

ICF CONVERGE

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A Fun and Fascinating Dive into the World of the ICF Code of Ethics

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Agenda

- 1. Context of the Code of Ethics and the IRB**
- 2. Active Work with case study**

History of the Code of Ethics

- First Ethics Pledge was created in 1997, two years after the ICF was founded
- First Ethics Code published in 2000
- Several code reviews. The last ones were in 2019 and in Apr 2025
- The IRB was created in the early 2000's
- From being punitive in nature to embrace a way of being an ICF Professional rooted in integrity, presence, and relational responsibility – the new approach reflects a profound shift from mere rule-following to conscious ethical embodiment in every coaching interaction

Ethics resources - Good ethics stuff!

- Ethics tab on the ICF website
- ICF Ethics Course ([Course](#))
- ICE (Insights and Considerations for Ethics) statements ([ICE-
Insights and Considerations](#))
- Case studies
- Books and articles
- Ethics Community of Practice
- Monthly Ethics Water Cooler Conversations

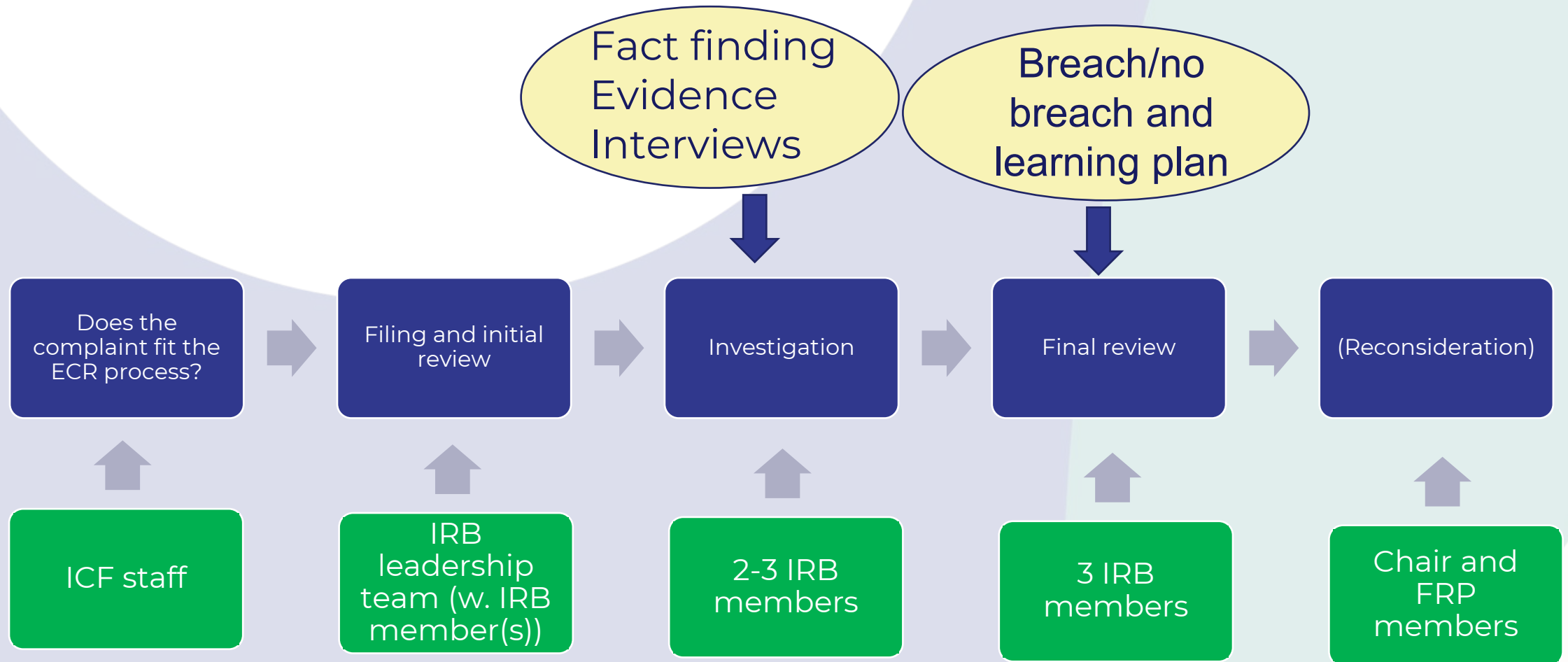
Why a Code of Ethics and ECR Process? Benefits for the **Coach**

