



AAMFT Code of Ethics



PREAMBLE

The Board of Directors of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) hereby promulgates, pursuant to Article 2, Section 2.01.3 of the Association's Bylaws, the Revised AAMFT Code of Ethics effective January 1, 2026.

Honoring Public Trust

The AAMFT strives to honor the public trust in marriage and family therapists by setting standards for ethical practice as described in this Code. The ethical standards define professional expectations and are enforced by the AAMFT Ethics Committee.

Commitment to Service, Advocacy, and Public Participation

Marriage and family therapists are defined by an enduring dedication to professional and ethical excellence, as well as the commitment to service, advocacy, and public participation. These commitments are recognized as responsibilities to the profession equal in importance to all other aspects. Further, these commitments promote equitable access to the mental healthcare marriage and family therapists provide. As systemic clinicians, marriage and family therapists embody these aspirations by participating in activities that contribute to a better community and society, including devoting a portion of their professional activity to services for which there is little or no financial return. Marriage and family therapists are concerned with developing laws and regulations pertaining to marriage and family therapy that serve the public interest, and with altering such laws and regulations that are not in the public interest. Marriage and family therapists also encourage public participation in the design and delivery of professional services and in the regulation of practitioners. Professional competence in these areas is essential to the character of the field, and to the well-being of clients and their communities.

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Seeking Consultation

Although the AAMFT Code of Ethics seeks to be comprehensive, it is not exhaustive and there may be behaviors or situations that implicate ethical principles but are not explicitly addressed here. Marriage and family therapists who are uncertain about the ethics of a particular course of action are encouraged to seek counsel from consultants, attorneys, supervisors, colleagues, or other appropriate authorities.

Ethical Decision-Making

Both law and ethics govern the practice of marriage and family therapy. When making decisions regarding professional behavior, marriage and family therapists must consider the AAMFT Code of Ethics and applicable laws and regulations. If the AAMFT Code of Ethics prescribes a standard higher than that required by law, marriage and family therapists must meet the higher standard of the AAMFT Code of Ethics. Marriage and family therapists comply with the mandates of law, clearly communicate their commitment to the AAMFT Code of Ethics, and take steps to resolve the conflict in a responsible manner. The AAMFT supports legal mandates for reporting of alleged unethical conduct.

Marriage and family therapists remain accountable to the AAMFT Code of Ethics when acting as members or employees of organizations. If the mandates of an organization with which a marriage and family therapist is affiliated, through employment, contract or otherwise, conflict with the AAMFT Code of Ethics, marriage and family therapists clearly communicate to the organization their commitment to the AAMFT Code of Ethics and take reasonable steps to resolve the conflict in a way that allows the fullest adherence to the Code of Ethics.

Binding Expectations

Members of AAMFT in all membership categories, including applicants for membership, must know the AAMFT Code of Ethics and its application to their professional services. Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of an ethical standard is not a defense to a charge of unethical conduct. The AAMFT Code of Ethics is binding on members of AAMFT in all membership categories, including applicants for membership.

Resolving Complaints

The process for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct is described in the current AAMFT Procedures for Handling Ethical Matters. AAMFT members and applicants for membership who are accused are considered innocent by the Ethics Committee until proven guilty, except as otherwise provided, and are entitled to due process. If an AAMFT member resigns in anticipation or during the course of an ethics investigation, the Ethics Committee will complete its investigation. Any publication of action taken by the Association will include the fact that the member, or applicant for membership, attempted to resign during the investigation.

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Aspirational Core Values

The following core values speak generally to the membership of AAMFT as a professional association, yet they also inform all the varieties of practice and service in which marriage and family therapists engage. These core values are aspirational in nature and are distinct from ethical standards. These values are intended to provide a framework within which marriage and family therapists may pursue the highest goals of practice.

The core values of AAMFT embody:

1. The cultivation of an inclusive environment without prejudice and oppression where equity, belonging, and mutual respect are intrinsic.
2. Responsiveness and excellence in service to members.
3. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and excellence in clinical practice, supervision, research, education, and administration.
4. Distinctiveness and excellence in training of marriage and family therapists in systemic and relational therapies.
5. Integrity in ethical and honest behavior within Association governance.
6. Innovation and the advancement of knowledge of systemic and relational therapies.

