

NATIONAL ENTRY-TO-PRACTICE COMPETENCY PROFILE FOR COUNSELLING THERAPISTS

(Applicable to counsellors and therapists working in the field of mental health)

May 2007

Endorsed by:

The Task Group for Counsellor Regulation in British Columbia

The New Brunswick Association of Professional Counsellors

The Nova Scotia Association of Counselling Therapists

The Prince Edward Island Counselling Association

The Competency Profile was developed by the *Task Group for Counsellor Regulation in British Columbia* as a proposed regulatory entry-to-practice standard. It was subsequently validated and endorsed for the same purpose by the professional associations listed above.

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TASK GROUP FOR COUNSELLOR REGULATION COMPETENCY PROFILE - COUNSELLING THERAPIST

ORIGINS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Competency Profile was developed by the Task Group for Counsellor Regulation in British Columbia, over the period May 2004 – May 2006.

The Task Group is composed of representatives of the following professional associations:

- The American Association of Pastoral Counsellors (BC Chapter)
- The BC Art Therapy Association
- The BC Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
- The BC Association of Clinical Counsellors
- The Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education (BC Chapter)
- The Canadian Counselling Association (BC Chapter)
- The Music Therapy Association of BC

Collectively these associations represent over 2,300 counsellors and therapists who practice in British Columbia.

The Competency Profile was drafted by a broadly based Working Committee of experienced counsellors, therapists and educators, assisted by a consultant in competency-based workplace standards*. In doing its work the committee consulted available documentation describing relevant standards, and educational program curricula from across North America. It also drew heavily upon the expertise of its members.

Proposed competencies were validated through a province-wide survey that included responses from 11% of the membership of the participating associations. Respondents provided feedback on the importance of the proposed competencies for safe and effective practice, and on the frequency of use of the competencies in their own work settings. The results were used to ensure that the Competency Profile reflects current practice.

The Task Group would like to acknowledge the time and commitment of all who participated in this process.

Since its approval by the BC Task Group in May 2006, the Competency Profile has been validated elsewhere in Canada, and endorsed by several professional counselling associations (see front cover) as a proposed entry-to-practice standard in their jurisdictions.

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PURPOSE OF THE COMPETENCY PROFILE

In British Columbia, the proposed entry-to-practice regulatory designation is known as the *Counselling Therapist*. Consequently the term "Counselling Therapist" is used throughout the Competency Profile. However this terminology is not binding upon other provincial professional associations that have endorsed the Profile.

The Profile lists the entry-to-practice competencies that are proposed as requirements for the Counselling Therapist. It identifies the common ground that exists among a wide variety of counselling orientations. It defines a minimum standard of practice, and has been developed with protection of the public as a prime motive.

The competencies in the Profile represent an integrated set of knowledge, skills and behaviours that all entry-level Counselling Therapists must possess.

Each competency in the Profile informs and qualifies each other competency; competencies are not intended to be used in isolation.

Competencies should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the Counselling Therapist's chosen framework of theory and practice. For example, the term "empathic understanding" will be interpreted differently dependent upon theoretical framework. Likewise the approaches to assessment and closure may vary.

In reading the Profile, the terms *counselling* and *therapy* should be regarded as synonymous, as should the terms *counsellor*, *therapist* and *Counselling Therapist*.

The organization of the competencies within the Profile should not be construed as prescribing a process for therapy. The Counselling Therapist is expected to use professional judgment and to apply the competencies in a manner that suits their theoretical framework, and the situation at hand.

When Counselling Therapy becomes a regulated profession within British Columbia, it is recommended that this Competency Profile be adopted as the regulatory standard. The Competency Profile would then serve the following purposes:

- It would provide a standard against which counsellor education programs may be developed and / or evaluated, to determine if their learning outcomes provide a basis for registration.
- It would provide a blueprint for the development of a registration examination, if such were deemed necessary by the regulatory body.

The Competency Profile is intended to define the minimum set of competencies necessary for registration as a Counselling Therapist. Educational programs may provide learning outcomes over and above this minimum competency set; candidates for registration may present with additional competencies; both situations are to be encouraged.

