Catharsis Staff Code of Conduct

Staff selected to work for Catharsis come with relevant qualification (all therapists are qualified to at least MA level), registration, clinical supervision and insurance; Arts Therapists are governed by the HCPC (Health Care Professions Council) and all other therapists are members of the governing body particular to their specialism. As such they are required to adhere to the codes of conduct, performance, ethics, and proficiency set out by their profession.

Catharsis will apply the current statutory safer-recruitment and disqualification requirements applicable to the setting in which a therapist works**.** Catharsis therapists are expected to adhere to Catharsis policies, their roles and responsibilities as agreed at induction, their freelance therapy contract and the policies of the institutions they work in.

Other Catharsis policies, which have links with this Staff Code of Conduct, are as follows:

- Safeguarding Policies
- Equality and Diversity
- Quality Assurance
- Compliments and Complaints
- Whistleblowing and Allegations about Staff
- Fraud Prevention Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Data Protection and Information Sharing Policy
- Absence, Sickness and Health Support Policy

In order to practice safely and effectively, therapists need to ensure they maintain high standards of personal conduct and that they do not engage in behaviours that may affect the public's confidence in the arts and other psychotherapies.

Therapists have a professional responsibility to recognise when their health, wellbeing or other circumstances may affect their ability to practice safely and effectively. Where there is a risk that their ability to practice may be impaired, they must seek appropriate professional support, supervision and notify Catharsis SLT (see Absence, Sickness and Health Support Policy).

Working with Clients

There is an expectation around dual relationships that therapists should not work with clients with whom they have personal, family, or financial ties. Therapists should also avoid situations where conflicts of interest may arise. Any potential conflicts of interest must be declared to SLT as per the freelance therapist contract.

Catharsis considers the welfare of our clients and particularly, young people within our care to be paramount; our aim is to protect them from harm and properly support where harm has occurred. Catharsis staff are responsible for their own actions and should avoid any conduct that may lead others to question their motivations and intentions. It is recognised however, that in the course of their work, therapists may need to make professional judgements about their physical contact with young people, including the use of appropriate, 'Safe Touch'. For young people to feel safe in their therapy sessions, the building of a trusting relationship and safe boundaries are very important.

- physical contact should be therapeutically justified
- consent should be ongoing and can be withdrawn at any time
- age/developmental capacity should be considered
- any unusual or disputed incident should be recorded/reported;
- therapists should seek supervision and discuss with SLT where uncertain.

Therapists are encouraged to discuss or take advice about any incident that they feel may give rise for concern, including any misunderstandings, threats, or accidents. Incidents should be discussed with their clinical supervisor, the Safeguarding Lead or key member of staff within a school / institution; they should also be discussed with the Catharsis SLT. Staff must report concerns about another member of staff's conduct through the appropriate safeguarding, management or whistleblowing route and must not attempt to investigate allegations themselves.

Standards of Conduct and Professional Behaviour

It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of behaviours that may be inconsistent with this Code of Conduct. All staff are expected to exercise professional judgement and to conduct themselves in a way that protects the safety, dignity and wellbeing of young people, other clients, colleagues and partner organisations.

The following are examples of conduct that would be considered unacceptable and may result in action being taken, including removal from the Catharsis therapist pool and, where appropriate, referral to the relevant professional or regulatory body:

- Aggressive, threatening, intimidating or abusive behaviour towards young people, clients, colleagues or other professionals.
- Using abusive, discriminatory, derogatory or otherwise inappropriate language or behaviour.
- Engaging in sexualised behaviour or inappropriate discussion of sexual matters with a client, including discussing the therapist's own sexual relationships.
- Any form of sexual misconduct, harassment, exploitation or inappropriate physical contact.
- Taking, sharing or accessing inappropriate photographs, recordings or images of clients, including upskirting or similar behaviour.
- Arranging to meet clients outside agreed therapeutic sessions without a clear professional reason and appropriate authorisation.
- Entering into inappropriate personal, social or financial relationships with clients.
- Breaching confidentiality or data-protection requirements without a lawful and appropriate reason for sharing information.
- Consuming alcohol or using substances with clients or attending work while impaired by alcohol or substances.
- Making malicious, knowingly false or deliberately misleading allegations about colleagues or other professionals.
- Failing to comply with safeguarding procedures, professional boundaries, relevant Catharsis policies or the policies of the organisation in which the therapist is working.
- Using digital technology, social media or artificial intelligence in a way that breaches confidentiality, professional boundaries, safeguarding requirements or Catharsis policy.