Ethical Standards

Ethical standards, by contrast to aspirational values, are rules of practice that marriage and family therapists are obliged to follow. Ethical standards are used to adjudicate ethical complaints. The introductory paragraph to each standard in the AAMFT Code of Ethics is an aspirational and explanatory orientation to the enforceable standards that follow.

STANDARD I: RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS

Marriage and family therapists advance the well-being of families, partners, and individuals and make reasonable efforts to find the appropriate balance between conflicting goals within family systems.

1.1 Non-Discrimination. Marriage and family therapists provide professional assistance to persons without discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity, color, religion, national origin, location, citizenship status, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions), sexual orientation, sexual or gender expression, gender identity, disability (physical or mental), age, genetic information, marital status, veteran or military status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.

1.2 Informed Consent. Prior to initiating services, and as often as necessary throughout treatment, marriage and family therapists obtain appropriate informed consent to therapy or related procedures and use language that is reasonably understandable to clients. When persons, due to age or mental status, are legally incapable of giving informed consent, marriage and family therapists obtain informed permission from a legally authorized person, as permitted by law. The content of informed consent may vary depending upon the client and treatment plan; however, informed consent generally necessitates that the client: (a) has the capacity to consent; (b) has been adequately informed of significant information concerning treatment processes and procedures; (c) has been adequately informed of potential risks and benefits of treatments; (d) has freely and without undue influence expressed consent; and (e) has provided consent that is appropriately documented.

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1.3 Multiple Relationships. Marriage and family therapists must not exploit clients. Marriage and family therapists, therefore, make every effort to avoid multiple relationships or conditions with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation. Such relationships include, but are not limited to, business or close personal relationships with a client or the client's family. When the risk of impairment or exploitation exists due to multiple roles or conditions, marriage and family therapists document the precautions taken.

1.4 Sexual Behavior with Current Clients, Former Clients, and Others. All forms of sexual behavior with current and former clients or with known members of the client's family system are prohibited.

1.5 Reports of Unethical Behavior. Marriage and family therapists must comply with applicable laws regarding the reporting of alleged unethical conduct.

1.6 Abuse of the Therapeutic Relationship. Marriage and family therapists do not abuse their power in therapeutic relationships.

1.7 Client Autonomy in Decision Making. Marriage and family therapists must respect the rights of clients to make decisions and help them to understand the consequences of these decisions. Marriage and family therapists clearly advise clients that clients have the responsibility to make decisions regarding relationships such as cohabitation, marriage, divorce, separation, reconciliation, custody, and visitation or parenting time.

1.8 Relationship Beneficial to Client. Marriage and family therapists continue therapeutic relationships only as long as it is reasonably clear that clients are benefiting from the relationship.

1.9 Referrals. Marriage and family therapists make reasonable efforts to provide current, former, or prospective clients with appropriate referrals if the marriage and family therapist is unable or unwilling to provide professional help.

1.10 Non-abandonment. Marriage and family therapists do not terminate treatment with clients without making reasonable efforts to provide appropriate arrangements for the continuation of care.

1.11 Written Consent to Record. Marriage and family therapists must obtain informed consent and written authorization from clients or legally authorized persons before recording any images, video, audio, using any transcription services, or permitting third-party observation.

1.12 Relationships with Third Parties. Marriage and family therapists, upon agreeing to provide services to a person or entity at the request of a third party, clarify, to the extent feasible and at the outset of the service, the nature of the relationship with each party and the limits of confidentiality.

STANDARD II: CONFIDENTIALITY

Marriage and family therapists have unique confidentiality concerns because the client in a therapeutic relationship may be more than one person. Marriage and family therapists respect and guard the confidences of each individual client in the client system.

