

Insights and Considerations for Ethics (ICE)



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This Insights and Considerations for Ethics (ICE) resource has been developed to support members of the coaching profession with their assessment of and decision-making in matters of professional ethics. **The purpose of these ICE statements is to provide ICF Professionals with support around the learning and understanding of each standard in the ICF Code of Ethics and to promote enhanced ethical awareness and discernment/critical thinking.**

It cannot and does not attempt to capture the intensity and complexity involved in the ethical decision-making process. Rather, it was developed to serve as a complementary resource to the [ICF Code of Ethics](#).

The ideas and information shared in this document have been gathered from contributions from volunteers of the ICF Code Review Team, ICF Ethics Community of Practice, the Ethics Water Cooler, the Independent Review Board, and other valued and informed sources. Insights and considerations in this document are intended to be reflective, responsive, and open to re-alignment within the current context of coaching.

While the ICF Code of Ethics (CoE) is reviewed and revised at intervals, the ICE is a living document subject to periodic revisiting and where appropriate, updating and supplementation. ICE was developed with the goal of providing a dynamic resource representative of current and fresh thinking on the various ethical issues addressed. ICF professionals are invited to use the ICE statements along with the related standards of the CoE as resources for reflecting on their conduct, as well as to inform and promote their ethical decision-making.

If you have comments or questions regarding the ICE, please send them to ethics@coachingfederation.org.

Standard 1.1

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.

ICE for Standard 1.1

This Standard highlights the ICF Professional's responsibility to communicate and explain the nature of coaching to Clients, Sponsors, and other involved parties before the coaching engagement begins. This communication serves as an opportunity to:

- Share the coaching process and its benefits.
- Clarify expectations regarding coaching details and outcomes.
- Discuss the rights and responsibilities of all parties, including clients, sponsors, managers, supervisors, and HR personnel.

As part of this process, the ICF Professional collaborates with all involved parties to co-create a Coaching Agreement that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, confidentiality, financial arrangements, and other critical aspects of the coaching engagement. This agreement explicitly establishes the rights, roles, and obligations of the ICF Professional, the Client, the Sponsor (if distinct from the Client), and any additional entities involved, such as coaching agents or platforms.

The Standard calls for an ICF Professional to share in writing or verbally the Code of Ethics and the Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process with all involved parties. One recommended best practice is to highlight the sections relevant to the involved parties and include the link to the entire ICF Ethics Code in a written communication. This practice not only informs all involved parties about the ICF Professional's responsibilities, but also conveys that coaching profession takes ethics seriously.

ICF encourages having a written agreement, if culturally appropriate, as best practice that supports both the ICF Professional and all the involved parties. A clear, comprehensive Coaching Agreement is important to have in place to clarify and confirm the professional Coaching Relationship. The Coaching Agreement is put in place prior to the start of coaching. In the Coaching Agreement, the ICF Professional needs to clearly identify which legal frameworks (legislation) will be used to manage possible conflicts. This is particularly relevant in cases where the

parties reside in different countries, with different legislation and the services are provided in digital/virtual spaces. Further, consideration should be given to separation of agreements for allied services, for example psychometric assessments, services by third parties. This is particularly important where the ICF Professional is engaging with the same Client(s) or the Sponsor(s) for a variety of services.

When coaching engagements are facilitated through a third party — such as a coaching platform, agent, or an organization outsourcing coaching services — the ICF Professional is responsible for ensuring their own conduct and professional practices toward the directly involved stakeholders (Client, Sponsor, or other immediate participants) fully comply with the ICF Code of Ethics. Even when the third party maintains the primary contractual agreement with the client or sponsoring organization, and the ICF Professional holds a separate agreement only with the third party, the ICF Professional must clearly understand and uphold the ICF Code of Ethics — to the best of their ability — in all their interactions and obligations toward these directly involved stakeholders. This clarity of responsibility is essential for maintaining ethical standards throughout the coaching engagement.

Special attention should be given to potential dilemmas that may arise when working with platform providers. Key areas to address include roles, confidentiality, and adherence to Ethical Standards. For example, if there is any uncertainty about how or to what extent the platform guarantees confidentiality, the Coach must seek clarification from the platform provider.

It is good practice for an ICF Professional to have a template for their Coaching Agreement which can be modified to the needs of a particular involved party of a coaching engagement. The ICF Professionals could use one of the Sample Coaching Agreements in the ICF Member Toolkit (follow the link below, after logging onto the ICF website as a member) as a base for preparing their own template for coaching agreements and ensuring that they have included all the necessary specifications in their agreement.

Standard 1.2

Section 1: Agreements for Client and/or Sponsor Engagement

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 1.2

A Coaching Agreement should include a clear termination clause stating that any party may cancel the agreement at any time for any reason. A best practice is to have a clear refund policy in the written agreement, outlining the terms and conditions for any refunds.

The ICF Professional must always respect and accept the Client's request to end the coaching relationship immediately if that is the Client's wish. Similarly, an ICF Professional may decide to terminate the relationship, provided they honor the involvement of the Client, Sponsor, or other stakeholders in the coaching process. When communicating the decision to terminate, the ICF Professional is encouraged to share their reasons in a respectful and thoughtful way that acknowledges and honors the coaching experience for all the parties involved, while safeguarding the confidentiality and integrity of the Client, Sponsor and other stakeholders.

In either scenario, the ICF Professional may offer the Client to a closure session to receive feedback, making clear that such a session is entirely voluntary and never obligatory. If the Client prefers to terminate the coaching relationship without any further sessions, including the closure session, the ICF Professional must honor this decision without exerting any pressure. Should the Client accept, the closure session should function like any other coaching session, adhering to the same professional standards.

In the event of termination, the ICF Professional must support and encourage the Client to seek the services of another ICF Professional or an alternate professional resource, especially when both parties agree the Client would benefit from this change.

ICF Professionals could use one of the Sample Coaching Agreements available on [ICF Engage](#) as a base for the coaching services.

A related standard that the ICF Professional can draw upon is Standard 4.3, which emphasizes the importance of being alert to signs that the Client is no longer benefiting from the coaching relationship. If left unaddressed, such situations could lead to termination initiated by the Client. ICF Professionals should refer to Standard 4.3 to ensure they proactively address these indications in a manner that aligns with ethical coaching practices.

Standard 2.1

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.

ICE for Standard 2.1

Confidentiality is foundational to the coaching relationship. Maintaining confidentiality is a continuous process for an ICF Professional and should be considered for each role(s) an ICF Professional undertakes once they represent themselves as an ICF Professional. Maintaining confidentiality at the “strictest level” should be viewed as a given in coaching interactions unless there are applicable legal or other agreed upon exceptions. (See Standard 2.3).

Any known confidentiality related considerations that might come up in the coaching engagement must be addressed, clarified, and agreed upon between all parties. Part 1 of the ICF Code states: 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. If any signatories attempt to reach agreements that limit or exclude confidentiality (or any other provision of the Code), ICF Professionals should rely on the ethical principle of “informed consent” to give sufficient information regarding the purpose of the Code of Ethics and is advised to consider remitting a copy of the Code of Ethics to the other party(ies) to the contract.

