

All Ireland Spiritual Guidance Association (AISGA)

CODE OF ETHICS©

PREAMBLE

Spiritual Guidance has a long history. Persons in search of a deeper relationship with God tend to seek out another who helps them on the journey. Models of spiritual guidance vary from the formal to the more informal. In the more formal approach, there is a structured relationship with clear presuppositions, specific aims and a corresponding methodology through which the Spiritual Guide provides a service to the client. Fees for this service are common. The focus for the meetings is firmly on the client's desire to deepen his/her relationship with God. Both the Guide and the client set up the working alliance and are attentive to the activity of the Holy Spirit within it. The Guide is one who is also personally engaged in the inner work of spiritual transformation. At the same time he/she continues to grow in the skills and expertise necessary for the task of spiritual guidance. The work is of care and friendliness (not friendship) directed at fostering the relationship between the client and God. Guides usually avail of supervision and are certified/accredited. In this broad sense, spiritual guidance can be regarded as a professional service, which needs to be governed by a Code of Ethics.

This Code of Ethics includes:

- Aspirational aims to guide members of All Ireland Spiritual Guidance Association Limited (hereinafter called "AISGA") towards the highest ideals of good practice as Spiritual Guides.
- A set of rules of conduct and practice for members in the ethical practice of spiritual guidance that are required to be adhered to for so long as each person subscribing to such rules is a member of AISGA.

Members of AISGA agree to adhere to the Code of Ethics and the rules and regulations used to implement it for so long as they are members of AISGA.

What is the purpose of the Code of Ethics?

The Code of Ethics serves as:

- a norm to protect the client and the Spiritual Guide from the unethical application of spiritual guidance.
- a standard for its members re conduct, training and continuing education.
- a foundation for settling complaints through the procedure for instigating, investigating, resolving and appealing complaints of unethical conduct. This is set out in the Appendix, *Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures*.

Who is it for?

The Code is applicable to members' **work related activities** that are part of their professional spiritual guidance work. Included in this are private practice, group work, teaching, supervision, consultancy and other such interventions/engagements within the remit of spiritual guidance.

TERMINOLOGY

Spiritual Guidance

Spiritual guidance may take place in a one-to-one or group setting in which a trained person helps another/others to grow in an ever-closer relationship with God and to live out the consequences of this relationship.

Spiritual Guide

The person who provides the service of spiritual guidance.

Client

The person / persons who seek spiritual guidance.

Membership

There are two degrees of membership.

- **Associate Member:**
Associate member is one who is actively interested in the area of Spiritual guidance/spirituality and who is working towards becoming full members of AISGA
- **Full Member**
A full member is one who is accredited by AISGA for engagement in the professional practice of spiritual guidance in private practice, group work, teaching, supervision, consultancy and other such interventions/engagements within the remit of spiritual guidance.

I THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND THE SELF

Personal Spirituality

1. Spiritual Guides assume responsibility for their personal growth by:
 - a. developing a prayer life through engaging in personal and communal practices and disciplines;
 - b. availing of regular spiritual guidance.

Formation

2. Spiritual Guides engage in ongoing formation by:
 - a. continuing to discern their call to the ministry of spiritual guidance;
 - b. nurturing self-knowledge and freedom;
 - c. cultivating insight into the influences of culture, socio-historical context, environmental setting, and institutions;
 - d. studying scripture, theology, spirituality, psychology, and other disciplines related to spiritual guidance;
 - e. contributing according to their ability to ongoing research in the field of spiritual guidance.

Supervision

3. Spiritual Guides engage in supervision by:
 - a. receiving regular supervision from a mentor or in a peer supervision group;
 - b. seeking consultations with other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.

Personal Responsibility

4. Spiritual Guides meet their own needs outside the spiritual guidance relationship in a variety of ways, especially by:
 - a. self-care, wisely balancing time for prayer, work, leisure, family, and personal relationships;
 - b. refraining from practising spiritual guidance when their physical or psychological condition impairs attention and judgment;
 - c. Removing themselves, in so far as possible, from any situation that compromises the integrity of the spiritual guidance relationship, e.g. dual or multiple relationships. (see II.4 below)

Limitations

5. Spiritual Guides recognize the limits of:
 - a. Energy, by restricting the number of clients;
 - b. Attentiveness, by appropriate spacing of meetings and clients;
 - c. Competence, by refraining from entering new areas that involve additional skills without further study, training, and supervision and by referring clients to other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.

II THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND THE CLIENT

Covenant or Contract

- 1 A contract¹ is established between the Spiritual Guide and the client and includes agreements about:
 - a. the nature of spiritual guidance;
 - b. the roles of the Spiritual Guide and the client;
 - c. the frequency and length of guidance sessions;
 - d. the nature and limits of confidentiality;
 - e. the kind and amount of remuneration, if any, to be given to the Guide or institution;
 - f. the process for evaluating and terminating the relationship.

Dignity

- 2 Spiritual Guides value the dignity of the client by:
 - a. respecting the client's gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, membership of any community (all prohibited by the Equal Status Act 2000, i.e., once a person is over 18 years they can't be refused service on grounds of age.), culture, values, conscience, theology and spirituality, even when these are different from those of the Guide;
 - b. avoiding judgmental and defensive stances in the clear awareness of their own beliefs and convictions, and the capacity these have to create bias and prejudice;
 - c. respecting the unique process through which an individual becomes aware of spiritual, religious, moral or other values;
 - d. recognizing the imbalance of power in the spiritual guidance relationship and taking care not to exploit it through behaviours such as sexual abuse, sexual harassment, bullying and spiritual abuse.

Sexual Boundaries

- 3 The function of boundaries is to protect the nature of the spiritual guidance relationship and the vulnerability of both client and Spiritual Guide. The crossing of sexual boundaries is always an ethical violation. Hence Spiritual Guides do not:
 - a. engage in sexual intimacy with current clients;
 - b. engage in sexual intimacy with former clients until a reasonable time, (not less than five years), has elapsed since the termination of the guidance relationship;
 - c. undertake spiritual guidance with persons with whom they have been or are at present engaged in sexual intimacy;

¹ Spiritual Guides are understood to be acting in a personal capacity and not on behalf of AISGA when they make such a contract.

- d. engage in any kind of sexual harassment within the spiritual guidance situation, i.e. solicitation, physical advances, verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature, or anything that might reasonably be construed as sexual.

Multiple Relationships

- 4 In so far as possible Spiritual Guides will avoid being in more than one role with a client. In situations where dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable the Spiritual Guide will take great care:
 - a. that the dual or multiple relationship between Guide and client be carefully monitored, especially through supervision, and every effort made to avoid conflicts of interest;
 - b. that any influence the Guide may have through a non-guidance relationship not be used to the Guide's own advantage or the client's harm;
 - c. not to engage in business or other financial affairs with clients;
 - d. not to exploit persons sexually or otherwise over whom they hold supervisory or training influence.

Confidentiality

- 5 Spiritual Guides maintain the confidentiality and the privacy of the client by:
 - a. protecting the identity of the client;
 - b. keeping confidential all oral and written matters arising in the spiritual guidance sessions;
 - c. storing only such information as is essential for the process in written or electronic form;
 - d. conducting guidance sessions in appropriate settings;
 - e. observing legal regulations that require disclosure to proper authorities,² including but not limited to child abuse, elder abuse and physical harm to self or others;
 - f. making prudent arrangements to see that confidentiality is preserved in the event of death, incapacity, retirement, or other form of withdrawal from work as Spiritual Guides
 - g. allowing the client access to all personal data kept in electronic or written form.

² It is the responsibility of members to inform themselves of their legal obligations and the procedures to follow when reporting allegations.

III THE SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND OTHERS

Colleagues

- 1 Spiritual Guides maintain collegial relationships with other professionals and display an openness to an inter-disciplinary approach by:
 - a. developing intra- and interdisciplinary relationships, networking;
 - b. requesting a client who is in analysis or therapy to inform his or her analyst or therapist about being in spiritual guidance;
 - c. securing written releases and permission from clients when specific information needs to be shared for the benefit of the client;
 - d. honouring the contribution of other professionals.

Faith Communities

- 2 Spiritual Guides maintain responsible and respectful relationships to communities of faith by:
 - a. remaining open to processes of corporate discernment, accountability, and support;
 - b. appropriately drawing on the teachings and practices of communities of faith;
 - c. respecting the client's relationship to his or her own community of faith.