2.1 Disclosing Limits of Confidentiality. Marriage and family therapists disclose to clients and other parties with a legal interest at the outset of services the nature of confidentiality and possible limitations of the clients' right to confidentiality. Marriage and family therapists review with clients the circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. Repeated disclosures to clients and other relevant parties may be necessary due to changes in circumstances.

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2.2 Written Authorization to Release Client Information. Marriage and family therapists do not disclose client confidences except by written authorization or waiver, or where mandated or permitted by law. Verbal authorization will not be sufficient except in emergency situations, unless prohibited by law. When providing couple, family, or group treatment, the marriage and family therapist does not disclose information outside the treatment context without a written authorization from each individual competent to provide written authorization. In the context of couple, family, or group treatment, the marriage and family therapist must not reveal any individual's confidences to others in the client unit without the prior written permission of that individual.

2.3 Client Access to Records. Marriage and family therapists provide clients with reasonable access to records concerning the clients. When providing couple, family, or group treatment, the marriage and family therapist does not provide access to records without a written authorization from each individual competent to provide written authorization. Marriage and family therapists limit a client's access to their records only in exceptional circumstances when there is compelling evidence that such access could cause serious harm to the client. The client's request and the rationale for withholding some or all of the record must be documented in the client's file.

Marriage and family therapists take steps to protect the confidentiality of other individuals identified in client records.

2.4 Confidentiality in Non-Clinical Activities. Marriage and family therapists use client and clinical materials in teaching, writing, consulting, research, and public presentations only if written authorization has been obtained in accordance with Standard 2.2, or when appropriate steps have been taken to protect client identity and confidentiality as permitted by law.

2.5 Protection of Records. Marriage and family therapists store, safeguard, and dispose of clinical records to comply with applicable laws and professional standards.

2.6 Breaches. In the event of a breach of clinical records, marriage and family therapists must notify clients in a timely manner that is consistent with applicable laws and professional standards.

2.7 Preparation for Practice Changes. In preparation for moving, selling, or closing a practice, incapacitation, or death, marriage and family therapists arrange for the storage, transfer, or disposal of client records in compliance with applicable laws and professional standards.

2.8 Confidentiality in Consultations. Marriage and family therapists, when consulting with colleagues or referral sources, do not share confidential information that could reasonably lead to the identification of a client, research participant, supervisee, or other person with whom they have a confidential relationship without written authorization. Marriage and family therapists share information only to the extent necessary to achieve the purposes of the consultation.

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STANDARD III: PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY

Marriage and family therapists maintain high standards of professional competence and integrity.

3.1 Maintenance of Competency. Marriage and family therapists pursue knowledge of new developments and emerging therapeutic approaches. Marriage and family therapists maintain their competence in the field through education, training, or supervised experience.

3.2 Knowledge of Regulatory Standards. Marriage and family therapists pursue appropriate education, training, or consultation to ensure adequate knowledge of, and adherence to, applicable laws, ethics, and professional standards.

3.3 Seek Assistance. Marriage and family therapists must not engage in therapeutic services when those services are compromised due to impairments to their clinical competence. Marriage and family therapists seek appropriate supervision, consultation, or professional assistance for issues that may impair work performance or clinical judgment.

3.4 Conflicts of Interest. Marriage and family therapists do not knowingly provide services that create a conflict of interest that may impair work performance, compromise clinical judgment, or cause harm to a client.

3.5 Maintenance of Records. Marriage and family therapists maintain accurate and adequate clinical and financial records in accordance with professional standards and applicable law.

3.6 Development of New Skills. While developing new skills in specialty areas, marriage and family therapists take steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect clients from possible harm. Marriage and family therapists practice in specialty areas new to them only after appropriate education, training, or supervised experience.

3.7 Harassment. Marriage and family therapists must not engage in sexual or other forms of harassment of clients, students, trainees, supervisees, employees, colleagues, research participants, or other persons with whom they have a professional relationship.

3.8 Exploitation. Recognizing the potential for power imbalances, marriage and family therapists do not exploit clients, students, trainees, supervisees, employees, colleagues, research participants, or other persons with whom they have a professional relationship.