Concerns about a therapist's conduct will be considered in accordance with the relevant Catharsis policies and procedures. The response will be proportionate to the nature and seriousness of the concern and may include supervision, management action, investigation, removal from the Catharsis therapist pool, or referral to the therapist's professional or regulatory body. Where there is a concern that meets the relevant threshold for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Catharsis SLT will make the appropriate referral in accordance with safeguarding procedures.

Catharsis takes concerns and complaints about the service seriously. Any client, parent/carer or partner agency who feels that they have not received a satisfactory service is encouraged to raise their concerns through the Compliments and Complaints Policy. Complaints will be considered fairly, promptly and appropriately, with information shared with those involved on a need-to-know basis and in accordance with confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

Social media / Communication

Therapists must not:

- "friend", follow or connect with clients through personal social-media accounts
- communicate with clients through personal messaging accounts
- search for clients online except where there is a legitimate professional/safeguarding reason
- monitor or interact with clients' social-media activity
- discuss cases in closed Facebook/WhatsApp/Reddit/online groups
- use screenshots of client communications for training or supervision without appropriate safeguards.

It is recognised that social media and the use of AI is widely used by young people and adults. Therapists should ensure that all communication with clients is open to scrutiny and should not give out their own personal e-mail. Where a client discusses their use of AI for mental-health advice or support, therapists should respond within their professional competence, explore any associated risks and misinformation, and consider safeguarding implications where appropriate.

Where circumstances such as a pandemic occur, agreement with all relevant parties about alternative methods of communication can be reached. In these circumstances school email addresses, Catharsis email addresses and work phone numbers may need to be shared and utilised; consent will need to be reviewed and clear boundaries put in place (see Alternative Ways of Working within Safeguarding C&YP Policy).

Catharsis welcomes positive promotion of its services; however use of the Catharsis name and logo should only be with approval of the Catharsis Management Team.

Internet, Mobile Phones and Digital Devices

Online therapy/remote sessions protocols:

- Use only secure platforms
- Ensure confidentiality/privacy during sessions (no other people present unless agreed – guidance available).
- Maintain the same professional standards online as in-person.

Use of the internet, mobile phones and other digital devices during therapy sessions must be consistent with the policies and procedures of the school or institution in which the therapist is working, including its mobile-phone, acceptable-use and online-safety policies.

Therapists must not permit Young People to use personal mobile phones, smartwatches or other personal digital devices during therapy sessions unless this is expressly permitted by the relevant school or institution and there is a clear therapeutic or safeguarding reason for doing so. Any agreed use must be appropriately supervised and consistent with the school's arrangements.

Where internet access is required as part of therapeutic work, this should be agreed in advance where possible and undertaken using an appropriate, secure device and connection. Therapists should ensure that Young People do not access inappropriate, unsafe or unauthorised websites, applications or online content during a therapy session.

Catharsis Wi-Fi may only be accessed using the password or credentials provided for authorised use. Where there is any uncertainty about whether a digital device or internet access is permitted, therapists should follow the policy of the school or institution and seek advice from the relevant member of school staff or Catharsis SLT before proceeding.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Tools

Catharsis recognises that artificial intelligence (AI), including generative AI, may be used in professional and administrative settings. Staff remain personally and professionally accountable for their practice when using AI or other digital tools.

