

ICF Code of Ethics



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The International Coaching Federation (ICF) Code of Ethics is composed of five main parts and an appendix:

1. PURPOSE

2. ICF CORE VALUES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

3. COMMITMENTS FOR ALL WITHIN THE ICF ECOSYSTEM

4. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR ICF PROFESSIONALS

5. THE PLEDGE OF ETHICS

APPENDIX

KEY DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE CODE

GLOSSARY OF OTHER TERMS

1. PURPOSE

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is the world's leading coaching association.

The ICF is made up of six family organizations (FOs). Together, they form the ICF Ecosystem. The FOs are: ICF Professional Coaches, ICF Credentials and Standards, ICF Coaching Education, ICF Foundation, ICF Coaching in Organizations, and the ICF Thought Leadership Institute. The ICF Global Board provides strategic direction for and coordination of the complete ICF ecosystem.

Based on its mission and responsibility, ICF provides a code of ethics setting out ethical standards of professional conduct required to be adhered to by all within the ICF Ecosystem, whether acting as ICF professionals (see definition) or in any other capacity. The roles and responsibilities governed by the ICF Code of Ethics include ICF professionals, ICF staff (see definition), volunteers, members of ICF boards, leaders of ICF Communities of Practice, and members of ICF global committees, task forces, and core teams (whether they are ICF professionals or not).

The ICF Code of Ethics incorporates the core values of the International Coaching Federation (ICF Core Values) as a foundation to understanding the ICF Code of Ethics, ethical principles, and ethical standards of conduct.

The ICF Code of Ethics serves to uphold the integrity of ICF and the global coaching profession by:

- Setting standards of conduct consistent with ICF core values and ethical principles.
- Guiding ethical reflection, education, and decision-making.

- Adjudicating and preserving ICF ethical standards through the ICF Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process.
- Providing the basis for ICF ethics training in ICF accredited programs.

This Code of Ethics is intended to assist those persons subject to the Code by directing them to the ethical factors, values, and principles that need to be taken into consideration whenever they need to engage in ethical reasoning and ethical decision-making.

The ICF Code of Ethics applies when people represent themselves as belonging within the ICF ecosystem and/or ICF professionals in their professional interactions.

The challenge of working ethically means that those within the ICF ecosystem will inevitably encounter situations that require responses to unexpected issues, resolution of dilemmas, and solutions to problems.

People within the ICF ecosystem strive to be ethical, even when doing so involves acting courageously and making difficult decisions that uphold the “DO GOOD” principle when it comes to their stakeholders.

Part 4 of the Code articulates the ethical obligations of ICF professionals who are acting in their different roles as coach, coach supervisor, mentor coach, trainer, and student coach-in-training.

The ICF Independent Review Board serves to uphold this Code of Ethics through the Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process, which is applicable to all ICF professionals.

ICF mandates that all credentialed ICF professionals have continuous ethical education and training. Furthermore, ICF accredited coaching education programs are required to provide ethics training as ICF considers ethics to be the foundational element of the coaching profession.

The ICF Code applies to all individuals or entities falling within the ICF ecosystem. No individual or entity falling within the ICF ecosystem may opt out of any section or part of the Code, nor are they permitted to delete, modify, or amend any provisions within the Code.

2. ICF CORE VALUES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The Code of Ethics provides guidelines for implementing the core values and ethical principles and shows how they are put into practice. All values and principles are equally important, support one another, and are aspirational. All within the ICF ecosystem are expected to honor the core values and align with the principles in all their professional interactions.

The core values and the related ethical principles are listed on the ICF website and are reiterated below. (See <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2022/01/ICF-Core-Values.pdf>.)

Professionalism: A commitment to a coaching mindset and professional quality that encompasses responsibility, respect, integrity, competence, and excellence.

