate the content of the ethics code, sensitivity to law would protect the integrity of the document as a useful tool for the everyday ethical decisions of psychologists. The 2002 Ethics Code revision process involved the following:

- Collecting from psychologists engaged in a broad spectrum of scientific and professional activities critical incidents describing ethical challenges they had encountered, actual or ideal ethical approaches to these challenges, and the extent to which the existing 1992 Ethics Code could be applied to these challenges
- Establishing an open call for and review of comments from the membership, graduate students, state psychological associations, licensing boards, and the public on the adequacy of the 1992 Ethics Code and on the content and format of each of seven drafts produced by the ECTF
- Opening ECTF meetings to observers from different APA constituencies so as to benefit from their insights and perspectives
- Ongoing legal review by APA General Counsel and outside defense, plaintiff, Federal Trade Commission, and federal regulatory attorneys

- Ongoing feedback from consumers, students, APA divisions and committees, the APA Ethics Committee, the APA Board of Directors, and the APA Council of Representatives

After reviewing more than 1,300 comments and feedback on seven drafts, in August 2002, the APA Council of Representatives voted unanimously to adopt the final revision as the new Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (APA, 2002b).

The 2010 Amendments: The Controversy Over Psychologists' Involvement in Inhumane Military Interrogations

The APA has taken a strong historical stance against psychologists' involvement in torture (American Psychiatric Association & APA, 1985; APA Council of Representatives, 1986; APA Presidential Task Force, 2005). In 2006, the APA Council of Representatives unequivocally prohibited participation of its members in torture and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment and included a nonexhaustive list of 19 specifically barred interrogation techniques, including mock executions, water boarding, sexual humiliation, and exploitation of phobias or psychopathology (APA Council of Representatives, 2006). The Council's statement also noted, "It is consistent with the APA Ethics Code for psychologists to serve in consultative roles to interrogation and information-gathering processes for national security-related purposes."

However, congressional investigation into the alleged role of psychologists in developing harsh interrogation programs for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA; Steele & Morlin, 2007) raised serious questions as to whether a consultative role can be morally distinguished from involvement in torture if the tactic is used in the psychologist's presence or with the psychologist's awareness, or is based on techniques the psychologist has developed for the purpose of interrogation. While there was little disagreement that military psychologists were highly qualified to assess detainees' mental health during or following harsh interrogations or that at the time the executive branch had determined that such interrogations were lawful, some forcefully argued that any psychological activity conducted in a setting in which prisoners are not afforded basic human rights—such as the right to an attorney, habeas corpus, and against self-incrimination—is unethical (Olson, Soldz, & Davis, 2008).

This controversy extended to the wording of Standard 1.02, Conflicts Between Ethics and Law Regulations, or Other Governing Legal Authority, and Standard 1.03, Conflicts Between Ethics and Organizational Demands. Some argued that the language in these standards could be interpreted as permitting psychologists to be associated with violations of human rights if conflicts between the Ethics Code and laws or organizational policies could not be resolved. On June 1, 2010, the APA voted to amend the language of these two standards to make clear that when there is a conflict between ethics and law or between ethics and organizational demands, psychologists are prohibited from "engaging in activities that would justify or defend violating human rights" (APA, 2010a, 2010c).

Format and Distinctive Features of the APA Ethics Code

Why Does the Ethics Code Separate General Principles From Enforceable Standards?

The General Principles provide a conceptual framework that expresses the aspirational values of the common community of psychologists, and the behavioral rules articulated in the standards flow from these principles. They impart core moral values reflecting the highest ideals of the profession: promoting the welfare and protecting the rights of others, doing no harm, and acting faithfully and responsibly with integrity and fairness. The principles themselves are not enforceable but represent the ideals shaping the enforceable standards.

The 151 standards differ from the principles in that by using behaviorally specific language they can be enforced by the APA Ethics Committee and other state or professional organizations that adopt the Code. The explicitly stated ethical conduct in these standards provide APA members with sufficient due notice of the ethical behaviors required and prohibited by the APA, lend support to members' ability to defend their ethical actions, and increase the APA's success in sustaining decisions by the APA Ethics Committee in court, thus strengthening both the enforceability and credibility of APA's ethical oversight procedures.

General and Area-Specific Standards

The Ethics Code includes six general standard sections that apply to all psychological activities: (1) Resolving Ethical Issues, (2) Competence, (3) Human Relations, (4) Privacy and Confidentiality, (5) Advertising and Other Public Statements, and (6) Record Keeping and Fees. These standards are worded broadly to apply to the broad range of scientific and professional work performed by psychologists. There are four additional sections reflecting specialized activities of psychologists: (1) Education and Training, (2) Research and Publication, (3) Assessment, and (4) Therapy.

Are Standards Relevant to Teaching, Research, Assessment, and Therapy Restricted to Their Specific Sections in the Code?

No! Standards within the first six general sections apply to *all* psychological activities.

Where Are Standards That Apply to Activities in Forensic Psychology?