3.9 Gifts. When deciding whether or not to accept from or give gifts to clients, marriage and family therapists consider cultural norms and meaning, professional standards, and client perceptions. Marriage and family therapists consider the potential effects that receiving or giving gifts may have on clients and the therapeutic relationship.

3.10 Scope of Competence. Marriage and family therapists do not diagnose, treat, or advise on problems outside the recognized boundaries of their competencies.

3.11 Public Statements. Marriage and family therapists, because of their ability to influence and alter the lives of others and the public perception of the profession, adhere to professional standards when making professional recommendations or giving opinions through testimony or other public statements.

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3.12 Professional Misconduct. Marriage and family therapists may be in violation of this Code and subject to termination of membership or other appropriate action if they: (a) are convicted of any felony; (b) are convicted of a misdemeanor related to their qualifications or functions; (c) engage in conduct which could lead to conviction of a felony, or a misdemeanor related to their qualifications or functions; (d) are expelled from or disciplined by other professional organizations; (e) have their licenses or certificates suspended or revoked, or are subject to any order, settlement, or disciplinary action by a regulatory body; (f) continue to practice marriage and family therapy while no longer competent to do so because they are impaired by physical or mental causes or the abuse of alcohol or other substances; or (g) fail to cooperate with the Association at any point from the inception of an ethical complaint through the completion of all proceedings regarding that complaint.

STANDARD IV: RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS AND SUPERVISEES

Marriage and family therapists recognize and attend to power differentials with students and supervisees, and promote the professional development of students and supervisees.

4.1 Multiple Relationships. Marriage and family therapists must not exploit students and supervisees. Marriage and family therapists, therefore, make every effort to avoid multiple relationships or conditions that could impair professional objectivity or increase the risk of exploitation to students and supervisees. When the risk of impairment or exploitation exists due to multiple roles or conditions, marriage and family therapists document the precautions taken.

4.2 Therapy with Students or Supervisees. Marriage and family therapists must not provide therapy to students or supervisees over whom they exercise professional authority.

4.3 Sexual Behavior with Students or Supervisees. Marriage and family therapists must not engage in sexual behavior with students or supervisees over whom they exercise professional authority.

4.4 Oversight of Supervisee Competence. Marriage and family therapists do not knowingly permit students or supervisees to perform, or to hold themselves out as competent to perform, professional services beyond their training, level of experience, and competence.

4.5 Oversight of Quality of Care Provided by Supervisees. Marriage and family therapists make reasonable efforts to ensure that services provided by supervisees meet minimum standards of ethical and clinically appropriate care.

4.6 Confidentiality with Supervisees. Marriage and family therapists do not disclose supervisee confidences except by written authorization or waiver, or when mandated or permitted by law, or when providing assessments of supervisee competence to licensing boards, professional organizations, and other entities that provide clinical credentials. In educational or training settings where there are multiple supervisors, disclosures without authorization are permitted only to other professional colleagues, administrators, or employers who are involved in the training or management of the supervisee. Verbal authorization is not sufficient except in emergency situations, unless prohibited by law.

4.7 Payment for Supervision. Marriage and family therapists providing clinical supervision must not enter into financial arrangements with supervisees through deceptive or exploitative practices, nor shall marriage and family therapists providing clinical supervision exert undue influence over supervisees when establishing supervision fees.

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STANDARD V: RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Marriage and family therapists respect the dignity and protect the welfare of research participants, and uphold applicable laws, regulations, and professional standards governing the conduct of research.

5.1 Institutional Approval. Marriage and family therapists submit accurate and honest research proposals, obtain institutional approval prior to conducting the research, and maintain institutional approval throughout the research process, in accordance with applicable laws and professional standards.

5.2 Protection of Research Participants. Prior to collecting data, marriage and family therapists must evaluate the potential risks and benefits for participants in relation to the potential knowledge to be gained through the research.

5.3 Conflict of Interest in Research. To protect research participants, marriage and family therapists must identify and continually monitor conflicts of interest during the research process, and disclose such conflicts to participants, institutional review boards, and research consumers.