The ICF Professional’s recommended “best practices”:

- Have an understanding, written or otherwise, that all client/sponsor information and communication will be held confidential prior to being hired by the client/sponsor, during the coaching engagement, and after the conclusion of the engagement.
- Set up and abide by policies on record keeping, which protect data from hackers, thieves, and wandering eyes and ears, training of staff or support personnel on the importance of maintaining confidentiality relating to all parties.
- Safeguarding confidentiality and complying with relevant data protection policies/rules. This also applies to the use of digital media and application platforms, software, and social media (i.e. cell phones, computers, tablets, etc.). The ICF Professional might need to seek legal advice regarding the

EU's GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) or similar regulations for other areas. The ICF Professional remains accountable for data privacy protection even when using resources not belonging to the coach.

- Recognize that when an ICF professional acts in another role other than a coach within the same organization it is incumbent on the ICF professional to inform others if the confidentiality rules apply differently. (Note: other roles could include but are not limited to, consultant, facilitator, trainer, or business mentor).

The ICF Professional should be aware that information on company-owned resources (e.g., computers, phones, etc.) may be accessible by others. Hence, full confidentiality is not guaranteed. It is therefore recommended that the ICF Professional considers how to maintain confidentiality while being compliant with the data protection requirements.

Related standards: 2.2 - 2.8 and 3.7

Standard 2.2

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.2 Have a clear agreement about what information is exchanged and how it is exchanged among all parties involved during all coaching engagements.

ICE for Standard 2.2

An ICF Professional should make sure that everyone involved in the coaching process clearly agrees on when, how, what, and the ways in which coaching information, including confidential information, is shared. In coaching engagements with multiple parties or in which the ICF Professional holds more than one role, it is especially important to discuss the processes for exchanging information to protect the client from unauthorized disclosures or indirect communications among parties. For example, an ICF Professional is responsible for clarifying the framework and process regarding sharing reports, evaluations, the process, and results of assessments that are administered within the framework of a coaching initiative.

The rules of confidentiality must be clear to all participants before the coaching process begins. In standard 2.1, strictest confidentiality encompasses balancing of

the ethical standards identified in the Code, the ICF Professional's ethical judgment, and the agreement among the parties. Maintaining confidentiality is a continuous process requiring communication among all parties in a coaching engagement. The agreements may need to be re-clarified at any point in the process for the parties involved.

Although ICF encourages having a written agreement/contract, even in a verbal agreement, the ICF Professional should take into consideration and make sure that the terms of information sharing are clearly understood by all the parties involved.

ICF Professionals working with coaching platforms may find more information in the ICE for Standard 2.5.

Standard 2.3

Section Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.3 Have a clear agreement with client(s), and 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; and imminent/likely risk of danger to self or to others).

ICE for Standard 2.3

Confidentiality is foundational to the coaching relationship. An ICF Professional considers all information exchanged with their clients/sponsors as sensitive and personal information and must protect such information from unauthorized disclosure.

Confidential information may need to be disclosed in the following circumstances.

- **Reasons set by law:**
 - ICF Professionals should make sure that they know the details of local laws.*
 - When a person has made a credible threat to harm themselves, their organizations, or others.
 - When the ICF Professional is required by a court order or subpoena, the ICF Professional must provide the information requested by the court or subpoena. (Note: ICF Professionals have no client privilege in a court of law. Contrary to some other professions).
- **Reasons defined by contract with client or with client and sponsor:**

- When the coaching agreement allows (informed consent on the part of the coaching client applies).
- When the sponsor agreement allows, and the client agrees.
- When the ICF Professional is required to substantiate basic information about the coaching process for the ICF Professional's credentialing or re-credentialing - without sharing any client or personal information. However, the ICF Professional is responsible for obtaining the client's permission in the event of a confidentiality breach.
- When the ICF Professional needs to talk about a case with their mentor or coach supervisor – without sharing any client or personal information.

*It is the ICF Professional's responsibility to ensure that they know the details of local law and should establish the legal forum that governs the contract. The coaching industry is currently unregulated and has no special legal protection, and a legal specialist can be helpful. In the event of a dispute, individually concluded contracts are judged according to civil law (e.g., disputes within a commercial contract, allegations of client poaching, or other). Whenever available in their country, it is recommended that ICF Professionals get a professional services insurance policy for coaches.

It is the responsibility of the ICF Professional to ensure the coaching client knows when the ICF Professional is required to breach confidentiality. ICF professionals are to discuss confidentiality prior to the beginning of the coaching engagement and document in writing the client's understanding and/or any amendments to the agreement. If information was not initially covered by the agreement (e.g., it happened at a later stage), the ICF Professional should obtain the specific consent of the client(s) and document the amendment before breaking confidentiality.

Best practices include:

- Inform the client that discussions around confidentiality may come up at any time.
- Seek supervision if one of the parties to the agreement is in a vulnerable situation (e.g., elderly, sick, disabled, minor or as assessed by the coach).
- Seek ethical advice through the resources made available by the ICF.

Coaching for some populations may be more nuanced requiring further consideration of specific characteristics of the client. Examples provided here are neither comprehensive nor limited and should be considered as guide points.

- Example: Internal coaches may find themselves in a situation of conflict between their duty towards their organization and the interest of their coaching client.

- Example: External coaches may also find themselves in a situation of conflict where they hold more than one role in an engagement.

On Coaching of Minors:

- It is strongly encouraged for ICF Professionals to consider the legal and ethical considerations surrounding the protection of a minor's privacy while also recognizing the role and responsibilities of parents and/or legal guardians. In this context, the way confidentiality is handled depends on the jurisdiction and the specific coaching relationship. (Note: some general ethical principles to apply when protecting the minor coaching client's interest while also respecting the requirement to keep a legally responsible person involved).

This includes the following measures:

- Communicate clearly to the minor and the parents and/or legal guardians the exceptions to confidentiality. The legal obligation and requirement in many countries is to report reasonable or actual harm, abuse and/or neglect to proper authorities.
- The agreement should be updated with the aforementioned discussions and reviewed with the minor and parent and/or legal guardians on clarity of content, expectations, what type information will be exchanged, how that information is exchanged, and specifically who the information is exchanged.

Standard 2.4

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.4 Maintain, store, and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security, privacy, and complies with applicable laws and agreements.

ICE for Standard 2.4

This standard addresses all matters relating to technology-assisted coaching services. Records or documentation created in connection with interactions with the client and sponsor includes, but is not limited to, emails, text messages, written notes, recording files, audio or video notes, entries in databases or tools (e.g., for customer administration or other). The subject of this standard is the protection of the client and/or a sponsor's information and the handling of the records and documentation of the coaching agreement and sessions.

ICF Professionals manage records or documentation in the manner that works for their practice and confidentiality agreements (e.g., some ICF Professionals will keep records of the content and progress of their interactions, while others choose not to retain the content but store only the contract and contact information).

There are country-specific laws that address the time requirements for the retention of records — it is advisable to seek specific information on data retention by speaking with professional business advisors, accountants, lawyers, or financial advisors. If you have clients in the European Union, please refer to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) or other applicable local laws.

