

# Insights and Considerations for Ethics (ICE)

This *Insights and Considerations for Ethics* (ICE) document has been developed as a resource to support members of the coaching profession with their assessment of and decision-making in matters of professional ethics. **The purpose of these ICE statements is to provide ICF Professionals with support around the learning and understanding of each standard in the ICF Code of Ethics, and to promote enhanced ethical awareness and discernment/critical thinking.**

It cannot and does not attempt to capture the intensity and complexity involved in the ethical decision-making process. Rather, it was developed to serve as a complementary resource to the [ICF Code of Ethics](#).

The ideas and information shared in this document have been gathered from contributions from volunteers of the ICF Ethics Community of Practice, the Ethics Water Cooler, the Independent Review Board, and other valued and informed sources. Insights and considerations in this document are intended to be reflective, responsive, and open to re-alignment within the current context of coaching.

While the ICF Code of Ethics (CoE) is reviewed and revised at intervals, the ICE is a living document subject to periodic revisiting and where appropriate, updating and supplementation. This document was developed with the goal of providing a dynamic resource representative of current and fresh thinking on the various ethical issues addressed. ICF professionals are invited to use the ICE statements along with the related standards of the CoE as resources for reflecting on their conduct, as well as to inform and promote their ethical decision-making.

If you have comments or questions regarding the ICE, please send them to [ethics@coachingfederation.org](mailto:ethics@coachingfederation.org).

## Standard 1

### Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

1. Explain and ensure that, prior to or at the initial meeting, my coaching Client(s) and Sponsor(s) understand the nature and potential value of coaching, the nature and limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement.

### Insights and Considerations for Standard 1

This standard invites the ICF professional to assume that clients or sponsors need to understand the scope of the coaching interaction. This means talking about it in a meeting prior to the beginning or at the beginning of the process. The meeting offers the opportunity to clarify expectations about the possibilities and benefits of coaching and to modify them if necessary.

The ICF Professional uses this opportunity to explain to all stakeholders (client, sponsor, and other related parties) the details of the coaching agreement/contract to be signed/agreed upon. By doing so, all stakeholders have an opportunity to ask questions and fully understand their rights and responsibilities prior to signing the coaching agreement.

The ICF Professionals might use one of the Sample Coaching Agreements in the ICF Member Toolkit (follow the link below, ensuring that you're logged into the ICF website as a member) as a base in this initial meeting if they do not have a standard agreement of their own.

Updated August 31, 2023

[Access Member Toolkit](#)

## **Standard 2**

### **Section I—Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

2. Create an agreement/contract regarding the roles, responsibilities and rights of all parties involved with my Client(s) and Sponsor(s) prior to the commencement of services.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 2**

ICF encourages having a written agreement/contract, if culturally appropriate, as best-practice that supports both the Client and the ICF Professional. A clear, comprehensive agreement/contract is important to have in place in order to clarify and confirm the professional coaching relationship. Services commence once the agreement/contract is put in place.

A contract is also an opportunity for all parties to be clear of the nature of the involvement of third parties such as Sponsors, managers/supervisors, HR personnel etc. In all cases, coaching agreements/contracts should clearly establish rights, roles, and responsibilities of all parties, i.e., the ICF Professional, the Client and/or the Sponsor (if different than the Client), as well as any other entities involved in the coaching process.

It is good practice for an ICF Professional to have a template for their coaching agreement/contract which can be modified to the needs of a particular Client/Sponsor. The ICF Professionals might use one of the Sample Coaching Agreements in the ICF Member Toolkit (follow the link below, ensuring that you're logged into the ICF website as a member) as a base for preparing their own template for coaching agreements/contracts, and ensuring that they have included all the necessary specifications in their agreement/contract. The ICF Professional needs to clearly identify which legal frameworks (legislation) will be used to manage possible conflicts. This is particularly relevant in cases where the parties reside in different countries, with different legislation and the services are provided in digital/virtual spaces. Further consideration should be given to separation of contracts for allied services for example assessments, services by third parties. This is particularly important where the ICF Professional is engaging with the same Client(s) or the Sponsor(s) for a variety of services.

The ICF Professional remains accountable for checking the alignment of the contract for the services to be offered by the ICF Professional with the ICF Code of Ethics, even when the contracting happens between a third party (for example a platform operator / agent) and a Sponsor / Client.

Updated October 11, 2023

[Access Member Toolkit](#)

## **Standard 3**

### **Section I—Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

3. Maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all parties as agreed upon. I am aware of and agree to comply with all applicable laws that pertain to personal data and communications.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 3**

All confidentiality related considerations that might come up in the coaching engagement must be addressed, clarified and agreed upon between all parties. The confidentiality rules apply to any situation in which an ICF Professional interacts with clients and sponsors. Confidentiality is not limited to the client but extends to all parties involved in the coaching engagement as outlined in the coaching agreement.

A strict level of confidentiality infers that the ICF Professional has “best practices” in place, for example:

- an understanding, written or otherwise that all client/sponsor information and communication will be held private prior to being hired by the client/sponsor, during the coaching engagement, and after the conclusion of the engagement.
- Policies on record keeping which protect data from hackers, thieves, and “wandering eyes and ears”, training of staff or support personnel (including virtual assistants) on the importance of maintaining confidentiality relating to all parties.
- The ICF Professional safeguards confidentiality and is in compliance with the relevant data protection policies/rules. This also applies to the use of digital media and application platforms, software, and social media (i.e. cell phones, computers, tablets etc.). The ICF Professional might need to seek legal advice regarding the EU’s GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) or similar regulations for other areas. The ICF professional remains accountable for data privacy protection even when using resources belonging to others (e.g. companies).

The ICF Professional should be aware that information on company owned resources (e.g., computers, phones) may be accessible by others. Hence full confidentiality is not guaranteed. It is therefore recommended that the ICF Professional considers how to maintain confidentiality while being compliant with the data protection requirements.