- Provides a common definition of what coaching is, making its distinction from other services
- Promotes clear contracting in order to protect the coach
- Supports a competitive advantage for ICF affiliated coaches
- Ensures ICF's reputable and professional position in the coaching industry
- Helps maintain self-regulation of the coaching profession
- Serves to support the professionalism of coaching in the eyes of the public by demonstrating integrity and professional responsibility

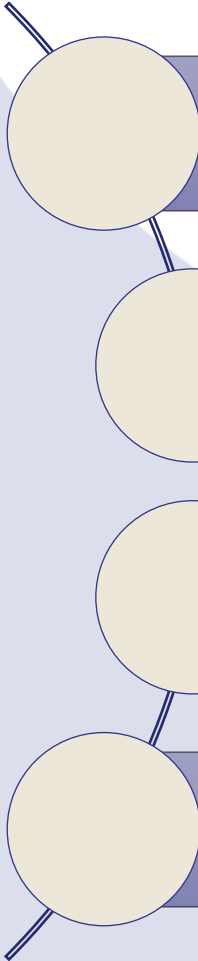
Why a Code of Ethics and ECR Process? Benefits for the **Client**

- Provides a common definition of what coaching is, making its distinction from other services
- Demonstrates professional responsibility thereby promoting a partnership of greater trust
- Upholds and honors the integrity and confidentiality of the coaching process
- Serves to support the professionalism of coaching in the eyes of the public
- Offers consumers of coaching services and the general public assurance that ICF has a viable method for self-regulation.

Official ECR (Ethics Complaint Review) Process



Typical Causes for Complaints



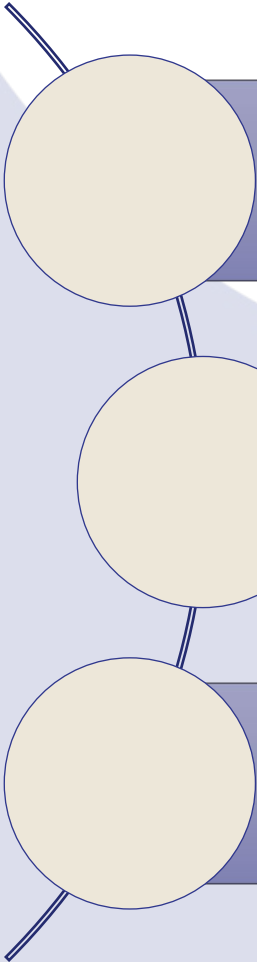
Unclear agreements

Misrepresentation of services and/or credentials

Lack of confidentiality (coaches and support personnel)

Conflicts of Interest and not knowing when to step away

Typical Causes for Complaints



Inappropriate Relations with clients (social, physical and/or sexual)

Lack of awareness or judgment as to when a client can be better served by another professional or resource

Not respecting a client's right to end the coaching arrangement

Complaints 2021-24 breakdown - pitfalls

Theme	2021	2022	2023	2024
Inappropriate conduct	31.25%	52.4%	50.0%	65.0%
Misrepresentation of services	18.75%	23.8%	16.8%	12.0%
Unclear contracting	18.75%	14.3%	-	-
Conflict of interest	6.25%	4.8%	-	-
Breach of confidentiality	25.0%	4.8%	8.3%	17.0%
Power differential	-	-	16.6%	6.0%
Right to terminate	-	-	8.3%	-

Source: Annual Ethical Conduct and Compliance Reports 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024
<https://coachingfederation.org/ethics/ethical-conduct-review-process>

Complaints 2023

THE ECR AT WORK

15 Ethical complaints filed via the ECR
(29% decrease from previous year).

4 Complaints did not move past the initial review phase due to lack of evidence of an alleged breach of the ICF Code of Ethics.

