

## IJP's Ethical Responsibilities in Publication

The “mission statement” of the **International Journal of Psychotherapy** specifies that we aim to “... further through publication the objective of advancing learning, knowledge and research in psychotherapy, worldwide ...”. As part of this mission or objective, *the Journal itself adopts a neutral position on the wide variety of issues that are treated within its contents. The Journal serves to further academic discussions of topics connected with psychotherapy, irrespective of their nature – without any conscious bias*: be that religious, gender-based, environmental, ethical, political, cultural, institutional, method or modality, or bias about other potentially or topically contentious areas or subjects.

Publication of any article in such an academic peer-reviewed journal as the IJP serves several functions: one of which is to validate and preserve the "minutes" of research, as well as the “details” of new and/or innovative professional clinical practice.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore of immense importance that both these "minutes" are accurate and trustworthy and that these “details” are clearly and accurately described, thus demonstrating an ethical professional practice. We may reject any articles where these minutes or details are unclear or incomplete.

The act of publishing involves many parties, each of which plays an important role in achieving these aims. It therefore follows that the author, the journal editor, the peer-reviewer, the printer, the publisher and the ‘owner’ of the journal – all have various ‘responsibilities’ dedicated to meet expected professional and ethical standards at all stages in their varied involvement from submission to publication of an article or an issue.

**The International Journal of Psychotherapy (IJP) is committed to meeting and upholding the highest possible standards of professional and ethical awareness and behaviour at all stages of the publication process.**

We closely follow the work of relevant organisations and associations: such as the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE);<sup>1</sup> the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICJME); the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME); the APA’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Ethics; the Wiley Online Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy Ethics; and the Ethical Principles of the Journal of Advanced Research in Psychology & Psychotherapy; and other organisations that collectively set standards, and provide guidelines for best publishing practices, in order to meet these requirements. We review and adapt our own publication ethics in the light of these, reflecting the development of the . Below is a summary of our key expectations of editors, peer-reviewers, authors and ‘owners/publishers’.

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### 1.1 Editor’s General Responsibilities

**The Editor is generally responsible for everything published in the Journal and for how it is published. He/she (or they, if appropriate) should therefore:**

- Strive to meet all the needs of its readers and of its authors
- Consistently improve the quality and scope of the journal to fulfil the highest professional standards

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there are currently (21<sup>st</sup> century) over 1,000 separately identified methods or modalities or techniques of psychotherapy: some are minor variations, or relate to distinct types of ‘client’, whilst others are based on very different conceptions of psychotherapy; different philosophies or ethics (how to live); or on different techniques and approaches.

- Ensure the quality of the material published to the best of his/her ability
- Champion freedom of expression and policies of inclusion
- Ensure the integrity of the academic record
- Preclude (as far as possible) commercial, business or financial needs from compromising intellectual, academic or ethical standards
- Always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions, etc.
- Ensure that the authors have informed the readers about any conflicts of interests, research funding sources or affiliations that may affect the impartiality of their article
- Accept (or reject) an article based only on its (lack of) importance, originality, clarity, quality and relevance
- If there are two (essentially) negative reviews, that also provides a sufficient basis for rejection
- Publish clear guidance to reviewers on everything that is expected of them
- Follow the reviewers' recommendations as far as is possible (or appropriate) and communicate with them about any comments and/or conclusions that seem questionable
- Ensure that the peer-review process is both clearly published and properly conducted and that the 'double-blind' process is adhered to, as far as is possible or appropriate
- Have systems to ensure that peer-reviewers' identities are protected appropriately
- Have systems to ensure that published material remains confidential whilst under review
- Ensure there is a declared mechanism for authors to appeal against any adverse editorial decisions
- Ensure that the published 'guidance to authors' includes everything expected of them and everything that they are expected to know
- Ensure that decisions to accept submissions are only reversed as and when serious 'problems' have been identified and that the author is properly informed of these
- Follow proper procedures as far as all complaints are concerned
- Ensure that cogent criticisms of published work are published
- Ensure that any 'criticized' authors are given an equal opportunity to respond in the same published issue
- Ensure that studies reporting negative results are not excluded
- Ensure that research conforms to internationally accepted ethical guidelines
- Protect the confidentiality of individual information
- Have a duty to act if they suspect misconduct. NB: This is an onerous - but important - duty
- Make decisions based only on quality and suitability; not on any financial or political gain
- Have declared policies on advertising, in relation to the content of the journal
- Have systems for managing any conflicts of interest