I demonstrate professionalism by:

- Ensuring my professional conduct is consistently aligned with the value of humanity and the coaching mindset competency in all my professional interactions.
- Being true and accurate in my statements.
- Committing to my life-long professional learning and personal development.
- Supporting the ongoing personal and professional development of my clients, students, and ICF professionals.
- Delivering on my commitments.
- Being aware of ethical dilemmas and issues and responding with adherence to the ICF Code of Ethics.
- Adding to the knowledge base and sharing expertise and skills as described in the ICF Core Competencies.
- Being resilient and confident when faced with challenges.
- Behaving with respect and transparency in all business dealings related to coaching.
- Making clear and accurate representations in all my professional interactions in relation to coaching.
- Committing to honesty, courage, consistency of action, ethical practice, and the highest standards for ICF and the coaching profession.

Collaboration: A commitment to developing social connection and community building.

I work collaboratively by:

- Making commitments and progress towards promoting professional coaching through fostering joint creativity and resourcefulness.
- Partnering with others, both within and across multiple social-identity groups.
- Being mindful and intentional in my own participation while working in any collective effort.
- Cooperating with other ICF professionals working with client(s) and sponsor(s).
- Partnering and communicating with related professions, associations, and people in other coaching organizations and professions.

Humanity: A commitment to being humane, kind, compassionate, and respectful towards others.

I demonstrate humanity by:

- Accepting that, as humans, I am not meant to be perfect, and with a coaching mindset, expressing imperfections is an opportunity for me to spread a culture of openness and self-acceptance.
- Knowing I always have more to learn and being open to other points of view.
- Creating authentic relationships that support honesty, transparency, and clarity.
- Continuously seeking and developing self-awareness.
- Being willing to acknowledge and own my mistakes.
- Accepting responsibility for my actions and learning from them.
- Being modest about my achievements.
- Avoiding any behaviors or communication that suggest superiority in any way.
- Committing to inclusivity, dignity, self-worth, and human rights.

Equity: A commitment to using a coaching mindset to explore and understand the needs of others so I can practice equitable processes at all times that create equality for all.

I am equitable by:

- Recognizing and respecting all identity groups and their contributions.
- Treating everyone with the same dignity and sense of fairness.
- Bringing awareness to systemic patterns of conscious and unconscious biases in myself and in others.
- Exploring to understand and bring awareness to social diversity, systemic equality, and systemic oppression, and how they show up in the coaching profession.
- Maintaining equality and partnership in all my coach-client, trainer-student, mentor-coach, and supervisor-coach relationships.

3. COMMITMENTS FOR ALL WITHIN THE ICF ECOSYSTEM

The values are aspirational and a robust guide for ethical reasoning and decision-making. All within the ICF ecosystem are expected to honor and uphold these values in all their professional interactions.

We:

- Mindfully perform our duties with integrity and accountability by thinking globally, being courageous in our thoughts, actions, and speech, being aware of our impact, and bearing the responsibility of any consequences.
- Commit to excellence through continued personal, professional, and ethical development.
- Remain alert to cultural filters and demonstrate respect for cultures different from our own through open conversations about cross-cultural and multicultural differences.
- Maintain awareness of relationships and how they are influenced by factors including biases, power dynamics, and forms of systemic oppression, and actively address these factors through continuing education and open conversations.
- Cultivate our ethical growth and maturity through continuous self-reflection and increased self-awareness. If an ethical dilemma arises, we will pursue assistance where needed to resolve the matter.
- Respectfully attempt to communicate our concerns with others if we become aware of unethical conduct by them, and if necessary, seek ethical guidance for next steps.
- Communicate with those who need to be informed of the ethical responsibilities established by this Code by providing access to this Code of Ethics.
- Accept that behaving ethically means going beyond what is written in the Code of Ethics.

4. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR ICF PROFESSIONALS

Meeting these ICF ethical standards of conduct is the first of the ICF core coaching competencies (ICF Core Competencies): “Demonstrates Ethical Practice: understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards.”

The following ethical standards are applied to the professional activities of ICF Professionals – regardless of an existing formal coaching relationship (see definitions) or not. These ethical standards are divided into five sections:

1. Agreements for Client and/or Sponsor Engagement.
2. Confidentiality and Legal Compliance.
3. Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest.

4. Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value.
5. Professional Integrity and Accountability.