Forensic psychologists engage in a wide range of activities, including assessment, treatment, teaching, research, consultation, and public statements. In these activities,

they must conform to the relevant general and area specific standard sections throughout the Ethics Code. Forensic or court-related work activities are explicitly mentioned in Standards 2.01f, Boundaries of Competence; 3.05c, Multiple Relationships; 3.10c, Informed Consent; 9.01a, Bases for Assessments; 9.03c, Informed Consent in Assessments; 9.04b, Release of Test Data; 9.10, Explaining Assessment Results; 9.11, Maintaining Test Security; and 10.02b, Therapy Involving Couples or Families.

The forensic icons and case illustrations throughout this book are meant to assist in quickly identifying standards applicable to forensic work. Hot Topics at the end of Chapters 8 and 12 provide in-depth analysis of the relevance of Ethics Code standards to testimony given by psychologists in legal settings. Case 1 in Appendix B provides readers with an opportunity to examine the relevance of the human rights language in Standard 1.02, Conflicts Between Ethics and Law, Regulations, and Other Governing Legal Authority, to forensic assessment of intellectual disability in death penalty cases.

Where Are Standards That Apply to Work With and Within Organizations?

Psychologists working in industry, consulting, or delivering services to other organizations should refer to Standard 3.11, Psychological Services Delivered To or Through Organizations. This standard lists the information that must be provided to organizational clients beforehand and, when appropriate, to those directly affected by the organizational services psychologists provide (i.e., employees). Other standards that explicitly refer to work for or within organizations include Standards 1.03, Conflicts Between Ethics and Organizational Demands; 3.07, Third Party Requests for Services; 5.01, Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements; 8.05, Dispensing With Informed Consent for Research; and 9.03, Informed Consent in Assessments. As with other areas of specialization, the broadly worded enforceable standards are relevant to and should be carefully read by consulting, organizational, and industrial psychologists. The industrial–organizational icons and case illustrations throughout this book are meant to assist in quickly identifying standards applicable to organizational settings.

Where Are Standards That Apply to Psychologists' Involvement With Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs)?

Psychologists' involvement with HMOs is addressed in standards throughout the Ethics Code. The implications of HMOs to standards on record keeping and fees are discussed in Chapter 9 of this book, followed by a Hot Topic devoted to the application of the Ethics Code to billing and contractual arrangements with HMOs, "Managing the Ethics of Managed Care." Involvement with HMOs is also relevant to

standards on privacy and confidentiality (Standards 1.03, Conflicts Between Ethics and Organizational Demands; and 3.07, Third Party Requests for Services) and standards on informed consent (Standards 3.10, Informed Consent; 8.02, Informed Consent to Research; 9.03, Informed Consent in Assessments; and 10.01, Informed Consent to Therapy). The HMO icons and case illustrations throughout this book are meant to assist in quickly identifying standards applicable to work involving HMOs.

Are the Standards Relevant to Psychologists Working in the Military, Law Enforcement, and Correctional Facilities?

Military and correctional psychologists engage in a range of psychological activities, including treatment, assessment, research, and consultation, and sometimes face ethical challenges associated with the dual roles of officer and psychologist (Standard 3.05, Multiple Relationships). As with other contexts in which psychologists work, the broadly worded enforceable standards are relevant to and should be carefully read by psychologists in the military and other areas of public service. The military/correctional psychology icons throughout this book are meant to assist in quickly identifying standards and case examples applicable to these contexts. The value of self-care for military as well as other psychologists is discussed in Hot Topic “The Ethical Component of Self-Care” in Chapter 3.

Is Sufficient Attention Given to Responsibilities of Administrators of Psychology Programs and Psychology Faculty?

The Ethics Code devotes a separate section for standards designed to highlight responsibilities of university administrators and faculty and to strengthen protections for students. Relevant standards include 7.02, Descriptions of Education and Training Programs; 7.04, Student Disclosure of Personal Information; 7.05a and b, Mandatory Individual or Group Therapy; 7.07, Sexual Relationships With Students and Supervisees; and 8.12c, Publication Credit. The relevance of enforceable standards to supervision and training is also covered in a Hot Topic, “Ethical Supervision of Trainees,” in Chapter 10 and Case 7, “Handling Disparate Information for Evaluating Trainees,” in Appendix B.

Does the Ethics Code Specifically Address Internet and Other Electronically Mediated Research and Services?

The past two decades have witnessed an expansion in psychology’s evolving use of the Internet and other electronic media for behavioral telehealth, psychological

assessment, consulting, video conferencing, public statements, and research. Throughout each section of the code, the broadly worded enforceable standards are applicable to these activities and do not require specific reference to the medium in which research or services are conducted. Use of the Internet and other electronically mediated forms relevant to research or services is explicitly mentioned in four standards: 3.10a, Informed Consent; 4.02c, Discussing the Limits of Confidentiality; 5.01a, Avoidance of False or Deceptive Statements; and 5.04, Media Presentations. To quickly locate discussions in this book on how other standards should be applied to work using electronic media, readers can look for the electronic media icon in chapters on the enforceable standards. Readers may also refer to Case 5, “Web-based Advertising for a Community Program Development and Evaluation Consulting Service” in Appendix B of this book.