Updated December 14, 2023

## **Standard 4**

### **Section I—Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

4. Have a clear understanding about how information is exchanged among all parties involved during all coaching interactions.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 4**

ICF Professional should make sure that everyone involved in the coaching process clearly agrees on when, how, what and the ways in which coaching information, including confidential information is shared.

The rules of confidentiality must be clear to all participants before the coaching process begins. They may need to be re-clarified at any point in the process for the parties involved. It is also important to clarify the framework and procedures for sharing possible reports, evaluations, and results of assessments that are administered.

Although ICF encourages having a written agreement/contract, even in a verbal agreement, the ICF Professional should take into consideration and make sure that the terms of information sharing are clearly understood by all the parties involved.

ICF Professionals who work with coaching platforms, might find more information in the ICE for Standard 7.

Updated December 13, 2023

## **Standard 5**

### **Section I—Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

5. Have a clear understanding with both Clients and Sponsors or interested parties about the conditions under which information will not be kept confidential (e.g., illegal activity, if required by law, pursuant to valid court order or subpoena; imminent or likely risk of danger to self or to others; etc.). Where I reasonably believe one of the above circumstances is applicable, I may need to inform appropriate authorities.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 5**

In the coaching profession, confidentiality is not just a skill, but an expectation. Coaches occupy a unique and powerful position where individuals and organizations share and trust sensitive and personal information to them. Anyone communicating with a coach must be comfortable to open themselves completely and know without a doubt that their communications to the coach are protected. Therefore, a coach must have a very high standard of confidentiality in all interactions:

- When information is shared before the coach is hired
- When information is shared or learned intentionally or otherwise
- At any point in the coaching relationship
- At any time after a coaching relationship ends

A coach may divulge confidential information in the following circumstances:

- Reasons, set by law (ICF Professionals should make sure, that they know the details of local law):
  - When a person has made a credible threat to harm themselves, their organizations or others

- When the coach is compelled by a court order or subpoena (Coaches have no client privilege in a court of law. This means that if coaches are asked for information, they must provide it. This is different for physicians and psychiatrists and some other professions.)
- Reasons, defined by contract with client or with client and sponsor:
  - When the coaching agreement allows for it
  - When the sponsor agreement allows for it, and the client agrees
  - When the coach is required to substantiate basic information about the coaching process for the coach's credentialing or re-credentialing without sharing any personal notes or other personal information. The coach is responsible for getting the clients acknowledgment for signing that the clients gave permission.
  - When the Coach needs to talk about a case (without indicating names of the client or sponsor) with the coach's mentor or coach supervisor.

ICF Professionals should make sure, that they know the details of local law and should establish the legal venue for the contract. Make sure that there are experts in your network (e.g. lawyers) who you can refer to in case of doubt.

It is the responsibility of the ICF Professional to ensure the client knows when the ICF Professional is required to breach confidentiality. The best way is to speak about before the beginning of the coaching process and to document this is in the written coaching agreement.

Example: if the ICF Professional is a mentor coach working with another coach, they must be clear about when confidentiality may be breached. The mentor coach or supervisor is, as a supporter (see Standard #15), bound to confidentiality.

Our unregulated industry has no special legal protection. In the event of a dispute, individually concluded contracts are judged according to civil law. If possible in your country, try to get a professional services insurance policy for coaches.

In coaching the under age (children/teenagers) there is an additional coaching relationship which has to be honored. There is presumably done with a Sponsor (parents, guardians, etc.) for minors. All questions about confidentiality has to be cleared in the same way with the client and the sponsor.

As an internal coach please see No. 6 too.

## **Standard 6**

### **Section I – Responsibility to Clients**



As an ICF Professional, I:

6. When working as an Internal Coach, manage conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest with my coaching Clients and Sponsor(s) through coaching agreement(s) and ongoing dialogue. This should include addressing organizational roles, responsibilities, relationships, records, confidentiality and other reporting requirements.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 6**

An internal coach could have roles of an HR employee, a non-related manager or direct manager besides that of being a coach, or no other roles than being a coach.

As the success of coaching depends on the client's trust on the coach, it is recommended that, in the beginning of appointment as an internal coach, a confidentiality agreement is signed between the company and the internal coach and shared with the coaching client, defining what is going to be shared and with whom, when and how, and what is not going to be shared.

Internal privacy rules of the company, information in the computers, right of a manager to reach any information through IT, information on company phones, reports to be shared should all be considered.

Whatever is determined by the organization, ICF Professionals should be sure all parties are privy to the agreement and aware of all the relationship dynamics to ensure transparency, and talk about it continuously.

As an internal coach, the ICF Professional should pay particular attention to conflicts of interest arising from former, current or potential future leadership relationships (e.g. line or matrix organizations, agile systems, etc.)

Possible conflicts between the ICF code of ethics and an existing corporate culture or internal company regulations should be identified and taken into account by the coach.

## **Standard 7**

### **Section I – Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

7. Maintain, store and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, created during my professional interactions in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security and privacy and complies with any

applicable laws and agreements. Furthermore, I seek to make proper use of emerging and growing technological developments that are being used in coaching services (technology-assisted coaching services) and be aware how various ethical standards apply to them.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 7**

This standard relates to all matters relating to technology assisted coaching services. Records are all documents created in connection with interactions with the client and sponsor. This includes, but not limited to, written notes, files, audio or video notes, entries in support databases or tools (e.g. for customer administration etc.).

Some ICF Professionals keep records of the content and progress of their interactions, while others choose not to retain the content of client conversations but store only the contract and contact information. The careful handling and retention of these records in the broadest sense of protecting this information and thus the identity of the client and the sponsor are the subject of this standard. While some countries require retention of records for a period ranging from 5 to 10 years, it is advisable to check with professional business advisors, accountants, lawyers, or financial advisors for country specific laws regarding such retention. If you have clients who live in the European Union, please refer to the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) or other applicable local laws. See **ICF policies** for examples.