Section 1: Agreements for Client and/or Sponsor Engagement

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 1.1** Communicate (before coaching begins) with coaching client(s), sponsor(s), and/or other involved parties that the coach is in a direct relationship with to explain the nature of coaching and to co-create a coaching agreement regarding roles, responsibilities, confidentiality, financial arrangements, and other aspects of the coaching engagement.
- 1.2** Respect all parties' right to terminate the coaching relationship at any point for any reason during the coaching engagement, subject to the provisions of the agreement.

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 2.1** Maintain the strictest level of confidentiality with all parties involved, regardless of the role I am fulfilling.
- 2.2** Have a clear agreement about what information is exchanged and how it is exchanged among all parties involved during all coaching engagements.
- 2.3** Have a clear agreement with client(s), sponsor(s), and other involved parties about what confidential information may need to be disclosed to the appropriate authorities, e.g., illegal activity, required by law, valid court order or subpoena; or imminent/likely risk of danger to self or to others.
- 2.4** Maintain, store, and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security, and privacy, and complies with applicable laws and agreements.
- 2.5** Fulfill my ethical and legal obligations to my coaching client(s), sponsor(s), colleagues, and to the public at large directly and through any technology systems I may utilize (i.e. technology-assisted coaching tools, databases, platforms, software, and artificial intelligence).
- 2.6** Am responsible for my support personnel's adherence to the relevant standards of the Code of Ethics.

2.7 Maintain the privacy of ICF professionals and use of their contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only as authorized by ICF or the ICF professional.

2.8 Comply with copyright laws and recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property of others, only claiming ownership of my own material.

Section 3: Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

3.1 Am aware of and discuss with all involved parties the implications of having multiple agreements and relationships, and the potential for conflicts of interest.

3.2 Manage conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest with coaching client(s) and sponsor(s) through self-reflection, coaching agreement(s), and ongoing dialogue. This includes addressing organizational roles, responsibilities, relationships, records, confidentiality, and other reporting requirements.

3.3 Resolve any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest by working through the issue with relevant parties, seeking professional assistance, or suspending or ending the professional relationship.

3.4 Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern professional interactions, physical or otherwise.

3.5 Maintain fairness by being aware of my biases and addressing them so that I do not discriminate toward others based on race, color, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, spiritual practice, ability, and other groups, classes, and categories of human differences.

3.6 Am mindful of the level of intimacy in the coaching relationship. I do not participate in any sexual or romantic relationship with client(s) or sponsor(s). If I detect a shift in the relationship, I take appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the coaching engagement.

3.7 Understand that ICF professionals often serve in multiple professional roles based on prior training and/or experience (i.e. mentor, therapist, HR specialist, assessor), and it is my responsibility to disclose to the client when I am acting in a capacity other than the role of an ICF professional.

3.8 Disclose to Client(s) the information of compensation and benefits that have been paid/received or will be paid/received for referrals.

Section 4: Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 4.1** Am aware of and, in partnership with my client, actively manage any power or status differential between us that may be caused by cultural, relational, psychological, or contextual issues.
- 4.2** Recognize my personal limitations or circumstances that may impair my coaching performance or professional commitments. I will seek support if necessary, including relevant professional guidance. This may require suspending or terminating my coaching relationship(s).
- 4.3** Remain alert to indications that there might be a shift in the value received from the coaching relationship and discuss this with the client. If appropriate, explore changes in the coaching relationship and/or the potential for a different coach, professional, or resource.

Section 5: Professional Integrity and Accountability

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 5.1** Accurately identify my coaching qualifications and work within the boundaries of my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications, and my ICF credential.
- 5.2** 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.
- 5.3** Adhere to the philosophy of “doing good” versus “avoiding bad,” recognizing the impact of my professional conduct on my clients, stakeholders, the coaching profession, and society.

I understand that ICF may, at its discretion and according to the ECR process, hold me accountable for violations of the ICF Code of Ethics. I further agree that my accountability to ICF may include sanctions for any violation, such as mandatory additional coach education, mentoring, supervision, or loss of my ICF membership and/or ICF credentials.

5. THE PLEDGE OF ETHICS:

While fulfilling any role within the ICF ecosystem, I promise to uphold my ethical obligations by adhering to the ICF Code of Ethics in all my professional interactions. I commit to doing my best to represent the integrity and professional reputation of coaching and the ICF.

