



ICF Code of Ethics Interpretive Statements

**This document was last updated January 2020. For the most up-to-date version of the Interpretive Statements, please visit <https://coachfederation.org/interpretive-statements>.*

The ICF Code of Ethics Review Team prepared the following interpretive statements to support ICF Members and Credential-holders in understanding the revised ICF Code of Ethics and applying them in their practice.

Standard 1

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

1. *(old Code 18) Explain and ensure that, prior to or at the initial meeting, my coaching Client(s) and Sponsor(s) understand the nature and potential value of coaching, the nature and limits of confidentiality, financial arrangements, and any other terms of the coaching agreement.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 1

This standard invites the ICF professional not to assume that clients or sponsors understand the scope of the coaching interaction. This means explaining it in a meeting prior to the beginning or at the beginning of the process. The initial interview offers the opportunity to clarify expectations about the possibilities and benefits of coaching and to correct them if necessary.

In keeping with ICF's definition of coaching being a partnership with the client, the ICF Professional should verbally explain to all stakeholders (client, sponsor, and other related parties) the details surrounding the coaching engagement and the content of the articles of the coaching agreement to be signed/agreed. By doing so, all stakeholders have an opportunity to ask questions and fully understand their rights and responsibilities prior to signing the coaching agreement.

The ICF Professionals might use one of the two Sample Coaching Agreements in the ICF Member Toolkit (follow the link below) as a base in this initial meeting if they do not have a standard agreement of their own to ensure that all articles of the coaching agreement are included.

Standard 2

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

2. *(old Code 19) Create an agreement/contract regarding the roles, responsibilities and rights of all parties involved with my Client(s) and Sponsor(s) prior to the commencement of services.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 2

ICF defines the “Coaching Relationship” as a relationship that is established by the ICF Professional and the Client(s)/Sponsor(s) under an agreement/contract that defines the responsibilities and expectations of each party; i.e. without an agreement/contract the coaching relation is not accepted as established.

ICF recommends that having a written agreement/contract is the best practice and best supports both the client and ICF Professional. A written agreement/contract is encouraged if culturally appropriate. A written agreement/contract is important to evoke at any time in the professional relationship the rights and obligations of the parties regardless of their legal character both for the ICF Professional and for the client and/or all parties in the process. (see definitions) The advantage of a written agreement also becomes clear in an appeal case.

It is best practice for an ICF Professional to have a standard coaching agreement which can be modified to the needs of a particular client/sponsor. This is also an opportunity for all parties to be clear of the nature of the involvement of managers, supervisors, HR personnel etc. in the coaching engagement. In all cases, coaching agreements/contracts should clearly establish the rights, roles and responsibilities for both the client and sponsor if the client and sponsor are different people.

The ICF Professionals might use one of the two Sample Coaching Agreements in the ICF Member Toolkit (follow the link below) as a base for preparing their own standard coaching agreements, and ensuring that they have included all the necessary articles in their agreement.

Standard 3

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

3. *(old Code 24) Maintain the strictest levels of confidentiality with all parties as agreed upon. I am aware of and agree to comply with all applicable laws that pertain to personal data and communications.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 3

Confidentiality in the coaching relationship is absolutely critical for creating the safe space for the client to succeed. Besides this, personal data protection is becoming an issue of highest importance with the emerging and growing technological developments.

The confidentiality rules apply to any situation in which an ICF Professional interacts with clients, sponsors, and all confidentiality issues should be addressed and clarified during the initial meeting before an agreement/contract is signed/agreed between the parties.

Confidentiality does not end with the client, but extends to all parties involved in the coaching engagement as outlined in the coaching agreement. The strictest levels of confidentiality infer that the ICF Professional has a series of best practices in place, including:

- Overarching personal/office policy on confidentiality (an understanding, written or otherwise that all client information and communication will be held private prior to being hired by the client, during the coaching engagement, and after the conclusion of the engagement).
- Policies on record keeping (safe physical storage, secure cloud storage, etc.)
- Training staff or support personnel (including virtual assistants) on the importance of maintaining absolute confidentiality on all client matters.
- Maintaining strict confidentiality applies to all parties and includes all technology, off-site storage, application platforms, software, and social media owned/operated by third parties (i.e. cell phones, computers, tablets etc.).

ICF Professionals should make sure that their documentation of the coaching process is protected to safeguard confidentiality and in compliance with the relevant data protection rules. This applies in particular to the use of digital media and means of communication. They should make sure that they have an expert lawyer in their reach to consult on the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) for working in the EU.

The ICF Professional should keep in mind that notes, messages, text messages kept on a company-owned computer, company-accessible platform, company-owned email or company-owned mobile phone are the property of the company and is therefore, not confidential. Unless otherwise determined in the coaching agreement, internally employed or contracted coaches should be particularly aware that IT resources and equipment that are owned by the organization, may give them (the organization) full rights to access information and communications that were assumed private.

Standard 4

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

4. *(old Code 25) Have a clear understanding about how information is exchanged among all parties involved during all coaching interactions.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 4

ICF Professional should make sure that everyone involved in the coaching process clearly agrees on when, how, what and the ways in which coaching information, including confidential information is shared.