Social Responsibility

- 3 Spiritual Guides have a responsibility to the wider society as well as to their individual clients. They show this by:
 - a. keeping in mind issues of peace, justice, equality, reconciliation, ecology, etc. without in any way diminishing the integrity of their commitment to individuals;
 - b. seeing if spiritual guidance can be made available at times to those who cannot afford to offer remuneration;
 - c. advertising in a way that is prudent and discreet;
 - d. representing their academic and professional qualifications and accreditations accurately;
 - e. respecting all persons regardless of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical handicap, any preference, personal characteristic, condition or status or membership of a community;
 - f. modelling a way of living that contributes to the faith life and spiritual development of people.

RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

- 1 Members have a responsibility to be familiar with this code and to inform clients that such a code exists. Lack of awareness is not in itself a defense to an allegation of ethical misconduct.
- 2 Whenever a member has a question regarding the Code of Ethics, the member should consult the Ethics Committee for information, clarification and direction.
- 3 If members receive complaints of unethical conduct against them, they shall promptly report the complaint to the Ethics Committee.
- 4 If a member becomes aware of a lesser infringement of the Code of Ethics which is not threatening to the well-being of the member or others, (e.g., where boundaries are crossed, but not violated), he or she is encouraged to approach the member in question with the purpose of resolving the matter through clarification or remonstrance.
- 5 All ethical violations are recognized as serious. Where an alleged violation appears to be a serious threat to the well-being of the member or others, members shall refer the matter to the Ethics Committee by informing the Chairperson of the alleged violation. The Ethics Committee begins an investigation as soon as possible. The procedure for dealing with a complaint shall conform to the norms outlined in the Appendix, Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures.
- 6 If the complaint is upheld, actions which may be taken include reprimands, suspension, termination of membership, reporting to other relevant bodies or reporting any criminal matters to the relevant authorities.
- 7 Action to terminate or suspend membership may also be taken on foot of conviction for an offence, a finding of any civil liability that may, at the discretion of the Board, have an adverse affect on AISGA, expulsion from another professional organisation or other such suspensions even if such matters are not related to the activities of the member governed by these rules of ethics.
- 8 All members are expected to cooperate with the investigation process. Failure to cooperate is itself a violation of the Code and may be considered grounds for suspension or termination of membership.
- 9 Only those who were members of AISGA at the time that the alleged violation of the Code took place may be investigated and disciplined.
- 10 A member may be temporarily suspended from AISGA pending the resolution of any accusation, investigation or prosecution of a criminal matter, whether or not directly related to that member's role that is governed by AISGA or referred to by the code of ethics.

- 11 A member may be temporarily suspended from AISGA pending the resolution of any accusation, investigation or prosecution of a civil matter, whether or not directly related to that member's role that is governed by AISGA or referred to by the code if such matter may, in the sole opinion of the Board of AISGA affect AISGA in any way.

APPENDIX

Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures

AISGA aims to promote high standards of practice– and a ~~professional~~ code of ethics and discipline among its members. AISGA is unable to directly supervise or monitor compliance by its members with the agreed codes of ethics. Nonetheless, it has a duty to investigate any complaint which alleges violation by a member of the codes of conduct and/or standards of behaviour in the course of his /her relationship with a client, colleague or member. (see; preamble of code of ethics)

The following complaints and disciplinary procedures which follow the principals of natural justice, set out the action to be taken by the Board of Directors in the case of a complaint being brought against a member of the organisation. AISGA is committed to fair, just and uniform procedures and practices.

General Principles

1. No disciplinary action will be taken against a member until the case has been fully investigated and the member has had an opportunity to state his or her case. *Suspension may take place if such an investigation and opportunity to allow the member to state his or her case occurs as soon as reasonably practical after such suspension.*
2. At all stages in the procedure the member will be advised of the nature of the complaint against him/ her and be provided with all available evidence before any hearing takes place.
3. At all stages the member will have the right to be accompanied by a person of his or her choosing. The member's chosen companion will be entitled to address the hearing but not to answer questions on behalf of the member, unless the companion is a legal representative.
4. A member will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary penalty imposed.
5. At all stages of the procedure the matter should be dealt with without undue delay.
6. Information relating to any disciplinary proceedings, including witness statements and records of any sanction imposed, shall remain confidential except in the case of the matter being required by the Gardai or PSNI.
7. If a complaint/disciplinary procedure is made against a member, such a member has an obligation to notify AISGA.

