

## Code of ethics and professional practice for Gestalt Practitioners in Organizations

### Introduction

This is the first edition of a Code of Ethics and Professional Practice for Gestalt Practitioners in Organizations (GPO) of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy. The purpose of this code is twofold: firstly, to define general values and principles and to establish standards of professional conduct for GPO's, and, secondly, to inform and protect those members of the public who seek their services.

Gestalt Practitioners are responsible for the observation of the principles inherent in the GPO Code of Ethics and the Professional Practice and are to use this code as the basis of good practice rather than a set of minimal requirements. These codes are designed to be beneficial not only for the protection of clients, but are also meant to protect the practitioner by establishing standards of conduct that clarify the boundaries of practice and accountability in the work setting.

The general aim of the GPO's work is to enable the client and/ or the team to increase his/its competences (training), to reach his/its objectives (coaching), to take a good decision (counsel) and as a result of that, to increase his/its wellbeing within the field organizations or larger systems as well as improving the functioning of these organizations and systems as a whole.

These codes are applicable to all GPO members of the European Association for Gestalt Therapy at an international level. When a discrepancy between this code and national codes occur, the conditions of the national code take preference. This code is subject to revision in the event that it proves inadequate in the practical application as a means of establishing standards of professional conduct.

The code is divided into three sections. The first section gives some definitions and the second one states those values and principles that are inalienable rights of the individual. The third section demonstrates guidelines that honor and protect these rights.

All members of the EAGT agree to have a complaints procedure.

The EAGT Ethics Committee is responsible for maintaining an overview of the GPO code of ethics and complaints procedure for national umbrella organizations and, where relevant, national awarding organizations. The EAGT will encourage and support those countries without a GPO Code of Ethics and Complaints Procedure in their process of developing and establishing such a code that is agreeable to EAGT standards allowing for cultural diversity or field conditions (e.g. legal, political).

The EAGT will also encourage and support each national umbrella organization to establish and maintain a GPO code of ethics and complaints procedure in the event that this does not already exist.

### A. Definitions

#### GPO

A GPO is a Gestalt Practitioner in Organizations with recognized experience and specialized skills in applying the Gestalt approach while working as a manager, leader, coach, consultant or trainer in organizations

### Professional relationship

A professional relationship exists when the relationship is based on or includes a business agreement or contract that defines the responsibilities of each party. This contract may be explicit, written or verbal. Particular caution should be taken with verbal agreements.

### **Client and assigner or sponsor**

In order to clarify roles in the professional relationship, it is often necessary to distinguish between a client and the assigner or sponsor. In most cases, the client and assigner or sponsor are the same person and therefore jointly referred to as the client or client system. For purposes of identification, however, we define these roles as follows:

- **Client:** The "client" is the person(s) being managed, coached, consulted or trained.
- **Assigner or Sponsor:** The entity (including its representatives) paying for and/or arranging for the services to be provided.

In all cases, engagement contracts or agreements should clearly establish the rights, roles, and responsibilities for both the client and assigner or sponsor if they are not the same persons and as a consequence of this, there should be total clarity concerning the figural unit of work; which can be: person or persons/team/organisation. Where possible, these contracts/agreements should be explicit and in writing

## **B. Code of ethics**

1. A GPO treats people with respect and dignity regardless of the differences in role or status
2. Respect for the uniqueness, worth and dignity of the individual
3. Appreciation and valuing of diversity of race, extraction, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity or preference, handicap, age, religion, language, social or economic status and of the need for spirituality.
4. Recognition of the importance of autonomy and self-regulation of the individual in the context of the organization and other interpersonal relationships.

## **C. Code of professional practice**

1. Advertising and publications
  - 1.1. The GPO will not knowingly make any public statement that is untrue or misleading about what he/she offers or make false claims in any written documents relating to the profession or his/her credentials and/or areas of competence and expertise.
2. Competence
  - 2.1. The GPO will only undertake those tasks where he/she knows, or should know that he/she has the necessary competence to address these tasks and bring them to a completion that is beneficial to the client or client system.
  - 2.2. During the working process, the GPO, upon discovering the limits of his/her competence, will either refer the client to another professional or will establish collaboration with another professional/other professionals. If this is not possible, he will refuse to continue the contract.
  - 2.3. A GPO will not apply therapy to his client, unless, he is also a qualified Gestalt therapist and this change is clearly agreed upon by both client and the assigner.
  - 2.4. The first step during this process is the renegotiation of the original contract with the client. Continuing with the client means taking the necessary action to improve competence. Such action can be:
    - 2.4.1. The GPO examines carefully whether his/her competence can be applied in the field in which the work is to take place fully to the benefit of the client. If the GPO determines that the organizational field, its structure, boundaries and the aims that dominate that field to be in any way contradictory or too restrictive to/for the unfolding of the competence that is necessary to further the client's process, he/she abstains from any further working project undertaken in this field.
    - 2.4.2. The GPO seeks support and clarification of his/her difficulty regarding a problematic situation in an intermission context with experienced colleagues.
    - 2.4.3. The GPO has regular supervision to clarify its stakes in his interventions and to support his integrity.
    - 2.4.4. The GPO establishes and maintains relationships with its professional networks
  - 2.5. The GPO prevents all activities like conferences, interviews in the public media, seminars etc. that might contradict his ethics.