It is expected that the ICF Professional creates a regular and careful handling plan that is timely and a thoroughly effective tool to destroy client records and documentation.

- Written documents should be shredded, if possible.
- Deletion of data storage devices are to be erased, deleted, and destroyed preventing reconstruction.
- Identify a deletion program appropriate for the type of storage used for the records or documentation or online provider of such a service.

Additionally, an ICF Professional should have written directives for handling of all client records in the event the ICF Professional becomes incapacitated. ICF Professionals might also consider addressing their wishes for anything connected with their business in their personal Will.

The client must be made aware of the possibility of written notes, electronic notes or recordings made during the coaching conversation and the coaching relationship. The ICF Professional should make sure data is secure and take appropriate security precautions when using electronic communications such as emails, online chat sessions, mobile communications, and text messages, and when using technical services/tools of any kind. The constant technological development of these tools/platforms requires vigilance and, if necessary, actions by the coach. Data protection should be ensured when using a client's/company's infrastructure. (Note: be aware of placing/storing notes in places where another party can read them other than the client or agreed upon by the client).

Technological development tools:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as Alexa and Siri: The client's consent must be obtained before making audio or video recordings. This also applies to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) devices that automatically record the sound in a room.
 - ICF Professionals are responsible for these devices in their homes; however, the ICF Professional is not responsible for how a client

chooses to use an AI tool such as Alexa or Siri. The ICF Professional should discuss confidentiality with the client about AI devices and comfort level of both client and coach with respect to AI management.

- **Social Media:** The ICF Professional should be aware that information left on social media could be seen by clients and affect the coaching process. (Note: ownership of photos and statements is transferred to the social media app). Unless authorized by the client, ICF Professionals must not post any identifying or confidential information about their clients on websites or other forms of media.

Standard 2.5

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.5 Fulfill my ethical and legal obligations to my coaching client(s), sponsor(s), colleague(s), and to the public at large directly and through any technology systems I may utilize (e.g., technology-assisted coaching tools, databases, coaching platforms, software, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)).

ICE for Standard 2.5

The ICF professional is ultimately responsible for obtaining the informed consent of their clients and other parties to the contract when using any technology systems, including artificial intelligence (AI).

The ICF professional's duty is to research technological tools, associated risks of the tool, and ascertain risk management in case of a breach of confidentiality before proposing the tools to the client. The ICF professional's responsibility is to inform and educate the client on the use of the tools regarding confidential coaching.

We recognize that coaching platforms or executive education companies may have their own rules and ethics concerning confidentiality and recordings; however, it is the responsibility of the ICF professional to understand the rules and ethics of the coaching platforms or organizations; and share that information with the client so they are able to make an informed decision around the coaching process.

Careful consideration should be made when working with coaching platforms. Many of these offer possibilities for conducting coaching business, networking among ICF professionals, and learning options, and other opportunities for professional growth. ICF professionals enrolling with coaching platforms should consider the following questions to process ethical behavior and alignment with the ICF Code of Ethics:

- Would the use of such a coaching platform in any way conflict with the ICF Code of Ethics?
- Does the coaching platform have its own standards regarding roles/boundaries/information exchange amongst those who are enrolled?
- What are the terms-of-contract for enrollment on the coaching platform?
- Would it in any way interfere with the ethical duties coaches towards clients and sponsors?
- How does the coaching platform handle the data collected regarding coaches, their clients, and evaluation results during and after the coaching engagement?

Standard 2.6

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.6 Am responsible for support personnel's adherence to the relevant standards of the Code of Ethics.

ICE for Standard 2.6

The essence of this standard is to alert the ICF professionals to their responsibility to inform support personnel of the Code and the relevant standards that may affect and/or apply to the support personnel's role. Support personnel refer to the people that ICF professionals work with, employ, or associate; and who from time to time have access to client(s) information. These could be people in coach offices, virtual assistants, companies that provide services such as speech to text conversions, language to language translations, or other similar service providers.

It is recommended that ICF professionals have a written and signed agreement where support personnel will be asked to accept and abide by ethical standards relevant to the confidential care and respect of the coaching client.

The ICF professional should be mindful of the Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) process as it pertains to misconduct of support personnel. The Independent Review Board will examine the process of confidentiality as set by the ICF professional when protecting the interests of the coaching client. The ECR will include a review of the written or verbal agreement, transparency of the agreement, and informed consent as obtained by the coaching client.

The standard invites ICF Professionals to share the Code of Ethics and the ECR process with those who may have access either directly or indirectly of client information.

Standard 2.7

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

2.7 Maintain the privacy of ICF Professionals and use of their contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and other potential contact data) only as authorized by ICF or the ICF Professional.

ICE for Standard 2.7

As an ICF Professional, maintaining the privacy of fellow coaches is a fundamental ethical responsibility. Standard 2.7 explicitly requires that professionals safeguard the contact information of other ICF members — such as email addresses, phone numbers, and other personal data — and only use this information as authorized by either the individual professional or the ICF itself.

This means that coaches must not use ICF membership data for purposes beyond what has been permitted. A common violation of this standard would be utilizing ICF contact lists to send promotional materials about one's own coaching business without explicit consent. Similarly, publishing another coach's contact details — whether in newspapers, on social media, or other public platforms — without their permission would be a breach of confidentiality.

ICF policies emphasize that any data shared within the organization should only be used in accordance with the organization's privacy guidelines. For instance, if a coach provides their contact information for networking or chapter-related activities, this does not grant blanket permission for others to use it for marketing or other personal interests. Additionally, while coaching profiles on the ICF website are public, further access to member details is typically limited to chapter leaders, who must comply with the Chapter Leader Pledge.

For more details on ICF's privacy policies and how they regulate the use of professional data, refer to the official [ICF Privacy Policy page](#).

Standard 2.8

Section 2: Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

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

ICE for Standard 2.8

This standard requires ICF Professionals to recognize and respect the contributions and intellectual property rights associated with all published or originally created materials. When using work created by others, ICF Professionals must clearly acknowledge the original author(s) and cannot borrow, replicate, or duplicate such materials in any form without explicit written permission from the rights holder or publisher.

ICF Professionals are expected to be knowledgeable about copyright laws. This knowledge includes properly attributing material created by others, citing sources clearly, organizing and presenting references accurately and consistently demonstrating best practices in copyright compliance.

ICF Professionals conducting scientific research must respect intellectual property rights as defined by relevant publication standards, dissertation requirements, academic or educational guidelines, and organizational requirements.

Similarly, all individuals or entities collaborating or working with ICF (including speakers, vendors, contractors, service providers, and others) are expected to adhere to applicable copyright laws and provide proper attribution.

For further details, please refer to the ICF Privacy Policy, Research Policies, and Spam Policy:

<https://coachingfederation.org/about/privacy-policy/>

<https://coachingfederation.org/about/cookies-policy/>.

<https://coachingfederation.org/about/accessibility-statement/>

Standard 3.1

ICF Code of Ethics 2025 Section 4 Part 3: Professional Conduct and Conflict Resolution

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.