Careful handling of records is important at the end of all interactions (e.g. coaching processes) when records are destroyed. Written documents should be shredded if possible. There are deletion programs for all types of electronic data which largely prevent reconstruction. It is expected that effort is made towards deletion of such data especially when data storage devices are discarded or passed on. It might be good to consider shredding content/conversation notes/files of sessions with past clients with regularity. There should be written directives for handling of all client records in the event the ICF Professional become incapacitated. ICF Professionals might also consider addressing their wishes for anything connected with their business in their personal Will (a.k.a. Testament).

For the part of the ICF Professional, data storage should be made secure as much as possible in particular when using technical services/tools of any kind. The constant technological development of these tools/platforms requires vigilance and, if necessary, actions by the coach. Data protection should be ensured when using a client's/company's infrastructure. Be aware of placing/storing notes in places where another party can read them (other than the client or agreed upon by the client).

ICF professionals should take appropriate security precautions when using electronic communications such as e-mails, online mail, online chat sessions, mobile communications, and text messages. Examples could be using updated anti-virus software, encryptions, firewalls with passwords, etc. The client must be made aware of the possibility of written notes, electronic notes or recordings made during the course of the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship.

The client's consent must be obtained before audio or video recordings are made. This also applies to the use of artificial intelligence devices that



automatically record the sound in a room (e.g. Alexa, Siri). The coach might point out to the client that their own devices might be making recordings. Obviously, the recording functions could be switched off.

The ICF Professional should be aware that information left on social media could be seen by clients and affect the coaching process. Be aware that ownership of such information (e.g. photos and statements) is transferred to the social media app. Unless authorized by the client, ICF Professionals must not post any identifying or confidential information about their clients on websites or other forms of media.

Careful consideration should be made when working with “coaching platforms.” Many of these offer possibilities for conducting coaching business, networking amongst ICF professionals, and learning options etc. ICF professionals enrolling with such “platforms” must consider the following:

- Would use of such a “platform” in any way conflict with the ICF Code of Ethics?
- Does the “platform” have its own standards regarding roles/boundaries/information exchange amongst those who are enrolled?
- What are the terms-of-contract for enrollment on the “platform”?
- Would it in any way interfere with existing relationships between coaches and clients?
- How does the “platform” handle the data collected regarding coaches, their clients, evaluation results, etc.?

## **Standard 8**

### **Standard 8**

#### **Section I – Responsibility to clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

8. Remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship. If so, make a change in the relationship or encourage the Client(s)/Sponsor(s) to seek another coach, seek another professional or use a different resource.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 8**

The ICF Professional should be willing to recuse themselves if and whenever their coaching services do not benefit the client and/or appear to go against the clients or sponsors interest. The ICF Professional has a responsibility to

encourage the client in this case to make a change or seek the services of another professional.

ICF Professionals are expected to establish a customer orientated review process with the client and the sponsor (if involved) which helps determine the value of the coaching relationship. If a shift in the perceived value of coaching is evidenced, the ICF Professional is expected to find out what is driving the shift.

ICF Professionals are expected to remain alert for indications which go beyond their capabilities as a coach. Therefore, it is particularly important to learn as a coach how to recognize in a timely manner whether a client will be best served by another professional service provider. If they are unable to support the client, they may need to refer the client to other modes of support such as counseling, therapy, legal, tax, medical, nutrition, etc. In case of doubt, the ICF professional should seek expert advice. (See the resources below.)

It is useful to build a network that includes coaches of other orientations as well as therapists, etc. in the event a referral is requested.

The ICF Professionals should disclose to the client and the sponsor(s) any referral fee that might be paid to them by any of these professionals.

[Refer To Therapy White Paper \(PDF\)](#)

[Refer To Therapy One-Sheet \(PDF\)](#)

## Standard 9

### Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

9. Respect all parties' rights to terminate the coaching relationship at any point for any reason during the coaching process subject to the provisions of the agreement.

### Insights and Considerations for Standard 9

A clear coaching termination clause in the agreement should clarify that either or both parties may cancel the agreement at any time for any reason. The ICF Professional must be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from the coaching relationship and explore other possibilities with them. In the coaching process, it is important to determine why the client wants to end the coaching. The ICF Professional must support and encourage the client to seek the services of another ICF Professional or professional resource when it is mutually agreed that they would be better served with such a change. It may

also be a solution to encourage the client to engage more intensively with the coaching content, possibly with another ICF Professional. A best practice is to have a clear refund policy in the written agreement.

The ICF Professional must respect and accept the clients request to end the relationship; however, it is okay to invite a closure session for the client to provide feedback. The ICF Professional might want to consider doing this as complimentary and voluntary. A closure session functions the same as any other coaching session in which the ICF Professional is involved.

## **Standard 10**

### **Section I – Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

10. Am sensitive to the implications of having multiple contracts and relationships with the same Client(s) and Sponsor(s) at the same time in order to avoid conflict of interest situations.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 10**

In every situation of the coaching process, it is necessary to ensure that the ICF Professionals' current role is unambiguous and that it is recognizable from which contract they are acting. The intention of this standard is to address potential conflict of interest when an ICF Professional holds multiple contracts (e.g. having a coaching and trainer relationship) with the same individual. Furthermore, some ICF Professionals coach a client 1:1 and at the same time coach the client's team. Even though this may be on one contract, this might be a multiple relationship.

When an ICF professional is a trainer in a coach-training program, they may be one of the people who decide whether a student fulfills all responsibilities of the training program, including performance on written and oral exams. They may also be a designated-adviser for a student and/or their coach as required for student completion of coach-training programs and/or their mentor coach as required for student completion of coach-training programs.

In such a case the ICF professional would need to be aware of any biases and if a conflict exists in having multiple roles, make a decision that would be in the best interest of the student to resolve any potential conflict of interest. For ICF Professionals who teach, mentor, assess, and coach those in coach training programs, if your program has enough ICF Professional staff members, then ideally, to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest, you would have only 1 role with each participant during the program: teacher, mentor, assessor, or coach. (For more information about the role of the Mentor Coach, please follow the link below.)

