

Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology

Policy Advisory: Co-Signing of Psychological Reports

The issue of co-signing psychological reports has come to the attention of the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology as a practice which may be misleading to the public and may also constitute an ethical breach. Co-signing may be done by a psychologist or a non-psychologist and each instance will be considered separately. The Ethical Code referred to in this document is the **Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists**, 3rd edition, Canadian Psychological Association, (2000).

1. Co-signing of a psychological report by a non-psychologist

The position of the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology is that psychologists must make every effort to change the practice of non-psychologists co-signing psychological reports within the workplace. If support is required through this process, psychologists are requested to communicate with the Board.

Co-signing of a psychological report by a non-psychologist occurs most frequently in school psychology where special education administrators are often psychologists' supervisors. This also occurs in some health settings where other professionals may be the administrative supervisors.

Psychologists must be aware that their signature at the end of a report indicates their legal responsibility for the content of the entire report. Co-signing suggests co-authorship and shared responsibility. However, if there are any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the report, the psychologist will be responsible for the content of the entire report, even if parts were co-written by other professionals.

The Principal of the Ethical Code applying to this issue is Principle III, Integrity in Relationships: specific sections are under Accuracy /Honest statement (1)

“Not knowingly participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, or misrepresentation.”

and under Extended Responsibility (39)

“Encourage others, in a manner consistent with this Code, to relate with integrity.”

The easiest solution is to clearly state the psychologist's authorship of and responsibility for their parts of the report and for the non psychologist to state his/her role, such as reading the report and approving that it conforms with the employer's policies for authorizing its circulation.

2. Co-signing of reports prepared by candidate registered psychologists, or psychological technicians/assistants, psychometrists or another psychologist.

A supervising psychologist in an employment setting, may be requested to co-sign the reports of a candidate registered psychologist, a psychological technician/assistant, a psychometrist or another psychologist’s report. This can be a valid part of supervision, assuring the public the trainee or technician was closely supervised in test choice, administration, and scoring. Interpretations and recommendations are often generated collaboratively with the psychologist. With this direct client involvement, the supervising psychologist could validly co-sign the report, accurately conveying to the public co-authorship and ultimate responsibility for the report.

Without the psychologist’s co-signature the report would be misleading and misrepresentative, constituting a possible ethical breach under Principle III of the Ethical Code, Integrity in Relationships. Specific sections which apply are under

(a) Accuracy/Honesty:

1. “Not knowingly participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, or misrepresentation.”
2. “Accurately represent their own and their colleagues’ credentials, qualifications, education, experience, competence, and affiliations, in all spoken, written, or printed communications, being careful not to use descriptions or information that could be misinterpreted (e.g., citing membership in a voluntary association of psychologists as a testament of competence).”
3. “Carefully protect their own and their colleagues’ credentials from being misrepresented by others, and act quickly to correct any such misrepresentation.”
5. “Accurately represent their own and their colleagues’ activities, functions, contributions, and likely or actual outcomes of their activities (including research results) in all spoken, written, or printed communication. This includes, but is not limited to: advertisements of services or products; course and workshop descriptions; academic grading requirements; and, research reports.”
6. “Ensure that their own and their colleagues’ activities, functions, contributions, and likely or actual outcomes of their activities (including research results) are not misrepresented by others, and act quickly to correct any such misrepresentation.”
7. “Take credit only for the work and ideas that they have actually done or generated, and give credit for work done or ideas contributed by others (including students), in proportion to their contribution.”

(b) Straightforwardness/openness:

18. “Make no attempt to conceal the status of a trainee and, if a trainee is providing direct client service, ensure that the client is informed of that fact..”

(c) ***Extended Responsibility:***

39. “Encourage others, in a manner consistent with this Code, to relate with integrity.”

40. “Assume overall responsibility for the scientific and professional activities of their assistants, employees, supervisees, students, and trainees with regard to the Principle of Integrity in Relationships, all of whom, however, incur similar obligations.”

Conclusion

It is the Board’s position that co-signing practices must be undertaken with great care to ensure the public is clear on who is authorizing the report and who is ultimately responsible for the reports’ contents. Both the psychologist who is allowing his/her reports to be co-signed by a non-psychologist and the psychologist who is co-signing reports of a non-psychologist, candidate registered psychologist, psychological technician/assistant, psychometrist, or another psychologist must be cognizant of the ethical principles involved and the potential hazards to the public and themselves as psychologists.

Issued by The Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology in 1990
Revised August 2009