Furthermore, in the future, more advanced competency sets might be recognized by the regulatory body, through an advanced or specialized registration category.

The BC Task Group for Counsellor Regulation has approved the following Scope of Practice for the Counselling Therapist:

The practice of Counselling Therapy assists people experiencing difficulties in relationships, or within themselves, and enhances their growth and well-being, by making use of relational, conversational, somatic, expressive, or educational methods and techniques informed by established counselling and psychotherapeutic theories, research, ethical standards, human diversity, and the range of human traditions.

Organization

For convenience, the Competency Profile has been divided into the following *Competency Areas* and *General Competencies*:

Competency Area 1: Foundational Principles

- 1.1 Apply a theory of human functioning.
- 1.2 Work within an established theoretical framework.
- 1.3 Maintain awareness of self in relation to professional role.
- 1.4 Apply knowledge of human and cultural diversity.

Competency Area 2: Collegial Relationships

- 2.1 Use effective professional communication.
- 2.2 Maintain effective relationships.
- 2.3 Contribute to a collaborative and productive atmosphere.
- 2.4 Display sensitivity to diversity.

Competency Area 3: Professional Practice and Ethics

- 3.1 Comply with legal requirements.
- 3.2 Comply with general requirements of the provincial regulatory body (where applicable).
- 3.3 Maintain awareness of relevant professional associations.
- 3.4 Apply an ethical decision making process.
- 3.5 Maintain self care and level of health necessary for responsible counselling.
- 3.6 Evaluate and improve professional performance.
- 3.7 Participate in continuing education and professional development.
- 3.8 Obtain clinical supervision.
- 3.9 Practice in a manner consistent with the role of the Counselling Therapist within the health care system.
- 3.10 Provide consultation within the limits of therapist's expertise.
- 3.11 Provide education and training within the limits of therapist's expertise.
- 3.12 Facilitate group process.
- 3.13 Maintain client records.
- 3.14 Establish business practices relevant to professional role.
- 3.15 Advocate for clients.
- 3.16 Prepare clear, concise and accurate reports.

Competency Area 4: Counselling Process

- 4.1 Orient client to Counselling Therapist's practice.
- 4.2 Establish and maintain core conditions, consistent with selected theory and practice.
- 4.3 Obtain and integrate multiple levels of information during the therapeutic process.
- 4.4 Conduct an appropriate risk assessment.
- 4.5 Maintain an effective therapeutic relationship.

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STRUCTURE OF THE COMPETENCY PROFILE

- 4.6 Structure and facilitate the therapeutic process.
- 4.7 Manage interruptions to the therapeutic process.
- 4.8 Refer client.
- 4.9 Conduct an effective closure process.
- 4.10 Evaluate clinical practice.

Competency Area 5: Applied Research

- 5.1 Use research findings to inform clinical practice.
- 5.2 Remain current with professional literature and other relevant media.
- 5.3 Participate in informal inquiry.

For each General Competency, there are listed a number of *Competency Statements*. The Competency Statements collectively define the entry-to-practice requirements for the Counselling Therapist.

Assessment of Proficiency

For each Competency Statement, the Competency Profile identifies a *Proficiency Environment (PE)*. The Proficiency Environment establishes the setting in which proficiency is to be determined.

Three distinct Proficiency Environments are used, defined as follows:

Proficiency Environment (PE)	Definition
A (Academic)	Proficiency must be determined through objective assessment of the candidate in a written or oral examination.
S (Simulated)	Proficiency must be determined through objective assessment of the candidate participating in an activity (such as a role play) that simulates professional practice.
C (Clinical Practice)	Proficiency must be determined through objective assessment of the candidate working directly with a client in clinical practice. (This could occur through supervision, videotape review etc.)

The Proficiency Environment selected for each Competency Statement is intended to ensure that proficiency is determined in a manner that affords an appropriate level of protection to the public.

Assessment of proficiency should be undertaken by an individual with advanced skills in the profession.

The Counselling Therapist is expected to demonstrate, as a minimum, *Entry-to-Practice Proficiency* relative to each Competency Statement in the Competency Profile.