Separate contracts are recommended for an ICF Professional who has consulting expertise; (e.g. nutrition, chiropractic, professional organizer) and is asked by the client to receive this expertise. Having separate contracts allows the coaching client not to be confused as to what role the ICF Professional is assuming. This is also important regarding the public view of our profession being distinct from other professions (e.g. therapy, counseling, consulting, etc.)

## Mentor Coaching

# Standard 11

## Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

11. Am aware of and actively manage any power or status difference between the Client and me that may be caused by cultural, relational, psychological or contextual issues.

## Insights and Considerations for Standard 11

An ICF Professional is aware of, explores and manages interpersonal coach-client power differences and aims to co-create coach-client relationships of partnership and equality unless superseded by an opposing context of the client's identity, environment and culture. Coaching takes place at the level of equivalence; i.e. lack of power distance in the coaching relationship. A feeling of superiority, or inferiority, on the part of the coach burdens the coaching relationship and should be clarified in supervision.

The coach-client relationship might be seen by the client as a hierarchical relationship that involves coach-client power differences. *Coach* is a dominant social-group identity and *Client* is a marginalized social-group identity. Sustaining the coach-client partnership means the coach has an ongoing task of acknowledging and working to reduce the impact of rank, status, and hierarchy in the working alliance between coach and client. If such a "partnership" cannot be maintained, the coach and/or client should consider terminating the relationship.

# Standard 12

## Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

12. Disclose to my Clients the potential receipt of compensation, and other benefits I may receive for referring my Clients to third parties.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 12**

A transaction, in which the third party who is for example, a coach, therapist, provider of a personal assessment instrument, attorney, professional, or other referring person, may give an ICF Professional a referral fee, or commissions in monetary or some other form that has benefit or advantage, personal and professional benefits for referring a client to them, sets up a conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest for the ICF Professional. A reasonable outside person might infer that the ICF Professional is acting in their own benefit rather than in service of their client.

Disclosing in an open and frank discussion with clients and allows clients to choose, as well as demonstrate/preserve a coach's integrity – it is all above board and transparent, and it is asking clients to take ownership of their choice about acting on the referral or not. Giving the monies back to the client, or to a charitable group, might be an alternative.

An example of compensation received where a disclosure is needed might be when an ICF Professional directly refers the client to a personality assessment like MBTI, DISC where the ICF Professional receives a commission. If the names of all such assessments in the market are given and a recommendation is not made, disclosure may not be needed. If the client is referred to a consultant from whom the ICF Professional receives a referral fee, this must be disclosed.

An option for ICF Professionals is not to accept monetary or non-monetary benefit from third parties for referring our clients to them.

## **Standard 13**

### **Section I – Responsibility to Clients**

As an ICF Professional, I:

13. Assure consistent quality of coaching regardless of the amount or form of agreed compensation in any relationship.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 13**

The intention of this standard is to ensure that ICF Professional Coaches provide equal quality of professional-coaching services specified in the coaching agreement, regardless of client's race, gender, and other social-group identity

and of form of compensation — whether monetary, pro bono or barter or any other form of compensation agreed to.

*Bartering is an equal exchange of goods or services without involving money.*

## **Applications**

1. Some business agreements involve the provision of coaching service in exchange for services or products in a reciprocal barter arrangement. Others may provide very low-cost coaching services to those who would benefit from coaching, but have limited resources at the time. The ICF Professional must only barter for services, goods or other non-monetary remuneration when it does not impair the coaching relationship.
2. This includes any coach/client relationship, business relationships between ICF Professionals, training schools etc. that involves barter, pro bono, or any other types of agreed upon compensation.
3. Equal quality also must be delivered when coaching a student, business person, or executive.
4. ICF Professionals should always deliver 100% of their benefit, regardless of the amount of compensation. A price-dependent difference in quality contradicts the ICF Professional mindset and practice.
5. ICF Professionals should not knowingly use their position to take any personal, professional, or monetary advantage or benefit beyond the coach-client agreement.
6. ICF Professionals should know the tax laws of the country in which they are working if they choose pro bono and bartering.

Here the connection between the offer of the ICF Professionals to make their coaching service available on the basis of the competences described (training, experience, etc.) for an amount X and the actual service provided is important. According to the contract, the client is entitled to this service.

## **Standard 14**

### **Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance**

As an ICF Professional, I:

14. Adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics in all my interactions. When I become aware of a possible breach of the Code by myself or I recognize unethical behavior in another ICF Professional, I respectfully raise the matter with those involved. If this does not resolve the matter, I refer it to a formal authority (e.g., ICF Global Assist Line) for resolution.



## Insights and Considerations for Standard 14

This standard reflects individual responsibility and accountability of the ICF Professionals once they recognize unethical behavior. ICF Professionals should be mindful that when they are identifiable as ICF Professionals, for example on social media and electronic platforms and/or in marketing materials they are representing the ICF, along with its values and its quality standards to the public.

ICF Professionals who adhere to the Code of Ethics strive to uphold ethical standards, even when faced with challenging decisions or the need for uncomfortable actions. Implicit here is that the ICF Professional be self-aware of potential code breaches. Responsible ICF Professionals look at their own behavior and attempt to correct those things in oneself that might be unethical. When the ICF Professional detects any potential breach in their own conduct, they could use Coaching supervision, ICF Community of Practice, ICF Ethics Watercooler discussions.

This standard also calls on the ICF Professional to recognize and acknowledge potential unethical behavior by another ICF professional. Direct contact should be made as soon as possible between the two parties to discuss a potential breach of the Code and constructively discuss the next best course of action.

The risk taken to take care of the interests of all involved could be high and would require courage, preparation and respect. Evaluate the most appropriate and respectful approach, understanding the nature of the possible reaction in this type of situation. Prepare the context for an uncomfortable conversation. It is important to give careful consideration while bringing up the matter with the other ICF Professional, respecting their view of the situation and their conduct.

When an ICF colleague approaches us and offers feedback on their view on our behaviour from their observation, experience and/or perception, it is recommended to receive the feedback and interact with the feedback giver in an open, constructive and respectful way.

