

Ethical Orientation for Group Coordinators
(Group Leaders)
Pre-Project for the International Association
of Group Psychotherapy (IAGP)
Code of Ethics

Jose Fonseca

This pre-project concerns the general condition of *Group Coordinator (or Group Leader)*, those who work with groups, regardless of the professional's anchor role (physician, psychologist, social worker, professor, clergy, etc.). The ethical-legal questions concerned in the exercise of these different professions must be submitted to national and regional professional boards as well as to the laws of the country in question.

The International Association of Group Therapy (IAGP) has no legal authority from which to legislate over these ethical matters in different countries, but believes that all *Group Coordinators* can base their practice on general ethical principles, common to everyone. Ethical questions highlight the possibility of harmony and order in the meeting of parts (roles and counter-roles) with common objectives. In this way, the IAGP has proposed some lines of conduct to facilitate good encounters between *Group Coordinators* and group members.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR GROUP COORDINATORS

Ethics desired from *Group Coordinators*

1- Attitude

1. The goal of the *Group Coordinator* is to serve each member of the group and the group as a whole, protecting and restoring the dignity of the group members.
2. The *Group Coordinator* must have an anchor profession (physician, psychologist, social worker, professor, clergy, etc.) that, in itself, is subject to a professional ethical code.
3. The *Group Coordinator* must lead the group democratically, cultivating the free expression of group ideas and feelings.
4. The *Group Coordinator* should coordinate the group in such a way that the members are respected for their economic, social, cultural, political and religious differences.

5. The *Group Coordinator* must assume responsibility, both within and outside the group, for his/her part in the results of the work proposed.
6. The *Group Coordinator* must make his/her work philosophy and curriculum vitae available to group participants as well as the public at large.
7. The *Group Coordinator* must be aware of his/her own prejudices, to avoid wounding the dignity of any of the group members. This attitude will also help the group members become more conscious of their own prejudices.
8. The *Group Coordinator* shouldn't impose his/her own values on the group, but rather help the members find their own.
9. The *Group Coordinator* must consider each potential group member's real possibility for benefiting from the group process. If it is not likely, other therapy alternatives should be explored.
10. The *Group Coordinator* must clearly state the group objectives and operating methods to all group members.
11. The *Group Coordinator* and the group participants establish a connection comprised of distinct, asymmetrical roles, which fosters transference relationships. This means, among other things, that the coordinator gains a position of power over the group members that must never be exploited for financial, political or sexual gain. This remains true even after a member has left the group.
12. At isolated group events which are not part of the continuity of a process (open sessions, public psychodramas, etc.), the *Group Coordinator* must indicate whether the primary objective is therapeutic, educational, for entertainment or otherwise, so that the members do not participate uninformed.
13. The *Group Coordinator* must consider and act with discretion and care in any occasional social contacts which occur outside the group.
14. Commercial relations between the *Group Coordinator* and members of the group not already established before the outset of group work are discouraged.
15. The *Group Coordinator* should take care of his/her physical and mental health, thus preventing illness from interfering with his/her work.

II - Professional Training

1. The *Group Coordinator* must have adequate scientific and methodological training from a peer-recognized educational institution.
2. A *Group Coordinator's* education must include, in addition to theoretical learning, supervised practical experiences.
3. In the case of professional uncertainty, the *Group Coordinator* should address questions with a peer ("altervision" or "coveision") or more experienced colleague (supervision) at an appropriate time and place.

4. The *Group Coordinator* should seek to keep his/her professional knowledge continually up to date and use this knowledge to improve his/her work.

III - Confidentiality

1. Group confidentiality, beyond the *Group Coordinator's* formal attitude, should extend informally to the other group members. Therefore, the *Group Coordinator* should remind the group of the importance of confidentiality, both for the social protection of the members as well as in order to establish the trust necessary for good group work. The *Group Coordinator* should also advise the group about the limits of absolute confidentiality under these circumstances.
2. The *Group Coordinator* must protect the anonymity of the group and its members at all times.
3. The *Group Coordinator* must announce the entrance of any potential new member to the group and proceed, whenever possible, only with the full approval of the members.
4. The *Group Coordinator* should explain the purpose of any occasional recordings of the sessions (audio or video tapes) that may occur, and only proceed with such recordings after both pre- and post-approval of the group members.
5. A *Group Coordinator* may only break confidentiality in situations where the national code of ethical professional conduct permits.

IV - Relations with Colleagues

1. Any pronouncements by the *Group Coordinator* about colleagues should be ethical and respectful, limited to technical or professional concerns. Personal comments should be refrained from, unless doing so would serve to condone unethical practices.
2. In the case of inappropriate conduct on the part of a colleague, the *Group Coordinator* should direct his/her criticism to the appropriate institutional or professional forum, where the technical and administrative conditions necessary to correct the situation exist.
3. As an organizer of professional meetings, the *Group Coordinator* should conduct him/herself democratically, giving equal opportunity to colleagues with differing lines of thought.