Entry-to-Practice Proficiency is defined as follows:

When presented with routine situations, the entry-to-practice Counselling Therapist applies each relevant competency in a manner consistent with generally accepted standards in the profession, without supervision or direction, and within a reasonable timeframe. The Therapist selects and applies competencies in an informed manner. The Therapist anticipates what outcomes to expect in a given situation, and responds appropriately.

The entry-to-practice Counselling Therapist recognizes unusual, difficult to resolve and complex situations, and takes appropriate steps to address them based on ethics and standards of practice; this includes seeking consultation or supervision, reviewing research literature, and referring the client.

Development beyond entry-to-practice (advanced skills):

The therapist working at an advanced level has extensive experience and exhibits a nuanced understanding of clinical situations. Decision-making and treatment flow more effectively because the therapist readily perceives which aspects of a presenting situation are the important ones, and how they should be addressed. The therapist working at an advanced level deals effectively with most unusual, difficult to resolve and complex situations.

Beyond the advanced level, therapists may be recognized as leaders in their fields, who regularly contribute to the advancement of the profession.

**TASK GROUP FOR COUNSELLOR REGULATION
COMPETENCY PROFILE - COUNSELLING THERAPIST**

AREA 1 FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Competency Statements		PE
1.1 Apply a theory of human functioning.		
a	Integrate knowledge of developmental transitions and challenges across the lifespan.	A
b	Integrate knowledge of contextual and systemic factors that affect human functioning, including social, biological and family factors.	A
c	Integrate knowledge of the role of religion, spirituality and meaning.	A
d	Integrate knowledge of moral development and reasoning.	A
e	Integrate therapist's beliefs about wellbeing and distress.	S
1.2 Work within an established theoretical framework.		
a	Integrate knowledge of the historical, philosophical, socio-cultural and scientific foundations of the theoretical framework.	A
b	Apply the theory or theories upon which the therapist's practice is based.	C
c	Integrate knowledge of how human problems develop, from the viewpoint of the therapist's theoretical orientation.	A
d	Apply therapist's theoretical orientation to client's context and presentation.	C
e	Identify circumstances where therapy is contraindicated.	C
f	Choose counselling approach that flows from the theoretical framework.	S
g	Establish a therapeutic relationship informed by the theoretical framework.	C
h	Apply a theory of change consistent with the therapist's theoretical orientation.	A
1.3 Maintain awareness of self in relation to professional role.		
a	Recognize instances where therapist's life experiences may compromise therapeutic effectiveness.	S
b	Recognize instances where therapist's life experiences may enhance therapeutic effectiveness.	S
c	Obtain personal support when necessary.	C

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AREA 1 FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Competency Statements		PE
1.4 Apply knowledge of human and cultural diversity.		
a	Integrate knowledge of diversity with reference to age, class, race, gender, ethnicity, levels of ability, language, spiritual and religious beliefs, educational achievement and sexuality.	A
b	Recognize how differences may impact counselling therapy.	S
c	Adapt the therapist's approach when working with diverse clients.	C
d	Recognize the impact of diversity on the therapeutic relationship.	A
e	Recognize how oppression may impact human functioning.	A
f	Integrate knowledge of the relationship between culture, health beliefs and willingness to seek help.	A
g	Recognize barriers that may affect access to counselling services.	A
h	Recognize how the therapist's values and biases may affect diverse clients.	A
i	Identify culturally-relevant resources.	A

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AREA 2 COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Competency Statements		PE
2.1 Use effective professional communication.		
a	Use clear and concise written communication.	A
b	Use clear and concise oral communication.	A
c	Communicate in a manner appropriate to the recipient.	S
d	Use effective listening skills.	S
e	Differentiate fact from opinion.	A
f	Evaluate the significance of non-verbal communication.	S
g	Respond appropriately to non-verbal communication.	S
h	Evaluate the significance of voice qualities in oral communication.	S
i	Respond appropriately to voice qualities in oral communication.	S
j	Employ electronic communication as relevant to practice.	A
k	Maintain security when using electronic communication.	A
2.2 Maintain effective relationships.		
a	Show respect to others.	C
b	Maintain appropriate boundaries.	S
c	Recognize conflict, whether overt or covert, verbal or non-verbal.	S
d	Explore and address in a timely manner differences that may lead to conflict.	S
e	Use a conflict resolution approach appropriate to situation.	S
f	Follow through on commitments in a timely manner.	A
g	Monitor the influence of self on others.	C
h	Maintain congruence between what is said and what is done.	C

