

# EATA European Association for Transactional Analysis

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The official language of EATA is English. It is this version, written in English that is the "official" one.

## EATA Ethical Code

**Voted by EATA Delegates: July 2007 and 2011**

### Introduction

The EATA Ethical Code is intended to provide guidance for national organisations affiliated to EATA and for each EATA member. It is intended to help EATA members working in psychotherapy, counselling, organisational and educational fields to act ethically<sup>1</sup>. Each National Association has the task of applying it coherently to the TA deontological national guidelines

In addition, this Code informs the public about what behaviour they can expect in these contexts from members of this Association.

This Code focuses on the criteria for professional ethical behaviour. Values and related ethical principles are the basis for constructing ethical behaviour and identifying unethical behaviours. This is the binding core document for all members of EATA and can only be changed by EATA council. The EATA Ethical Guidelines (updated in November 1995), which are now called deontological guidelines, are still valid and can be adapted by National Associations. Therefore that document remains separate from the EATA Ethical Code.

National Associations affiliated to EATA adopt the EATA Ethical Code and use it as a frame of reference to analyse specific situations for its members. Each EATA member needs to conform with it in his or her practice. If this is not the case, the National Associations will formulate sanctions<sup>2</sup>.

This Code is in three sections: the first section is an introduction to the Code, describing its basic perspective on ethics; the second section is the core of the Code, and defines its fundamental values and related ethical principles. The third section is an application of those values and principles to practice. The sections are therefore as follows.

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<sup>1</sup> The term practitioner is used within the present Code in relation to all EATA members who use TA and/or other concepts as models for comprehending and changing individuals, couples, groups or organisations. The word 'client' denotes any user, patient, student, group or organisation that is a recipient of professional services of members of EATA.

<sup>2</sup> Sanctions may include temporary or definitive suspension of membership.

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### **Section I**

#### **General framework on ethics**

##### **1.1. Some definitions of ethics**

Ethics<sup>3</sup>, in its broadest sense, is the philosophical discipline that studies human actions, which includes both moral intent and human will. Ethics<sup>4</sup> supposes the ability to choose how to act. It includes the ability to choose according to one's own parameters (subjective ethics) and taking into account the other's perspective (intersubjective ethics).

Deontology (professional ethics) is the study of the moral obligation and commitment of practitioners to act ethically.

##### **1.2. Basic assumptions**

- *There is a close connection between ethics and practice<sup>5</sup>: behaviour can be ethical or not, depending on whether or not it promotes the well-being of self and others.*
- *Ethics is a general framework, which guides a practitioner in providing a professional service and always underpins practice. It is not limited to solving difficult and problematic situations.*
- *Ethics identifies values that help people to realise their potential as human beings; values underpin ethical principles as guidelines to actualise values. Principles, which underpin deontological norms, and are a guideline to professional practice.*

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<sup>3</sup> The definition derives from an Italian dictionary, Dizionario delle Idee, Sansoni, 1977, p. 392.

<sup>4</sup> The strict meaning of ethics is that it is synonymous to morality ("Ethos" and "Mos" in Greek and Latin mean customs, habits) and refers to the ability to self-examine in order to find fulfilment: so we behave ethically when we are fulfilling our potential and accounting for the other's fulfilment.

<sup>5</sup> *Practice* means the professional relationship of help that occurs when a practitioner and a user agree on a clear contract. This applies in all four areas of speciality: Psychotherapy, Counselling, Education and Organisations; the application may be different, but the rationale is the same in all of these fields.

### **1.3. Approach of the Ethical Code**

The *EATA Ethical Code* identifies *basic values*. These values offer a frame of reference to inform a practitioner about their personal and professional behaviour, in order to promote the well-being of people involved in a professional relationship. These values help to construct criteria for ethical and professional behaviour. The Code incorporates basic values, and related ethical principles, and uses them as a basis to inform ethical practice in all helping professions.

*Deontological guidelines* (guidelines for professional ethics) offer a set of prescriptive rules to regulate practitioners' behaviour for the protection of the rights of each client. These guidelines are strictly linked to a nation's laws, and are specific for different professional bodies.

The goal of the *Ethical Code and deontological guidelines* is to guarantee human rights as well as complying with national laws.

In this Code, the primary emphasis is on the importance of holding clear values and ethical principles, in order to create a frame of reference for managing a wide range of situations, even if these are not specifically described in the Ethical Code.