Procedures

1. Complaints should be made in writing to the **Chairperson of the AISGA Board of Directors**. If the Chairperson has a conflict of interest regarding the complaint, then the Vice- Chairperson should assume the responsibility for the Chairperson throughout the procedure.
2. The Chairperson shall inform the member who is the subject of the complaint of its receipt and will provide the member with a copy of the Complaints Procedure, the name of the complainant and the substance of the complaint. The chairperson shall inform the member of the steps envisaged thereafter.
3. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors shall inform the Board of Directors of the complaint and the Board of Directors shall refer the matter to the **Standing Ethical Committee** to carry out a preliminary investigation. The Standing Ethical Committee shall be composed of at least five persons who are full members of AISGA.
4. The Standing Ethical Committee shall carry out its functions expeditiously, mindful of the anxiety which any complaint involves for all parties concerned. It shall carry out a thorough preliminary investigation which will include interviews with the complainant and any witnesses proposed by the complainant. It shall seek necessary consents to obtain any documents relevant to its investigation. It shall interview the person who is the subject of the complaint (respondent) and inform him/her of the procedure being followed and of his/her right to be accompanied during the interview. It shall inform the respondent of the evidence gathered in relation to the complaint and afford the respondent the opportunity and adequate time to make a full response. It shall interview any witnesses proffered by the respondent in support of his/her response.
5. The Standing Ethical Committee shall submit a report of its investigation to the **Chairperson of the Board of Directors**. The Report should contain all statements of evidence gathered and all documents received. It should state whether, in the opinion of the Standing Ethical Committee, there is a case to answer. If it considers that there is a case to answer the Standing Ethical Committee shall make recommendations as to whether conciliation ought to be attempted between the two parties or, whether the matter should be sent forward for a full hearing of the Board of Directors.
6. AISGA has a policy of reporting reasonable suspicion or knowledge of child abuse discovered during the course of its investigation, to the appropriate authorities. If such child abuse is against an adult, when that adult was a child, no report shall be made without the consent of that adult unless the full Board of Directors of AISGA consent in writing if the Directors are of the opinion that such reporting is prudent and proportional in the circumstances.
7. The Chairperson of the Board of Directors shall present the Report to the **Board of Directors** which shall determine the means by which the complaint should be brought forward. If a full hearing of the complaint is considered necessary, the

Board of Directors shall appoint a **Disciplinary Sub-Committee** to conduct the hearing.

8. The **Disciplinary Sub-Committee** shall be provided with the Report of the Standing Ethical Committee and shall conduct a hearing of the complaint on a date and time which is convenient to the complainant and the respondent and at which all the evidence in support of and contradicting the complaint will be heard. In advance of any hearing, the complainant and the respondent shall receive any documents, to which it is proposed reference will be made, in the course of the hearing, including the Report of the preliminary investigation. The respondent will have the right, in person or through a representative to question the complainant and any witnesses called by the Disciplinary Sub-Committee.

If indicated, the Disciplinary Sub-Committee may request to consult with legal experts. Such persons may meet with the Disciplinary Sub-Committee in private, but normally shall not be present and in no circumstances participate in its final decisions or vote.

9. The Disciplinary Sub-Committee, having heard all available evidence, shall determine whether, in its opinion, the complaint is sufficiently well founded to justify the imposition of penalties.

The following actions may be recommended:

- Advice that the complaint is unfounded
- Admonishment - this is meant to be educational, when a member has been unaware of having violated the Code of Ethics
- Formal reprimand - this is a serious rebuke of the member, based on the assessment that the member has accepted responsibility for the violation and guarantees in writing that it will not reoccur.
- Suspension of membership for a stated period
- Termination of membership.

10. The Disciplinary Sub-Committee shall inform the complainant and respondent of its determination and the right to appeal. It shall communicate its determination to the **Chairperson of the Board of Directors** for implementation. The respondent shall be permitted to appeal a determination of the Disciplinary Sub-Committee within fourteen working days of notification thereof. The appeal grounds thereof shall be notified in writing to the Chairperson of the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors shall appoint an **Appeals Committee** to conduct the hearing. *The number of this Appeals Committee shall consist of at least six persons, one of whom shall be a member of the Disciplinary Sub-Committee but such person will not have a vote in any decision of the Appeals Committee.*
11. If the right to appeal has not been exercised, the Board of Directors shall accept and implement the determination of the Disciplinary Sub-Committee. The Chairperson will communicate this decision to the complainant and the respondent.

If the right to appeal has been exercised, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors will communicate its decision in relation to the appeal to the complainant and the respondent as soon as possible thereafter.

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