In all such cases, a constructive discussion will require openness to listening to others' views, experience and /perception and being ready to review one's view/assessment.

If direct contact does not resolve the matter, the ICF Professional should contact ICF local ethics committee or ICF Global Assist Line or initiate a formal complaint in order to activate an Ethical Conduct Review process.

If you have questions regarding the ICF Code of Ethics, refer to **Ethic Resources** or contact the ICF Ethics Hotline at [ethics@coachingfederation.org](mailto:ethics@coachingfederation.org) or 1.859.226.4245.

When someone believes that an ICF Professional is in violation of the code, they may also formally initiate a complaint to be considered in the conduct review process.

## Standard 15

### Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

15. Require adherence to the ICF Code of Ethics by all Support Personnel.

### Insights and Considerations for Standard 15

This standard is about the people we work with, or employ, or we are associated with, who could from time to time have access to clients and their information.

These could be people in our office, virtual assistants, as well as the companies that we might use for speech to text conversions or language to language translations, or other such service providers.

It is recommended to have a written and signed agreement with them regarding ethical practice. (Note: Some cultures do not prefer written agreements.) Nonetheless, the ICF Professional is held responsible, in respect of the ECR process, in case of misconduct by these people.

One best practice is for those who work with ICF Professionals to read and review the ICF Code of Ethics regularly and to occasionally discuss the ICF Code of Ethics with all ICF Professionals involved. A commitment written by the Support Personnel creates security for all parties involved.

## Standard 16

### Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

16. Commit to excellence through continued personal, professional and ethical development.

# Insights and Considerations for Standard 16

A best practice is for the ICF Professional to commit to lifelong learning to develop and continuing development of their professional skills in the coaching space to include the latest personal and professional development information such as books, videos, supervision, mentoring, newsletters, conferences etc. This commitment must include continued self-reflection and exploration of ethics in coaching. ICF Professionals should be knowledgeable and forthright about their strengths and areas for development; develop new skills and competencies; own and be accountable for their personal, professional, and ethical development.

## Personal development

ICF Professionals should work continually for self-knowledge and emotional, physical, social, and spiritual health and well-being. One should be active in learning about one's conscious and unconscious bias. ICF Professionals should know who they are and what they stand for by identifying their life-purpose, values, vision. These should be congruent with them in their behaviors, words, thoughts, feelings, body experiences, sexuality, and intentions.

They should seek deeper cultural, emotional, and social self-awareness and understanding of themselves as a racial and cultural being. They should own their personal biases and prejudices involving; race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, rank/status/class, nationality, spiritual practice, age, ability, and other human differences, and their effects on their behavior.

They should know and own their personal history and culture. These include their stage of life, their addictions, their dominant and marginalized-group identities, their areas of internalized privilege, superiority, and subordination.

They should know how these may impact their behavior; identify limiting beliefs and reclaim repressed, disowned, and projected parts of themselves with information gained through disclosure, feedback, bodywork, coaching, supervision, therapy, and mediation and through their dreams, memories, body sensations, and emotions.

## Professional development

ICF Professionals should engage in continual professional development; continuously expand their knowledge base.

This can be done by:

- Improving their competence and practice
- Maintaining awareness of new coaching approaches
- Staying up to date with current scientific findings
- Being aware of new professional information
- Participating in ongoing education, workshops and training and having a personal coach

- Taking advantage of regular case supervision to maintain and improve their coaching quality
- Having a Mentor Coach
- Engaging in research

### **Ethical development**

The ICF Professional adheres to the first Core Competency: Demonstrates Ethical Practice.

The discussion of ethical questions arising from all standards of the Code of Ethics begins in coaching training and is continued in all certification processes and in practice. Ethic appreciation is improved by answering questions from practice which should be regularly reflected upon in discussions with ICF professionals and others outside of ICF.

The Ethics Community of Practice and the Ethics Water cooler discussion events offered in various languages are particularly suitable for this purpose. Efforts in this direction continue to include the open exchange of coach-related knowledge, case studies, leadership and participation in knowledge-sharing platforms through webinars, peer coaching, mentor coaching and ICF ethical awareness workshops.

The ICF Professional should continually “think outside the box” and be aware of ethical developments outside the ICF.

ICF Professionals should, in addition to their personal and professional development, wholeheartedly support the further development of the profession of coaching and the coaching organization. ICF Professionals should endeavor to be a role model of good ethical practice in all situations.

For this purpose, the ICF professional should know the ICF documents that define coaching: Core Values, Code of Ethics, Core Competencies, PCC Markers etc.

## **Standard 17**

### **Section II – Responsibility to practice and performance**

As an ICF Professional, I:

17. Recognize my personal limitations or circumstances that may impair, conflict with or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships. I will reach out for support to determine the action to be taken and, if necessary, promptly seek relevant professional

guidance. This may include suspending or terminating my coaching relationship(s).

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 17**

An ICF Professional must perform their duties without encumbrance from any relationship conflict. Such limitations could be extrinsic as well as intrinsic. For purposes of awareness and monitoring, each ICF Professional would benefit from having a mentor or supervisor as well as participate in personal coaching, technical discussions, community of practice, etc.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to ensure that the client has full access to the ICF Professional within the parameters of the agreement. The ICF Professional should be fully present, be aware of internal conflicts within self, and use awareness of self and their intuition to deal with any limitations or circumstances impeding performance. Examples of these could include conscious and unconscious personal and professional bias and triggers of the coach's personal/professional situations that may cause them to lose presence. They should avoid becoming judgmental or emotional to the point that they impair their coaching performance.

This standard also calls on the ICF Professional to reach out to trusted third parties for counsel and advice. If the conflict cannot be otherwise resolved, the ICF Professional must remove self from the coaching engagement. ICF Professionals' self-awareness and responsibility needs to include their physical and mental well-being.

A further aspect on the subject of consistent quality concerns the ICF Professionals' responsibility to ensure their physical and mental performance. For example, are they as fit and attentive with the fourth client on the same day as with the first? How does the ICF Professional behave in the event of illness?