5 Complaints were not accepted because they named coaches who were neither an ICF member nor an ICF credential-holder.

6 Complaints administered by the IRB.



Category	Count
Complaints administered by the IRB	6
Complaints not moving past initial review	4
Complaints not accepted	5

Source: Annual Ethical Conduct and Compliance Reports 2021, 2022, 2023
<https://coachingfederation.org/ethics/ethical-conduct-review-process>



CASE STUDY

“Initial Review” exercise - Background

Note: This case is fictional and created for the Ethics Community of Practice session in January, 2023. It is inspired by some of the standards commonly featured in IRB investigations, and is written for educational purposes only.

Complainant: The person who filed the complaint. The Complainant is in the beginning of their coaching career after having gone through a Level 1 program at the school where they studied.

Coach: The ICF member coach the complaint was filed against.

“Initial Review” exercise - Background

Background:

The Complainant sought coaching as they wanted to grow their newly formed coaching business. The Coach's website described expertise and experience in the field. It promised results, so the Complainant signed up for the coaching package 8x60 min sessions. The Complainant agreed to have the sessions recorded on a secure server for the duration of the coaching relationship for reference and then destroyed. The Complainant saw value in having recordings and consented. In the fifth session the Complainant expressed to the Coach that they didn't feel that the coaching addressed the key issue they wanted to work on and wanted to end the coaching relationship and get a refund.

Case – “Initial Review” exercise

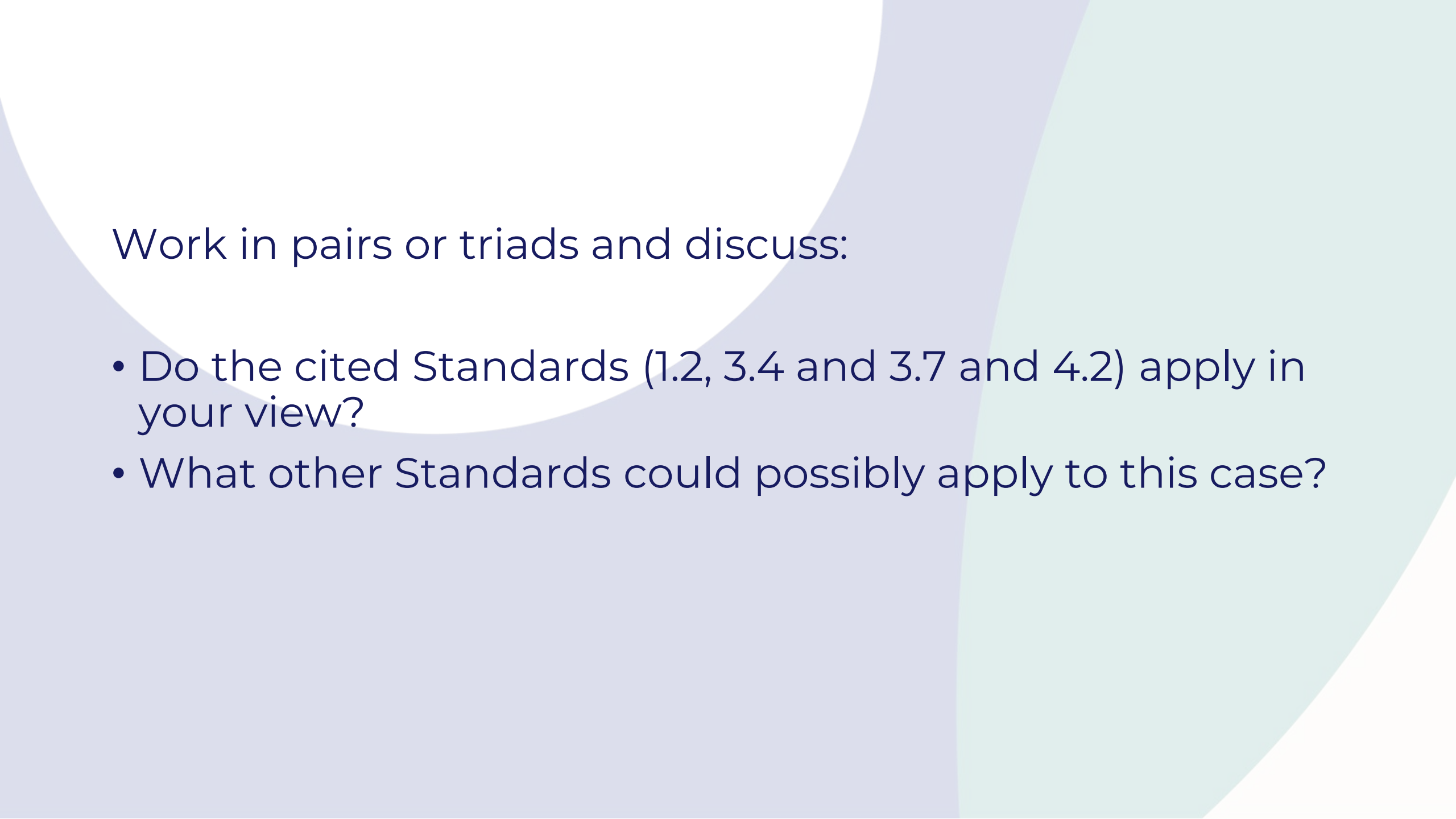
The complaint:

In the complaint form to the IRB, the Complainant stated that they had felt a growing unease in the coaching relationship. On two occasions the Complainant's suggestions on actions they wanted to take were skirted by the Coach, who had then proceeded to advise another course of action. In the second session the Coach had labeled the Complainant saying, “you are an introvert”, whereupon the Complainant expressed they didn't feel they were. When the Complainant in the first 10 minutes of the fifth call had gathered courage to tell the coach they wanted to immediately end the coaching relationship, the Coach had responded “Sure, let's just go ahead and finish this sessions so that we can close it on good terms.”

The Complainant cites that they think Standard 1.2, 3.4 and 3.7 and 4.2 have been violated

BREAKOUT

- Work individually. Put yourself in the place of an IRB Initial Review member.
- Determine if you think there is merit to investigate this further based on FACE VALUE only.



Work in pairs or triads and discuss:

- Do the cited Standards (1.2, 3.4 and 3.7 and 4.2) apply in your view?
- What other Standards could possibly apply to this case?

Standards applying to this case

Out of these, which is the most relevant?

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.
- 4.1) Am aware of and, in partnership with my client, actively manage any power or status differential between us that may be caused by cultural, relational, psychological or contextual issues.
- 4.2) Recognize my personal limitations or circumstances that may impair my coaching performance or my professional commitments. I will seek support, if necessary, including relevant professional guidance. This may require suspending or terminating my coaching relationship(s).
- 5.1) Accurately Identify my coaching qualifications and work within the boundaries my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications and ICF Credentials.
- 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.

Reflection

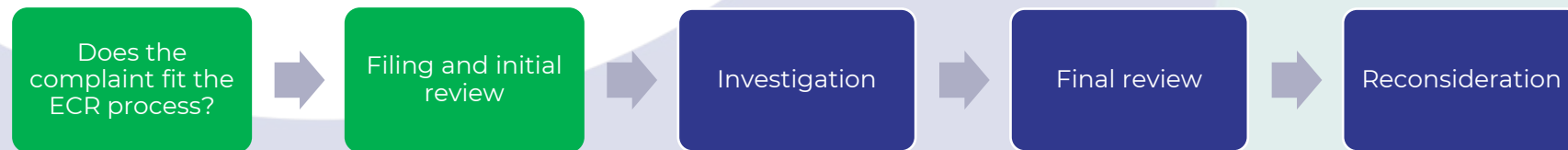
- What bias did you detect in yourself?
- How comfortable were you reading the complaint?
- Was there anything that triggered you?
- Did you discover anything unexpected?
- What did you get curious about?



