

Consulting Police Psychologist Guidelines

Ratified by the IACP Police Psychological Services Section
Chicago, Illinois, 2011

1. Purpose

1.1 Consulting police psychologists adhere to the most current version of the American Psychological Association's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct." These principles and standards make it clear that psychologists are responsible not only to individuals but also to society at large. These specific ethical aims frequently compete when police psychologists consult with government organizations where the obligation to protect individual rights challenges the safety and welfare of others. In such circumstances, consulting police psychologists must exercise reasonable judgment to weigh the duty to protect individual rights with the need to protect the safety and welfare of others. While all psychologists must weigh these potentially competing interests, those who consult to police and public safety agencies are more frequently involved with the prevention and control of conduct recognized as threatening to life and property. They are often called upon to help resolve conflicts between individuals, between groups, or between individuals and their government. As such, they can more often be expected to confront the tension between individual and societal duties.

1.2 Although guidelines are not binding, they serve as guiding principles and provide a framework for psychologists to conduct their professional practice.¹ These guidelines are not intended to take precedence over any federal, state, or local laws.

2. Definition

2.1 Consulting police psychologists provide analysis, consultation, and assistance to police and public safety operations, supervisors, managers, groups, and other organizations for the purpose of improving group or organizational functioning and operational effectiveness. These activities include, but are not limited to, the development of performance appraisal systems; organizational development; executive consultation; management consultation; supervisor consultation; process consultation; assessment-related consultation; operations-related consultation (e.g., crisis and hostage negotiation teams); mediation; individual and cultural diversity consultation; and emergency consultation concerning the seriously mentally ill.

¹ American Psychological Association, "Determination and Documentation of the Need for Practice Guidelines," *American Psychologist* 60 (2005): 976–978.

3. Roles and Boundaries

- 3.1 Consulting police psychologists operate ethically and within the boundaries of their competence. Consulting police psychologists provide services to clients in a manner consistent with their education, training, and experience in the field of police psychology and undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence in accordance with current research, theory, and practice.
- 3.2 Consulting police psychologists may be asked to function in nontraditional roles where the client is the law enforcement agency. Consulting police psychologists strive to inform their agencies, their colleagues, and the community of consulting police psychologists' ethical responsibility to balance respect for human rights with the obligation to protect public safety.
- 3.3 Consulting police psychologists respect the basic rights of individuals who may be affected by the recommendations or services they provide and balance the risk of harm to the individual with the risk to public safety. While the agency is ultimately responsible for identifying and implementing a course of action, best practices will typically dictate that the relationship between client and consulting police psychologist is a collaboration.
- 3.4 Consulting police psychologists do not facilitate or participate in the unlawful, cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment of others. On occasion, their input may have negative consequences for others, particularly when an imminent risk of substantial harm to public safety is reasonably determined. If the demands of the agency with which psychologists are affiliated or for whom they are working are in conflict with this ethical position, psychologists clarify the nature of the conflict, make known their commitment to the APA's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct," and take reasonable steps to resolve the conflict consistent with the ethics code. Under no circumstances may this standard be used to justify or defend violating human rights.
- 3.5 Consulting police psychologists maintain competency in current standards of practice and exhibit ethical integrity. Current competence and ethical integrity should be applied to consultation, assessment, and test interpretation

4. Integrity

- 4.1 Mindful that conflicts may emerge between the ethical standards or practice guidelines of psychologists and the needs of the hiring organization, the consulting police psychologist clarifies the nature of the relationship, the nature and limitations of the services to be provided, and the intended use of the information obtained. As consultants, the final decision with respect to the use of the information provided is the prerogative and responsibility of the referring agency.

- 4.2 Consulting police psychologists exercise independent professional judgment; render objective opinions; and are sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences. Consulting police psychologists try to eliminate the effect of biases on their work, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon prejudices.
- 4.3 Consulting police psychologists are sensitive to the problems inherent in multiple relationships while recognizing that requests often involve multiple relationships that may pose complex ethical dilemmas. A consulting police psychologist refrains from entering a multiple relationship if the multiple relationship could reasonably be expected to impair the psychologist's objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing his or her functions as a psychologist, or otherwise risks exploitation or harm to the person with whom the professional relationship exists. Multiple relationships that would not reasonably be expected to cause impairment or risk exploitation or harm are not unethical.
- 4.4 If the consulting police psychologist finds that, due to unforeseen factors, a potentially harmful multiple relationship has arisen, the psychologist takes reasonable steps to resolve it with due regard for the best interests of the affected person and compliance with the APA's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct."
- 4.5 Because some situations necessitate reliance upon collateral information and preclude direct assessment, consulting police psychologists frequently rely upon third-party information (indirect assessment). When consulting police psychologists conduct indirect assessment, they identify the limitations of the reliability and validity of their opinions, regardless of the source of their data, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions and recommendations.
- 4.6 When ethical dilemmas arise, consulting police psychologists seek counsel from colleagues with knowledge and experience in police psychology.

5. Confidentiality and Privilege

- 5.1 Consulting police psychologists are aware of the laws and ethical standards pertaining to confidentiality and privilege and, whenever possible, take steps to ensure that all involved parties are likewise informed.
- 5.2 In addressing confidentiality and privilege, a police psychologist considers applicable professional and ethical standards of conduct, the law, and the risk of harm to an individual versus the risk to public safety.

6. Methods and Procedures

- 6.1 Consulting police psychologists should be competent to conduct, evaluate, and/or utilize science-based research in the practice of consulting police psychology.
- 6.2 Consulting police psychologists are familiar with relevant department procedures and pertinent local, state, and federal laws.
- 6.3 Consulting police psychologists work with other professionals, as necessary, to serve their clients effectively and appropriately.
- 6.4 Consulting police psychologists may partner with a multidisciplinary team to gather, coordinate, and assess information or share knowledge and experience with the goal of facilitating an ethical, practical, and successful outcome.