## **Standard 18**

### **Section II – Responsibility to practice and performance**

As an ICF Professional, I:

18. Resolve any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest by working through the issue with relevant parties, seeking professional assistance, or suspending temporarily or ending the professional relationship.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 18**

This standard applies also to internal as well as external coaches who are ICF Professionals.

ICF Professionals need to be conscious about conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest as they are in positions vulnerable to conflict or potential conflict of interest between the client, the coach and the management of the company, or organization, or agency they are part of. (See Interpretive Statements for standard 14.)

Conflict or potential conflict of interest may include financial or non-financial, personal or professional advantage for ICF Professionals. Such conflict of interest may arise from recommendation to specific resources such as psychometric assessment firms, coach training schools, specific tools, partners for transcribing services for recorded sessions, or research projects assistance, etc.

Best practice for ICF Professionals is to establish clear agreements between all relevant parties and, when in conflict, take personal responsibility to voluntarily suspend or remove themselves from the relationship.

Coaching supervision is useful to identify case-related potential conflicts of interest.

## **Standard 19**

### **Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance**

As an ICF Professional, I:

19. Maintain the privacy of ICF Members and use the ICF Member contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only as authorized by ICF or the ICF Member.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 19**

ICF Professionals should not infringe on the use of contact data belonging to another ICF Member, nor their right to privacy.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to adhere to the privacy policy of the ICF. Any contact or exchange of contact details of another member ICF Professional should be done within the boundaries and policies established by the ICF. Review ICF policies by following the link below.

Coaching profiles on the ICF / Coach website are public. Further data are usually only available to chapter leaders who are bound by the Chapter Leader Ethical Guidelines.



## Standard 20

### Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

**As an ICF Professional, I:**

20. Identify accurately my coaching qualifications, my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications and my ICF Credential.

### Insights and Considerations for Standard 20

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to correctly represent self, in the interest of the Client and other ICF Professionals. This includes titles, certifications, credentials, coaching related experience (e.g., coaching, mentor coaching, training, supervision), higher education degrees, and the like. All identifying descriptions of an ICF Professional should be verifiable by the respective bodies. If a previous coaching related qualification is no longer valid, the ICF Professional must drop this description. Refer to the ICF Brand Manual for proper use of ICF branded designations.

There is a notable confusion in that the words “credential” and “certification” are sometimes used interchangeably.

#### ICF Credential

ICF Professionals can follow one of three paths to obtain an ICF credential: Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and Master Certified Coach (MCC). ICF Credentials (ACC, PCC, MCC) are for individuals.

Individuals seeking ACC or PCC credentials can either a) apply directly via the ICF Portfolio route, or b) enroll for Coach Training with any of the ICF accredited third party training providers. Please note that credentialing for MCC has only one application type.

Under the ICF Portfolio route, learners are required to submit an application which clearly demonstrates that they have completed a comprehensive training program including the ICF definition of coaching, the Code of Ethics and the Core Competencies, and is organized in a scope and sequence that encourages the growth of the coach.

#### ICF-accredited third-party training providers

The word “accreditation” can also be connected with the words “credential” and “certification.”

ICF provides three forms of accreditation to third-party training providers:

Accredited Coaching Training Program (ACTP) accreditation is for third-party training providers who are “all inclusive” training programs which offer start to finish coach training. Graduates of an ACTP program may apply for an individual ICF Credential via the ACTP credential application path.

Approved Coaching Specific Training Hours (ACSTH) program accreditation is for third party-training providers who are “al la carte” training programs which may or may not offer start to finish coach training programs. Graduates from an ACSTH program may apply for the Associate Certified Coach (ACC) Credential or the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) Credential using the ACSTH application path if they meet the credentialing application requirements.

Continuing Coach Education (CCE) accreditation is for third-party training providers of supplemental and advanced education for those wishing to acquire new learning and/or those who are renewing their ICF Credential.

Credentials

Accreditation

## Standard 21

### Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

21. Make verbal and written statements that are true and accurate about what I offer as an ICF Professional, what is offered by ICF, the coaching profession, and the potential value of coaching.

### Insights and Considerations for Standard 21

When ICF Professionals represent themselves as an ICF Professional or a member of the coaching profession, their representation must be portrayed truly and accurately.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to know what the ICF stands for and what coaching as a profession means to the marketplace and to the world. An over-inflated representation of the potential value of coaching is considered deceptive and unprofessional. This standard thus calls on the ICF Professional to offer only what can be delivered. ICF Professionals are ambassadors for the

profession and are responsible for their contribution to the reputation of coaching to the public anywhere in the world.

The standard is about maintaining truth in any form of marketing, including word-of-mouth sharing of the services by the ICF professional. It invites the ICF Professional to reflect on the conceptual distinction of different resources of professional practices (e.g., mentoring, counseling, psychotherapy) and to be able to accurately share the differences between these, in comparison to coaching. The standard calls on the ICF professional to be able to accurately share and demonstrate added value of the discipline of professional coaching. This includes establishing and acting towards achieving goals, deepening levels of learning, building personal awareness, and supporting improvement in specific skills to meet desired goals, etc. The coach should make clear to the client that the success of the coaching depends on the client's ability to move forward and willingness to challenge themselves. For example, the client may want to try something new, and the coach can enable this to happen. The coach manages the process, the client manages the progress. Therefore, the client is solely responsible for the results and must be able to be accountable for achieving their own objectives. In sum, the ICF Professional should never make guarantees regarding the client's success.

ICF Professionals should always be aware that they are seen as ICF's calling card and as an example of professional coaching and behave accordingly. This also includes knowing and representing the ICF understanding of coaching, the ICF values, the core competencies and the code of ethics. The presentation of the potential benefits of coaching also includes pointing out the limits of coaching processes. This Standard 21 complements Standard 20 which also addresses ICF professionals' coaching qualifications, competency level, credentials, training, and so on.

