

2022 Best Practices in Therapeutic Consulting

The IECA Therapeutic Committee has created this document to guide independent educational consultants (IECs) who work with clients with therapeutic needs. This document delineates **best practices in therapeutic educational consulting** and outlines practices therapeutic consultants are expected to apply with knowledge, empathy, professionalism, and respect. Professional practice in independent educational consulting, as in many other professions, depends on a community of informed professionals who apply their skills flexibly, meeting the unique needs of each client while remaining mindful of best practices and principles.

Therapeutic consultants are expected to be competent in the following five areas:

- 1) Having a working knowledge of mental and behavioral health concerns, neurodevelopmental disorders and learning differences, their functional impact, and accommodations and services required to support clients with such challenges.
- 2) Understanding psychological, educational, psychiatric, neurological, and related assessments.
- 3) Understanding levels of care among inpatient, residential, outpatient, step down programs and other supports and services.
- 4) Evaluating services and treatment modalities provided at various levels of care.
- 5) Maintaining the confidentiality and security of client records.

IECA members are expected to secure their own training before applying for the Therapeutic (“T”) specialty designation. Therapeutic consultants are also expected to participate in a variety of learning experiences including conferences, webinars, and therapeutic program tours. New therapeutic consultants should participate in the IECA summer training program along with the IECA mentoring program.

Elements of Best Practices

Working with the Client

IECs are expected to:

1. Gather information relevant to the unique **needs and characteristics** of each **client**.

These characteristics include client values, attitudes, interests, goals, challenges, learning styles, levels of achievement, aptitudes, skills, age, cultural considerations (ethnicity, religion, etc.) gender identity and sexual orientation, physical health, behavioral manifestations, family values, family dynamics, substance abuse history, mental health, and psychiatric diagnoses.

2. Utilize a variety of data sources to gather client-specific information. These data sources may include parent/guardian interviews; client interview; review of educational records; review of clinical records; conferences with the referring professional (if any) and other professionals who have knowledge of the client (e.g., guidance counselor, teacher, tutor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, etc.).

- a. All exchanges of information with third parties are arranged only with the properly signed authorization of the appropriate party (parent/guardian in the case of a minor client, and client in the case of a legal adult).
 - i.
 - b. It is understood that it may not be practical, appropriate, or useful to access all of these data sources for a particular client, and that the decision whether or not to access a particular source is a professional one that is generally made by the IEC in consultation with adult clients or parents/guardians and the referring professional.
3. Provide, as appropriate, information and emotional support relevant to the placement advisement process to the client and family.
 4. When appropriate establish and maintain communication with the client.
 5. Understand the issues in each state associated with legal majority and legal minority as these relate to the advisement and placement of clients.
 6. Act in the best interests of the client.

Working with the Family

IECs are expected to:

1. Inform parents/guardians or adult client of the role of the independent educational consultant in the placement advisement process. Explain to the parent/guardian, or adult client that it is they (i.e., not the IEC) who make the final decisions regarding placement, treatment, and educational setting.
2. Provide parents/guardians, or adult client, with information relevant to the placement advisement process, especially information that will enable parents/guardians, or the adult client, to make an informed, thoughtful decision regarding placement.

Such information may include: the range of options for the client (including alternatives, if any, to boarding/residential programs); costs; services offered by recommended programs; resources for learning about professional transporters or interventionists, if indicated and requested; estimated duration of recommended programs; sources of additional information on recommended programs; explanation of why the IEC has included each program on the list of options.

3. Gather information about and respect the family's unique history, cultural background, experiences, values, goals, and resources.
4. If indicated, refer parents/guardians to appropriate mental health professionals for additional support.
5. Inform and include, as appropriate, all legally responsible custodial parents in the placement advisement process.



Working with Schools and Programs

1. Obtain knowledge of a variety of potentially appropriate educational and therapeutic settings and resources, especially boarding and residential programs for clients with mental health, special educational, and related needs. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including visiting programs and schools, attending conferences, and collaborating with colleagues.