Shall we send to an investigation?

What happens next?

What is the learning plan?



Reflection

- What did you learn today that applies to:
 - You as an ICF Professional
 - Your business
- What will you do differently in your own practice as a coach?



Q&A and insights

Code of Ethics Section 1

Agreements for Client and/or Sponsor Engagement

As an ICF Professional, I:

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

Code of Ethics Section 2

Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 2.1 Maintain the strictest level of confidentiality with all parties involved, regardless of the role I am fulfilling.
- 2.2 Have a clear agreement about what information is exchanged and how it is exchanged among all parties involved during all coaching engagements.
- 2.3 Have a clear agreement with client(s), sponsor(s), and other involved parties about what confidential information may need to be disclosed to the appropriate authorities, e.g., illegal activity, required by law, valid court order or subpoena; or imminent/likely risk of danger to self or to others.
- 2.4 Maintain, store, and dispose of any records, including electronic files and communications, in a manner that promotes confidentiality, security, and privacy, and complies with applicable laws and agreements.

Code of Ethics Section 2 contd.

Confidentiality and Legal Compliance

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 2.5 Fulfill my ethical and legal obligations to my coaching client(s), sponsor(s), colleagues, and to the public at large directly and through any technology systems I may utilize (i.e. technology-assisted coaching tools, databases, platforms, software, and artificial intelligence).
- 2.6 Am responsible for my support personnel's adherence to the relevant standards of the Code of Ethics
- 2.7 Maintain the privacy of ICF professionals and use of their contact information (email addresses, telephone numbers, and so on) only as authorized by ICF or the ICF professional.
- 2.8 Comply with copyright laws and recognize and honor the contributions and intellectual property of others, only claiming ownership of my own material.

Code of Ethics Section 3

Professional Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 3.1 Am aware of and discuss with all involved parties the implications of having multiple agreements and relationships, and the potential for conflicts of interest.
- 3.2 Manage conflicts of interest and potential conflicts of interest with coaching client(s) and sponsor(s) through self-reflection, coaching agreement(s), and ongoing dialogue. This includes addressing organizational roles, responsibilities, relationships, records, confidentiality, and other reporting requirements.
- 3.3 Resolve any conflict of interest or potential conflict of interest by working through the issue with relevant parties, seeking professional assistance, or suspending or ending the professional relationship.
- 3.4 Hold responsibility for being aware of and setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern professional interactions, physical or otherwise.

Code of Ethics Section 3 contd.

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.
- 3.6 Am mindful of the level of intimacy in the coaching relationship. I do not participate in any sexual or romantic relationship with client(s) or sponsor(s). If I detect a shift in the relationship, I take appropriate action to address the issue or cancel the coaching engagement.
- 3.7 Understand that ICF professionals often serve in multiple professional roles based on prior training and/or experience (i.e. mentor, therapist, HR specialist, assessor), and it is my responsibility to disclose to the client when I am acting in a capacity other than the role of an ICF professional.
- 3.8 Disclose to Client(s) the information of compensation and benefits that have been paid/received or will be paid/received for referrals.

Code of Ethics Section 4

Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value

As an ICF Professional, I:

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

Code of Ethics Section 5

Commitment to Delivering Consistent Value

As an ICF Professional, I:

- 5.1 Accurately identify my coaching qualifications and work within the boundaries of my level of coaching competency, expertise, experience, training, certifications, and my ICF credential.
- 5.2 Make verbal and written statements that are true and accurate about what I offer as an ICF professional, what is offered by ICF, the coaching profession, and the potential value of coaching.
- 5.3 Adhere to the philosophy of “doing good” versus “avoiding bad,” recognizing the impact of my professional conduct on my clients, stakeholders, the coaching profession, and society.