

Guidelines for Consulting Police Psychologists
Ratified by the IACP Psychological Services Section
Boston, Massachusetts, 2006

Purpose

Consulting police psychologists adhere to the most current American Psychological Association's "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct." These principles make it clear that psychologists are responsible not only to individuals but also to society at large. These specific ethical aims frequently compete when police psychologists consult with government organizations where the obligation to protect individual rights challenges the safety and welfare of others. In such circumstances, consulting police psychologists must exercise reasonable judgment to weigh the duty to protect individual rights with the need to protect the safety and welfare of others. While all psychologists must weigh these potentially competing interests, those who consult to police and public safety agencies are more frequently involved with the prevention and control of conduct recognized as threatening to life and property. They are often called upon to help resolve conflicts between individuals, between groups, or between individuals and their government. As such, they can more often be expected to confront the tension between individual needs and societal duties.

Although guidelines are not binding they serve as guiding principles and provide a framework for psychologists to conduct their professional practice. Guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive and may not be applicable to every situation. They are not intended to take precedence over the judgment of individual psychologists.¹

Roles and Boundaries

1. Consulting police psychologists operate ethically and within the boundaries of their competence. Consulting police psychologists provide services to clients in a manner consistent with their education, training, and experience in the field of police psychology and undertake ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competence in accordance with current theory and practice.

2. Consulting police psychologists may be asked to function in nontraditional roles where the client is the law enforcement agency. Consulting police psychologists strive to educate and inform their agencies, their colleague and the community of their ethical responsibility to balance respect for human rights with the obligation to protect public safety.

¹ American Psychological Association, "Determination and Documentation of the Need for Practice Guidelines," *American Psychologist* 60 (2005): 976-978.

3. Consulting police psychologists respect the basic rights of individuals who may be affected by the recommendations or services they provide and balance the risk of harm to the individual with the risk to public safety. While the agency is ultimately responsible for identifying and implementing a course of action, a consulting psychologist should avoid active participation in a police action that appears in his or her best professional judgment to be unlawful or unethical.

Integrity

4. Mindful that conflicts may emerge between the ethical standards or practice guidelines of psychologists and the needs of the hiring organization, the psychologist clarifies the nature of the relationship, the nature and limitations of the services to be provided, and the intended use of the information obtained. As consultants, the final decision with respect to the use of information provided is the prerogative and responsibility of the referring agency.

5. Consulting police psychologists should not facilitate or participate in the unlawful, cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment of others. On occasion, their input may have negative consequences for others, particularly when an imminent risk of substantial harm to public safety is reasonably determined.

6. Consulting police psychologists are sensitive to the problems inherent in dual relationships. A police psychologist acting in a consulting capacity avoids, when possible, assuming multiple roles with the same individual.

7. Consulting police psychologists frequently rely upon third-party information (indirect assessment) rather than face-to-face assessment. When psychologists conduct assessments, they identify the limitations of the reliability and validity of their opinions, regardless of the source of their data, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions and recommendations.

8. When ethical dilemmas arise, consulting police psychologists seek counsel from colleagues with knowledge and experience in police psychology.

Confidentiality and Privilege

9. Consulting police psychologists are aware of the laws and ethical standards pertaining to confidentiality and privilege and whenever possible take steps to ensure that all involved parties are likewise informed.

10. Consulting police psychologists exercise independent professional judgment and render objective opinions. In rendering an opinion, a police psychologist should consider applicable professional and ethical standards of conduct, the law, the risk of harm to an individual versus the risk to public safety, and other relevant concerns, such as moral, social, and cultural factors.

Methods and Procedures

11. Consulting police psychologists should be familiar with relevant department procedures and local, state, and federal law.
12. Consulting police psychologists work with other professionals, as necessary, to serve their clients effectively and appropriately.
13. Consulting police psychologists may partner with a multidisciplinary team to gather, coordinate, and assess information or share knowledge and experience with the goal of facilitating an ethical, practical, and successful outcome.