



# INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF SCHEMA THERAPY ETHICS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION COMMITTEE CODE OF CONDUCT ACTIONS & PROCEDURES

## Introduction

The International Society of Schema Therapy (ISST) is committed to advancing good practice among all its members. ISST's **Code of Conduct** ([Click here to be taken to ethical procedures and guidelines](#)) is a set of principles and values that provide the membership of ISST a solid foundation for good, safe, and ethical practice.

All ISST members, regardless of their grade or position, are invited to commit to the good practice standards presented in this **Code of Conduct Actions & Procedures**.

The **Code of Conduct Actions & Procedures** is the Ethics and Conflict Resolution Committee's (ECRC) primary reference when considering professional conduct Complaints brought before the Committee.

The ECRC will not begin an investigation of a Complaint if an investigation is already underway with the respondent's licensing or professional body and will pause its investigation if an investigation has been initiated with the respondent's licensing or professional body.

The ECRC is committed to investigating all cases objectively and independently.

ISST cannot stop a practitioner from continuing to practice or help a member receive financial compensation.

Once an investigation has been completed, the ECRC will recommend resolution outcomes to ISST's Executive Board (EB). The EB holds the authority for administering the outcome.

If an ethical breach is not established, but the outcome of the Complaint identifies a fundamental conflict between the **Complainant** (the ISST member who files the Complaint) and the **Defendant** (the ISST member against whom the Complaint has been filed), Mediation may be recommended.

It is expected that if a Complaint is filed with the ECRC, and the committee's investigation results in a recommendation, that the **Complainant** will accept the outcome.

If the committee's investigation results in the identification of an ethical breach or practice recommendation with which the **Defendant** disagrees, the **Defendant** has the right to Appeal.

## Six principles underpin the Code of Conduct Actions & Procedures:

- I. Objectives.
- II. The decision to investigate a Complaint.
- III. ECRC recommendations and actions undertaken by ISST's EB
- IV. Procedures for filing a Complaint.
- V. Appeal.
- VI. Review.

### I. Objectives.

After a Complaint is filed against *any* member of ISST, the ECRC's objectives are to:

- A. Investigate.
- B. Resolve.
- C. Recommend actions to ISST's EB to uphold the aims of ISST, founded in 2008 at a conference in Coimbra, Portugal:
  1. *"To promote training in schema therapy at a high professional level by specifying a curriculum for training and to provide accreditation and certification for trainees who show that they have met these requirements.*
  2. *To promote developing and disseminating new developments within schema therapy by holding regular conferences and training events.*
  3. *To provide a structure for networking among schema therapists and those seeking to become certified as schema therapists."*
- D. If an ethical Complaint is unfounded, the ECRC will offer suggestions of "good practice" to the **Defendant**.
  1. These suggestions of "good practice" are not meant as a punishment.
- E. When reviewing a Complaint, the ECRC will consider the evidence and perspectives of all sides before recommending actions to the EB or making suggestions of "good practice" to the **Defendant**.

### II. The decision to investigate a Complaint.

- A. When a Complaint against an ISST member is severe (e.g., violence, sexual offense, serious or sustained dishonesty, or fraud), and the **Defendant** is registered with an organization that either statutorily or voluntarily regulates that member, the ECRC will ask the **Complainant** to refer the Complaint to the **Defendant's** licensing or professional organization for action.
- B. The ECRC will not act on a Complaint and will pause its investigation of a Complaint if another investigation is underway with the **Defendant's** licensing or professional body.
  1. The ECRC will defer to the outcome of that investigation unless the result deviates from ethical codes stipulated by the ISST or if the member presents new evidence to the ECRC.
- C. Complaints about ISST members, regardless of whether they are members of a professional/regulatory body, will be reviewed according to the Complaints Procedure of the ISST.

- D. When another professional/regulatory body or tribunal has completed its investigation of the same allegations and has found no merit to the claims, the ECRC may, at its discretion, decide not to open an investigation or, if already open, to close it.
- E. The ECRC may open an investigation when a member of ISST:
  1. Has been expelled or suspended from a professional/regulatory body or similar entity.
  2. Has been denied a license/accreditation, certificate, or registration.
  3. Has had a license/accreditation, certificate, or registration withdrawn or suspended by a professional or regulatory body or similar organization.
  4. Has voluntarily surrendered a license/accreditation, certificate, or registration because of pending allegations.
- F. If the ***Defendant's*** professional body has decided to uphold a Complaint, that decision must stand.
  1. If new evidence becomes known, the ECRC may review the Complaint again.

### III. ECRC recommendations and actions undertaken by ISST's EB.

- A. ISST's EB will suspend a Clinician's ISST membership while the judiciary investigates the following criminal offenses:
  1. Sexual misconduct involving a child or vulnerable adult, including any offense involving indecent images or pornography.
  2. Sexual misconduct against a person who has mental health problems.
  3. Any other criminal offense for which a term of custodial sentence is imposed, probation is not considered, and such conviction is not under appeal.
- B. ISST's EB will terminate a Clinician's ISST membership following convictions of the following criminal offenses:
  1. Sexual misconduct involving a child or vulnerable adult, including any offense involving indecent images or pornography.
  2. Sexual misconduct against a person who has mental health problems.
  3. For any other criminal offense for which a term of a custodial sentence is imposed, probation is not being considered, and such conviction is not under appeal.
- C. The ECRC will recommend actions regarding membership to ISST's EB when:
  1. A member is found guilty of malpractice or incompetence by the professional body that regulates their professional practice.
  2. A member has been found guilty by a court or tribunal, an employer's internal disciplinary investigation, or a university disciplinary investigation of the plagiarised the work of another or the falsification of data relating to, psychological or other types of research.
  3. A member who, while holding an elected or appointed position within the Society, has acted in a way that is in serious conflict with the mission of the Society.
  4. A member who has claimed to hold a grade of membership to which they have not been elected or has used false or misleading titles or descriptions.
  5. A member who has been found by the Society to have provided false or misleading information in an application to become a member of the Society or an application for election, will have their membership withdrawn.