The rules of confidentiality must be clear to all participants before the coaching process begins. It may need to be re-clarified at any point in the process for the parties involved. It is also important to clarify the framework and procedures for sharing possible reports, evaluations, and results of assessments that are administered.

In many countries written agreements take precedence over verbal ones and are considered a best practice. The ICF Professional should take into consideration local cultural norms and even in a verbal agreement, make sure that the terms of information sharing are clearly understood by all the parties involved.

Standard 5

Section I—Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

5. *(old Code 26) Have a clear understanding with both Clients and Sponsors or interested parties about the conditions under which information will not be kept confidential (e.g., illegal activity, if required by law, pursuant to valid court order or subpoena; imminent or likely risk of danger to self or to others; etc.). Where I reasonably believe one of the above circumstances is applicable, I may need to inform appropriate authorities.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 5

In the coaching profession, confidentiality is not just a skill, but an expectation. Coaches occupy a unique and powerful position where individuals and organizations share and trust sensitive and personal information to them. Anyone communicating with a coach must be comfortable to open themselves completely and know without a doubt that their communications to the coach are protected. Therefore, a coach must have a very high standard of confidentiality in all interactions:

- When information is shared before the coach is hired
- When information is shared or learned intentionally or otherwise
- At any point in the coaching relationship
- At any time after a coaching relationship ends

A coach may divulge confidential information in the following circumstances:

- Reasons, set by law (ICF Professionals should make sure, that they know the details of local law):
 - When a person has made a credible threat to harm themselves, their organizations or others
 - When the coach is compelled by a court order or subpoena (Coaches have no client privilege in a court of law. This means that if coaches are asked for information, they must provide it. This is different for physicians and psychiatrists and some other professions.)
- Reasons, defined by contract with client or with client and sponsor:
 - When the coaching agreement allows for it
 - When the sponsor agreement allows for it, and the client agrees
 - When the coach is required to substantiate basic information about the coaching process for the coach's credentialing or re-credentialing without sharing any personal notes or other personal information. The coach is responsible for getting the clients acknowledgment for signing that the clients gave permission.
 - When the Coach needs to talk about a case (without indicating names of the client or sponsor) with the coach's mentor or coach supervisor.

ICF Professionals should make sure, that they know the details of local law and should establish the legal venue for the contract. Make sure that there are experts in your network (e.g. lawyers) who you can refer to in case of doubt.

It is the responsibility of the ICF Professional to ensure the client knows when the ICF Professional is required to breach confidentiality. The best way is to speak about before the beginning of the coaching process and to document this in the written coaching agreement.

Example: if the ICF Professional is a mentor coach working with another coach, they must be clear about when confidentiality may be breached. The mentor coach or supervisor is, as a supporter (see Standard #15), bound to confidentiality.

Our unregulated industry has no special legal protection. In the event of a dispute, individually concluded contracts are judged according to civil law. If possible in your country, try to get a professional services insurance policy for coaches.

In coaching the underage (children/teenagers) there is an additional coaching relationship which has to be honored. There is presumably done with a Sponsor (parents, guardians, etc.) for minors. All questions about confidentiality has to be cleared in the same way with the client and the sponsor.

As an internal coach please see No. 6 too.

Standard 6

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

6. *(old Code 14) When working as an Internal Coach, manage conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest with my coaching Clients and Sponsor(s) through coaching agreement(s) and ongoing dialogue. This should include addressing organizational roles, responsibilities, relationships, records, confidentiality and other reporting requirements.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 6

An internal coach could have roles of an HR employee, a non-related manager or direct manager besides that of being a coach, or no other roles than being a coach.

As the success of coaching depends on the client's trust on the coach, it is recommended that, in the beginning of appointment as an internal coach, a confidentiality agreement is signed between the company and the internal coach and shared with the coaching client, defining what is going to be shared and with whom, when and how, and what is not going to be shared.

Internal privacy rules of the company, information in the computers, right of a manager to reach any information through IT, information on company phones, reports to be shared should all be considered.

Whatever is determined by the organization, ICF Professionals should be sure all parties are privy to the agreement and aware of all the relationship dynamics to ensure transparency, and talk about it continuously.

As an internal coach, the ICF Professional should pay particular attention to conflicts of interest arising from former, current or potential future leadership relationships (e.g. line or matrix organizations, agile systems, etc.)

Possible conflicts between the ICF code of ethics and an existing corporate culture or internal company regulations should be identified and taken into account by the coach.

Standard 7

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

7. *(old Code 11) Maintain, store and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, created during my professional interactions in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security and privacy and complies with any applicable laws and agreements. Furthermore, I seek to make proper use of emerging and growing technological developments that are being used in coaching services (technology-assisted coaching services) and be aware how various ethical standards apply to them.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 7

Many coaches keep written, spoken, electronic or otherwise made records of the content and progress of their coaching sessions. The careful handling and retention of these records in the broadest sense of protecting this information and thus the identity of the client and the sponsor, are the subject of this standard.

Records are all documents created in connection with the coaching process. This includes, but not limited to, written notes, files, audio or video notes, entries in support databases or tools (e.g. for customer administration etc.).

Data protection must be ensured in particular when using technical services/tools of any kind. The constant technological development of these tools / platforms requires vigilance and, if necessary, actions by the coach.

ICF Professionals should make sure, that they know the details of local law and should establish the choice legal venue for the contract.