The knowledge obtained about programs should include some or all of the following: educational, therapeutic and/or residential models and [therapeutic approaches](#) utilized at the program; background and experience of administrative/supervisory staff; background, training and experience, including licensure status, of professional staff; physical resources, including buildings, grounds, libraries, technology, etc.; program size; admissions criteria and student/client profile; average and/or minimum length of stay; tuition cost; policies regarding communication with IECs.

2. When visiting programs, adhere to the ethical guidelines stated in the IECA Principles of Good Practice. Please review at <https://link.iecaonline.com/POGP>

3. When possible, recommend programs that the IEC has visited.

If the needs of the client and/or family require that the IEC consider recommending a program the IEC has not visited, then the IEC should learn more about the program via independent research, such as in-person, phone, video conference or other meetings with program personnel, consulting with the the IECA Therapeutic Connected Community, and consulting with colleagues who are familiar with the program.

4. For each program under consideration, learn, as appropriate, about the program's licensure and certification status, and any recent history of legal/ regulatory complaints and/or lawsuits against the program or its leadership team.

Inform parents/guardians, and client (if an adult) of any known licensure or certification restrictions or censures, and legal/regulatory complaints or lawsuits, especially if these are outstanding or within the past two years.

5. In addition to the above guidelines, IECs are expected to adhere to relevant state regulations for IECs.

Professional Ethics

1. Be familiar with and adhere to the ethical guidelines stated in the IECA Principles of Good Practice (<https://link.iecaonline.com/POGP>) concerning competence, relationships with schools and programs, relationships with students and families, relationships with other IECs, potential conflicts of interest, and advertising and public statements.

2. Maintain respectful and professional standards, including safeguarding the confidentiality of the client.

3. Advise families on the best options for an individual and articulate the pertinent rationale for those choices.



4. Provide information on the price range of potential recommendations prior to contracting for services.
5. Develop and use written permission forms and contracts or agreements with full delineation of services, disclosures, and disclaimers.
6. *When the needs of the client exceed the IEC's scope of expertise, consult with or refer the client to another IEC whose expertise better suits the client's needs.*

Establishing a Professional Environment

1. Establish an effective and secure system of communication and documentation with client, families, and programs, and of retention and ultimate disposal of client records. Adhere to state regulations that are relevant to IECs.
2. Arrange for coverage by another qualified IEC during times of inaccessibility. Consider drafting a professional will.
3. Seek the advice of such qualified professionals as attorneys, accountants, etc. regarding business practices and organizational issues, regulations and compliance, and accounting and tax matters.

Professional Responsibilities

1. Conduct school and program visits on an ongoing basis; use a structured method for gathering information and assessing programs and follow IECA's guidelines regarding the minimum number of school/program visits expected per year.
2. Develop a network of professional resources, including fellow IEC's, mental health practitioners, advocates, attorneys, educators, and psycho-educational or neuropsychological evaluators.
3. Achieve professional competency by developing a working knowledge of mental health and educational issues including but not limited to psychiatric disorders, substance use disorders, learning differences, autism spectrum disorders and other neurodevelopmental disorders.
4. Understand levels of care appropriate to the population served, including, but not limited to: therapeutic boarding schools, residential treatment centers, outdoor behavioral health programs, young adult transitional living programs, psychiatric hospitals and assessment centers, substance abuse programs, and outpatient programs.
5. Understand how to interpret and evaluate the significance and limitations of measures commonly used in the educational and psychological evaluation of children, adolescents, and adults, and their implications for placement advisement.
6. IECs are expected to adhere to IECA's guidelines for professional development by participating in learning opportunities provided by IECA and other organizations. IECA offers conferences, pre- and post-conference workshops, master classes, the Summer Training Institute, professional retreats, on-line member networks, a mentoring program, webinars, and publications such as Insights, and other offerings.