Informed Consent for Research, Assessment, and Therapy

Informed consent is seen by many as the primary means of ensuring the rights and welfare of those with whom psychologists work. Informed consent is designed to ensure that research participants and clients/patients are provided with sufficient information to rationally and voluntarily decide whether they wish to participate in research or to receive psychological services. The general standard on informed consent provides direction on the nature of information that must be included in all informed consent procedures and steps that must be taken to protect the rights of children and adults with cognitive impairments who are legally unable to provide consent (Standard 3.10, Informed Consent). The Hot Topic in Chapter 6 of this book examines specific applications of informed consent standards to adults with impaired decisional capacity. Additional standards lay out information required for basic and intervention research; psychological assessments relevant to mental health, forensic, and employment contexts; and individual and multiperson therapies, as well as additional consent safeguards for therapies for which generally recognized techniques and procedures have not been established (Standards 8.02, Informed Consent to Research; 8.03, Informed Consent for Recording Voices and Images in Research; 9.03, Informed Consent in Assessments; 10.01, Informed Consent to Therapy; 10.02, Therapy Involving Couples or Families; and 10.03, Group Therapy).

Dispensing With Informed Consent

There are some instances in which informed consent is not necessary or not feasible as a means of protecting the rights and welfare of those with whom psychologists work. The Ethics Code provides specific descriptions of situations in which the requirement for informed consent may be waived and the additional steps needed to ensure individuals are treated with respect and concern for their welfare. These standards reflect enhanced sensitivity to naturalistic, neuropsychological, forensic, school, and industrial–organizational contexts in which psychologists provide services, conduct

research, or administer assessments, including anonymous research surveys, assessments to determine decisional capacity, emergency treatment, and assessment or treatment mandated by law (Standards 3.10a, Informed Consent; 8.05, Dispensing With Informed Consent for Research; 9.03a, Informed Consent in Assessments; and 10.01, Informed Consent to Therapy).

Are There Ethical Standards Specific to Issues of Individual and Cultural Diversity?

Principal D, Justice, and Principal E, Respect for People's Rights and Dignity, are reflected in enforceable standards designed to ensure the fair treatment of all individuals and groups regardless of age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status. Psychologists must obtain the necessary competencies to work effectively with diverse populations and are prohibited from engaging in unfair discrimination or harassment based on any of these characteristics (Standards 2.01b, Competence; 3.01, Unfair Discrimination; 3.02, Sexual Harassment; 3.03, Other Harassment). They must provide informed consent information and administer assessments appropriate to an individual's language competence and use assessment techniques whose validity and reliability have been established with members of the population tested (Standards 3.10, Informed Consent; 9.02, Use of Assessments). The diversity icon helps readers locate discussions in this book on how other standards should be applied to individual and group differences. These issues are also covered in a Hot Topic, "Multicultural Ethical Competence," in Chapter 5 and Case 2, "Cultural Values and Competent Health Services to Minors," in Appendix B.

What Is the Distinction Between the APA Ethics Code and Specific APA Guidelines?

The Introduction and Applicability section of the Ethics Code recommends that members refer to guidelines adopted or endorsed by scientific and professional psychological organizations as materials that may be useful in applying the Ethics Code to everyday activities. Specific APA guidelines to which psychologists may refer are not listed in the current Code. The reason for this decision was that APA guidelines are frequently revised or become outdated, and in some instances, older guidelines are inconsistent with standards in the current Ethics Code and prevailing psychological science and practice. Professional and scientific guidelines are essential to ethical practice. As indicated earlier, the language of the Ethics Code is intentionally broad to be as applicable as possible to the wide range of activities that psychologists perform. Guidelines help psychologists place the standards in the context of their field of expertise. Guidelines will be cited throughout this book to illustrate best ethical practices in a given area.

Under the Ethics Code, Are Psychologists Obligated to Report Ethics Code Violations of Others?

When psychologists learn about a potential violation by another psychologist, they must attempt to resolve it informally by bringing it to the attention of the other psychologist if a resolution appears appropriate and the confidentiality rights of a research participant, client/patient, organizational client, or others are not violated (Standard 1.04, Informal Resolution of Ethical Violations). However, Standard 1.05, Reporting Ethical Violations, requires psychologists to formally report an ethical violation if it has or is likely to result in substantial harm, informal resolution is not appropriate, and the reporting would not violate confidentiality rights. This standard does not apply to psychologists retained to review another psychologist's ethical conduct.

The integrity of the APA adjudication of ethics complaints is jeopardized when psychologists make "frivolous" complaints, and Standard 1.07, Improper Complaints, prohibits filing an ethics complaint with reckless disregard for or willful ignorance of facts that would disprove the allegation. The Ethics Code also prohibits psychologists from penalizing persons based solely on their having made or been the subject of an ethics complaint (Standard 1.08, Unfair Discrimination Against Complainants and Respondents). This standard is often relevant to situations that arise in whistle blowing, discrimination, and sexual harassment cases.