Data protection must be ensured when using the client's / company's own infrastructure.

ICF professionals, should take appropriate security precautions when using electronic communications such as e-mails, online mail, online chat sessions, mobile communications and text messages, such as encryption, firewalls with passwords, etc.

The client is to be informed about the fact of the written, electronic or otherwise made recordings and their protection, but not about their content. The client's consent must be obtained before audio or video recordings are made. This also applies to the use of artificial intelligence devices that automatically record the sound in a room (e.g. Alexa, Siri, etc.).

When using external service providers, it must be checked whether the handling of data and information (general standard terms and conditions, GTC) by this service provider matches the ICF's ethical requirements.

Should unauthorized persons have access to client data or information despite all preventive measures, the clients must be informed immediately.

The ICF Professional should be aware that the use of social media and the information they leave behind might also be seen by potential clients and might influence the coaching process.

ICF Professionals should avoid posting any identifying or confidential information about their clients on professional websites or other forms of social media.

Standard 8

Section I – Responsibility to clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

8. *(old Code 23) Remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship. If so, make a change in the relationship or encourage the Client(s)/Sponsor(s) to seek another coach, seek another professional or use a different resource.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 8

The ICF Professionals should be willing to recuse themselves if and whenever their coaching services do not benefit the client and/or appear to go against the clients or sponsors interest. The ICF Professional has a responsibility to encourage the client in this case to make a change or seek the services of another professional.

ICF Professionals should try to find out what is driving the shift in the perceived value of coaching. Institutionalizing a customer orientated review process with the client and the sponsor (if involved) helps determine the value of the coaching relationship.

ICF Professionals may only work with clients that are free of psychological problems. Therefore, it is particularly important to learn as a coach how to recognize in time whether a client should be referred to a therapist. In case of doubt, the ICF professional should seek expert advice.

It is useful to build a network that includes coaches of other orientations as well as therapists, etc. in the event a referral is requested.

The ICF Professionals should disclose to the client and the sponsor(s) any referral fee that might be paid to them by any of these professionals.

Standard 9

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

9. *(old Code 22) Respect all parties' rights to terminate the coaching relationship at any point for any reason during the coaching process subject to the provisions of the agreement.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 9

A clear coaching termination clause in the agreement should clarify that either or both parties may cancel the agreement at any time for any reason. The ICF Professional must be alert to indications that the client is no longer benefiting from the coaching relationship and explore other possibilities with them. In the coaching process, it is important to determine why the client wants to end the coaching. The ICF Professional must support and encourage the client to seek the services of another ICF Professional or professional resource when it is mutually agreed that they would be better served with such a change. It may also be a solution to encourage the client to engage more intensively with the coaching content, possibly with another ICF Professional. A best practice is to have a clear refund policy in the written agreement.

The ICF Professional must respect and accept the clients request to end the relationship; however, it is okay to invite a closure session for the client to provide feedback. The ICF Professional might want to consider doing this as complimentary and voluntary. A closure session functions the same as any other coaching session in which the ICF Professional is involved.

Standard 10

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

10. (old N1) *Am sensitive to the implications of having multiple contracts and relationships with the same Client(s) and Sponsor(s) at the same time in order to avoid conflict of interest situations.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 10

In every situation of the coaching process, it is necessary to ensure that the ICF Professionals' current role is unambiguous and that it is recognizable from which contract they are acting. The intention of this standard is to address potential conflict of interest when an ICF Professional holds multiple contracts (e.g. having a coaching and trainer relationship) with the same individual. Furthermore, some ICF Professionals coach a client 1:1 and at the same time coach the client's team. Even though this may be on one contract, this might be a multiple relationship.

When an ICF professional is a trainer in a coach-training program, they may be one of the people who decide whether a student fulfills all responsibilities of the training program, including performance on written and oral exams. They may also be a designated-adviser for a student and/or their coach as required for student completion of ACTP coach-training programs and/or their mentor coach as required for student completion of ACTP coach-training programs. In this case the ICF professional would need to arrange to have only one of the relationships with a student in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

Separate contracts are recommended for an ICF Professional who has consulting expertise; (e.g. nutrition, chiropractic, professional organizer) and is asked by the client to receive this expertise. Having separate contracts allows the coaching client not to be confused as to what role the ICF Professional is assuming. This is also important regarding the public view of our profession being distinct from other professions (e.g. therapy, counseling, consulting, etc.)

Standard 11

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

11. *(old N3) Am aware of and actively manage any power or status difference between the Client and me that may be caused by cultural, relational, psychological or contextual issues.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 11

An ICF Professional is aware of, explores and manages interpersonal coach-client power differences and aims to co-create coach-client relationships of partnership and equality unless superseded by an opposing context of the client's identity, environment and culture. Coaching takes place at the level of equivalence; i.e. lack of power distance in the coaching relationship. A feeling of superiority, or inferiority, on the part of the coach burdens the coaching relationship and should be clarified in supervision.

The coach-client relationship is, in of itself, a hierarchical relationship. Coach is a dominant social-group identity and Client is a marginalized social-group identity. Sustaining the coach-client partnership means the coach has an ongoing task of acknowledging and working to reduce the impact of rank, status, and hierarchy in the working alliance between coach and client. If such a "partnership" cannot be maintained, the coach and/or client should consider terminating the relationship.