This standard applies to ICF Professional's own behavior as an ICF Professional and to the behavior of ACTPs, ICF, and other coaching organizations of which ICF Professional is a part. It also means that ICF Professionals have a responsibility in the case of a breach of this standard to respectfully raise the matter with those involved.

## **Standard 22**

### **Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism**

As an ICF Professional, I:

22. Communicate and create awareness with those who need to be informed of the ethical responsibilities established by this Code.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 22**

Each ICF Professional has a responsibility to let others know that professionalism is of the highest importance.

In the interest of professional coaching, it is recommended that ICF professionals draw attention in detail to the standards of ICF. This standard calls for the ICF Professional to communicate in writing or verbally the Code of Ethics which supports conformance to the standards through the Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process. Addressing the ECR process during the initial meeting with the client(s) and sponsor(s), and pointing out the complaint possibilities to the client, increases the credibility of our claim to professional quality. The same goes for the ICF Pledge of Ethics located at the end of the ICF Code of Ethics.

The standard invites an ICF Professional to share the Code of Ethics and the ECR process with all those who need to know. This might include organizations, employees, sponsors, coaches, students, support personnel, and others. [See Section I, Responsibility to clients]

One recommended best practice is to provide all constituents with the entire ICF Ethics Code and highlight those sections. In addition to them being informed about the ICF Professional's responsibilities, they are also getting the message that the profession of coaching takes ethics seriously.

## **Standard 23**

### **Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism**

As an ICF Professional, I:

23. Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern interactions, physical or otherwise.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 23**

The purpose of this standard is to create awareness of appropriate boundaries of all stakeholders in the coaching environment. This includes cultural, physical, sexual, emotional, and other boundaries. The coach should be aware of how religion and tradition might affect the coaching relationship.

Working worldwide requires the ICF Professionals to actively engage with the culturally determined local customs in the cultures in which they work. Before undertaking a coaching engagement in a territory new/unknown to the ICF Professional, this Standard invites them to seek information regarding cultural nuances that underpin inter-personal interactions. These include professional physical interactions (what is permissible, e.g., hug, handshake, touch), professional arrangements (e.g. boundaries with the manager/HR for sharing client progress a.k.a. reporting).

The assumption that the understanding of situations, the experience with well-known coaching tools, or the expectations of the reaction to different intervention methods are the same worldwide can prove to be wrong and hinder the coaching process. This applies analogously to all standards of this code.

ICF Professionals should make sure to include the above when moving between modalities (bodywork, counseling, mentoring, consulting, etc.). In such cases, they must ensure that the client understands which roles the ICF Professional is in, that these are appropriate and do not cross sensitive boundaries in any of their interactions.

In keeping with Standard 10, which deals with being sensitive to the implications of having multiple contracts and relationships at the same time, this Standard invites ICF Professionals to learn how to separate boundaries in such multi-roles relationship which they might have entered with their clients, and to ensure that their clients know when they are in the different roles during their interactions.

This Standard encourages ICF Professionals to work with a mindset and a framework that identifies and mitigates their biases and support those beliefs that work for them. It calls on the ICF Professional to work on recognizing any conscious and unconscious personal bias by engaging in one or more of the numerous ways of dealing with it, such as coaching supervision and practicing self-reflection.

## **Standard 24**

### **Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism**

As an ICF Professional, I:

24. Do not participate in any sexual or romantic engagement with Client(s) or Sponsor(s). I will be ever mindful of the level of intimacy appropriate for the relationship. I take the appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the coaching engagement.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 24**

The primary objective of this Standard is to protect the client, the coach, and the coaching profession.

In order to protect the client and in the interest of the ICF Professional, it is important to pay attention to any dependencies and expectations, unspoken contracts etc. which may arise as a result of the coaching process and the relationship as a whole.

Sexual attraction, or falling in love, are common human experiences. This standard provides guidance in the event that one of these experiences occurs during the coaching engagement. An ICF Professional should be aware of the causes of intimacy for the relationship and must be aware of the potential for cultural differences that could be misinterpreted.

Coaching requires trust and is particularly successful when the clients can open up and talk freely about their situation and feelings. Experience has shown that this can lead to strong feelings: “Finally someone who listens to me, someone who understands me,” or “This coach is like a father/mother to me and creates security.” This can lead to very personal feelings which are not automatically obstructive, but which have to be recognized and addressed by the ICF Professional. This is especially true for “transference” and “counter-transference,” and becomes very sensitive, requiring great vigilance and self-reflection by the ICF Professional. It is also possible that an ICF Professional becomes romantically enamored with the client during the coaching journey.

Recognizing that sexual or romantic feelings might not be mutual, and might cause discomfort to any party (including when the safe space being threatened or violated), the ICF Professional has a responsibility to initiate an appropriate action when the attraction is first noticed. Such actions can include getting coaching supervision, clarifying the stance with the other party, and ending the coaching relationship while maintaining the Client/Sponsor interests as paramount. In all such situations, the ICF Professional must support the Client or Sponsor to transition to another ICF Professional and/or allow for cancellation of the coaching arrangement.

## **Standard 25**

### **Section IV – Responsibility to Society**

As an ICF Professional, I:

25. Avoid discrimination by maintaining fairness and equality in all activities and operations, while respecting local rules and cultural practices. This includes, but is not limited to, discrimination on the basis of age, race, gender expression, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, disability or military status.

### **Insights and Considerations for Standard 25**

Discrimination by ICF Professionals is unacceptable and is unethical and is a breach of this standard.