This approach moves the arena of ethical practice away from the application of a set of rules, which denotes what shall or shall not be done, to a consideration of the values and principles that guide practitioners in TA. In addition, describing our ethics in terms of general values and principles helps to take into account cultural differences within the EATA community, and provides National Associations with a template for integrating it with national deontological codes (code of professional ethics). It is possible to encounter situations that are not covered by specific codes, or to be faced with a decision between more than one ethical principle. In such circumstances, any chosen course of action only becomes unethical if it can be shown that the practitioner did not take appropriate care with regard to the values and principles of TA. Any examples given have been developed as an indication of good practice and are not intended to be comprehensive.

### **1.4. Principal goals**

1. Enhance a practitioner's awareness and thinking in terms of Ethics (values and principles, as well as norms and prohibitions) in order to create a frame of reference for analysing human situations.
2. Give to EATA members a clear framework of Ethics so that the practitioner have criteria to help them choose ethical positions and to use as a template to analyse practical situations.
3. Provide some examples of applications of ethical principles, derived from values, so that practitioners understand the relationship between the two and do not simply over adapt to a set of rules.
4. Demonstrate the necessity of self-reflection, by presenting values and ethical principles instead of a list of rules and required behaviours.

## **1.5. Commitments**

Because of the nature of EATA, which is an association of Associations, this article is written in two parts: the first part is specifically for the Associations, and the second part is for individual EATA members. Adoption of this Ethical Code is a requirement of EATA membership for both Associations and individual members.

### **1.5.1. Commitment of EATA-affiliated National Associations**

Each EATA-affiliated National Association agrees with this Ethical Code and commits to the following.

- To create their own deontological guidelines (these can be based on the EATA deontological guidelines) in accordance with:
  - the EATA Ethical Code
  - the EATA and ITAA professional practice guidelines
  - their national laws.
  - The national deontological guidelines must take into account the different professions of TA practitioners and cultural aspects.
- To ensure that each member subscribes to the EATA Ethical Code, the EATA and ITAA professional practice guidelines and to the national deontological guidelines, and uses them in their practice.
- To take care to resolve local situations when a member's professional behaviour is not congruent with their national deontological guidelines, the EATA Ethical Code and national laws.

### **1.5.2. Commitment of members of the National Associations**

Each EATA individual member, (usually as part of a National Association), agrees with the EATA Ethical Code and commits him/her self to:

- use it as a frame of reference for his/her ethical thinking and reflections, and as a guidance in practice;
- follow their country's deontological guidelines (guidelines of professional ethics), taking into account his/her specific profession.

Each individual is responsible for their own professional behaviour and needs to be aware of his/her commitment to the EATA community. If any behaviour is not congruent with the EATA and national deontological guidelines, it will be investigated and assessed by the National Association, which will determine sanctions if appropriate.

Each EATA trainer commits him/her self to discuss and reflect on this Code in all aspects of training.

## **Section II**

### **Core Ethical Code**

Ethics is a discipline that makes explicit the basic values that guide the thinking and behaviour of human beings.

*Values* come from an existential and philosophical perspective, are valid for everyone and contribute to the well-being of self and others. They are universal and transcend both cultural norms and the development of individual realisations.

*Ethical principles* are derived from values and indicate attitudes to assume in order to translate values into professional practice. Principles, because of their nature, need to be culturally interpreted. Some principles can be expressed in different ways in different cultures. They are also valid for each person who is directly or indirectly involved with that practitioner.

In this section, specific values and ethical principles will be identified and defined. The values are essential for all healthy human development, both individually and interpersonally, and therefore may be considered as fundamental human rights. Therefore the values described in this Code are congruent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>6</sup>.

Ethical principles are briefly defined. These need to be applied to practice by taking into account people directly or indirectly involved. Therefore, for each principle a list of possible issues is indicated that need to be addressed in order to behave ethically towards the client, self as practitioner, trainees, colleagues and human environment/community.

### **2.1. Basic values**

Value means what is fundamental for a human being to promote his/her personal development and fulfilment, and that of others. It includes reference to natural law that informs how people behave respectfully towards self and others. The following identified values are related to Human Rights, and are included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This frame of reference is also congruent with the existential and philosophical perspective of TA. Many values can be extrapolated, so the following list should not to be considered exhaustive by EATA members.

Considering the range of activities involved, the fundamental values are:

#### **1. *Dignity of human beings***<sup>7</sup>

Each human being is of worth, regardless of sex, social position, religious creed, ethnic origin, physical or mental health, political beliefs, sexual orientation etc.