Standard 12

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

12. *(old Code 15) Disclose to my Clients the potential receipt of compensation, and other benefits I may receive for referring my Clients to third parties.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 12

A transaction, in which the third party who is for example, a coach, therapist, provider of a personal assessment instrument, attorney, professional, or other referring person, may give an ICF Professional a referral fee, or commissions in monetary or some other form that has benefit or advantage, personal and professional benefits for referring a client to them, sets up a conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest for the ICF Professional. A reasonable outside person might infer that the ICF Professional is acting in their own benefit rather than in service of their client.

Disclosing in an open and frank discussion with a client and allows the client to choose, as well as demonstrate/preserve a coach's integrity – it is all above board and transparent, and it is asking them to take ownership of their choice about acting on the referral or not. Giving the monies back to the client, or to a charitable group, might be an alternative.

An example of compensation received where a disclosure is needed is, the ICF Professional directly refers the client to a personality assessment like MBTI, DISC where the ICF Professional receives a commission. If the names of all such assessments in the market are given and a recommendation is not made, disclosure may not be needed. If the client is referred to a consultant from whom the ICF Professional receives a referral fee, this must be disclosed.

The safest approach is probably to be clear that as ICF Professionals we do not accept monetary or non-monetary benefit from third parties for referring our clients to them.

Standard 13

Section I – Responsibility to Clients

As an ICF Professional, I:

13. *(old Code 16) Assure consistent quality of coaching regardless of the amount or form of agreed compensation in any relationship.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 13

The intention of this standard is to address conflict of interest with unconscious or unintentional bias. ICF Professional Coaches provide equal quality of professional-coaching services specified in the coaching agreement, regardless of client's race, gender, and other social-group identity and of form of compensation — whether monetary, pro bono or barter or any other form of compensation agreed to.

Bartering is an equal exchange of goods or services without involving money.

Applications:

1. Some business agreements involve the provision of coaching service in exchange for services or products in a reciprocal barter arrangement. Others may provide very low-cost coaching services to those who would benefit from coaching, but have limited resources at the time. The ICF Professional must only barter for services, goods or other non-monetary remuneration when it does not impair the coaching relationship.
2. This includes any coach/client relationship, business relationships between ICF Professionals, training schools etc. that involves barter, pro bono, or any other types of agreed upon compensation.
3. Equal quality also must be delivered when coaching a student, businessman, or executive.
4. ICF Professionals should always deliver 100% of their benefit, regardless of the amount of compensation. A price-dependent difference in quality contradicts the ICF Professional mindset and practice.
5. ICF Professionals should not knowingly take any personal, professional, or monetary advantage or benefit of the coach-client relationship
6. ICF Professionals should know the tax laws of the country in which they are working if they choose pro bono and bartering. Example 1: In order for a contract to be valid there has to be some exchange of value which is the basic money value used as currency, such as \$1 USD in the USA or €1 in the European Union. If this is not exchanged then in the eyes of the law, the contract is not valid. Example 2: In the United States, the predetermined amount of income that would have been derived from bartering must be reported as business income and must be reported as income and it is taxable, even though no money has exchanged hands. It may be a best practice to establish the monetary value of barter for goods and services and include this in the initial coaching agreement.

Here the connection between the offer of the ICF Professionals to make their coaching service available on the basis of the competences described (training, experience, etc.) for an amount X and the actual service provided is important. According to the contract, the client is entitled to this service.

Standard 14

Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

14. *(old Code 2) Adhere to the ICF Code of Ethics in all my interactions. When I become aware of a possible breach of the Code by myself or I recognize unethical behavior in another ICF Professional, I respectfully raise the matter with those involved. If this does not resolve the matter, I refer it to a formal authority (e.g., ICF Global Assist Line) for resolution.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 14

This standard reflects individual responsibility and accountability of the ICF Professionals once they recognize unethical behavior.

ICF Professionals who accept the Code of Ethics strive to be ethical, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously.

Implicit here is that the ICF Professional be self-aware of potential code breaches. Responsible ICF Professionals look at their own behavior and attempt to correct those things in oneself that might be unethical. Coaching supervision can be used for support.

This standard also calls on the ICF professional to make others aware of unethical behavior of other professionals in the coaching profession. A first attempt should be made to increase the awareness of how another ICF Professional might be in violation of the code. If direct contact does not rectify the problem, a third party should be brought in.

When someone believes that an ICF Professional is in violation of the code, they may formally initiate a complaint to be considered in the conduct review process.

Position of the client (employee or CEO) may no longer play a role. This also applies to pro bono services. If the ICF Professional wants to offer different performance qualities at different prices. This must be clearly and transparently presented (see standards 1, 2, 11, 20, 21).

A further aspect on the subject of consistent quality concerns the ICF Professionals' responsibility to ensure their physical and mental performance. For example, are they as fit and attentive with the fourth client on the same day as with the first? How does the ICF Professional behave in the event of illness?

Standard 15

Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

15. *(old Code 27) Require adherence to the ICF Code of Ethics by all Support Personnel.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 15

This standard is about the people we work with, or employ, or we are associated with, who could from time to time have access to clients and their information.

