



Tips for Getting the Best Out of Your Ethics Committee Consultation

Keely Kolmes, PsyD, Robin S. Rosenberg, PhD, ABPP and Robert A. Simon, PhD

The main function and purpose of the CPA's Ethics Committee is to assist members in learning about professional ethics and thinking through ethical dilemmas in their work. Members of the ethics committee are experienced colleagues who, in addition to their other professional activities, volunteer to serve the CPA community because they are interested in professional ethics. The members of the committee represent a cross section of the general CPA membership with diverse foci in their professional activities. Committee members include those in private practice, those in the non-profit sector and those in academia. Committee members' areas of expertise span across the profession and include those in clinical practice, forensic practice, training/administration and professional education.

All CPA members, including student members, may request a free personal and confidential consultation from the CPA Ethics Committee on questions related to ethics in psychology. We want these consultations to be helpful and useful to you. Therefore, we have compiled this brief guide to help you get the best out of your consultation.

Before You Call

To make your consultation as productive as possible, please review the APA Ethics Code at www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx. Don't think that you have to become an expert on the Code. But it will help if you review it and identify areas that may apply to your question(s).

When You Call

Leave us a brief message, speaking slowly. It is not necessary to go into detail about the nature of your call in your message, but it is helpful if you identify an area of ethical concern (e.g., "this is related to record keeping," or "I have a question related to resolving an ethical issue with another professional."). Leave your phone number(s). If you wish, leave times that we can reach you and we'll call you then if we can; please provide more than a couple of times when we can call you back, as coordinating times can be difficult. We'll do our best in following up with you, so be patient.

We ask that you choose a time and place when you can focus on the consultation in private and can have access to the Ethics Code. Thus, a time when you are driving is not a good time for an ethics consult. It helps if you can be prepared with some specific questions.

When We Speak with You

Our Consultation Model involves helping you think through your ethical issues and identify relevant aspects of the Ethics Code as applied to your situation. We won't tell you what to do. Our goal is to empower you and help you in thinking through the ethical issues.

Each call is logged and a summary of the call is submitted to the Committee Chair and CPA. The information retained does not identify the caller, rather it characterizes the area(s) of question(s) and provisions in the Ethics Code that were discussed. This information is gathered to help the Committee keep track of the types of questions we are asked.

Sometimes callers confuse ethical issues with legal issues. If we identify your question as primarily a legal one, we will refer you to CPA Director of Professional Affairs, Chuck Faltz, PhD or suggest you may want to contact a practice attorney or your malpractice insurance carrier for a legal consultation. In some of these situations, ethical issues are also present. In these cases, we will discuss the ethical aspects of your call.

Our members rotate taking ethics hotline telephone calls. Each member serves for a week at a time. Occasionally, the member who is on call will feel that there is another member of the Committee who may be more suited to work with you and may refer you to them.

We look forward to helping you with your ethical concerns. 

Keely Kolmes, PsyD (drkkolmes@gmail.com) is a psychologist in private practice in San Francisco and serves on the CPA Ethics Committee. She is also founder and President of <http://bayareaopenminds.org/> a group of psychotherapists who affirm sexual and gender diversity. Her website is <http://drkkolmes.com>.

Robin S. Rosenberg, PhD, ABPP (robin@drrobinrosenberg.com) has a clinical practice in San Francisco and in Menlo Park. She is co-author of the textbooks *Introducing Psychology and Abnormal Psychology* and author of *What Makes Superheroes Tick and Why We Care*. She is President of the Santa Clara County Psychological Association and a member of CPA Ethics Committee.

Robert A. Simon, PhD (rsimon@dr-simon.com) is a forensic psychology consultant based in Del Mar. Dr. Simon's practice focuses on family law issues and child custody disputes. Dr. Simon, who consults on cases throughout California, is currently finishing a book on forensic consulting and expert witness testimony.

Our disclosure statement: "The CPA Ethics Committee and its members provide consultation through education. The Committee and its members cannot provide legal advice nor can a specific course of action be suggested for your situation. It is recommended that the advice of an attorney be obtained before making any decision that could have significant legal consequences. The CPA Ethics Committee works collaboratively on many calls in order to provide the best possible consultation."