ICE for Standard 3.1

Standard 3.1 is relevant when an ICF Professional holds multiple roles and contracts/agreements, for example, combinations of coach and consultant/trainer/educator/colleague/ manager; team coaching (as a whole, team members and team leader).

Standard 3.1 (awareness) is to be read with Standard 3.2 (manage) and Standard 3.3 (resolve).

It is necessary for the ICF Professional to be proactive in ensuring that their role/s is/are clear and unambiguous to all parties. The ICF Professional raises and welcomes questions and concerns about differences in perspective about the appropriateness and potential consequences of performing multiple roles. The ICF Professional responds to questions and concerns aiming to clarify these to the satisfaction of all parties.

ICF Professionals are accountable for noticing potential conflicts of interest. Claiming ignorance will be insufficient if a complaint is lodged. The ICF website alerts to a number of ethics resources that ICF Professionals can make use of when unsure about whether there is a potential ethical dilemma as defined by the ICF Code of Ethics.

The ICF Professional addresses any potential biases that may exist that are relevant to conflicts of interests. ICF Professionals are open to responding to any perceived biases that others raise.

Where conflicts arise, the ICF Professional is ethically bound to engage in reflection and consultation, in order to co-create a resolution that is perceived as in the best interests of all parties. Where this cannot be achieved within a reasonable time, the ICF Professional requests assistance from an appropriate authority.

Source: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>

If an ICF Professional is qualified and prepared to deliver a variety of services (for example coaching, therapy, consulting and training) the recommended practice is

to have a separate contract/agreement for each role that will establish roles, responsibilities and ethical codes that apply to a specific role.

If an ICF Professional decides to include multiple services in the same contract/agreement, it is recommended to have a separate part in the contract outlining each role, its responsibilities, ethical demands and resolution for potential conflicts of interests. It is a responsibility of the ICF Professional to proactively clarify the differences between the roles and make sure that all involved parties are clear on that.

ICF Professionals who teach, mentor coach, supervise, assess, and/or coach students in Coaching Education programs are transparent about their multiple roles. They engage in clear communications and offer a channel for raising concerns about possible conflicts of interest.

ICF Professionals who act in the role of educator, mentor coach and/or supervisor in a Coaching Education program, may hold the role of internal performance evaluation assessor, thereby deciding whether a student fulfills all requirements of the program. This may raise concerns about power relations, bias, fairness and equity, and hence perceived conflicts of interest.

For more information about the roles of the ICF Mentor Coach, the ICF Coaching Supervisor, and the ICF Coach Educator please follow the links below.

ICF Mentor Coaching:

<https://coachingfederation.org/education-professional-development/find-professional-development/mentor-coaching/>

<https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-competencies/mentor-coaching-competencies/>

ICF Coaching Supervision:

<https://coachingfederation.org/education-professional-development/find-professional-development/coaching-supervision/>

<https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-competencies/coaching-supervision-competencies/>

Link to ICF Coaching Education:

<https://coachingfederation.org/for-coach-educators/>

<https://coachingfederation.org/for-coach-educators/ce-competencies/>

Standard 3.2

ICF Code of Ethics 2025 Section 4 Part 3: Professional Conduct and Conflict Resolution

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 3.2

Standard 3.2 (manage) is to be read with Standard 3.1 (awareness) and Standard 3.3 (resolve).

When you notice a potential conflict of interest (Standard 3.1), Standard 3.2 offers you guidance about how to respond to, and manage, the potential conflict/s of interest ethically.

Standard 3.2 is applicable to a variety of roles. These include but are not limited to offering external or internal coaching, individual, group or team coaching, mentor coaching, coaching supervision, and coaching education. Conflict/s or potential conflict/s of interest may include relationships which can appear to provide unfair advantage for ICF Professionals, whether financial or non-financial, personal or professional.

For ICF Professionals, who are in an internal role (i.e. an employee), conflict/s of interest can arise from acting in multiple roles, for example, as an HR employee, in a direct — solid line reporting, indirect — dotted line reporting, or a matrix-style authority relationship, or from being a co-worker/fellow employee.

ICF Professionals who are internal, manage the potential for perceived conflicts of interest by having a clear scope of work for each of their roles (coaching agreement), which outlines authority and duties, and indicates channels for raising and managing concerns, preferably by constructive dialogue and in alignment with organizational policies. For example, an ethically aligned coaching agreement defines what is going to be shared, and with whom, when and how, and what is not going to be shared. The details of the coaching agreement also offer guidance about managing potential for bias, favoritism, and unfair advantage.

For external ICF Professionals — contractors, vendors, service providers — conflict/s of interest can arise from having multiple coaching clients in one organization. Also, they can arise if you are simultaneously engaging in team coaching with a team, as well as engaging in individual coaching with individual team members.

External ICF Professionals strive to include clear statements about multiple roles or simultaneous engagements at the contracting stage. Proactive management includes taking the initiative to check in and being responsive when concerns or questions arise throughout the engagement (ongoing dialogue).

External ICF Professionals may be asked to agree to abide by a third party's contract, rather than all parties agreeing to the coach's contract and coaching agreement. Such third-party contracts include those used by the sponsor, an agent, a platform, or the client. The ICF Professional needs to carefully review such third-party contracts and coaching agreements to ensure there is no restrictive condition that prevents them from contracting with a competitor of the third party. They should also check whether there are any restrictions or obligations in the third-party contract that are not well aligned with the ICF Code of Ethics.

ICF Professionals should request relevant organizational policies and a briefing before engagement to ensure alignment with the ICF Code of Ethics. Establishing early agreements clarifies confidentiality terms, information-sharing conditions, and points of contact for potential conflicts of interest between clients and their employers.

When working within organizations or with sponsors, ICF Professionals must familiarize themselves with data storage and privacy rules, ensuring compliance with policies on device usage, information access, and reporting requirements. Contracts should specify who can access reports beyond the involved individuals. To maintain ethical integrity, many coaches co-create reports with clients, allowing them to decide on further sharing.

Those engaged in teaching, mentoring, supervision, or assessment within Coaching Education programs must be transparent about their multiple roles and provide clear channels for addressing conflicts of interest.

ICF Professionals should engage in regular self-reflection and continuous learning through coaching literature, online events, mentorship, or coaching supervision. These practices help distinguish ethical concerns from legal or cultural issues and clarify where personal values may require conscious management rather than ethical intervention.

Standard 3.3

ICF Code of Ethics 2025 Section 4 Part 3: Professional Conduct and Conflict Resolution

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 3.3

Standard 3.3 (resolve) is to be read with Standard 3.1 (awareness) and Standard 3.2 (manage).

Standard 3.3 alerts you to what kind of resolution to potential or actual conflicts of interest/s would meet the ICF requirement to demonstrate ethical coaching.

Should the professional relationship need to be ended, see Standard 1.2 for guidance.

There are four ways to resolve conflicts of interest or potential conflict/s of interest:

- A. Work through the issue with the involved parties to find a mutually acceptable resolution.
- B. Seek professional advice.
- C. Suspend professional relationship until a resolution is found.
- D. End the professional relationship if there is no resolution to the conflicts of interest.

