

EFPA - Board of Ethics 2011

Guidelines for psychologists who contribute to the media

1. Preamble

- 1.1 This Guideline is based upon the EFPA Meta-code of Ethics approved by the EFPA General Assembly, Granada, July 2005 (<https://www.efpa.eu/meta-code-ethics>).
- 1.2 Psychologists have a responsibility to share their knowledge, insights and expertise with the public. Media (television, radio, internet, print-media) have become important sources of knowledge, opinions and power. By using the media, psychologists can disseminate their knowledge and aspire to contribute to the welfare of people.
- 1.3 Psychologists may have many objectives when dealing with the media, e.g.:
 - a. to share information regarding various areas of psychology, research and services;
 - b. to inform people about psychological services as well as the ways to obtain them;
 - c. to play a part in the presentation of psychological challenges and problems by using media;
 - d. to act as educators and informants to consumers;
 - e. to support empowerment activities;
 - f. to reduce uncertainty and stress in times of crisis in an informative way.
- 1.4 These underlying guidelines have been developed to support member Associations in developing national guidelines in order to:
 - a. support psychologists who are appearing in public media to behave in an ethically sound way.
 - b. respect and protect the rights of all people involved.

2. Basic elements of a media guideline

The following are basic elements of *the media guidelines*. Each item has a reference to the relevant article(s) of the Meta-code (MC).

A psychologist appearing in public media should:

- 2.1 *show respect for all persons involved.*

Though respect is expected in *all* professional activities, it is of utmost importance when the psychologist appears on television, writes in a newspaper or when the

psychologist presents to the public. Appearing in the media involves many people watching or hearing the psychologist.

One should be careful not to show unintended disrespect to any person involved or to refer negatively to any individual or organisation without sufficient evidence. Public statements are always read in a local context and one should therefore be careful not to accidentally or erroneously identify third parties. (MC: 3.1.1.ii)

2.2 *avoid giving professional opinions about any person in public.*

It is generally accepted among psychologists that an assessment of a person's psychological condition should be based on a proper investigation which can only be done with the consent of the person involved, if not otherwise required by legal regulations. A proper investigation includes observations, interviews and/or tests.

But even if it could be considered possible to make a professional judgement about a person based solely on information provided by public media, the psychologist should refrain from such statements as he or she has no consent from the person involved.

In general this rule does not apply in the study of deceased persons of historical interest. But even in this situation one should be careful not to harm the interests of others for example, descendants. (MC: 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.2.3.ii)

2.3 *be very careful not to bring into the public domain any personal data about persons with whom the psychologist has or has had a professional relationship.*

Confidentiality is a key value in the work of psychologists. Even with consent or on request from the client the psychologist should refrain from bringing information about the client into the public domain.

The psychologist should be aware of potential conflicts of interest when taking on different roles which involve providing a service to a particular group of clients and at the same time publishing information about them. (MC: 3.1.2.ii and 3.4.4.i)

2.4 *be careful not to go beyond his/her range and level of competence.*

Successful involvement with the media by the psychologist may result in the psychologist being asked at a later date about similar or other questions. The psychologist should take care not to go beyond his/her experience and field of competence. (MC: 3.2.2)

2.5 *aim at empowering his audience.*

Psychologists aim at sharing psychological knowledge and insights that may be relevant to the lives of their audience. In doing so it is advised to use language that will be understood by the general public and as far as possible avoids misunderstanding. (MC: 3.1.1.i and 3.4.4)

2.6 *be aware that he/ she is also representing a community of psychologists.*



Being aware of this responsibility, the psychologist should be respectful to different psychological models and work styles and abstain from statements that could discredit or hinder the presentation of the work of colleagues. However, fair critique with valid arguments should not be hindered; this might even strengthen the profession. (MC: 3.3.1.ii)

- 2.7 *be sensitive to the potential effects on third parties, like relatives and other acquaintances.*

Although it may be difficult to foresee negative effects on third parties and their relationships, the psychologist should do their best to avoid such effects. (MC: 3.3.3)

- 2.8 *be sensitive to negative effects of self-promotion.*

When appearing in public media, psychologists have the opportunity to raise the profile of the organisation they work for, or their own practice. Due account should be taken of guidelines on honesty and integrity when presenting this information and be sensitive to the potentially negative effects of self-promotion. (MC: 3.4.2 and 3.4.4)

3. Recommendations for the Member Associations:

- 2.4 to implement these EFPA guidelines on the ethical aspects of appearing in, and working with the media;
- 3.1 to check – if possible within the national legal regulations – whether persons who are presented in public media as psychologists, indeed are psychologists according to the regulations of the country;
- 3.3 to offer their members media training which includes training in awareness of ethical issues as well as the more technical aspects.

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