#### **2. *Self-determination***<sup>8</sup>

Each individual is free to decide his or her own future within the national laws of their country, and with due consideration of the needs of self and others. Each person can learn from their experience to be in charge of him/her self, whilst taking into account the nature of the world and the freedom of others.

#### **3. *Health***<sup>9</sup>

Physical and mental stability is a right of every individual, and needs to be actively safeguarded.

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<sup>6</sup> This was proclaimed on December 10, 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>7</sup> Arts.1, 2, 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see appendix.

<sup>8</sup> Arts.18, 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see appendix.

<sup>9</sup> Arts.24 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see appendix.

#### 4. *Security*<sup>10</sup>

Each person needs to be able to explore and grow in an environment that enables a sense of security.

#### 5. *Mutuality*<sup>11</sup>

Each person, considering that he/she lives and grows in an interpersonal world, is mutually involved with the well-being of others, developing interdependency with others in order to build their own and others' security.

These values are directly related to each other and will influence TA practitioners in their own professional practice.

### **2.2. Basic ethical principles**

Because of the nature of values and their significance in human life, and in order to guarantee the respect and rights of each person, it is necessary to identify clear guidelines for behaviour, which are strictly linked to values. Ethical principles are derived from values and are intended as an indication of how to practice, in order to promote the well-being, development and growth of a person. They are prescriptive and offer criteria for ethical behaviour.

Using values as the starting point, it is possible to determine a set of ethical principles. The principal ones are:

- Respect
- Empowerment
- Protection
- Responsibility
- Commitment in relationship

Within the helping professions, ethical principles need to address many target groups in order to influence ethical behaviour. The main ones are:

- Clients
- Self as practitioner
- Trainees
- Colleagues
- Human environment/Community.

TA practitioners will consider each value and derived ethical principles, and self-reflect in order to decide what attitude to take, and how to behave in each of the target groups detailed above. The practitioner will analyse any situation, considering the influence of ethical principles on their practice, and choose behaviours that take into account a wide variety of factors e.g. client, self, environment etc.

After a brief definition of each ethical principle, there is a list that indicates points to

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<sup>10</sup> Arts. 22 and 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, see appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Art. 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights see appendix.

address. This will enable a practitioner to evaluate a situation and take responsibility for their choices. Firstly, there are examples of good practice developed in response to that ethical principle. The list gives criteria that need to be assumed in TA practice. The purpose of this list is to stimulate the practitioner to question him/her self, in order to translate principles into practice. It is not an exhaustive list, and each practitioner will find their own response, looking at the five target groups. This process will enable the practitioner to clarify the reasons for their behaviour.

1. *Respect* for each person as a human being, aside from any specific characteristic or quality.

- toward clients: the practitioner will fully consider and seek to understand the personal perspectives of every individual. The practitioner will help the individual to be congruent with the individual's own perspective. The practitioner will provide their best possible services to the client. The practitioner will provide a safe and professional environment and, being aware of the power of their position; will be careful to create a trustworthy environment, avoiding any situation that is exploitative to anyone, etc.
- toward self: the practitioner will take into account his/her own perspective/difficulties/preferences, and refer to other competent colleagues any client or situation that they are not willing or able to handle, etc.
- toward trainees: the trainer, aware of the level of learning of the trainees, will give adequate support, provide all necessary learning resources and be open to address his/her own teaching style in order to attune to the learning needs of the trainee, etc.
- toward colleagues: the practitioner will maintain an awareness of the professionalism of colleagues and, when there are concerns, will directly address them with the colleague. After listening to the response, the practitioner will make an independent judgment on the issue, etc.
- toward the community: the practitioner will take into account the specific culture of their community, and will not seek to impose their own values, etc.

2. *Empowerment* that emphasises the importance of enhancing the growth of each person.

- toward clients: the practitioner will commit themselves to work on developing the awareness in clients of their dignity, responsibility and rights, etc.
- toward self: the practitioner will maintain ongoing education in their field of speciality in order to expand their knowledge, and take care of their professional and personal growth, etc.
- toward trainees: the trainer will evaluate the competency of their trainees and enable them to develop their potential, growth and well-being, etc.
- toward colleagues: the practitioner will respect a colleague's contributions and create occasions to expand their professionalism, aiming to share competences, instead of being jealous of their

