

# Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists

## Code of Ethics

### I. Mission Statement

The mission of the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists (ATSS) is to organize, educate and professionally certify its worldwide membership in order to assist those affected by trauma. This Code of Ethics is a framework to guide the actions of ATSS members as we meet our obligations toward those we serve.

### II. Value of ATSS

Values lie at the foundation of the ATSS's Ethical Statement. Values to which we ascribe are:

- We are an organization of people caring for people at all levels of intervention;
- We will do no harm (non-maleficence);
- We will promote human welfare (beneficence);
- We will be fair (justice);
- We will fulfill commitments (fidelity);
- We will strive to model empathic, engaged, responsive interaction and a high degree of professionalism;
- We will engage in acts intended to assist in the normative healing processes of trauma recovery through multiple levels of interaction;
- We are sensitive to and respectful in our interventions with persons who have experienced trauma;
- We acknowledge that human beings as individuals or in families, groups, communities, or nations can be overwhelmed by traumatic events and display a traumatic stress response.

### III. Functions of an Ethical Code

This Code of Ethics serves as a framework to guide the actions of any Certified Trauma Services Specialist (CTSS), Certified Trauma Responder (CTR), or Certified Trauma Treatment Specialist (CTTS). It provides guidelines for our behavior and states the goals for our professionalism. It articulates general areas of appropriate conduct, serves as an educational document, and is consistent with our view of reality that the impact of trauma follows a normative path. This visible statement provides the core features of an appropriate response to the impact of trauma in all its complexities and projects the image toward which we strive. It states our motives and is our moral anchor.

### IV. Basic Principles and General Standards of Practice

#### A. General Standards:

##### 1. Client Safety:

- a. We recognize that the primary obligation of each member of ATSS is the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of the client/patient-whether an individual, family, group, community, workplace; if safety does not exist, no beneficial services can be provided and no healing will occur.

- b. Traumatized persons, by virtue of their experiences, are often in positions in which they are unable to recognize and exercise power. Members therefore have the responsibility at these times to assume an advocacy role. These interventions include actions to obtain informed consent, maintain confidentiality, and avoid any actions that might re-traumatize, to the greatest extent possible, within the limits of the law.

**2. Client Health:**

- a. The CTSS/CTR/CTTS is client centered and holds paramount the welfare of that client, whether individual, family, group, organization, community or nation.
- b. Each member acts in a manner that upholds the honor, integrity, future promise and potential of the trauma counseling profession, sharing expertise when indicated, obtaining education on a continuing basis, and working toward the advancement of the profession.

**3. Professional Services:**

- a. Members are bound by the ATSS Code of Ethics regardless of international boundaries.
- b. Members are responsible for follow through for clients and/or trainees to assure delivery of services. In the event that services cannot be provided, an advisory should be given and/or services modified accordingly, including the changing of planned activities.
- c. Members must not place their own needs above those of clients. They are responsible for utilizing comprehensive assessment protocols within the limits of professional practice when diagnosing for treatment, fitness for duty, employment or forensic purposes.
- d. Competition should be respectful and dignified so as to maintain the honor of the profession and high standards of the CTSS, CTR, and CTTS.

**B. Commitment to Practice and Intervention**

- 1. All acts of members, at whatever level of interaction with persons who have experienced traumatic events, are designed to contribute to the normative healing process of trauma recovery.
- 2. Members of ATSS agree to do their work within the boundaries of the laws of their state/nation and to abide by the Code of Ethics of the professional organizations regulating (their) specific area of discipline.
- 3. Each ATSS member represents himself/herself as competent in only those areas of practice in which he/she is proficient and qualified whether by license, certification, education/training, and/or experience. The process and procedure of intervention is important in trauma recovery. Members will adhere to the specific standards of practice developed by ATSS in all areas of intervention, which may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Individual treatment
  - b. Family education and treatment
  - c. Group treatment processes
  - d. Debriefing

- e. Forensics
- f. Research
- g. Working with media
- h. Peer support
- i. Onsite intervention
- j. Public education
- k. Training and trainers
- l. Crisis intervention/Group Crisis Intervention
- m. Prevention
- n. Pre-employment screening
- o. Fitness for duty

**C. Commitment to Those We Serve:**

1. Members are obligated to share information and knowledge about trauma and its impact with victims, colleagues, organizations, communities and nations. The Standards of Practice of ATSS require the recognition that there are times that a member has the responsibility to assume an advocacy role.
2. Members will not take advantage of or exploit clients for their own sexual, emotional, financial or professional gain.
3. Members agree to operate within their own personal levels of training, expertise, education and experience.
4. Members seek to be culturally sensitive and attempt to operate within the cultural norms of the population they are serving, to the fullest extent possible.
5. Each member must be accountable for identifying and maintaining a heightened awareness of personal ethnic, cultural, political, gender, sexual, religious, or spiritual biases, so that member does not compromise the performance of providing care to trauma victims.

**D. Commitment to Knowledge Building through Training, Education and Research:**

1. Members are obligated to share information and knowledge about trauma and its impact with victims, colleagues, organizations, communities and nations.
2. Conducting research about trauma and its impact is secondary to establishing safety; any research which compromises the wellbeing of the client(s) is in violation of ATSS ethics.
3. Members have an obligation to protect and be accountable to client(s) when the client(s) may become research subject(s).

**E. Commitment to Standards of Self Care and Care of Other Members:**

1. Members agree to self--monitor for their own capacity to do the work.
2. Members acknowledge the effects of secondary trauma on themselves (ourselves) and colleagues, and take regular and ongoing actions to insure the welfare of themselves (ourselves) and enhance their (our) ability to deliver quality services.
3. Each member accepts the responsibility to have regular and open input from others in the field of traumatic stress regarding the effects of secondary trauma and the impact of this on themselves and the services they deliver.
4. Members have the ethical responsibility to assist other members in developing an awareness of their needs for self-care.

5. Members are responsible for their own needs without extending the client welfare and reputation of ATSS.
6. If members of ATSS are aware of unethical behavior of other members, they are obligated by virtue of licensure and membership in their professional organizations to report those violations to the appropriate licensing/accrediting/professional bodies and to the ATSS Board of Directors.

**F. Commitment to Professional Responsibility:**

1. Members are encouraged to join other similar organizations.
2. Members will obtain continuing education on a regular basis.
3. Members will treat each other humanly and with respect.
4. Members are committed to ATSS and will keep their membership and dues valid.

**V. Procedures for Investigation and Disciplinary Action**

The Code of Ethics of ATSS is designed to be an educational document. ATSS is not an investigative or enforcement body and this Code is not a legal code.

1. Complaints will be reviewed by the Ethics Committee of the Board of Directors.
2. Any officially substantiated complaints to ATSS concerning ethical impropriety may result in restriction in active participation in this association. Avenues for intervention include revocation of membership, temporary suspension of membership, censorship or loss of certification.
3. In the event an active member is indicted by a civil or criminal court system or is censured by a licensing board or professional organization or is removed from a school program for unethical behavior, that member will be automatically suspended from membership in ATSS until the violation in question is resolved favorably for her/him.
4. Conviction in a civil or criminal court in a practice-related offense will also result in automatic termination of membership and loss of certification. If the person in question is applying for certification, sponsorship may be withdrawn and processing of certification may be suspended.