Use A when the conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest is apparent, like financial, personal, or professional gains and advantages.

Use B when there is doubt or uncertainty about the existence of conflicts of interest. For example, indirect financial and reputational gain that arises from recommendation to specific resources such as assessment providers and organizations, coaching education providers, providers of specific tools, partners for transcribing services for recorded sessions, or research projects assistance, and more.

Use C when a pause in the professional relationship is needed during in order to attempt to find a resolution.

Use D when a resolution cannot be reached to the satisfaction of all parties. Standard 1.2 provides guidance about how to ethically terminate the professional relationship.

If an ICF Professional decides to end the professional relationship, it is the responsibility of the ICF Professional to communicate with all the involved parties in a timely and sensitive manner.

Standard 4.3 emphasizes the importance of being alert to signs that a client is no longer benefiting from the professional relationship. Refer to Standard 4.3 to ensure you proactively address these indications and resolve whether to continue and how.

The ICF website provides a number of resources that offer information, guidance when you are working towards managing and/or resolving the conflict/s of interest. <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>

Seek assistance from:

- The ICF ethics assist line - speak with a dedicated person who assists with compliance and resolution of ethical dilemmas, via email or telephone.
- Peer groups.
- Communities of Practice.
- Coaching Supervision.

Standard 3.4

ICF Code of Ethics 2025 Section 4 Part 3: Professional Conduct and Conflict Resolution

As an ICF Professional, I:

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

ICE for Standard 3.4

The purpose of this Standard is to create awareness of appropriate boundaries of all stakeholders. This includes cultural, physical, sexual, emotional, gender identification, religious, and other boundaries. ICF Professionals are aware of how these might affect their professional interactions and conduct themselves respectfully. ICF Professionals can hold responsibility for setting culturally sensitive boundaries in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

Reading, reflecting on, and discussing the ICF Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) resources — <https://coachingfederation.org/about/social-responsibility/diversity-inclusion/deib-resources/>

- These include a *Resource Guide on Diversity and Inclusion for Coaching Education Providers*.

- Whether working worldwide, regionally, and/or locally, digitally, or physically, the ICF Professional is encouraged to actively engage with culturally determined customs. Before undertaking a coaching engagement in a territory new/unknown to the ICF Professional, this Standard invites them to seek information regarding cultural nuances that underpin interpersonal interactions. These include professional physical interactions, e.g., hug, handshake, and touching, and their digital equivalents, for example, images and emojis.
- When undertaking professional interactions in a different country or region, ICF Professionals can connect with the local ICF Chapter in that area for support and assistance. <https://coachingfederation.org/community-events/icf-chapters/chapter-map/>
- Attendance at ICF Chapter events is another resource where the ICF Professional can develop their cultural sensitivity as well as build connections with other ICF Professionals. <https://www.icf-events.org/>
- The Ethics Community of Practice provides access to a virtual group of coaches who share best practices, emerging trends, tools, and tips in the area of coaching ethics. The CP delivers professional development opportunities through a variety of different outputs, including webinar presentations from subject-matter experts and facilitated discussion sessions. <https://coachingfederation.org/community-events/professional-community/communities-of-practice/>
- Similarly, the Ethics monthly Water Cooler meetings provide private and confidential spaces for ICF Professionals to discuss ethical questions, concerns, and dilemmas, and share resources. <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>

This Standard encourages ICF Professionals to work with a mindset and a framework that identifies and mitigates their assumptions and bias. It calls on the ICF Professional to work on recognizing any bias, whether conscious (within awareness), or unconscious (outside awareness), whether personal or shared. This can be accomplished by engaging in one or more reflective practices that assist with the development of ethical awareness and maturity, such as collegial/peer conversations, professional development activities, for example, continuing education courses, coaching supervision, and self-development activities, for example, reflective practice journaling.

Standard 3.5

Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 3.5

ICF Professionals adopt a stance that people are capable, resourceful, creative, and whole. They maintain an open-minded stance, prioritizing respect for the perceptions of others, and do not privilege their own values and views. ICF Professionals take care not to transfer their personal values system to clients but rather uphold the autonomy of the client to conduct themselves with reference to the client's value system.

ICF Professionals ensure that all individuals are treated equally, fairly and with respect. They practice a high level of self-awareness and are alert to their own bias and/ or blind spots regarding fairness and discrimination. Our clients are equal partners in the coaching process, and each client is treated with respect and fairness.

Unfair discrimination refers to prejudice and bias in behaviors and communications by ICF Professionals, including conduct that can be with awareness or without awareness, intentional or unintentional, and overt or covert.

An ICF Professional may prefer not to engage in professional interactions for personal reasons, such as a personal conflict of values. When this happens prior to contracting to provide services, ICF Professionals err on the side of not entering into a contract.

If they become aware of this while engaging in contracted professional activities, the ICF Professional addresses what they have become aware of, and, if necessary, brings the contract and the coaching relationship to a close.

ICF Professionals pay attention to closing engagements in ways that take into consideration the Client's/Sponsor's autonomy, integrity, and well-being. They seek to maintain fairness and avoid unfair discrimination.

Standard 3.5 calls on the ICF Professional to proactively ensure that this Code will be followed, unless it is superseded by local law. ICF Professionals seek information about local laws relevant to their professional interactions.

The ICF Professional is open to being challenged, and to attempting to address and resolve concerns arising within the professional interaction. The ICF Professional takes responsibility to address possible biases and /or blind spots in regard to unfair discrimination. They do so through activities such as self-reflection, seeking assistance from for example the ICF provided resources - <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>, by consulting with colleagues, and/or by engaging in coaching supervision.

Standard 3.6

Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 3.6

Coaching involves co-creating relationships with clients and sponsors, which can involve a blurring between the professional, social, and personal. Maintaining trust and safety in which learning and growth can occur is what ICF Professionals are committed to. They also honor and respect the autonomy of the Client and/or the Sponsor by avoiding conduct which may give rise to a sense of disadvantage, intimidation, manipulation, or exploitation for personal gain on the part of the ICF Professional.

Coaching encourages clients to express themselves fully and freely. This can lead to feelings of increased intimacy: “Finally someone who listens to me, someone who understands me.” Such emotions are not automatically obstructive to the professional interaction (added) but are recognized by the ICF Professional as having the potential for a shift in the relationship, away from what is conducive for a coaching relationship.

Sexual attraction, and/or developing romantic feelings, are common human experiences. Standard 3.6 provides guidance in the event that such experiences occur in the context of a coaching engagement. As such, the ICF Professional is aware that when interacting with a client, any physical contact, touch, gestures, gaze, use of language, may be interpreted and/or received as flirtation, even if not intended to be.

The ICF Professional has a responsibility to initiate appropriate responses when signs of romantic feelings and/or sexual attraction are first noticed. Such actions include,

but are not limited to, clarifying the stance with the other party, engaging in collegial consultation, and/or making use of coaching supervision. The ICF Professional enquires whether the Client or Sponsor wishes to be referred to another ICF Professional and/or offers to cancel the coaching contract. Where possible, these discussions are undertaken, and decisions are reached jointly and constructively. If necessary, ICF Professionals bring the coaching engagement to a close, paying attention to doing so in ways that take into consideration the Client's/Sponsor's autonomy, integrity, and well-being.