- 2.6. The methodological and technical approach in the process of work must serve the aims and developmental requirements of the client (system) agreed upon in the contracting.
  - 2.7. In an educative process lasting a whole professional life, the GPO takes care to enlarge and deepen his/her professional and personal competence. The GPO is open to important developments that affect this process, whether in the field of Gestalt theory and practice or in other fields or schools of organizational research and practice, with regard to the benefit of the clients.
  - 2.8. The GPO maintains careful documentation of his/her work with the client and observes the national prescriptions for the duration of document preservation and the security measure demanded.
3. The client – practitioner (C/P) relationship
    - 3.1. The C/P relationship is a professional relationship within which respect for the welfare of the client and the organization is the practitioners primary concern.
    - 3.2. GPO's recognize the importance of the relationship for effective results and are aware of the power and influence and the issues of dependency inherent in this situation. The GPO will act in a manner consistent with this recognition and not exploit or abuse clients in whatever way for his/her own personal advantage, or the advantage of any other person or institution.
    - 3.3. GPO's check that other relationships or external commitments do not conflict with the interests of the client. When such a conflict of interests exists, it is the responsibility of the GPO to bring it openly into the relationship with the client and the assigner or sponsor and take necessary action to resolve the issue.
    - 3.4. GPO's make sure that pre-existing relationships, such as employee, close friend, relative, neighbor or partner do not interfere with present activities.
4. Confidentiality
    - 4.1. All exchanges between the GPO and client are regarded as confidential.
    - 4.2. In case the client is another person then the assigner or sponsor, clear agreements must be made regarding exchanging information about the client and the process with the assigner or sponsor.
    - 4.3. The storing of clients' personal data, including case notes, is subjected to the relevant national legal and professional regulations.
    - 4.4. The GPO takes care that personally identifiable information is not transmitted through overlapping networks of confidential relationships, such as supervision, email exchanges, conferences and articles.
    - 4.5. When a GPO wishes to use specific information gained during work with a client or client system, the client's and assigner's permission will be obtained and this can only be done if obtaining this permission is not harmful to either one of them and strict anonymity is preserved around names, data, etc.
    - 4.6. When a GPO wishes to use specific case material for case studies, reports or publications, he/she obtains the client's and assigner's informed consent wherever possible and must effectively protect clients' anonymity.
    - 4.7. Video, photo and tape recordings or film will require the permission of the client or his/her legal representative's written permission, as well as the permission of the assigner or sponsor.
    - 4.8. The GPO will act according the laws of his country regarding the protection of personal data.
    - 4.9. The GPO has to respect its legal obligations to report or certificate in court, after informing clients.
    - 4.10. In case, the GPO has reasonable doubt or worry about the safety of the client and/or his/her environment, it may substantiate his/her decision to break the rule on confidentiality and to inform those officials or professionals, who are able to intervene and prevent the assumed danger or risk. The GPO must inform the client about this his/her decision.
5. Contracting with Client
    - 5.1. Any contract made between a GPO and a client, assigner or sponsor is binding for both parties whether it is written or verbal.
    - 5.2. Contracts with clients, assigners or sponsors whether written or verbal, are explicit regarding fees, payment schedule, location, breaks and cancellation of activities by client or GPO.
    - 5.3. Any changes that occur in the above mentioned conditions will require the re-negotiation of the original contract.
6. Safety
    - 6.1. The GPO will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client suffers neither physical nor psychological harm during his/her interventions or as a result of his/her interventions.

- 6.2. The GPO is required to ensure that his/her professional work is adequately covered by appropriate indemnity insurance (when this is available in the country).
7. Management of the GPO's Role in Society
- 7.1. Research. The GPO is open to cooperate with and to contribute to research work that is instrumental to further development in professional work and makes his/her own research work accessible to the GPO community. In all these cases respect for confidentiality and client interest is paramount.
- 7.2. In his/her own research work, the GPO observes the rules that respect his/her colleagues' work; and the copyrights of all professional material will be observed.
- 7.3. The GPO respects, also in public, the work of other colleagues and abstains from disqualifying remarks about other theoretical models, schools or colleagues in different professional roles.
- 7.4. Political aspects of organizational work. The GPO is aware of the social and political implications of his/her work and the social and political aspects influencing the contexts of their clients or client systems, organizations.
- 7.5. In cases where conditions are breached GPO's should consider reporting breaches to the ethical committee for further advice.
8. Training and educating Gestalt in organizations.
- 8.1. The task of education is to inform those in learning of the theoretical, methodological and technical developments of organizational work in general and the Gestalt approach in particular, in an objective and comprehensible manner. Personal views of teachers are to be declared as such. No false expectations are to be awakened especially as far as official recognition of the education concerned by the national authorities and laws.
- 8.2. Gestalt Training Institutes will verify the qualifications, expectations and psycho-physical suitability of candidates and furnish clear and complete information related to the curricula and internal regulations.
- 8.3. Gestalt Training Institutes will guarantee the quality of the education both with regard to the specific competence of those teaching and supervising and to the coherence of the curricula. They provide internal control for the verification of the quality of the education and furnish space and place of updating and comparison of teaching methodology.
- 8.4. The GPO should not teach in an institute not respecting the ethics of GPO
- 8.5. Gestalt training Institutes will periodically verify whether a student has attained a satisfactory level of training for being certified as GPO in the future and provide suitable and transparent structures to so do.
- 8.6. Gestalt Training Institutes control and secure adequate personal, didactic, clinical and scientific standards in their training staff.
9. Conflicts of interest
- 9.1. If the GPO finds himself/herself in conflict between different or several ethical positions and requirements and cannot solve this conflict himself/herself or with the help of intervention and supervision, he/she addresses himself/herself to the ethical committee installed in his/her institute or professional association in order to get the necessary support or consultation.
- 9.2. It can be advisable to seek support/consultation from the EAGT/GPO ethical committee and to keep that committee informed.
10. Legal Proceedings
- 10.1. Any GPO who is a member of the EAGT and is convicted in a court of law for any criminal offence against a client or is the subject of a successful civil action by a client will inform the Executive committee of the EAGT.