5.4 Informed Consent to Research. Marriage and family therapists involved in research obtain appropriate voluntary informed consent from participants or persons legally authorized to provide consent where mandated by law.

5.5 Right to Decline or Withdraw from Participation. Marriage and family therapists respect participants' freedom to decline participation in or to withdraw from a research study at any time without penalty. Marriage and family therapists must provide participants with a clear process for withdrawal.

5.6 Confidentiality of Research Data. Information obtained about a study participant during the course of research is confidential unless a written waiver is obtained. When the possibility exists that others, including family members, may obtain access to such information, marriage and family therapists clearly explain this risk as well as the measures that will be taken to protect confidentiality and keep data secure.

5.7 Truthfulness of Research. Marriage and family therapists do not fabricate or falsify research results

5.8 Authorship of Student Work. Marriage and family therapists do not accept or require authorship credit for a publication based on a student's research without the marriage and family therapist making a substantive contribution beyond being a faculty advisor or research committee member.

5.9 Plagiarism. Marriage and family therapists who are the authors of books or other materials that are published or distributed do not plagiarize or fail to cite sources to which credit for original ideas or work is due.

5.10 Accuracy in Publication. Marriage and family therapists who are authors of books or other materials published or distributed by a third party make reasonable efforts to ensure that the published materials are accurate and factual.

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STANDARD VI: TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Marriage and family therapists can benefit from a wide range of technologies to support and improve treatment and supervision, and must use them in a responsible manner. This standard addresses basic ethical requirements of using these tools to augment therapy, supervision, and related professional services.

6.1 Technology-Assisted Services. Marriage and family therapists may use technology to support and facilitate the delivery of treatment or supervision services. Prior to doing so, marriage and family therapists and supervisors must: (a) determine that technologically-assisted services or supervision are reasonably appropriate for clients or supervisees; (b) inform clients or supervisees of the potential risks associated with technologically-assisted services; (c) make reasonable efforts to ensure the security of any confidential information that is transmitted or stored; and (d) utilize technologically-assisted services only after obtaining appropriate education, training, or supervised experience using the relevant technology.

6.2 Technology and Treatment Decisions. Marriage and family therapists do not use technology in place of their own independent treatment decisions and decision-making process.

6.3 Technology and Consent to Treat. Marriage and family therapists must obtain informed consent prior to treating clients through technology-assisted means. Marriage and family therapists must inform clients in writing of the risks associated with the technology-assisted means.

6.4 Technology and Supervision. Marriage and family therapist supervisors must adhere to all applicable laws and professional standards associated with the use of technology for supervision.

6.5 Technology and Documentation. Marriage and family therapists must use technology that adheres to relevant professional and legal standards when electronically generating, transmitting, or maintaining documentation containing confidential or identifying client information.

6.6 Location of Services and Practice. Marriage and family therapists follow all applicable laws regarding location of practice and services. Marriage and family therapists do not use technology-assisted means for practicing in jurisdictions where they are not legally allowed to practice.

STANDARD VII: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES WITHIN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Marriage and family therapists adhere to the highest standards in when providing testimony or other services within the legal system.

7.1 Performance of Forensic Services. Marriage and family therapists may perform forensic services which may include interviews, consultations, evaluations, reports, and formal and informal assessments in accordance with applicable laws and competencies.

7.2 Testimony in Legal Proceedings. Marriage and family therapists who provide expert or fact witness testimony in legal proceedings must avoid misleading or false statements and base conclusions and opinions on appropriate data. The testimony from a marriage and family therapist expert witness must be accurate, independent, and based on reliable principles and methods.

7.3 Informed Consent. When evaluating individuals within the legal system, marriage and family therapists make reasonable efforts to obtain their written consent. Marriage and family therapists inform them about the evaluation process, use of information and recommendations, financial arrangements, and the therapist's role within the legal system using language that is reasonably understandable.

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7.4 Avoiding Conflicts. Marriage and family therapists protect the interests of persons being evaluated and make clear distinctions between therapy and evaluations. To avoid conflicts when legal systems are involved or when therapy is mandated, marriage and family therapists take reasonable steps to define their roles and clarify the extent of confidentiality.