ICF Professionals refrain from entering into coaching relationships with those they already have pre-existing intimate relationships, for example, romantic and/or sexual relationships.

There is no policy about a suitable time between ending a romantic and/or sexual relationship, and then entering into a coaching relationship, nor about the duration between ending a coaching engagement and entering into a romantic and/or sexual relationship. However, ICF Professionals can be guided by professions that are regulated by statute, who require a duration of at least one year, and sometimes for as long as two years.

ICF Professionals make use of the ICF Ethics resources to seek guidance and assistance, <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>. They err on the side of seeking assistance, rather than attempting to navigate this territory alone, given that they are directly involved in the relationship dilemma.

Standard 3.7

Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 3.7

The definition of "Client" in this Code of Ethics goes beyond a person who receives coaching. "Client" includes "the individual, team, or group member being coached,

the coach being mentored, or supervised, or the coach in training” (see the Appendix for key definitions).

Standard 3.7 provides guidance to ICF Professionals fulfilling multiple roles that do fall within the role definition of the ICF Professional, such as coach, team coach, mentor coach, coaching supervisor, instructor, educator, assessor.

Standard 3.7 also provides guidance for ICF Professionals who offer services and /or fulfill roles that fall outside the definition of roles within the ICF Ecosystem. These include, but are not limited to psychologist, therapist, psychotherapist, social worker, counselor, human resources practitioner, consultant, advisor, medical practitioner, allied health practitioner, lawyer, paralegal, alternate dispute resolution practitioner, religious advisor, spiritual advisor, body and/or energy work practitioner, fitness trainer, sports coach, nutrition advisor, hospice volunteer, birth and /or end-of-life doula, hypnotherapist, adult educator, skills development facilitator, professional development facilitator, author, editor, and policy writer.

Standard 3.1 deals with being sensitive to the implications of having multiple contracts and relationships at the same time. Standard 3.7 invites ICF Professionals to learn how to be transparent and hold boundaries in such multi-role relationships. ICF Professionals ensure that their clients know when they are fulfilling the different roles during their professional interactions.

ICF Professionals make sure to be clear when moving between roles and engage in re-contracting within and/or between sessions when doing so. In such cases, they ensure that the Client understands which role/s the ICF Professional is acting in, indicates how these role/s can be appropriate for serving the Client, and that they do not cross sensitive boundaries in their interactions.

The following provides some practical guidelines.

ICF Professionals clearly define their role/s at the start. They:

- Establish with the Client that they are operating as an ICF Professional, distinct from any other professional roles.
- Enquire about the client’s knowledge of the different roles. They offer information as appropriate and respond to questions the Client may pose.
- Discuss boundaries, expectations, and the nature of the professional role/s during the contracting stage. They embed the different roles being offered into the client agreement, establishing clear distinctions and include relevant definitions and unique aspects of each role/service being offered. They clarify the process and what to expect from the ICF Professional with respect to role changes within a coaching session or between coaching sessions. (See also Standard 3.1)

ICF Professionals proactively manage and communicate when they shift roles. They:

- Recognize when they are about to shift roles, even when the shift is in response to something the Client says. They acknowledge this to the Client.
- Request and/or confirm permission from the Client to shift roles.
- Pause to respond to any questions the Client may wish to raise about the role shift.
- Are clear about how the shift in role may bring with it a shift in authority, style of communicating, responsibilities of both the ICF Professional and the Client, and the channel for managing issues, concerns or complaints.
- Re-contract about the role/s the ICF professional will fulfill, in the session and/or the contract as a whole.

Examples:

- An ICF Professional who is also qualified to practice as a medical doctor may offer health coaching. During these sessions, they do not prescribe medical treatments or dispense medication. Rather, they may support the client in thinking through their reaction to the diagnosis and corresponding actions, support the client in finding the appropriate plan forward for themselves and explore lifestyle choices through a coaching conversation. If they wish / need to give medical advice, they explicitly shift roles, re-contract and disclose that they are now speaking in their role as a medical expert. They make clear that the services they offer in their role as a medical doctor are governed by the Hippocratic Oath, and the channel to which any concerns about their medical practice can be directed. They make clear what can be expected about agreements around for example, confidentiality. They alert the Client that their health coaching services are informed by the ICF Code of Ethics and alert the Client to the ICF Ethical Conduct Review process as the channel for any concerns or complaints.
- An ICF Professional who has prior experience as a consultant, explicitly shifts roles when they wish to advise or recommend best practices, strategies, techniques, or organizational development plans. They make clear what professional guidelines and/or Code of Ethics governs their consulting work, and what the appropriate channel is for raising concerns and / or complaints. They engage in re-contracting with the Client and/or Sponsor by clarifying what the desired outcomes are now that their role has changed. They also re-negotiate any terms and agreements - for example, is the fee different now that the role has been changed?
- An ICF Professional who acts in the role of Coaching Educator continues in this role when responding to assessment and developmental feedback with a Coach in Training. If the ICF Professional is asked to coach the coach in training, they would signal the shift in roles and consider whether the benefits of shifting roles outweigh the potential for conflict of interests. In particular care is taken to consider confidentiality and the sharing of information with other educators, mentor coaches and/or coaching supervisors. If acting as an assessor, particular care is taken to consider conflicts of interest that can arise

from fulfilling the assessor role as well as one of the other coaching education related roles.

In the case of coaching demonstrations that are for educational purposes, with other coaches in training present, the ICF Professional clarifies the terms and conditions under which these occur. If participation in coaching, whether as a client or as a coach, in the presence of others is part of the course requirements, these are made explicit in the contract signed by the coach in training as part of registration.

The ICF Professional uses explicit disclosure statements. They use clear, plain language, avoiding legal or other terminology that may not be familiar to the person/s they are speaking with.

Examples:

- “Now that we have discussed the services I offer, what questions, comments or concerns might you have?” and then “Which of the service/s that I offer best suit/s your needs?”
- “I am aware you are asking me for an opinion/information that requires me to respond from my other role (name of role). Would you like me to do that at this moment?” “What makes you think that advice from my side would be beneficial to you?” “How would it serve your (new) objective/desired outcome/goal?”
- “Can we please clarify, (wait for permission from Client to continue). You booked this as a coaching session, and now we may be shifting into my role as a financial advisor. I'd like to be sure you receive the service that you will find most beneficial. So, in which role would you like us to continue?” If a role shift is requested see the guidelines above.

ICF Professionals maintain ethical boundaries and avoid conflicts of interest by:

- Avoiding the mixing of roles in ways that create confusion or ethical dilemmas, e.g., investigating or contributing to investigations about workplace misconduct while actively coaching employees; engaging in consulting services involving audits or assessments while engaging in team coaching.
- Being mindful of power imbalances when coaching, especially if also offering services where engaging from an expert position forms part of the role and function, for example, consultant, medical practitioner, psychologist, lawyer.