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AREA 2 COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Competency Statements		PE
2.3 Contribute to a collaborative and productive atmosphere.		
a	Differentiate the functions of other service providers commonly encountered in therapeutic practice.	A
b	Create and sustain working relationships with other helping professionals.	A
c	Show respect toward various disciplines and interest groups.	S
d	Consider, and where appropriate initiate, collaboration with other professionals who are working with the client.	C
2.4 Display sensitivity to diversity.		
a	Value diversity.	A
b	Communicate in a manner that respects diversity.	S
c	Model behaviour that promotes inclusion.	S
d	Initiate consultation with culturally relevant practitioners as appropriate.	A

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AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Competency Statements		PE
3.1 Comply with legal requirements.		
a	Comply with relevant federal and provincial legislation.	A
b	Comply with regulations of the provincial regulatory body (where applicable).	A
c	Comply with relevant municipal and other local bylaws, and organizational directives.	A
3.2 Comply with general requirements of the provincial regulatory body (where applicable).		
a	Practice in accordance with Scope of Practice.	A
b	Practice in accordance with Bylaws.	A
c	Practice in accordance with Code of Ethics.	A
d	Practice in accordance with Standards of Practice.	A
3.3 Maintain awareness of relevant professional associations.		
a	Differentiate the roles and functions of professional associations relevant to therapist's practice.	A
3.4 Apply an ethical decision making process.		
a	Identify the range of ethical issues encountered in counselling, supervision, education and training, group process and research.	A
b	Resolve ethical dilemmas in a manner consistent with professional standards.	A
c	Accept responsibility for course of action taken.	C
3.5 Maintain self care and level of health necessary for responsible counselling.		
a	Maintain wellness practices in the context of professional performance.	A
b	Build and use a personal and professional support network.	A
c	Initiate personal counselling and / or supervision for the therapist.	C
d	Maintain personal hygiene and appropriate apparel.	C
e	Use planning and time management skills.	A
f	Respond to signs of burnout as an occupational hazard.	A

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AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Competency Statements		PE
3.6 Evaluate and improve professional performance.		
a	Obtain feedback from external sources to assist in performance review.	A
b	Undertake critical self-reflection.	A
c	Identify strengths and weaknesses as a therapist.	A
d	Set goals for improvement.	A
e	Modify practice as necessary.	A
3.7 Participate in continuing education and professional development.		
a	Identify areas of need and interest regarding continuing education.	A
b	Undertake relevant activities on an ongoing basis.	A
c	Remain current with developments in the therapist's area of practice.	A
d	Document activities.	A
3.8 Obtain clinical supervision.		
a	Recognize the importance of supervision to competent practice.	A
b	Identify appropriate sources of supervision.	A
c	Articulate parameters of supervision.	A
d	Apply supervisory feedback to evaluation of clinical practice.	S
e	Recognize when supervision is urgent.	A
f	Apply self-reflection while under supervision.	S
g	Protect client confidentiality and rights in supervision.	A

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AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Competency Statements		PE
3.9 Practice in a manner consistent with the role of the Counselling Therapist within the health care system.		
a	Differentiate the role of the Counselling Therapist in relation to other health professionals.	A
b	Recognize when consultation is necessary.	A
c	Consult with other professionals when appropriate.	A
d	Articulate parameters of consultation.	A
e	Protect client confidentiality and rights in consultation.	A
f	Share with client the learnings from consultation, when appropriate.	S
g	Recognize the major classes of psychotropic drugs and their effects.	A
h	Recognize the major diagnostic categories identified in the current edition of the DSM (<i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual</i>).	A
i	Recognize the impact of drug and alcohol misuse.	A
3.10 Provide consultation within the limits of therapist's expertise.		
a	Identify needs of consultee.	A
b	Recognize therapist's limits of professional expertise as a consultant.	A
c	Articulate parameters of consultation.	A
d	Employ effective consultation skills.	A
3.11 Provide education and training within the limits of therapist's expertise.		
a	Recognize the need to provide education and training.	A
b	Recognize therapist's limits of professional expertise as a trainer / educator.	A
c	Design and deliver effective instructional activities.	S
d	Evaluate education and training activities.	S

