Ethical Framework for the Use of Technology in EAPs

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A competent employee assistance (EA) professional working online will always adhere to at least the following minimum standards and practices in order to be considered to be working in an ethical manner.

EA Professionals have a sufficient understanding of technology.

EA professionals who deliver employee assistance services via technology should have a grounding in technology basics. They should possess a basic understanding of technology as it relates to delivery of services.

• **Encryption**: EA Professionals understand how to access encrypted services to store records and deliver communication. Record storage can be hosted on a secure server with a third-party, stored on the EA Professionals’ hard drive utilizing encrypted folders or stored on an external drive that is safely backed up.

• **Backup Systems**: Records and data that are stored on the EA Professionals’ hard drive are backed up either to an external drive or remotely via the Internet.

• **Password Protection**: EA Professionals ensure confidentiality of client communication and other materials by password protecting their computer, drives and stored files or communication websites.

• **Firewalls**: EA Professionals utilize firewall protection at multiple levels: desktop/laptop operating system level, local area network level and additionally utilize firewall resources provided by their Internet service provider.

• **Virus Protection**: EA Professionals assure that their work computers are protected from viruses that can be received from or transmitted to others.

• **Hardware**: EA Professionals understand the basic running platform of the work computer and know whether or not a client’s hardware/platform is compatible with any communication programs.
the practitioner uses.

- **Software:** EA Professionals know how to download and operate software and assist employees and their families with the same when necessary to the delivery of services.
- **Third-party services:** EA Professionals utilize third-party technology service providers (e.g. for backup, storage, virus protection and communication) that offer an address and phone number so that contact is possible via means other than email.

**EA Companies and Programs provide needed technological support.** EA Programs will provide the structure and technology for communication, supervision, etc. to their staff members and affiliate providers.

- EA Programs ensure their EA Professionals are trained in using technology so they can provide assessment, counseling and referral services.

- EA Programs set standards of service based on the Employee Assistance Professionals Association’s Standards and Professional Guidelines for Employee Assistance Programs, the EAPA Code of Ethics, the Guidelines for Use of EAPA Related Social Media (http://www.eapassn.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3431), and the CEAP Code of Conduct.

**EA Professionals work within their Scope of Practice.**

Scope of practice defines where a practitioner may work; for example, whether the practitioner may practice across various geographical boundaries. EA Professionals also represent themselves appropriately and follow local and regional laws and codes of ethics as applicable.

**Understand specific laws or ethics within ones’ own discipline or geographic location:**

EA Professionals understand the limits set forth by laws or ethics within their applicable discipline and geographic location. For instance, in the United States, Licensed Professional Counselors cannot call themselves Psychologists, and in the UK the term “Chartered Psychologist” is reserved by law for use only by those with proper recognition from the appropriate authorities. Another example would be that a counselor in one state should be cognizant that most states prohibit a practitioner who is not licensed in that state from providing
counseling to that state’s residents.

**EA Companies and Programs provide the means to communicate via technology.**

EAPs provide the technological equipment expertise, and support, as well as sufficient back up systems and plans to reasonably ensure communication continuity.

**EA Companies and Programs provide or ensure training, knowledge and supervision.**

Training, knowledge and supervision regarding EA services and technology is paramount to delivering a standard of service that is considered “best practice” within a global context. Those EA Professionals who will be working online need to have proficiency and competency through specialized training for this type of work. Supervision is mandated for all EA Professionals because of the specialized effort required for the provision of EA distance services.

- **Cultural and Setting Specific Knowledge:** EA Programs provide EA Professionals with sufficient information about the client or client company’s culture, needs, and current circumstances.
- **Training and supervision:** EA Professionals seek out continuing education and supervision.

**EA Companies, professionals and programs display pertinent and necessary information on Websites.**

**EA websites provide access to information for potential and current clients and managers.**

- **Crisis Intervention Information:** EAPs may display crisis intervention information on their website. EAPs understand that people in crisis may visit their website from anywhere in the world.

- **Organization Contact Information:** EAPs offer contact information that includes email, post address and a telephone or VOIP number. EA clients should have a post address for formal correspondence.
- **Practitioner Certification Information:** EA Programs indicate that EAPA allows the general public to verify whether an EAP practitioner currently holds the Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP) credential.
- **Encrypted Transmission of EAP sessions:** EA Programs offer
secure and encrypted means of communication. Video, email and chat programs in use are described along with encryption and security policies either embedded within the organization’s site or utilizing links to 3rd party platforms.

**EAP Initial Intake and Screening process.**

EA professionals screen the client’s suitability for delivery of EA services via technology, considering language and keyboarding skills, presenting issues and clinical concerns.

**EA Programs offer a Statement of Understanding that includes the following:**

**Potential Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Sessions:** Information is disseminated about the pros and cons of online sessions including such disadvantages as lack of visual and auditory cues and the limitations of confidentiality via technology, and advantages that include immediate access.

**Confidentiality and Technology**

- **Encryption:** An explanation is provided to the client about the use of encryption during online exchanges.

- **File Storage Procedures:** The client is informed about how records are stored (web-based, third party or hard-drive/external drive) and for how long the records are maintained. All procedures conform to the standards laid down in applicable law and as required by any relevant authority (such as professional body) and, at least, include encryption and password protection and a commitment to destroy all records after a given period as required by law/regulation/best practice.

- **Privacy Policy:** The EA Programs’ confidentiality and privacy policy is also included in the Statement of Understanding process including information about how client identifying information and records are used, shared or stored.

**Other Informed Consent Issues**

- **Physical Location & Geographical Jurisdiction:** The physical location of the EA professional is stated in the Informed Consent and if the practitioner is licensed within a specific jurisdiction, the
Statement of Understanding states that the client understands services are rendered under the laws or jurisdiction of the relevant country, state or region.

- **How to Proceed during a Technology Breakdown:** The client is informed about how to proceed if a technology breakdown occurs during a session, e.g. “If we disconnect, try to reconnect within 10 minutes. If reconnection is not possible, email or call to reschedule an appointment.”

- **Emergency Contact:** EA Professionals offer specific information about who to contact in case of an emergency and set specific rules about which technologies to use to accomplish this.

- **Online Relationships:** EA Professionals discuss with clients the expected boundaries and expectations about forming relationships online.

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