These could be people in our office, virtual assistants, as well as the companies that we might use for speech to text conversions or language to language translations.

It is recommended to have a written and signed agreement with them regarding ethical practice. (Note: Some cultures do not prefer written agreements.) Nonetheless, the ICF Professional is held responsible, in respect of the ECR process, in case of misconduct by these people.

One best practice is for those who work with ICF Professionals to read and review the ICF Code of Ethics regularly and to occasionally discuss the ICF Code of Ethics with all ICF Professionals involved. A written commitment of the Support Personnel creates security for all parties involved.

Standard 16

Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 16. (old Code 28) Commit to excellence through continued personal, professional and ethical development.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 16

A best practice is for the ICF Professional to commit to lifelong learning to develop and continuing development of their professional skills in the coaching space to include the latest personal and professional development information such as books, videos, supervision, mentoring, newsletters, conferences etc. This commitment must include continued self-reflection and exploration of ethics in coaching.

Life-long learning

ICF Professionals should be knowledgeable and forthright about their strengths and areas for development; develop new skills and competencies; own and be accountable for their personal, professional, and ethical development.

Personal development

ICF Professionals should work continually for self-knowledge and emotional, physical, social, and spiritual health and well-being. ICF Professionals should know who they are and what they stand for by identifying their life-purpose, values, vision and be congruent with them in their behaviors, words, thoughts, feelings, body experiences, sexuality, and intentions. They should seek deeper cultural, emotional, and social self-awareness and understanding of themselves as a racial and cultural being; own their personal biases and prejudices involving race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, rank/status/class, nationality, spiritual practice, age, ability, and other human differences, and their effects on their behavior; know and own their personal history and culture; their stage of life; their addictions; their dominant and marginalized-group identities; their areas of internalized privilege, superiority, and subordination; and how these may impact their behavior; identify limiting beliefs and reclaim repressed, disowned, and projected parts of themselves with information gained through disclosure, feedback, bodywork, coaching,

supervision, therapy, and mediation and through their dreams, memories, body sensations, and emotions.

Professional development

ICF Professionals should engage in continual professional development; continuously expand their knowledge base; improve their competence and practice; maintain awareness of new coaching approaches and of current scientific and professional information in the coaching profession. They should participate in ongoing education, workshops, training, supervision, and having a coach.

ICF Professional should support and encourage client growth and development; hold the client's short-term and long-term work and life goals; support clients in having a fully-alive, rich, and fulfilling life.

ICF Professional should wholeheartedly support and work towards personal and professional development of the coaching community. Efforts towards this, includes ICF Professional's sharing of coach related knowledge, case studies, leading and participation in knowledge-sharing platforms such as webinars, community of practice, peer coaching, mentor-coaching, ICF workshops on creating awareness.

For further information, the ICF Professional should look at coaching's defining documents; Core Values, Code of Ethics, Core Competencies, PCC markers etc.

Standard 17

Section II – Responsibility to practice and performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 17. (old Code 8) Recognize my personal limitations or circumstances that may impair, conflict with or interfere with my coaching performance or my professional coaching relationships. I will reach out for support to determine the action to be taken and, if necessary, promptly seek relevant professional guidance. This may include suspending or terminating my coaching relationship(s).*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 17

An ICF Professional must perform their duties without encumbrance from any relationship conflict. Such limitations could be extrinsic as well as intrinsic. For purposes of awareness and monitoring, each ICF Professional would benefit from having a mentor or supervisor as well as participate in personal coaching, technical discussions, community of practice, etc.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to ensure that the client has full access to the ICF Professional within the parameters of the agreement. The ICF Professional should be fully present, be aware of internal conflicts within self, and use awareness of self and their intuition to deal with any limitations or circumstances impeding performance. Examples of these could include conscious and unconscious personal and professional bias and triggers of the coach's personal/professional situations that may cause them to lose presence. They should avoid becoming judgmental or emotional to the point that they impair their coaching performance.

This standard also calls on the ICF Professional to reach out to trusted third parties for counsel and advice. If the conflict cannot be otherwise resolved, the ICF Professional must remove self from the coaching engagement. ICF Professionals' self-awareness and responsibility needs to include their physical and mental well-being.

Standard 18

Section II – Responsibility to practice and performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

18. (old Code 13) *Resolve any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest by working through the issue with relevant parties, seeking professional assistance, or suspending temporarily or ending the professional relationship.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 18

Internal ICF Professional coaches need to be conscious about conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest as they are in positions vulnerable to conflict or potential conflict of interest between the client, the coach and the management of the company, or organization, or agency they are part of.

Conflict or potential conflict of interest may include financial or non-financial, personal or professional advantage for ICF Professionals. Such conflict of interest may arise from recommendation to specific resources such as psychometric assessment firms, coach training schools, specific tools, partners for transcribing services for recorded sessions, or research projects assistance, etc.

Best practice is to establish clear agreements between all relevant parties.

Coaching supervision is useful to identify case-related potential conflicts of interest (e.g. transference, counter-transference, prejudice, etc.).