Discrimination is prejudiced and biased behaviors of individual ICF professionals including those that are:



- Based in, but not limited to, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, class, ethnicity, rank and status, ability, age, nationality, and other social group identities
- Expressed with behaviors that can be conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, and overt and covert
- Demonstrated by providing unearned rewards and benefits to clients with dominant-group identities and penalize and harm clients with marginalized-group identities in ways that might have fierce outcomes which are life-diminishing, life-deadening, life-threatening, and life-ending
- Explained and justified on legal, constitutional, scientific, cultural, religious, statistical, values, beliefs, profitability, medical, psychological, philosophical, emotional, physical, sexual, authority, superiority, systemic, and other “reasonable discrimination” grounds

The attitude of ICF Professionals is to be neutral. It is about the client’s perception and assessments and options for action and not about the coach’s values and views. It is not the task of the ICF Professionals to transfer their value systems to clients or their environment. However, nobody is free of prejudices. The ICF Professionals must therefore know their own reservations and work on themselves through self-reflection. If they find that reservations are so strong that they affect the quality of the coaching process, it is not right to start the process. If the assessment is made during an ongoing process, the ICF Professional should take the case to supervision and if necessary, end the relationship.

An ICF Professional may turn down offering service to a client for personal reasons, such as value conflicts. However, these reasons should not be based on local legal definitions of discrimination. This standard also calls on the ICF Professional to consciously ensure that this Code will be followed unless it is superseded by local law or statute or organizational policy. ICF Professionals need to know the local laws regarding which people groups are legally protected and which people groups are often in danger of being discriminated.

ICF Professionals must act with awareness of the cultural filters which affect their views of the world, respect cultures different from their own, and be sensitive to cross-cultural and multicultural differences and their implications. Discrimination experienced by coaching clients from ICF Professionals and others, needs to be addressed in the coaching process.

## **Standard 26**

### **Section IV – Responsibility to Society**

As an ICF Professional, I:

26. Recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property of others, only claiming ownership of my own material. I understand that a breach of this standard may subject me to legal remedy by a third party.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 26**

Intellectual property (IP) is a work or invention that is the result of creativity giving one the rights to apply for a patent, copyright, trademark etc. IP allows for the protection against brand misuse or abuse.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property rights of other's published or originally created material. If someone else owns it, the ICF Professional cannot borrow, replicate, or duplicate it in any form without the explicit written permission of the owner or publisher.

As local copyright laws change, it is expected of ICF Professionals to inform themselves about the current requirements and fully comply with them. This applies in particular to references, citation rules, etc.

It is an expectation that those working with ICF (speakers, vendors, contractors, service providers, etc.) abide by the copyright laws of the applicable local legal venue and give proper attribution.

## **Standard 27**

### **Section IV – Responsibility to Society**

As an ICF Professional, I:

27. Am honest and work within recognized scientific standards, applicable subject guidelines and boundaries of my competence when conducting and reporting research.

## **Insights and Considerations for Standard 27**

ICF Professionals are encouraged to conduct coaching research in order to advance the knowledge gained in coaching as coaches. However, they should always be aware that they are seen as ICF's calling card and as an example of professional coaching and behave accordingly. This also includes knowing and representing the ICF understanding of coaching, the ICF values, the core competencies and the code of ethics.

If an ICF Professional chooses to engage in formal research under the banner of coaching, it should be done according to professional standards. Sharing honestly how the research will be used and made available, protecting the

identity of the respondents, or obtaining their written consent for their identity to be included in the research, is an integral part of this standard.

Coaching research should be conducted and reported with an approach that provides participants with informed consent and protects participants from any potential harm. References to contributions listed in other publications, or obtained from other sources, must be explicitly mentioned in accordance with professional guidelines for conducting and reporting research.

This standard applies to a variety of coaching research methodologies including: descriptive and analytical, applied and fundamental, quantitative and qualitative, and conceptual and empirical research. Conducting and reporting coaching research includes:

- Sharing results of coaching research and coaching knowledge and expertise
- Adding to the knowledge base and practices of coaching and the coaching profession
- Presenting, writing, publishing, and educating about coaching and coaching knowledge and skills
- Honoring, acknowledging, and crediting the efforts and contributions of others
- Promoting the sharing of coaching knowledge and skills widely among dominant and marginalized people and communities

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to be sure to adhere to local laws (e.g. HIPAA, GDPR, etc.). If ICF Professionals are unsure about the proper way to conduct proper research, they should consult a qualified academic or scientific source for guidance.

For a review of ICF's Privacy Policy, Research Policies and Spam Policy, please follow the link below.

[ICF Policies](#)

## **Standard 28**

### **Section IV – Responsibility to Society**

As an ICF Professional, I:

28. Am aware of my and my clients' impact on society. I adhere to the philosophy of "doing good," versus "avoiding bad."

## Insights and Considerations for Standard 28

This standard refers to a basic attitude of the coach, a mindset that goes beyond the practice of coaching. This calls on the ICF Professional to exhibit ethical maturity. Professional coaching is a profession that has an impact on society. ICF Professionals should seek to be aware of this and rely on the Code of Ethics to reflect on their actions within the framework of professional development.

The ICF Professional should work with a consideration of the larger-system impacts of coaching; i.e. impacts beyond individuals, groups, and organizations. The ICF Professional should act with sensitivity that coaching may alter the lives and well-being of people within client systems and the larger systems of which they are a part. The ICF Professional should apply this code of ethics in a global context.

ICF Professionals should think systemically; have a multiple levels-of-system perspective: individual, family, group, organization, community, nation, world. They should understand their interdependence with clients, coach-client relationships, other individuals, groups, organizations, and other systems and their co-creation of system issues and innovations.

ICF Professionals are open, accepting, and curious which means they learn about both differences and commonalities. ICF Professionals refer positively or neutrally to colleagues. ICF Professionals should not engage in belittling comments about a coaching colleagues' level of competence or point of view in verbal, written, and electronic communications. This does not mean that ICF professionals should shy away from general discussions about quality in the coaching industry.

This standard calls for more than "avoiding bad." Also, "doing good" means being aligned both with ethical standards as well as with the ICF core values and principles.

It involves contemplating one's action/behavior towards others. "Doing good" in all such interactions calls for not doing any harm to the other person even if there is no specific Standard within this Code. Do no harm" is an underlying principle of this standard. It applies with a multiple levels-of-system perspective. Do no harm to clients, other ICF professionals, ICF staff, support personnel, families, groups, organizations, the communities of which they are a part, and the larger society.