Staff must not enter, upload, copy, paste or otherwise disclose identifiable client information, confidential case information, clinical notes, session transcripts, images, recordings, safeguarding information or other personal or sensitive information into publicly available AI systems.

AI-generated content must not be treated as accurate or clinically appropriate without appropriate professional review. In addition AI must not replace professional judgement, clinical assessment, therapeutic relationships, supervision, safeguarding decision-making or other decisions that require professional expertise.

Where AI is used to assist with administrative or professional work, the therapist remains responsible for the final work product and must ensure that it meets the same standards of confidentiality, accuracy, professionalism and record keeping as work produced without AI.

Any suspected inappropriate disclosure of client information to an AI system must be reported immediately in accordance with Catharsis's Data Protection and Information Sharing Policy, Safeguarding and Incident Reporting procedures.

Dress Code

Catharsis staff do not have a uniform or set dress code, however they are expected to convey a positive and professional image whilst at work. Staff should dress appropriately for their professional role, the therapeutic activities undertaken and the setting in which they work. Clothing should not compromise health and safety or contain material that could reasonably be considered discriminatory, offensive or inappropriate for children or vulnerable adults.

Gifts

Therapists should maintain safe boundaries and avoid behaviours that could be misinterpreted; this includes the giving and receiving of gifts. Therapists should not lend or borrow money, or enter into financial arrangements, with clients – all payments for sessions should be through Catharsis.

It is recognised that sometimes clients may wish to give a small gift as a token of their thanks. Small, low-value gifts may sometimes be accepted where doing so is unlikely to create an expectation, obligation or conflict of interest and is consistent with the therapist's professional code and Catharsis policy. Cash, vouchers, loans and gifts of significant value must not be accepted (see Fraud Prevention Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy).

Occasionally a therapist may wish to give a small gift as a token of the sessions that have taken place, or as a contribution towards agreed coping strategies (i.e. a notebook); this is at the discretion of therapist and is not an expectation. Therapists should inform the Catharsis Senior Management Team of gifts given or offered, in order that they are not compromised; see Fraud Prevention, Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy for further information.

Personal Belongings

Therapists' personal belongings and valuables should not be taken into therapy rooms, as the security of these items could be compromised. If personal belongings are used with clients, this is done at the therapist's discretion and Catharsis cannot be held liable for loss or damage.

Anti-Discriminatory Practice

Catharsis ethos is that everyone is entitled to a living and working environment that promotes dignity and respect for all. The Equality and Diversity Policy clearly states that we all have a responsibility not to be offensive to clients or colleagues and to not participate in or condone discrimination and unlawful behaviour; it further states that no form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. Breaches of the Equality and Diversity Policy will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings.

Catharsis supports guidance issued by ACAS in relation to Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures. Issues in relation to Staff Code of Conduct will be raised with individuals clearly (in writing if required) and dealt with promptly.

General Conduct

All staff should understand the importance of challenging inappropriate behaviour between children and young people in order that violence, sexual harassment and other abuse is not normalised. All staff should actively challenge behaviour and language that is contributing towards an unsafe environment for children and young people and should access school policies and procedures in relation to this. Failing to challenge what may be described as 'banter' and 'just having a laugh', can be seen as condoning and can contribute to victims feeling unable to report.

Staff must report concerns about another member of staff's conduct through the appropriate safeguarding, management or whistleblowing route and must not attempt to investigate allegations themselves.

Catharsis therapists are expected to inform the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) promptly of any changes or circumstances that may affect their professional role, suitability or ability to practise safely. This includes changes to contact details or address, professional registration or insurance, and any relevant allegations, cautions, convictions or other matters that may affect their suitability to work with children, young people or vulnerable adults. Therapists should seek advice from SLT where they are uncertain whether a change or circumstance needs to be disclosed.

Review

Implementation / Review date	**Reviewers**
August 2026	Hannah Robertson
Next Review date	Keren Adler
August 2027	