- discoveries, etc.
- toward the community: the practitioner will think in terms of wider well-being of the community, as well of the individual, etc.
3. *Protection* implies taking care of both self and others (physically, mentally, etc.), bearing in mind the uniqueness and the worth of everyone.
- toward clients: the practitioner will offer adequate services to his/her clients, providing a safe working environment (e.g. confidentiality, physical safety, informed consent for high-risk procedures), and will hold an awareness of any destructive tendencies of the client. They will not enter into, or maintain, a professional contract in which other activities or relationships might jeopardise the professional contract (G)<sup>12</sup>; they will maintain confidentiality even when the therapeutic relationship has ended (H), etc.
  - toward self: the practitioner will take care of their own values and learning process, and will refuse to work in situations that involve conflicts with self, or that require a higher level of competence. They will take care of their own safety and decide to terminate the relationship with a client if the practitioner experiences any physical or mental condition that impairs their ability to work effectively and competently with the client (K), etc.
  - toward trainees: the trainer will encourage trainees to recognise their own preferences and limits, in order to protect themselves and clients from inadequate or harmful interventions. They will stimulate trainees to take care of their personal and professional growth, looking at their personal styles and addressing personal issues that interfere with their own or other's safety, etc.;
  - toward colleagues: the practitioner will be willing to confront derogatory statements or actions by colleagues (B), etc.
  - toward the community: the practitioner will provide services to clients in full compliance with the existing laws of the country (I), etc.
4. *Responsibility* implies taking into account the consequences of our own actions as clients, trainers, therapists, supervisors, counsellors, etc.
- toward clients: the practitioner will make clear contracts and conduct the professional relationship in such a way as to bring no harm to the client when a client is unable or unwilling to function autonomously and responsibly (E). They will not exploit the client in any manner (F) or act in a way that causes intentional or deliberate harm to the client (C), etc.
  - toward self: the practitioner will consider the impact of their position on the client and be careful in the way that they respond to clients, in order to promote well-being and prevent abuse, etc.
  - toward trainees: the trainer will be aware of the learning needs of his/her trainees and provide them with the necessary tools and information to learn. If a trainee is not willing to change an unethical situation, they will confront him/her and decide a specific and ethical

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<sup>12</sup> Letters in parenthesis refer to the previous EATA Ethical Code.



course of action, etc.

- toward colleagues: the practitioner will accept responsibility for confronting a colleague if they have reasonable cause to believe that the colleague is acting in an unethical manner and, failing resolution, will report that colleague to the appropriate ethical body (L), etc).
- toward the community: the practitioner will hold it as a professional responsibility to be concerned with the psychological and physical health of their community, etc.

5. *Commitment in relationship* means the development of a genuine interest in our client's well being.

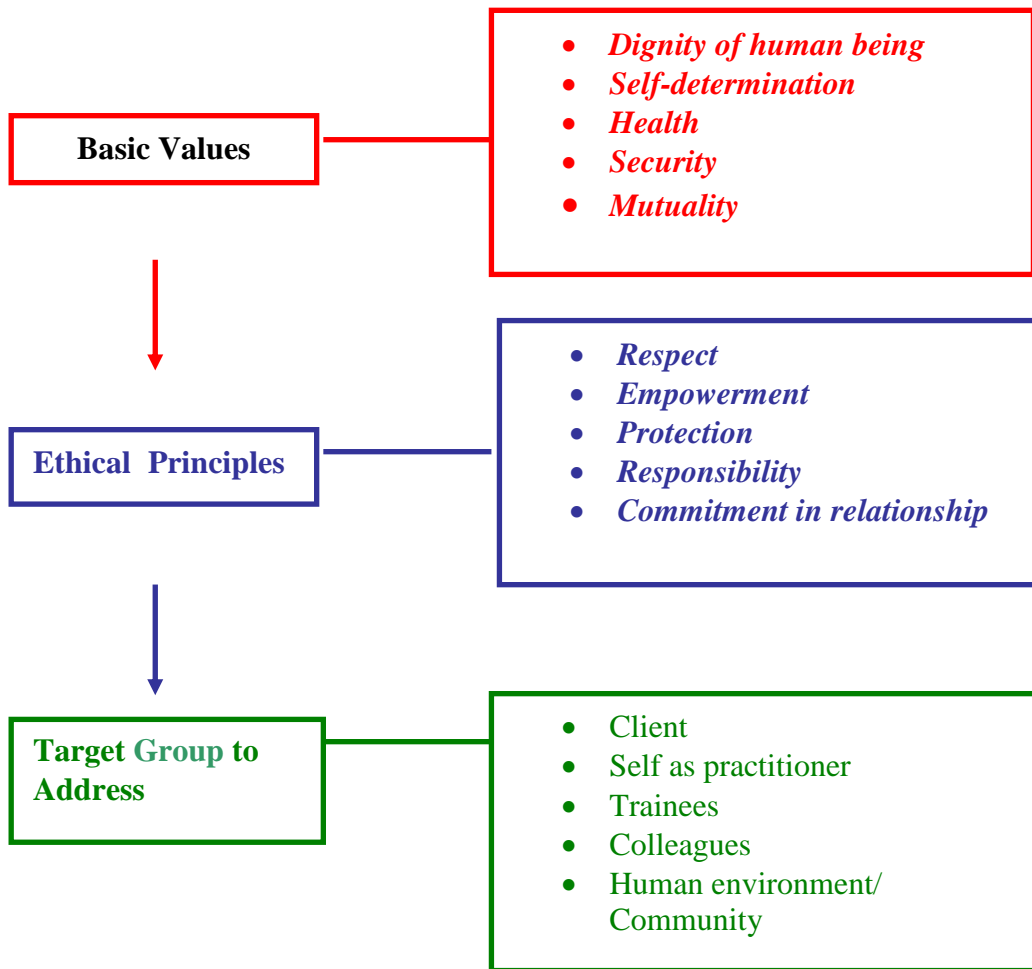
- toward clients: the practitioner will be careful to take into consideration the interpersonal world of the individual and to consider their impact on it, etc.
- toward trainees: the trainer will teach trainees to consider the interpersonal world of their clients, etc.
- toward colleagues: the practitioner will involve themselves in conferences, etc. sharing their contributions, etc.
- toward the community: the practitioner will be aware and active in the life of their community, etc.