Standard 19

Section II – Responsibility to Practice and Performance

As an ICF Professional, I:

19. (old Code 12) *Maintain the privacy of ICF Members and use the ICF Member contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only as authorized by ICF or the ICF Member.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 19

ICF Professionals should not infringe on the use of contact data belonging to another ICF Member, nor their right to privacy.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to adhere to the privacy policy of the International Coach Federation. Any contact or exchange of contact details of another member ICF Professional should be done within the boundaries and policies established by the ICF. (Review ICF policies by following the link below.)

Coaching profiles on the ICF / Coach website are public. Further data are usually only available to chapter leaders who are bound by the guidelines.

Standard 20

Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

20. (old Code 6) Identify accurately my coaching qualifications, my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications and my ICF Credential.

Interpretive Statement to Standard 20

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to correctly represent self, in the interest of the Client and other ICF Professionals. This includes titles, certifications, credentials, coaching related experience (e.g., coaching, mentor coaching, training, supervision), higher education degrees, and the like. All identifying descriptions of an ICF Professional should be verifiable by the respective bodies. If a previous coaching related qualification is no longer valid, the ICF Professional must drop this description.

The words “credential” and “certification” are sometimes used interchangeably:

ICF credential — ICF Professionals can follow one of three paths to obtain an ICF credential: Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and Master Certified Coach (MCC). ICF credential holders are ICF certified coaches. Credentials (ACC, PCC, MCC) are for individuals. (Learn more by following the link below.)

The word “accreditation” can also be connected with the words “credential” and “certification”.

ICF Accreditation — ICF provides three forms of accreditation to third-party training providers:

- ACTP accreditation — Accredited Coaching Training Program (ACTP) accreditation is for third-party training providers who are “all inclusive” training programs which offer start to finish coach training. Graduates of an ACTP program may apply for an individual ICF Credential via the ACTP credential application path.
- ACSTH Accreditation — Approved Coaching Specific Training Hours (ACSTH) program accreditation is for third party-training providers who are “al la carte” training programs which may or may not offer start to finish coach training programs. Graduates from an ACSTH program may apply for the Associate Certified Coach (ACC) Credential or the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) Credential using the ACSTH application path if they meet the credentialing application requirements.
- CCE Accreditation — Continuing Coach Education (CCE) accreditation is for third-party training providers of supplemental and advanced education for those wishing to acquire new learning and/or those who are renewing their ICF Credential.

Standard 21

Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

21. *(old Code 5 and 17) Make verbal and written statements that are true and accurate about what I offer as an ICF Professional, what is offered by ICF, the coaching profession, and the potential value of coaching.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 21

When ICF Professionals represent themselves as an ICF Professional or a member of the coaching profession, their representation must be portrayed truly and accurately.

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to know what the International Coach Federation stands for and what coaching as a profession means to the marketplace and the world. An over-inflated representation of the potential value of coaching is considered deceptive and unprofessional. This standard thus calls on the ICF Professional to offer only what can be delivered. ICF Professionals are ambassadors for the profession and are responsible for their contribution to the reputation of coaching to the public anywhere in the world.

This standard is about maintaining truth in marketing — marketing self as an ICF Professional and marketing the coaching profession. It invites the ICF Professional to reflect on the conceptual distinction of different resources of professional practices e.g, mentoring, counseling, psychotherapy, etc., and to be able to accurately share the differences between these, in comparison to coaching. The standard calls on the ICF professional to be able to accurately share and demonstrate added value of the discipline of professional coaching. This includes; establishing and acting towards achieving goals, deepening level of learning, building personal awareness, and supporting improvement in specific skills to meet desired goals, etc.

ICF professionals should always be aware that they are seen as ICF's calling card and as an example of professional coaching and behave accordingly. This also includes knowing and representing the ICF understanding of coaching, the ICF values, the core competencies and the code of ethics. This Standard 21 complements Standard 20 which also addresses ICF professionals' coaching qualifications, competency level, credentials, training, and so on.

This standard applies to ICF Professional's own behavior as an ICF Professional and to the behavior of ACTPs, ICF, and other coaching organizations of which ICF Professional is a part. It also means that ICF Professionals have a responsibility in the case of a breach of this standard to respectfully raise the matter with those involved.

Standard 22

Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

22. *(old Code 3) Communicate and create awareness with those who need to be informed of the ethical responsibilities established by this Code.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 22

Each ICF Professional has a responsibility to let others know that professionalism is paramount.

In the interest of professional coaching, it is recommended that ICF professionals draw attention in detail to the high quality standards of ICF. This standard calls for the ICF Professional to communicate in writing or verbally the tenets of the code, in particular the Code of Ethics which

supports the measurability of quality through the Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process. Addressing the ECR process during the initial client meeting, and pointing out the complaint possibilities to the client, increases the credibility of our claim to professional quality. The same goes for the ICF Pledge of Ethics located at the end of the ICF Code of Ethics.

The standard invites an ICF Professional to share these tenets with all those who need to know in their coaching interactions. This might include organizations, employees, sponsors, coaches, students, support personnel, and others.

One recommended best practice is to provide all constituents with the entire ICF Ethics Code and highlight those sections that pertain to the appropriate people. In addition to them being informed about their responsibilities, they are also getting the message that the profession of coaching takes ethics seriously.

Standard 23

Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

23. (old Code 20) Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern interactions, physical or otherwise.

Interpretive Statement to Standard 23

The purpose of this standard is to create a framework for understanding and honoring the cultural diversity of all stakeholders in the coaching environment.