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AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Competency Statements		PE
3.12 Facilitate group process.		
a	Apply a theory of group development and function.	A
b	Employ effective leadership style.	A
c	Evaluate group process and outcome.	A
3.13 Maintain client records.		
a	Establish and document client agreement to commence therapy.	C
b	Identify and document pertinent client intake information.	C
c	Document client progress on an ongoing basis.	C
d	Document client behaviour and self-report.	C
e	Ensure that records are legible.	C
f	Maintain security and preservation of records.	A
g	Establish confidentiality and access policy relative to records.	A
3.14 Establish business practices relevant to professional role.		
a	Ensure professional liability insurance.	A
b	Implement sound financial management procedures.	A
c	Employ ethical advertising.	A
d	Establish fee schedule.	A
e	Establish policies related to third party payment.	A
f	Establish policies regarding client attendance for therapy.	A
g	Establish procedures to deal effectively with client crisis and emergency situations.	A
h	Establish procedures to provide services during therapist absence.	A

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AREA 3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND ETHICS

Competency Statements		PE
3.15 Advocate for clients.		
a	Use judgement to identify where advocacy may be required, and respond when appropriate.	A
b	Support clients to overcome barriers.	A
c	Address social and institutional inequities.	A
3.16 Prepare clear, concise and accurate reports.		
a	Differentiate types of report that may be requested or required, and relevant contents.	A
b	Use written language that can be understood by the intended user.	S
c	Incorporate information from other sources as needed.	A

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AREA 4 COUNSELLING PROCESS

Competency Statements		PE
4.1 Orient client to Counselling Therapist's practice.		
a	Describe therapist's education and qualifications.	S
b	Explain scope of practice.	S
c	Explain the responsibilities of the therapist in a therapeutic relationship.	S
d	Explain the responsibilities of the client in a therapeutic relationship.	S
e	Explain confidentiality and its limits.	S
f	Provide key administrative policies and procedural information.	S
g	Respond to client questions.	S
h	Obtain informed consent where required.	S
i	Explain the right to refuse counselling therapy.	S
4.2 Establish and maintain core conditions, consistent with selected theory and practice.		
a	Establish rapport.	C
b	Show positive regard.	C
c	Present authentically.	C
d	Assume non-judgmental stance.	C
e	Demonstrate sensitivity to the setting in which therapy takes place.	C
f	Demonstrate sensitivity to client diversity.	S
g	Be consistent.	C
h	Be dependable.	C
i	Listen actively.	C
j	Attend to feelings, thoughts and behaviour.	S
k	Employ effective verbal communication.	S
l	Employ effective non-verbal communication.	S
m	Employ accurate empathic understanding.	C

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AREA 4 COUNSELLING PROCESS

Competency Statements		PE
n	Maintain therapeutic boundaries.	C
o	Engage client according to their level of commitment to therapy.	C
p	Explain theoretical concepts in everyday language.	C
4.3 Obtain and integrate multiple levels of information during the therapeutic process.		
a	Identify and respond to client's strengths, vulnerabilities, resilience and resources.	C
b	Apply interviewing techniques appropriate to client's developmental and socio-cultural identity.	C
c	Determine when formal assessment instruments may be required.	S
d	Recognize the role of intuition.	A
e	Attend to client's expectations of therapy.	C
f	Assess as counselling approach requires.	S
g	Assess client's engagement with the change process.	C
h	Monitor client progress.	C
i	Relate assessment, interventions and outcomes.	S
j	Communicate assessment information so client understands its relationship to treatment goals and outcomes.	C
4.4 Conduct an appropriate risk assessment.		
a	Assess for specific risks, including suicide, homicide, abuse and neglect.	S
b	Develop safety plan with client and / or others.	S
c	Refer to appropriate professional services.	S
d	Report to authorities as required by law and / or code of ethics.	S
e	Follow up with client and others as necessary.	S
f	Monitor risk over time.	S