**They should therefore be expected:**

- To do everything possible to meet the needs of both the readers and authors, as well as others involved in the publication process.
- To make decisions on which articles to publish that are based only on the quality of the article and the suitability for its readers, rather than for any immediate financial, political, or personal gain of the editor(s), author(s), publisher(s), or owner(s) of the journal.
- To strive constantly to improve the academic, literary and professional quality of the Journal at all levels.
- To ensure the quality of the material that they publish is also of the highest practicable professional standard.
- To champion the freedom of expression; the mission of the journal; the freedom of innovation (within ethical limits); and other essential freedoms.
- To ensure the integrity of the academic record and the openness and transparency of any clinical methodologies published. Whenever it is recognized that a significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distorted report has been published, it must be corrected promptly

and with due prominence. If, after an appropriate investigation, an item proves to be fraudulent, it must be retracted. The retraction must be clearly identifiable to readers and indexing systems. There must also be an investigative process.

- To preclude business needs or commercial considerations from compromising academic, intellectual and clinical standards.
- To act whenever it is recognized that a significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distorted report has been published, and to ensure that this is corrected promptly and with suitable prominence.
- To always be willing to publish corrections, clarifications, retractions and apologies, when needed.
- If, after an appropriate investigation, a published item proves to be fraudulent, to ensure that the item is fully retracted and that the retraction should be clearly identifiable to readers and indexing systems.
- To ensure that authors inform the readers about who has funded their research and about the role of the funders in exercising the actual research.
- To accept or reject a paper for publication, based only on the paper's importance, its quality, originality, clarity, and the paper's relevance to the remit of the journal.
- To ensure that essential details of the Journal's peer review process are clearly published.
- To have systems to ensure that peer reviewers' identities are suitably protected - unless there exists an open review system that is clearly declared to authors and reviewers.
- To have systems to ensure that any material submitted to their journal remains anonymous whilst under review.
- To publish guidance to reviewers on what is expected of them and about the significance of their review submissions.
- To ensure that authors take the reviewers' submissions and any Editorial suggestions into suitable consideration in any re-writing / revising process.
- To ensure that the journal should have a declared mechanism for authors to be able to appeal against Editorial decisions.
- To ensure that the Journal publishes guidance to authors on everything that is expected of them, which should be regularly updated, and should refer or link to this code of practice.
- To ensure that any cogent criticisms of previously published work are published unless the editors have convincing / compelling reasons why these cannot be so.
- To ensure that any authors of criticized material must be given the opportunity to respond publically – ideally in the same issue as the criticism is published.
- To ensure that any research studies reporting negative results are not excluded.
- To ensure that any research material published conforms to internationally accepted ethical guidelines.
- To require assurances that and to publish statements that all research has been approved by an appropriate body (e.g. research ethics committee, institutional review board, etc.). However, it should also be recognized that such approval does not guarantee that the research actually is ethical.
- Not to reverse any decisions or processes to accept submissions unless there are serious problems that become apparent concerning that submission.
- To protect the confidentiality of any individual's information (e.g. such as that obtained through the therapist-patient-client relationship). It is therefore almost always necessary: **(a)** for the author to obtain and submit written informed consent from the patient/client described in any case study or report, and (especially so) if photographs of patients/clients are included; and **(b)** to ensure that all personal details have been sufficiently altered so as to ensure that the patient/client cannot possibly be identified – and that this is clearly stated in the article.
- It might – 'exceptionally' – be possible to publish without such explicit consent, or without the suppression of identification, if the Editor decides that:- **(i)** the case study or report is considered sufficiently important to affect public health (or it is - in some other way -

important, or “in the public interest” to publish); and (ii) if obtaining consent would be unusually burdensome or impossible to obtain (e.g. after the death of the patient/client); and (iii) if a ‘reasonable’ individual would be unlikely to object to publication (N.B. All three conditions should be met, and also legal/ethical advice must be sought and followed in such ‘exceptional’ circumstances).

- To act appropriately if they suspect any misconduct: this duty extends to both published and unpublished papers. They should not simply reject papers that raise concerns about possible misconduct. They are ethically obliged to ensure that alleged cases are pursued. They should first seek an appropriate response from those accused. Editors must make all reasonable attempts to obtain a solution to the problem within the remits of their authority. If they are not satisfied with the response or outcome, they should ask the person’s relevant employers, or some other appropriate body (perhaps a regulatory or professional body) to investigate, and they should make all reasonable efforts to ensure that such a ‘proper’ investigation is conducted.
- To have declared policies on advertising – especially in relation to the content of the journal and about any processes for publishing advertising supplements. Misleading advertisements must be refused and the Journal must publish submitted criticisms of advertising or advertisements, according to the same criteria used for material in the rest of the Journal. All reprints and PDF files should be published exactly as they originally appeared in the Journal, unless a latterly published correction or amendment has to be added.