In order to make an ethical decision, practitioners are supported by ethical principles, which enable them to evaluate different situations so that their choice of action can be a considered one. However, it could happen that practitioners will be involved in situations where it is not possible to reconcile all the applicable principles. Despite this difficulty, the practitioner will still need to look at the specific situation, consider the different perspectives and be accountable for his/her decision.

The following scheme (fig. 1) is a synthesis of the core Ethical Code. There are three different levels used to evaluate the situation in terms of Ethics:

1. Level one, *Basic Values* – applicable to every human being and universally valid.
2. Level two, *Ethical principles* – invites cultural interpretation and implies differences in various professions.
3. Level three, *Target Group to Address* – indicates the people or situations that need to be considered for ethical practice.

Fig. 1. Synthesis of the Core Ethical Code: three levels of analysis for ethical practice.



### Section III

#### From the Code to practice<sup>13</sup>

##### 3.1. Introduction

As previously stated, this Code intends to provide TA practitioners with a frame of reference to help them reflect on and analysed situations in terms of Ethics, taking into account the complexity of the human situation. In this way, practitioners will be able to make appropriate professional choices, focusing on values and principles, as well as norms and prohibitions. The Code emphasises the practitioner's responsibility in deciding how to intervene in his/her specific field, i.e. psychotherapy, counselling, educational or organisational.

The present Code underlines the importance of an ethical attitude that obviously needs to be expressed in ethical behaviour. It is intended to have a wide application in analysing situations in which a TA practitioner would intervene in his/her practice, in order to contribute to the growth of the client in his/her community.

Any EATA member (1.5.2) commits him/herself to use the Ethical Code as a reference in his/her professional practice and to integrate it with the deontological guidelines, according to their national laws.

This short section is designed to be a bridge to ethical practice. A graphic instrument is provided, which is helpful in visualising the complexity required in applying the Code to practice.

That tool – a grid for the ethical assessment – provides a challenge for each TA practitioner to develop his/her own thinking in terms of ethics, taking responsibility for choosing appropriate proper interventions, through an attentive and complex analysis and assessment of the situation.

### **3.2. A grid for ethical assessment**

The following grid (Fig. 2) represents the key points described in section II of this EATA Ethical Code; it is basically founded on the third basic assumption mentioned in the section 1.2 of this Code: Ethics identifies values that help people to realise their potential as human beings; values underpin ethical principles as guidelines to actualise values. Principles, which underpin deontological guidelines, are a guideline to professional practice.