APPENDIX:

KEY DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THE CODE

- **“Artificial Intelligence”** – any algorithm or machine-based technology that enables computers and other digital devices to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving skills. (See Standard 2.5)
- **“Client”** – the individual, team, or group member being coached, the coach being coached, mentored, or supervised, or the coach in training. (See Standards 1.1, 2.3, 2.5, 3.2, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.3)
- **“Coaching”** – partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. (See Part 4)
- **“Coaching Agreement”** – a formal document established between an ICF professional and the client(s)/sponsor(s) that outlines the terms, expectations, and conditions of their coaching relationship. It typically includes details such as the goals of the coaching, the duration and frequency of sessions, confidentiality policies, payment terms, cancellation policies, and the responsibilities of both the coach and the client. (See Standards 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2)
- **“Coaching Engagement”** – the structured interaction between an ICF professional and the client(s)/sponsor(s). This engagement encompasses the entire coaching process, including the initial assessment, goal setting, regular coaching sessions, progress tracking, and evaluation of outcomes. (See Standards 1.1, 2.2, 3.6)
- **“Coaching Relationship”** – a relationship that is established by the ICF professional and the client(s)/sponsor(s) under an agreement that defines the responsibilities and expectations of each party. (See Standards 1.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 4.2, 4.3)
- **“Coach Supervisor”** – an experienced coach who engages in reflective dialogue and a collaborative process with a coach (or group of coaches) for personal, professional, and ethical development and learning. (See Parts 1 & 2)
- **“Code”** – ICF Code of Ethics; this document, which includes the purpose, core values & ethical principles, commitments, standards, key definitions, glossary, and pledge.
- **“Confidentiality”** – the protection of any information obtained in or around the coaching relationship unless there is a legal reason or requirement, a threat of harm, or written consent to release is given by the client. (See Standards 1.1, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 3.2)
- **“Conflict of Interest”** – a situation in which an ICF professional is involved in multiple interests where serving one interest could work against or conflict with another. This could be financial, personal, intrinsic, professional, or a perceived conflict with a client, prospective client, or sponsor. (See Standards 3.1, 3.2, 3.3)

- **“Core Competencies”** – specific skills of professional coaches. (See Parts 1 & 2)
- **“Equality”** – a situation in which all people experience inclusion and access to resources and opportunity, regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, immigration status, mental or physical disability, and other areas of human difference. (See Part 2 and Standard 3.5)
- **“ICF Accredited Coaching Education”** – a program offered by an educational institution that has gone through a rigorous review process by the ICF and demonstrates that its curriculum aligns with the ICF definition of coaching, ICF Core Competencies, and ICF Code of Ethics. (See Part 1 and Standard 5.1)
- **“ICF Credential”** – a professional certification indicating a person has met specific standards and requirements designed to develop and refine their coaching skills. ICF credential designations include Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC), and Master Certified Coach (MCC). (See Part 1 and Standard 5.1)
- **“ICF Ecosystem”** – ICF is made up of six family organizations (FOs). Together they form the ICF ecosystem. The FOs are: ICF Professional Coaches, ICF Credentials and Standards, ICF Coaching Education, ICF Foundation, ICF Coaching in Organizations, and the ICF Thought Leadership Institute, all under the umbrella of the ICF Global Board of Directors. (See Part 1)
- **“ICF Professional”** – individuals who represent themselves as an ICF member and/or ICF credential-holder, in roles including, but not limited to, coach, coach supervisor, mentor coach, coach trainer, coach in training, board member, volunteer, or leader. (See Parts 1, 2, & 4 and Standards 2.7, 5.2)
- **“ICF Staff”** – any person who is employed or contracted by ICF, or any management company contracted by ICF, to provide management and administrative services for ICF. (See Part 1)
- **“Intellectual Property”** – creations of the mind that are legally recognized as the property of their creator or owner. Intellectual property rights grant the creator or owner exclusive rights to use, produce, and distribute their creations, which are protected under laws against unauthorized use or infringement. (See Standard 2.6)
- **“Legal”** – Compliance with the law(s) of the country where the Coach practices. (See Part 4 and Standards 2.2, 2.5)
- **“Mentor Coach”** – an experienced coach who provides a collaborative learning process (mentor coaching) through which feedback is provided to another coach based on observed or recorded coaching sessions, to further develop their unique coaching style and skills in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies. (See Parts 1 & 2 and Standard 3.7)