## 1.2 Editor’s Ethical Responsibilities:

- To act in a balanced, objective and fair way while carrying out their expected duties, without discrimination on grounds of: gender, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, ethnic, cultural, personal, or geographical origin of the authors.
- To handle submissions for ‘sponsored’ supplements or ‘contracted’ special issues in the same way as all other submissions, so that all published articles are considered and accepted solely on their academic and professional merit and without any commercial or collegial influence.
- To adopt and follow reasonable and clear procedures in the event of complaints of an ethical or professional conflict or dispute, in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Journal and all relevant professional associations or involved organisations, where appropriate; and to give the person(s) complained against a reasonable opportunity to respond to any allegations or complaints.
- To investigate all complaints fully and promptly: no matter when or how the original publication was approved. Documentation associated with any such complaints must be retained.
- To update and revise this ethical guidance regularly and appropriately and to refer or link this to otherwise generally accepted ‘best practices’ in publishing.

## 1.3 Reviewers’ Responsibilities:

**Reviewers have an important role in publication. They should:**

- Treat any manuscript submitted to them as confidential document;
- Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and should not be used for personal advantage;
- Review the manuscript objectively, and observations should be formulated clearly with supporting arguments, so that authors can use them for improving their paper;
- Report promptly if they feel unqualified to review the research reported in a manuscript;
- Not consider manuscripts in which they have any conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or institutions connected to the papers.

**They should therefore be expected:**

- To contribute to the decision-making process, and assist in improving the quality of the published paper by reviewing the manuscript to their best ability, objectively, and in a timely manner.
- To maintain the confidentiality of any information supplied by the journal editor or author and not to retain or copy the manuscript.
- To alert the editor to any published or submitted content that they are aware of that is substantially similar to that under review.
- To be aware of any potential conflicts of interest (financial, institutional, collaborative or other relationships between the reviewer and author) and to alert the editor to these and, if necessary withdrawing their services for that manuscript.

#### **1.4 Authors' Responsibilities:**

##### **Authors should follow the ethical codes of publications. They should:**

- Present an objective discussion of the significance of research work as well as sufficient detail and references to permit others to replicate the experiments.
- Ensure that fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements are not given.
- Ensure that review articles should also be objective, comprehensive, and accurate.
- Ensure that their work is entirely original, and if the work and/ or words of others have been used, this has been acknowledged appropriately. Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical publishing behaviour and is unacceptable.
- Not submit the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently.
- Ensure that there is full consensus of all co-authors in approving the final version of the paper and its submission for publication, and that the corresponding author empowered on their behalf can submit the article.

##### **They should therefore be expected:**

- To confirm/assert that the manuscript is substantively theirs and has not been submitted (in any other format or version), and is not under consideration, nor has it been accepted, for potential publication anywhere else.
- To confirm/assert that any portions of the content of their manuscript do not overlap with previously published or submitted content and to acknowledge and cite those sources. Additionally, to provide the editor (when asked) with a copy of any manuscript from any source that might contain any closely related or overlapping content.
- To confirm/assert that all the work in the submitted manuscript is original to them and to acknowledge properly and to cite and/or reference content reproduced from other sources, and to obtain any necessary permissions to reproduce any content (especially artistic) from other sources, according to usual copyright conventions.
- To maintain accurate records of all data associated with their submitted manuscript, and to supply or provide access to these data, on reasonable request; and, where appropriate and where allowed by employer, funding body and others who might have an interest, to deposit any data in a suitable repository or storage location, for sharing and further use by others.
- To ensure that any research studies that they are involved with (or describing) involving human and/or animal subjects conform to national, local and institutional laws and requirements (e.g. WMA Declaration of Helsinki, NIH Policy on Use of Laboratory Animals, EU Directive on Use of Animals, etc.), and to be able to confirm that proper approval / licencing has been sought and obtained, where appropriate. Authors should obtain express (written) permission from all human subjects; maintain these for possible future examination; and respect people's privacy by successfully masking their identity.
- To declare any potential conflicts of interest (e.g. where the author has a competing interest (real or apparent) that could be considered or viewed as exerting an undue influence on his or her duties at any stage during the publication process): this includes close personal relationships with anyone involved with the publication process.

- To notify promptly the journal editor or publisher if any error in their publication is identified before (or after) submission, and to cooperate with the editor and publisher to publish an erratum, addendum, corrigendum notice, or to retract the paper, if and when this is deemed necessary.