Working worldwide requires the ICF Professionals to actively engage with the culturally determined local customs in the cultures in which they work. Before undertaking a coaching engagement in a territory new/unknown to the ICF Professional, this Standard invites them to seek information regarding cultural nuances that underpin inter-personal interactions. These include professional physical interactions (what is permissible; e.g. hug, handshake, touch), professional arrangements (e.g. boundaries with the manager/HR for sharing client progress a.k.a. reporting).

The assumption that the understanding of situations, the experience with well-known coaching tools, or the expectations of the reaction to different intervention methods are the same worldwide can prove to be wrong and hinder the coaching process. This applies analogously to all standards of this code.

ICF Professionals should make sure to include the above when moving between modalities (bodywork, consulting, etc.). In such cases, they must ensure that the client understands which roles the ICF Professional is in, that these are appropriate and do not cross culturally sensitive boundaries in any of their interactions.

In keeping with Standard 10, which deals with being sensitive to the implications of having multiple contracts and relationships at the same time, this Standard invites ICF Professionals to learn how to separate boundaries in such multi-roles relationship which they might have entered with their clients, and to ensure that their clients know when they are in the different roles during their interactions.

This Standard encourages ICF Professionals to work with a mindset and a framework that identifies and mitigates their biases and support those beliefs that work for them. It calls on the ICF Professional to work on recognizing any conscious and unconscious personal bias by engaging in one or more of the numerous ways of dealing with it, such as coaching supervision and practicing self-reflection.

Standard 24

Section III – Responsibility to Professionalism

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 24. (old Code 21) Do not participate in any sexual or romantic engagement with Client(s) or Sponsor(s). I will be ever mindful of the level of intimacy appropriate for the relationship. I take the appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the coaching engagement.*

Interpretive Statement to Standard 24

The primary objective of this Standard is to protect the client as well as to protect the coaching profession.

In order to protect the client and in the interest of the ICF Professional, it is important to pay attention to any dependencies and expectations, unspoken contracts etc. that may arise as a result of the coaching process, even after it has ended.

Sexual attraction, or falling in love, are common human experiences. This standard provides guidance in the event that one of these experiences occurs during the coaching engagement. An ICF Professional should be aware of the causes of intimacy for the relationship and must be aware of cultural differences which are outside their own perspective that could be misinterpreted.

Coaching requires trust and is particularly successful when the clients can open up and talk freely about their situation and feelings. Experience has shown that this can lead to strong feelings “Finally someone who listens to me, someone who understands me,” or “This coach is like a father/mother to me and creates security.” This can lead to very personal feelings which are not automatically obstructive, but which have to be recognized and possibly addressed by the ICF Professional. This is especially true for “transference” and “counter-transference,” and becomes very sensitive, requiring great vigilance and self-reflection by the ICF Professional. It is also possible that an ICF Professional becomes romantically enamored with the client during the coaching journey.

Recognising that sexual or romantic feelings might not be mutual, and might cause discomfort to any party (including when the safe space being threatened or violated), the ICF Professional has a responsibility to initiate an appropriate action when the attraction is first noticed. Such actions can include; getting coaching supervision, clarifying the stance with the other party, and ending the coaching relationship while maintaining the Client/Sponsor interests as paramount. In all such situations, the ICF Professional must support the Client or Sponsor to transition to another ICF Professional and/or allow for cancellation of the coaching arrangement.

Standard 25

Section IV – Responsibility to Society

As an ICF Professional, I:

25. (old Code 4) Avoid discrimination by maintaining fairness and equality in all activities and operations, while respecting local rules and cultural practices. This includes, but is not limited to, discrimination on the basis of age, race, gender expression, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, disability or military status.

Interpretive Statement to Standard 25

- This standard calls on the ICF Professional to know the local laws regarding which people groups are legally protected and which people groups are often in danger of being discriminated.
- This standard calls on the ICF Professional to consciously ensure that this Code will be followed unless it is superseded by local law or statute or organizational policy.
- An ICF Professional may turn down offering service to a client for personal reasons, such as value conflicts. However, these reasons are not be based on local legal definitions of discrimination.
- ICF Professionals must act with awareness of the cultural filters which affect their views of the world, respect cultures different from their own, and be sensitive to cross-cultural and multicultural differences and their implications.
- Nobody is free of prejudices. The ICF Professionals must therefore work on themselves through self-reflection and know their own reservations. If they find that reservations are so strong that they affect the quality of the coaching process, it does not make sense to start the process. If the assessment is made during an ongoing process, the ICF Professional should supervise the case and, if necessary, end the process.
- Discrimination is prejudiced and biased behaviors of individual ICF professionals toward coaching clients that:
 - Are based in race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, class, ethnicity, rank and status, ability, age, nationality, and other social-group identities;
 - Benefit and reward clients with dominant-group identities and penalize and harm clients with marginalized-group identities;
 - Are conscious and unconscious, intentional and unintentional, and overt and covert; They are all discrimination that provide unearned rewards and benefits to clients with dominant-group identities and do harm and violence to clients with marginalized-group identities in ways that are life-diminishing, life-deadening, life-threatening, and life-ending;
 - Are explained and justified on legal, constitutional, scientific, cultural, religious, statistical, values, beliefs, profitability, medical, psychological, philosophical, emotional, physical, sexual, authority, superiority, systemic, and other “reasonable discrimination” grounds.