ICF Professionals refer when the services they are qualified to offer may be insufficient or inappropriate.

If the Client requests or the ICF Professional hears information and/or makes observations that a different service may be more beneficial/appropriate, they discuss this with the Client.

The ICF Professional maintains the integrity of the coaching process by ensuring that the Client exercises choice and makes their own informed decisions.

The ICF Professional makes use of available ICF Resources when discussing referrals <https://coachingfederation.org/resource/referring-a-client-to-therapy/>

Liability Insurance

Some ICF Professionals who fulfill multiple roles, may wish to hold liability insurance.

For those who hold liability insurance, they check whether their insurance covers services provided in relation to multiple roles/services.

ICF Professionals who are required by their contracts to hold liability insurance, check whether multiple roles/services are covered.

The ICF provides an ethics resource on liability insurance for coaches - <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-ethics/icf-ethical-resources/>

Standard 3.8

Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

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

ICE for Standard 3.8

Referrals refer to the sharing of information by an ICF Professional about third-party products and/or services, where there is an explicit or implicit or no suggestion to a Client and/or Sponsor that they make use of these. Examples of third parties who may offer referrals include, but are not limited to, other ICF Professionals, assessment providers, therapists, counselors and mental health service providers, legal professionals, and financial advisors.

There are situations in which a third party may provide an ICF Professional with a referral fee or commission in monetary, or some other form that has benefit or advantage, whether personal and/or professional. These include, but are not limited

to, discounts, free services, or being a preferred provider. A reasonable outside person might infer that the ICF Professional is acting in their own interest rather than in service of the others involved in the arrangement.

Such arrangements can set up a conflict of interest or the perception of a conflict of interest for the ICF Professional. Such conflicts can be reputationally damaging not only for the ICF Professional, but also for the ICF and for professional coaching.

Conflicts of interest can arise when the ICF Professional recommends an assessment instrument, tools, software, and/or resources, where they fail to disclose that they benefit from their recommendations. An example of compensation received where disclosure is needed might be when an ICF Professional directly refers a client/sponsor/student to make use of an assessment or a transcription service, where the ICF Professional receives a commission.

When an ICF Professional personally uses a product or a service and shares this information with a Client and/or a Sponsor, they disclose that they do not have any professional and/or personal gain from it, over and above the benefits that are inherent in the product or service.

If a client/sponsor/student is referred to a consultant, a coaching education program, a mentor coach, or a coaching supervisor from whom the ICF Professional receives a referral fee, or other form of benefit or advantage, the ICF Professional discloses this when the information is provided.

Disclosure to the Client and/or Sponsor in an open and frank statement allows them to exercise informed and unbounded consent or refusal. Proactive disclosure, or disclosure as soon as the ICF Professional is made aware of any questions or concerns, communicates an ICF Professional's integrity and demonstrates accountability and respect for the human and civil rights of the other parties involved.

Whether the ICF Professional uses the benefits/income generated from the referrals for themselves or donates it to a charitable organization, the ICF Professional still discloses the information regarding the benefits/income from the referral.

The disclosure has to include information regarding the existence of the benefits/income, however, the ICF Professional has no obligation to disclose the exact amount of income, or the exact nature of the benefits or advantage.

ICF Professionals may prefer not to accept monetary or non-monetary benefits from third parties for making or receiving referrals, or for the use of resources and services.

Standard 4.1

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.

ICE for Standard 4.1

This Standard emphasizes ICF Professional's responsibility in co-creating an equitable coaching relationship, rooted in mutual respect and partnership with the Client. The Coaching Relationship must operate at the level of equality, where the ICF Professional and Client share equal responsibility for the coaching partnership.

An ICF Professional is aware of, and collaborates with their Client to identify and address, any power or status differentials that may arise due to cultural (e.g., traditions, societal norms, acceptable behavior in the interaction), relational (e.g., levels of experience, perceived authority), psychological (e.g., previous experiences that impacting the partnership), or contextual factors (e.g., organization hierarchy, rank, academic & professional status, social status, socio-economic environment). The ICF Professional actively works with the Client to build awareness of these dynamics, striving to minimize their potential impact on the coaching process or outcomes.

The ICF Professional recognizes that perceived or actual power imbalances can influence the Client's sense of ownership and safety in the relationship. Any perception of superiority or inferiority by the ICF Professional can burden the relationship. Similarly, the Client may perceive the Coaching Relationship as hierarchical, for example, if societal power dynamics are at play, with the Coach representing a dominant social group and the Client a marginalized one. Sustaining an equitable partnership requires the ICF Professional to continually acknowledge and mitigate the effects of any imbalance in the partnership.

If any such power differences affect the partnership, the ICF Professional works to balance the dynamic, seek coaching supervision or coaching if needed, and, if equality cannot be maintained, either party may consider ending the Coaching Relationship.

Standard 4.2

Section 4: Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value

As an ICF Professional, I:

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).

ICE for Standard 4.2

This Standard calls upon the ICF Professional to deliver coaching services without being hindered by conflicts or limitations that could impair their performance. These limitations may be both extrinsic (e.g., external relationships, circumstances) and intrinsic (e.g., personal biases, emotional triggers, internal conflicts). This Standard emphasizes the importance of the ICF Professional being fully present and aware of internal or external conflicts and use awareness of self and their intuition to manage any limitations or circumstances that may impact their coaching performance. Taking an example, they should avoid becoming judgmental or emotional to the point that it impairs their coaching performance.

Additionally, the ICF Professional is responsible for their physical and mental well-being to maintain consistent performance. For example, they a) assess whether their energy, presence, and focus are being sustained throughout multiple sessions in a day and b) evaluate how they manage situations like illness to maintain their professional presence while serving their client, sponsor or any stakeholder.

This Standard also calls on the ICF Professional to reach out to trusted third parties or resources when facing any conflicts. If the conflict cannot be resolved, the ICF Professional must consider suspending or terminating the coaching relationship to uphold ethical and professional standards.

To honor the commitment of delivering consistent value, the ICF Professional is expected to continually work on their self-awareness, professionalism and competencies, by engaging in ongoing professional development, including mentorship, supervision, personal coaching, technical discussions, ICF Water Cooler, ICF Communities of Practice, and ICF Ethics assist line.

Standard 4.3

Section 4: Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 4.3

When the ICF Professional perceives that their coaching services are no longer benefiting the Client or appear to go against the Client's or Sponsor's interest, they are expected to address this with the Client. In case the value is no longer consistent, it is the responsibility of the ICF Professional to disengage from the coaching relationship and encourage the Client to consider alternative support or transition to another professional.

The ICF Professional is responsible for establishing a review process with the Client and, if applicable, the Sponsor, to evaluate the ongoing value of the Coaching Relationship. If there is evidence of a shift in perceived value, the ICF Professional should explore the underlying factors driving this shift and address them appropriately.

The ICF Professional is encouraged to remain attentive to situations where the Client's needs exceed their coaching expertise. Therefore, it is particularly important to learn how to recognize in a timely manner, when a client may be better served by another professional. In such cases and if requested by the Client, the ICF Professional may refer the Client to other modes of support such as counseling, therapy, legal, tax, medical, nutrition, etc.

