



College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario  
Ordre des ergothérapeutes de l'Ontario

# CODE *of* ETHICS

## COMMITMENT TO *GOOD* PRACTICE

*The most fundamental reference points by which ethical practice is guided and judged and to which a profession aspires.*



## WHY A CODE OF ETHICS?

**A Code of Ethics outlines a set of values and principles.** This Code of Ethics provides Registrants with information about the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario's (the College's) expectations for ethical practice.

The Code of Ethics is intended for use in all contexts and domains of occupational therapy practice, and in all levels of decision making. It outlines the values occupational therapists promote as members of a self-regulating profession and it can be used to help clients, colleagues and members of the public understand our ethical commitments. As a critical component of the College's Complaints, Discipline and Quality Assurance Programs, the Code of Ethics provides information that is crucial to all Registrants.

**Ethical practice defines what is *good* – which means, what is *right*.**

The College expects all practitioners to commit to good practice. This commitment requires occupational therapists to consciously consider what is right in furthering the interests of our clients and what is right in protecting the public interest.

The ***Code of Ethics—Commitment to Good Practice*** forms the foundation for occupational therapists' ethical obligations. It is the framework for the professional and personal conduct expectations outlined in the laws, regulations, College standards and guidelines that govern the practice of occupational therapy. The Code of Ethics articulates the fundamental reference points that guide ethical practice and to which the profession aspires.

## FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

Values are the ethical building blocks of human behaviour and interaction. They are at the heart of all our everyday exchanges, and shape how we relate to and perceive others.

Occupational therapists are in a position of duty and authority. They have a duty to the individuals who rely on their knowledge, skill and judgment. Occupational therapists are in a position of authority because they have access to personal and sensitive information, and provide services to people who are vulnerable. Consequently, they have a professional responsibility to uphold the College's fundamental values.

While practice can take many forms and take place in a variety of contexts, occupational therapists must always aim for the same common goal – to enable clients to engage in meaningful ways with their world.

# CORE VALUES

**Occupational therapists are guided by two fundamental values: RESPECT and TRUST.** These core values are as important as the laws, regulations, and College standards and guidelines under which occupational therapists are governed.

Our values relate to the obligations occupational therapists have as self-regulated professionals in whom the public places its respect and trust. The values of respect and trust give rise to the *principles of practice* that underpin occupational therapy practice.

## RESPECT

An occupational therapist promotes respect by applying the principles of:

- **Client-centred practice**
  - Determine what has meaning and purpose for the client;
  - Recognize that clients are diverse and that each client is an individual;
- **Respect for Autonomy**
  - Recognize each client's right to make choices for him or herself;
  - Honour the dignity and worth of each individual;
- **Collaboration and Communication**
  - Practise as a team member with clients and other professionals.

## TRUST

An occupational therapist promotes trust by applying the principles of:

- **Honesty**
  - Truthfulness is a cornerstone of trust;
- **Fairness**
  - Practise justice and equity in dealings with others;
- **Accountability**
  - Take responsibility for decisions, actions, professional competence and judgement;
- **Transparency**
  - Full disclosure ensures integrity in relationships with clients, other professionals and society at large.

*The above lists of principles are neither definitive nor exhaustive. Additional principles may be needed in specific situations such as a pandemic or other emergency.*

## REGULATING PRACTICE

The Code of Ethics helps guide the College's judgement about the Registrant's conduct if a client files a complaint about the practice of an occupational therapist.

The College also considers the laws, regulations and its standards and guidelines to define the expectations of occupational therapists. In a situation in which these documents do not explicitly address a concern or complaint, the College would turn to the fundamental values and principles of practice for guidance on how to respond.

## REFLECTING ON PRACTICE

Unexpected ethical issues can arise at any time. Therefore, it is imperative that all occupational therapists be aware of the core values and uphold them by applying the principles of practice in their everyday work. When an ethical issue is difficult to resolve, an occupational therapist should consult with colleagues and relevant resources, such as the College, managers or leaders.

Occupational therapists need to reflect on what these ethical expectations mean day-to-day, and their commitment to *good* practice. Reflective practice is essential to ensuring occupational therapists preserve and promote the respect and trust required to achieve the common goal of enabling individuals to engage in meaningful ways in his or her life.

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