## 1.5 Publisher or Owners' Responsibilities:

**Publishers or Owners should follow the ethical codes of publications. They therefore should be expected:**

- To ensure that general good practice is maintained (according to the standards outlined herein) by the Journal, the editors, all the people involved in production, and the member societies and associations on behalf of which the Journal publishes.
  - To ensure that, for professional journals, more detailed ethical procedures may be set out and brought to the attention of journal editors, editorial boards, and authors, as and where appropriate.
  - To ensure that, in the case of society-owned journals, the governing bodies of that society subscribe to the principles outlined above (or to substantially similar principles), either adopting these formally or producing their own principles, for the attention of their editors, their editorial boards and authors.
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## 2. Procedures for Dealing with Unethical Behaviour

### 2.1 Reporting Potential Misconducts or Unethical Behaviour:

- Reports of possible misconduct and/or possible unethical behaviour – in relation to the Journal and its publication – can be brought to the attention of the Editor, Publisher, Owner, or a member of the Editorial Board, at any time, by anyone, without any prejudice.
- Whomsoever informs the Editor, Publisher or Owner (etc.) of any such possible unethical conduct must be assured that they can do so, without any fear of identification, discrimination or retribution.
- Possible misconduct and unethical behaviour may include (but need not be limited to) examples of a dereliction of responsibilities (as outlined above), or inappropriate behaviour, or overtly biased opinions, or other potentially unacceptable actions.
- Whoever informs the Editor, Publisher or Owner of such conduct must provide as much as and reasonably sufficient information and/or evidence in order to substantiate their allegation and for any investigation to be able to be initiated. Unsupported allegations, accusations without sufficient substantiation or sufficient evidence cannot be investigated: though they may be noted.
- All 'supported' allegations must be taken seriously, and treated in a sincere way, until a satisfactory conclusion, a clear decision, or a possible rejection, is reached.
- The person to whom the allegation is reported must acknowledge receipt of the allegation; must give the details to an appropriate person; must also inform the person accused of the full details of the accusation, who must be given a proper opportunity to respond.
- All parties must be kept informed of any 'next steps', and/or of any subsequent processes, and/or of any conclusions.

### 2.2 Investigational Processes:

- An initial decision should be taken by the Editor, the Editorial Board, the Publisher and/or Owner (or the recipient of the complaint) as to whether there are sufficient grounds to proceed further. The Editor should consult with, or seek advice from, the Publisher, Owner, Ethics Committee, or otherwise - as appropriate. It is almost certainly inappropriate for the Editor to investigate any complaint.

- A decision must be made as to who is going to investigate the complaint and the procedures under which any complaints will be investigated. Any further available evidence should be gathered, whilst avoiding spreading any allegations beyond those who are required to know.
- The person complained about (or allegations made against) must be informed of the allegation/complaint as soon as possible and must be given a proper opportunity of: (a) ‘just stating their case’; or (b) ‘refuting the allegation’; or (c) ‘acknowledging a mistake and apologising in an appropriate manner’. This response should be in writing; must be treated confidentially; and should also be presented appropriately to the person(s) making the complaint or alleging the misconduct.
- If the statement of refutation, or apology, or different perspective, is considered sufficient and acceptable by the accuser/complainant, and also by the involved persons and organisation(s), then the investigation / complaint / case stops there.

### 2.3 Minor Breaches

- Minor breaches of procedure or misconduct that have been complained about - and reasonably substantiated - should be dealt with timely, appropriately, and without the need to consult any more widely, or take any further action. Various forms of ‘closure’ or ‘resolution’ should be attempted by the ‘superior’ body/persons investigating the accusation/complaint. Both the complainant and the ‘accused’ should be reasonably satisfied with the outcome.
- A written record of the allegation/complaint and the refutation (or apology) must be kept ‘on file’ for a stated period of time, in the event of any appeal, repetition, or any further/future allegations.

### 2.4 Serious Breaches

- Allegations of serious misconduct require a formal investigation by a suitable third-party organisation, who will appoint a person to act as ‘investigator’. That organisation must have a published complaints procedure which is relevant to the situation.
- The person appointed as ‘investigator’, in consultation with both parties and the Publisher (or Society / Association) as appropriate, should make the decision whether or not to involve the ‘accused’ person’s superiors / employers / professional association, etc., though they must be notified appropriately.
- The formal Complaint’s Process is then initiated. At this point, it needs to be determined ‘who’ stands in ‘what’ role: does the accused person’s professional association ‘support’ that person, or investigate them; what is the role of their professional insurance company; who investigates; who ‘prosecutes’; who ‘supports’ (both accuser and accused); and who ‘determines’ an outcome; and what are the appeal processes; and what sanctions are accessible or relevant.
- In certain circumstances, a potential ‘criminal’ or ‘anti-contractual’ act might have been alleged to have been committed: in such a case, the appropriate civil or legal authorities would be asked to / must ‘take over’ / take ‘precedence’ over the accusations, and should investigate, and (potentially) adjudicate (or even ‘prosecute’) with respect to the allegation, before any professional or internal processes can start.
- In such a case, any possible professional misconduct issues must be kept in abeyance until the civil or legal authorities had concluded their processes and made any decisions. Only after such civil or criminal processes had run their course, and irrespective of the outcome, could / should a professional association, organisation, employer, or whomsoever, be able to ‘decide’ on any appropriate course of action.