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AREA 4 COUNSELLING PROCESS

Competency Statements		PE
4.5 Maintain an effective therapeutic relationship.		
a	Recognize when the therapist's subjectivity is affecting the therapeutic process.	A
b	Protect client from imposition of the therapist's personal issues.	C
c	Define clear boundaries of response to client's requests or demands.	S
d	Regain therapeutic perspective when it has been diminished.	C
e	Respond to disruptions of the therapeutic relationship in a timely fashion.	C
f	Foster client independence.	C
g	Monitor quality of client-therapist relationship on an ongoing basis.	C
4.6 Structure and facilitate the therapeutic process.		
a	Employ therapy that is within therapist's level of skill and knowledge.	S
b	Formulate a direction for therapy.	S
c	Develop individualized goals and objectives with the client, where possible.	C
d	Facilitate client exploration of issues.	C
e	Support client to explore a full range of emotions.	C
f	Engage client strengths.	C
g	Ensure interventions are timely.	S
h	Recognize the significance of both action and inaction.	A
i	Recognize pre-therapy, in-session, and between-session changes.	C
j	Identify contextual influences.	S
k	Monitor progress toward goals and objectives.	S
l	Review process with client periodically.	C
m	Modify direction for therapy as appropriate.	C
n	Recognize when to conclude therapy.	C

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AREA 4 COUNSELLING PROCESS

Competency Statements		PE
4.7 Manage interruptions to the therapeutic process.		
a	Respond appropriately to litigation.	A
b	Respond appropriately to client emergencies.	A
c	Respond appropriately to hospitalization.	A
d	Respond appropriately to third party interference.	A
e	Address premature endings.	A
f	Address issue of insufficient funds.	A
4.8 Refer client.		
a	Develop and maintain a referral network.	A
b	Identify situations in which referral may benefit the client.	A
c	Refer client, where indicated, in a timely fashion.	A
d	Identify community resources relevant to client needs.	A
4.9 Conduct an effective closure process.		
a	Prepare client in a timely manner for the ending of a course of therapy.	A
b	Recognize client issues and emotions relative to endings.	A
c	Conduct a client / therapist review of counselling.	C
d	Identify follow-up options.	A
e	Review support systems and resources.	A
4.10 Evaluate clinical practice.		
a	Develop and implement methods to assess effectiveness of interventions.	A
b	Develop and implement methods to assess overall effectiveness as a Counselling Therapist.	A
c	Implement changes to improve effectiveness.	C

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AREA 5 APPLIED RESEARCH

Competency Statements		PE
5.1 Use research findings to inform clinical practice.		
a	Integrate knowledge of research practices.	A
b	Determine the applicability of research findings to particular clinical situations.	A
c	Analyze research findings critically.	A
d	Use research findings to increase effectiveness as a therapist.	S
5.2 Remain current with professional literature and other relevant media.		
a	Read current professional literature relevant to practice area.	A
b	Access information from a variety of sources, including the Internet.	A
c	Analyze information critically.	A
d	Evaluate the relevance of information to client needs.	C
e	Apply information to practice.	S
f	Remain current with developments in foundational areas.	A
5.3 Participate in informal inquiry.		
a	Differentiate informal from formal inquiry.	A
b	Apply ethical standards in informal inquiry.	A
c	Formulate working hypotheses to account for presenting problems of clients.	C
d	Share hypothesis with client where appropriate.	C
e	Use working hypotheses to guide therapeutic approach.	C
f	Gather information pertaining to working hypotheses.	C
g	Assess working hypotheses and effectiveness of the therapeutic approach.	C
h	Reformulate working hypotheses and therapeutic approach as appropriate.	C