In case of doubt, the ICF professional is encouraged to seek assistance from another professional expert. Building a referral network that includes coaches with different approaches and professionals from related fields, such as therapy, counseling etc., can be beneficial when such a referral is requested.

The ICF Professional discloses to the Client and/or Sponsor(s) any referral fees they may receive from professionals or organizations whose services or products are recommended or utilized as part of the Coaching services.

Standard 5.1

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.

ICE for Standard 5.1

This Standard calls on the ICF Professional to correctly represent self, in the interest of the Client and other ICF Professionals. This includes titles, certifications, credentials, coaching-related experience (e.g., coaching, mentor coaching, training, supervision), and relevant education degrees.

ICF Professionals use verifiable descriptions to identify themselves, as approved by the appropriate certifying bodies. If any previously held coaching-related qualification is no longer valid, it must be removed from all representations. For guidance on the correct usage of ICF-branded designations, refer to the ICF Brand Manual.

There is often confusion surrounding the terms **“accreditation,” “certification,” and “credential,”** within the Coaching profession. To provide clarity, here is an explanation of these terms as defined by the ICF. The links provided alongside will help you stay fully aligned with ICF’s usage of these terms and any future updates they may implement:

- **Accreditation:** ICF’s evaluation and endorsement of Coaching Education programs offered by Coaching Education providers (training schools/institutes/organizations). ICF Accredited Coaching Education providers & programs undergo a review process to ensure they meet ICF’s quality standards for delivering coaching education. By enrolling in an ICF Accredited Coaching Education, coaches in training can expect that the education has been reviewed and meets the set standard.
- **Certification:** Refers to the completion of coaching education/coach-specific training program that has been accredited by ICF. These programs offer education/training in Coaching Competencies. Upon successful completion, individuals receive a certificate (from the ICF Accredited Coach Education provider) indicating they have met their program’s requirements.
- **Credentialing:** ICF credentialing is a formal process through which ICF assesses and recognizes an individual’s coaching competence and

professionalism. To earn an ICF credential, Coaches must meet specific criteria, such as accumulating relevant coaching experience and demonstrating proficiency in ICF's Competencies. There are different paths to obtaining an ICF credential, each with specific requirements, which are clearly outlined in the ICF Credentialing & Standards resource. Credentialing validates a Coach's expertise and adherence to professional standards. To ensure alignment with ICF's evolving standards, please refer to the following ICF resources:

- ICF Credentialing <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/>
- ICF Coaching Education or Accreditation of organizations <https://coachingfederation.org/for-coach-educators/>

In addition to the Coach role, ICF Professionals could also play ICF-specific roles such as Coach Supervisor, Mentor Coach, Coach Trainer. It is crucial for those in these roles to carry out their responsibilities with utmost care. The following links provide reference to ICF's expectations for these roles:

- Mentor coaches: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-competencies/mentor-coaching-competencies/>
- Teaching & Instruction across levels: <https://coachingfederation.org/for-coach-educators/>.
- Coaching Supervision: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/coaching-competencies/coaching-supervision-competencies/>

To ensure continued alignment with ICF's evolving standards, staying informed about any changes in terminology, expanded roles, or processes is essential. Regularly checking these and other relevant links helps maintain a clear understanding of the current ICF guidelines and requirements.

Standard 5.2

Section 5: Professional Integrity and Accountability

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 5.2

While representing themselves as an ICF Professional or a member of the coaching profession, ICF Professionals ensure their portrayal of themselves, ICF, and the coaching profession remains truthful and accurate.

This Standard calls on the ICF Professional to know what the ICF stands for and what Coaching as a profession means to the marketplace and to the world. Overstating the potential value of Coaching is considered deceptive and unprofessional. ICF Professionals are therefore required to provide an honest and accurate representation of the value and support they can offer through the Coaching process.

When presenting the potential benefits of Coaching, ICF Professionals are encouraged to clearly communicate its limitations, ensuring that realistic expectations are set.

As ambassadors of the profession, ICF Professionals hold responsibility for contributing positively to the public perception and reputation of coaching worldwide; this responsibility includes thoroughly understanding and representing ICF's definition of Coaching, its Values, Core Competencies, and the Code of Ethics. Their behavior serves as a calling card for ICF and an example of professional coaching. ICF Professionals are also responsible for addressing any breach of this standard by respectfully bringing the matter to the attention of those involved.

This standard emphasizes the importance of truthfulness in all forms of marketing, including word-of-mouth promotion of services by ICF Professionals. It invites the ICF Professional to understand and clearly articulate the distinctions between coaching and other professional development practices, such as mentoring, counseling, and psychotherapy, ensuring an accurate representation of each discipline.

The value of professional coaching lies in its ability to support Clients as they define their goals and work toward achieving them, deepen their learning, build self-awareness, and enhance specific skills needed to reach desired outcomes. Coaches are expected to clearly communicate to Clients that the success of coaching depends on the Client's willingness to take action and challenge themselves. For example, while the coach facilitates opportunities for growth, such as encouraging the Client to try something new, the Client is responsible for making progress. The coach manages the process, but the Client owns the progress and outcomes. As such, Clients are accountable for achieving their objectives, and ICF Professionals avoid making guarantees about a Client's success.

This Standard 5.2 complements Standard 5.1, which states: "As an ICF Professional, I accurately identify my coaching qualifications and work within the boundaries of my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications, and my ICF Credential."

Standard 5.3

Section 5: Professional Integrity and Accountability

As an ICF Professional, I:

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.

ICE for Standard 5.3

The ICF Foundation defines social impact as “the measurable positive outcome of a specific intervention — such as coaching— on the well-being and development of society as a whole, aimed at addressing social challenges and promoting systemic change.” Through transformational partnerships and capacity-building initiatives, ICF showcases the power of Coaching in fostering a thriving and equitable society.

In alignment with this vision, this Standard encourages ICF Professionals to adopt a mindset that extends beyond coaching practice to embrace ethical maturity and systemic awareness. Given the far-reaching impact coaching has on individuals, organizations, and society, ICF Professionals are urged to think systemically, recognizing the interconnectedness of various levels: individual, family, organization, community, nation, and the world. By acknowledging this interdependence, they are encouraged to co-create solutions and innovations with cultural sensitivity and a deep awareness of systemic issues.

Ethical Maturity: From Avoiding Harm to Creating Positive Impact

The distinction between “avoiding bad” and “doing good” serves as a guiding principle for ICF Professionals in their ethical decision-making:

- **Avoiding Bad:** This approach is being compliant to ethical standards to avoid breaches or violations and not going beyond that.
- **Doing Good:** This approach is going beyond compliance to ethical standards and being driven by ICF Core Values and Principles in ethical decision making. It is demonstrated by making decisions that would create positive impact on individuals, organizations, and society, while ensuring no harm is caused even in situations where it is legally permissible, or when a specific ethical standard may not be present or explicitly stated. All actions of an ICF Professional are driven by integrity rather than external scrutiny.