Fig. 2: A grid for ethical assessment according to EATA Ethical Code

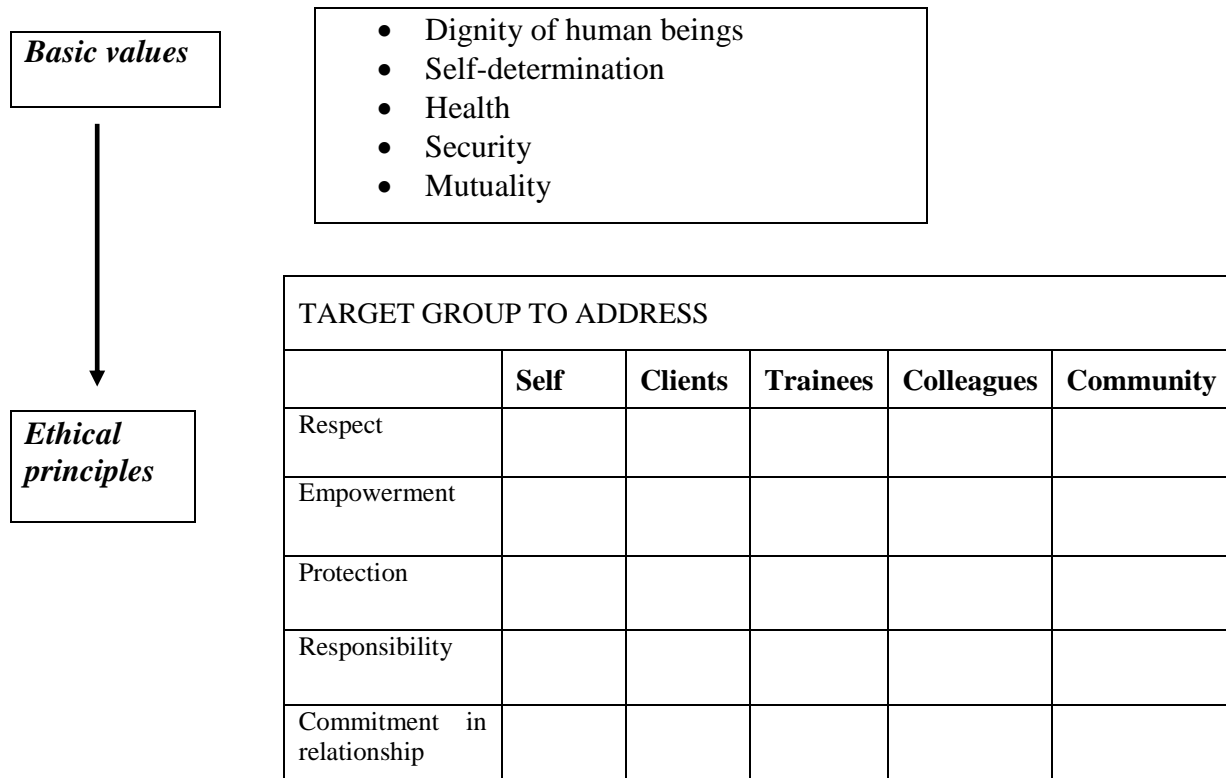


Fig 2 graphically shows that basic values constitute the basis and grounding for ethical principles that need to be applied in practice. The arrow from basic values to ethical principles illustrates the need to assess an issue first in terms of basic values. The next process is to identify ethical principles that are relevant to the situation, considering the field of application. This framework will be useful in orienting the intervention in the context of practice.

The lower side in the figure consists of a two dimensional table that underlines and allows visualisation of the complexity of the ethical assessment. We need to consider the ethical principles and different target groups involved in the situation, in order to evaluate which one(s) need special attention for the intervention. Often practitioners have to take care of different target groups and principles at the same time.

The practitioner needs to be aware of potential conflicts that will arise when choosing an intervention. The TA practitioner will take a deliberate decision, assessing the target groups in that situation (self, clients, trainees, colleagues, community), considering the implications for the persons, and taking into account their own views, sensitivities, histories, cultures and values.

### 3.3. Conclusion

Often coming to a proper ethical decision is a hard and serious process, resulting from a complex operation that the TA practitioner realises through his/her thinking, in terms of priority between important issues that need to be taken into account, in the light of basic values, ethical principles and different target groups to address in the professional practice. The perspective of this EATA Ethics Code increases the practitioner's responsibility and is

more difficult to follow than a check list of norms or prohibitions; as it takes into account the complexity of human life and the consequent importance to consider values, intents, attitudes, wishes and fears, together with behaviours.

## **Appendix**

### **Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, related to basic values**

**Art. 1:** *“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”*

**Art. 2:** *Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it is independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.*

**Art. 3:** *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

**Art. 18:** *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

**Art. 19:** *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

**Art. 22:** *Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.*

**Art. 23:** *(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*

**Art. 24:** *Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.*

**Art. 25:** *(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.*

**Art. 29:** *(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. (2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society. (3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.*