7.5 Avoiding Dual Roles. Marriage and family therapists must not provide forensic services or act as an expert witness for current or former therapy clients, unless otherwise mandated by legal systems. Marriage and family therapists must not provide therapeutic services to individuals for whom the marriage and family therapist has previously provided forensic services or expert witness services unless otherwise mandated by legal systems.

7.6 Separation of Custody Evaluation from Therapy. Marriage and family therapists must not provide custody evaluations for current or former therapy clients unless mandated by law or judicial order. Marriage and family therapists may provide the court or mental health professional performing the evaluation with information about the minor, so long as appropriate authorization to disclose information is obtained.

7.7 Professional Opinions. Marriage and family therapists who provide forensic evaluations must not offer professional opinions or diagnoses about persons they have not directly interviewed, unless mandated by law or judicial order.

7.8 Familiarity with Rules. Marriage and family therapists who provide forensic services must be familiar with judicial and administrative rules prescribing their roles.

STANDARD VIII: FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Marriage and family therapists make financial arrangements with clients, third-party payors, and supervisees that are reasonably understandable and conform to accepted professional practices and applicable laws.

8.1 Financial Integrity. Marriage and family therapists do not offer or accept kickbacks, rebates, bonuses, or other remuneration for referrals.

8.2 Disclosure of Financial Policies. Prior to entering into the therapeutic or supervisory relationship, marriage and family therapists clearly disclose and explain to clients and supervisees in writing: (a) all financial arrangements and fees related to professional services, including charges for canceled or missed appointments; (b) the use of collection agencies or legal measures for nonpayment; and (c) the policy of obtaining payment from the client, to the extent allowed by law, if payment is denied by the third-party payor. Once services have begun, therapists provide reasonable notice of any changes in fees or other charges.

8.3 Notice of Payment Recovery Procedures. Marriage and family therapists give reasonable notice to clients with unpaid balances of their intent to seek collection by agency or legal recourse. When such action is taken, marriage and family therapists will not disclose clinical information unless permitted or mandated by law.

8.4 Truthful Representation of Services. Marriage and family therapists represent facts truthfully to clients, third-party payors, and supervisees regarding services rendered.

8.5 Bartering. Marriage and family therapists ordinarily refrain from accepting goods and services from clients in return for services rendered. Bartering for professional services may be conducted only if: (a) the supervisee or client requests it; (b) the relationship is not exploitative; (c) the professional relationship is not distorted; (d) a clear written contract is established; and (e) the marriage and family therapist documents the rationale for entering into the bartering agreement.

8.6 Withholding Records for Non-Payment. Marriage and family therapists may not withhold records under their immediate control solely because payment has not been received for past services.

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STANDARD IX: ADVERTISING

Marriage and family therapists only engage in appropriate networking, advertising, and marketing activities.

9.1 Accurate Professional Representation. Marriage and family therapists accurately represent their affiliations, licensure, supervision status, educational degrees, competencies, training, and experience associated with the practice of marriage and family therapy, complying with applicable law.

9.2 Promotional Materials. Marriage and family therapists ensure that advertisements and publications in any and all media are true, accurate, and comply with applicable law and professional standards. Marriage and family therapists do not solicit testimonials or endorsements from current clients or from other persons who are vulnerable to undue influence.

9.3 Educational Credentials. Marriage and family therapists do not advertise or claim educational degrees for clinical services that do not demonstrate training and education in marriage and family therapy or related fields.

9.4 Employee, Contractor, or Supervisee Qualifications. Marriage and family therapists reasonably ensure that the qualifications of their employees, contractors, and supervisees are represented in a manner that is true, accurate, and in accordance with applicable law.

9.5 Specialization. Marriage and family therapists represent themselves as providing specialized services only after taking reasonable steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect clients, supervisees, and others from harm.

9.6 Correction of Misinformation. Marriage and family therapists make reasonable efforts to correct false, misleading, or inaccurate information and representations made on their behalf by others concerning the therapist's qualifications, services, or products.