6. Any member struck off the Register of their professional or regulatory body for reasons other than lack of competence may, at the discretion of the ISST EB, may have conditions placed upon their membership, including suspension or termination.
- D. When the ECRC has concluded its investigation of a Complaint, the ECRC may engage in any of the following actions:
1. Dismiss the case if:
    - a. There is insufficient evidence.
    - b. The **Defendant** has not violated the ethical standard as charged.
    - c. The violation is only minor or technical and would not warrant further action.
    - d. If another forum has addressed the breach of the **Defendant**.
  2. In the case of ethical violations, the ECRC may recommend to ISST's EB that the **Defendant**:
    - a. Incorporate specific changes into the **Defendant's** practice.
    - b. That the **Defendant** cease the specified unethical behavior(s).
    - c. That the **Defendant** obtain training, including consultation with a Schema Therapist at the Supervisory Trainer level who holds expertise in the specific area of concern.
  3. Recommend that ISST's EB **suspend** the **Defendant's** membership for up **to 3 years**.
  4. Recommend that ISST's EB consider **terminating** the **Defendant's** membership.
    - a. The **Defendant** may apply to reinstate their membership in ISST **after five years**, provided they have satisfied the conditions requested by ISST's EB at the time of their termination of membership.
  5. Offer suggestions of "good practice" to the **Defendant**.
- E. Concerning actions 3 and 4 above, the **Defendant** will undergo review for a specified period to ensure compliance with the ISST EB's directives.
- F. If the **Defendant** chooses not to comply with the ECRC's requests for information, the investigation of the Complaint will continue to the best of the ECRC's ability.
1. The outcome of the investigation may lead to ISST's EB terminating the **Defendant's** membership.

#### IV. Procedures for filing a Complaint.

- A. When an ISST member (**the Complainant**) wishes to file a Complaint about the behavior of another ISST member, the **Complainant** follows the procedure outlined on the ISST website that pertains to the ECRC ([Click here to be taken to ethical policies and guidelines](#)).
- B. Before filing the Complaint, the **Complainant** reviews the **ISST's Code of Conduct** and **ISST's Policy and Principles Regarding Dual/Multiple Relationships** to determine if the conduct of concern is addressed in these documents.
- C. The **Complainant** completes and signs the Complaint Form. The signature must be recognizable, and the printed name must be noted adjacent to the signature. The ECRC will not accept anonymous Complaints.
  1. The Complaint Form describes the behavior of specific concern, references the section of the **ISST Code of Conduct** or the **ISST Policy and Principles Regarding Dual/Multiple Relationships**, and includes evidence to support the allegation.
- D. If the ECRC accepts the Complaint the **Defendant** (ISST member against whom the Complaint has been filed) is informed.

- E. After a Complaint is investigated, and an outcome is achieved, the ECRC will recommend to ISST's EB suggested measures such as conditions placed on the **Defendant**, including suspension or termination of ISST membership:
  - 1. When ISST's EB suspends membership of the **Defendant**, the suspension period **will be at most three years**.
  - 2. When ISST's EB has determined that membership of the **Defendant** will be **terminated**, the **Defendant** may apply to reinstate their membership with the ISST **after five years have elapsed** since the decision to end their membership and that they meet reinstatement criteria.
- F. When the ECRC receives multiple Complaints against the same ISST member within a **three-year period**, the ECRC may review all Complaints in their entirety before concluding their review of the case.
- G. The **Defendant** must inform ISST's EB and the ECRC if they decide to resign from the Society.

#### V. Appeal.

- A. When recommendations have been made by the ECRC to ISST's EB regarding a **Defendant** concerning modifications of practice, and suspension or termination of membership, the **Defendant** may submit a request for an Appeal to ISST's EB within two weeks of the ISST EB letter detailing the grievance or suggestion(s) of "good practice."
- B. An *ad hoc* Appeal Panel commissioned by ISST's EB provides the **Defendant** an additional opportunity for an unbiased review.
- C. In response to the request for an Appeal Panel:
  - 1. ISST's EB nominates at least three members to compose the Appeal Panel who are neither involved with the case nor close affiliates of the **Defendant**.
  - 2. The Appeal Panel functions independently of the ECRC and operates under their own discretion.
  - 3. The Appeal Panel may uphold the ECRC's decision, place conditions on the **Defendant**, suspend or terminate the **Defendant's** membership.

#### VI. Review.

- A. In cases where the ECRC has suggested recommendations to ISST's EB, for further training or consultation, in terms of **Section II**, the ECRC will review the matter before the end of the specified period and evaluate whether the required conditions have been adequately met.
- B. To protect the public, if the ECRC determines that the conditions imposed by ISST's EB have yet to be fulfilled, the ECRC may recommend to ISST's EB that the conditions upon the **Defendant's** membership extend.
- C. Depending on the extent to which the modifications to practice have been satisfactorily fulfilled, the ECRC may recommend to ISST's EB an extension of the review period, or further suggestions to the **Defendant's** practice, extension of the review period, or termination of membership to ensure the protection of the public.
- D. Although the extent to which requirements have been met will be automatically reviewed before the specified period has elapsed, the **Defendant** may apply to the ECRC

to have the review brought forward if they believe that their circumstances have changed since the requirements were imposed.

1. For example, if the requirement for additional training was completed before the specified period or if the issues that led to the sanction being placed have been resolved.