- Discrimination by ICF Professionals is unacceptable and unethical behavior that is in breach of this standard. Discrimination experienced by coaching clients from ICF Professionals and others needs to be addressed in the coaching process.
- The opposite of discrimination may be defined as acting with love, respect, and integrity. A professional coaching relationship should be based on fairness and equality. This extends to equitable relationship of:
 - an ICF Coach with each of their clients and sponsors, with utmost positive regard,
 - an ICF Trainer, Mentor or Supervision Coach, with each of their clients, assessing without bias, enabling growth in coaching competence cherishing individual learning needs, etc.,
 - an ICF Support professional with each of their colleagues, supporting them alike.

In a coaching relationship, any kind of discrimination is forbidden. This does not have to be regulated by law. If there are corresponding laws, increased sensitivity of the coach is necessary.

Standard 26

Section IV – Responsibility to Society

As an ICF Professional, I:

26. (old Code 7) Recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property of others, only claiming ownership of my own material. I understand that a breach of this standard may subject me to legal remedy by a third party.

Interpretive Statement to Standard 26

This standard calls on the ICF Professional to recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property rights of other's published or originally created material. If someone else owns it, the ICF Professional cannot borrow, replicate, or duplicate it in any form without the explicit written permission of the owner or publisher.

Intellectual property (IP) is a work or invention that is the result of creativity giving one the rights to apply for a patent, copyright, trademark etc. IP allows for the protection against brand misuse or abuse.

As local copyright laws change, it is expected of ICF Professionals to inform themselves about the current requirements and fully comply with them. This applies in particular to references, citation rules, etc.

Standard 27

Section IV – Responsibility to Society

As an ICF Professional, I:

27. (old Code 10) Am honest and work within recognized scientific standards, applicable subject guidelines and boundaries of my competence when conducting and reporting research.

Interpretive Statement to Standard 27

If an ICF professional chooses to engage in formal research under the banner of coaching, it should be done according to high professional standards. Sharing honestly how the research will be used and made available, protecting the identity of the respondents, and obtaining their written consent for their identity to be included in the research, is an integral part of this standard. Coaching research is conducted and reported with an approach that provides participants with informed consent and protects participants from any potential harm. References to contributions listed in other publications, or obtained from other sources, must be explicitly mentioned in accordance with professional guidelines for conducting and reporting research.

This standard applies to a variety of coaching research methodologies including: descriptive and analytical, applied and fundamental, quantitative and qualitative, and conceptual and empirical research. Conducting and reporting coaching research includes: sharing results of coaching research and coaching knowledge and expertise; adding to the knowledge base and practices of coaching and the coaching profession; presenting, writing, publishing, and educating about coaching and coaching knowledge and skills; honoring, acknowledging, and crediting the efforts and contributions of others; and promoting the sharing of coaching knowledge and skills widely among dominant and marginalized people and communities. This standard calls on the ICF Professional to be sure to adhere to local laws (e.g. HIPPA). If ICF Professionals are unsure about the proper way to conduct proper research, they should consult a qualified academic or scientific source for guidance.

ICF professionals should always be aware that they are seen as ICF's calling card and as an example of professional coaching and behave accordingly. This also includes knowing and representing the ICF understanding of coaching, the ICF values, the core competencies and the code of ethics.

For a review of ICF's Privacy Policy, Research Policies and Spam Policy, please follow the link below.

Standard 28

Section IV – Responsibility to Society

As an ICF Professional, I:

28. Am aware of my and my clients' impact on society. I adhere to the philosophy of "doing good," versus "avoiding bad."

Interpretive Statement to Standard 28

Professional coaching is a profession that has an impact on society. ICF Professionals should seek to be aware of this and rely on the code of ethics to reflect on their actions within the framework of professional development.

"Avoiding bad" means being obedient just to the ethical standards and thus not being in a state of breach. This standard calls for more than this; "doing good" means being aligned not only with ethical standards, but also with the ICF core values and principles. It involves contemplating about one's own actions/behavior etc. towards others in one's relationship with them so that one doesn't do any harm even if a standard related to the matter at hand is not present.

The ICF Professional should work with a consideration of the larger-system impacts of coaching; i.e. impacts beyond individuals, groups, and organizations. The ICF Professional should act with

sensitivity that coaching may alter the lives and well-being of people within client systems and the larger systems of which they are a part. The ICF Professional should apply this code of ethics in a global context.

ICF Professionals should think systemically; have a multiple levels-of-system perspective: individual, family, group, organization, community, nation, world. They should understand their interdependence with clients, coach-client relationships, other individuals, groups, organizations, and other systems and their co-creation of system issues and innovations.

ICF Professionals should not engage in unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues in verbal, written, and electronic communications with clients or with other professionals. Unwarranted negative criticism may include belittling comments that refer to colleagues' level of competence, points of view or to individuals' attributes such as race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability.

"Do no harm" is an underlying principle of this standard. It applies with a multiple levels-of-system perspective. Do no harm to clients, other ICF professionals, ICF staff, support personnel, families, groups, organizations, the communities of which they are a part, and the larger society.