- **“Sponsor”** – the entity (including its representatives) or individual paying for and/or arranging or defining the coaching services to be provided. This includes those having parental responsibility for minors. (See Part 2 and Standards 1.1, 2.3, 2.5, 3.2, 3.6)
- **“Support Personnel”** – the people who work for ICF professionals and who have access to information about clients and/or coaches. (e.g. administrative assistants, marketing, accounting, etc.) (See Standard 2.6)
- **“Systemic Equality”** – gender equality, race equality, and other forms of equality that are institutionalized in the norms, language, images, beliefs, ethics, core values, policies, structures, laws, practices, and cultures of communities, organizations, professional associations, nations, and society. (See Part 2 and Standard 3.5)
- **“Systemic Oppression”** – Systemic racism, colorism, sexism, and other forms of systemic inequality that are embedded in the norms, beliefs, language, images, ethics, core values, policies, structures, laws, practices, and cultures of communities, organizations, professional associations, nations, and society and that perpetuate widespread prejudicial and harmful treatment of people with marginalized identities and reward and benefit people with privileged identities. (See Parts 2 & 3)

GLOSSARY OF OTHER TERMS

- **“Coaching Platform”** – a coaching platform uses digital technology to enable an integrated and seamless coaching journey between coaches and clients at a large scale.
- **“Coaching Platform Provider”** – an organization utilizing a coaching platform developed on their own or by a platform developer and branded as their own coaching technology platform.
- **“Coaching Provider”** – a for-profit or nonprofit organization providing professional coaching services including but not limited to a corporation, limited liability company (LLC), nonprofit, or partnership.
- **“Coaching Supervision”** – a dynamic and reflective process of collaboration, guidance, and support through which coaches develop their personal, professional, and ethical capacity and maturity.
- **“DEIB”** – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging: the combination of key concepts that support a range of similarities and differences, fair access and treatment, being welcoming, feeling a part of a group, and fairness.
 - “Diversity” – race, color, caste, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, rank, socio-economic status, age, spiritual practice, national origin, ability, and other groups, classes, and categories of human differences, such as personality characteristics, appearance, communication styles, and leadership styles.

- “Equity” – actions that provide access to resources and opportunities and establish norms, actions, policies, infrastructure, and culture so that everyone can realize their full potential.
- “Inclusion” – action that includes and fully supports people from marginalized as well as privileged groups; by creating and maintaining processes, infrastructure, and culture; so their inclusion goes beyond assimilation and differentiation to integrating them in the life and work of the organization in a way that they participate in decision-making about what the organization’s work is, and how the work gets done.
- “Belonging” – sustained sense of connectedness and involvement with the organization and its work by marginalized and privileged members of an organization, based on their experience that their presence, contributions, and inherent worth are truly valued and affirmed as demonstrated by the ongoing actions of the organization.
- **“External Coach”** – a coach, hired from outside of an organization who is neither a part time nor full time employee of an organization, to coach employees of the organization.
- **“Group Coaching”** – coaching a group of individuals who have similar goals or interests, serving each to move forward in their progress, where the coach and other group members offer support and inspiration on individual abilities and potential.
- **“ICF Assessor”** – a credentialed coach that has successfully completed ICF assessor training; ICF assessors review and assess the recorded coaching sessions for ACC, PCC, or MCC candidates.
- **“ICF Certified”** - indicates ICF credentialed and applies only to those with an ICF credential such as ACC, PCC, or MCC.
- **“Internal Coach”** - an individual who is employed within an organization and coaches either part-time or full-time the employees of that organization.
- **“Team Coaching”** – partnering in a co-creative and reflective process with a team and its dynamics and relationships in a way that inspires them to maximize their abilities and potential in order to reach their common purpose and shared goals.