### 2.5 Outcomes and/or Sanctions

In the event of any ‘sanctions’ being applied as a result of an ‘established’ serious breach of misconduct by an internal or professional investigation, and subsequent to any criminal or legal proceedings, these are listed here in an increasing order of severity. Such sanctions

may be applied separately, or in conjunction with other sanctions. These sorts of sanction ought to be available in such situations:

**Informally, informing (or educating) the person (author, editor, or reviewer, etc.) that there appears to be a lack of appropriate knowledge and awareness, and thus a misapplication of acceptable professional standards:** Such an outcome might ‘suggest’ / ‘require’ a refresher course in professional ethics and practice (or similar) be undertaken, before (or in conjunction with) any resumption of normal activities.

- **Informing the person (author, editor, or reviewer, etc.) that there has almost certainly been a lack of knowledge and awareness about ethics, professional standards and/or appropriate behaviour:** Such an outcome might ‘require’ a strongly worded ‘formal’ letter given to the appropriate person(s) (i.e. author, editor, reviewer, etc.) covering their apparent misconduct and thus acting as a formal warning about any future or similar lapses in behaviour. There may also be a ‘requirement’ that they undertake a course in professional ethics or practice (or similar) before they can resume their normal activities. There may be a ‘built-in’ review or timely re-assessment of their future actions.
- **Publication of a formal (public) notice detailing the misconduct and acknowledging the results of an investigation into the behaviour of the person involved:** Such an outcome would be chosen when there was a balance of probability, or an admission, that serious breaches of misconduct had occurred. It would state (publically) and without prejudice any sanctions applied, or requirements made, before the resumption of normal activities; and/or it might announce a dismissal of the person from any of these activities, or memberships. The person should have a right to appeal such a decision, which appeal must be heard before any such publication. A lawyer must scrutinise any draft text, before release, and the organisation must follow their advice.
- **Publication of an editorial detailing the misconduct, the investigation, and the sanctions decided upon:** This ‘publication’ (of an editorial) would follow the precepts of the above, and – especially in the evidence of any systemic issues – try to reassure the subscribers (readership) and other interested parties that the published journal disassociates itself from any such behaviour, has taken significant steps to try to ensure no repetitions of the aberration. A lawyer must scrutinise any draft text, before release, and the organisation must follow their advice.
- **A formal letter to the head of the author's or reviewer's department or funding agency:** This is where internal, professional (or public) actions – as described above – might seem to be insufficient, or may seem to be ineffective, and therefore a ‘superior’ body of that person should be asked to apply whatever appropriate sanctions they can decide upon.
- **Formal retraction or withdrawal of a publication from the journal, in conjunction with informing the head of the author or reviewer's department, Abstracting & Indexing services, and the readership of the publication:** This is when there has been a very serious breach of publishing ethics – either by the author, or possibly also by the reviewer, or editor. Besides the infringement, the publication needs to consider – from its side – how come the mistake or infringement was not picked up and corrected in the processes before publication. An internal investigation of some sort should be initiated as well, and must incorporate any appropriate legal or professional.
- **Imposition of a formal embargo on contributions from an individual for a defined period:** This is when the author(s) have been seriously deficient or even fraudulent, and the publication is now imposing this penalty. This could be done only as a result or a consequence of the above sort of processes, and only be a safeguard for further possible infringements: it should not be a ‘private’ “blacklist”.

- **Reporting the case and outcome to a professional organisation (or higher authority) for further investigation and action:** This is when the publication or investigating organisation feels there may be / should be more serious actions taken that outside of their remit.

These points are indicators only. They are not necessarily binding or totally rigid. Publications and such organisations, must – in the case of a complaint – ‘navigate’ their way through these processes, giving and taking full cognisance of the present individual (and possibly unique) situation. Previous decisions in similar situations do not necessarily set a precedent.

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<sup>1</sup> **Status:** Currently (Feb. 2019), the International Journal of Psychotherapy is not a member of COPE but is considering applying shortly.