

Revision of Ethical Standard 3.04 of the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (2002, as Amended 2010)

American Psychological Association

The following amendment to Ethical Standard 3.04 of the 2002 “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” as amended, 2010 (the Ethics Code; [American Psychological Association, 2002, 2010](#)) was adopted by the APA Council of Representatives at its August 2016 meeting. The amendment will become effective January 1, 2017. Following is an explanation of the change, a clean version of the revision, and a version indicating changes from the 2002 language (inserted text is in italics).

REVISION OF ETHICAL STANDARD 3.04

A revision to the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (2002, as amended 2010) was passed by the APA Council of Representatives on Wednesday, August 3, 2016, and will become effective on January 1, 2017. After that date, Standard 3.04 will read as follows:

3.04 Avoiding Harm

(a) Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients, students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients, and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.

(b) Psychologists do not participate in, facilitate, assist, or otherwise engage in torture, defined as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person, or in any other cruel, inhuman, or degrading behavior that violates 3.04(a).

The Ethics Committee revised Standard 3.04 in response to a request from the APA Council of Representatives to consider a revision to the Ethics Code to incorporate the prohibitions surrounding psychologists’ participation in national security interrogations as set forth in a resolution passed by the APA Council in August 2015 to amend the 2006 and 2013 Council resolutions to clarify the roles of psychologists related to interrogations and detainee welfare in national security settings, to further implement the 2008 Petition resolution, and to safeguard against acts of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in all settings.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the APA Ethics Office, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street Northeast, Washington, DC 20002, or 202-336-5930.

The revision was the result of a recommendation by the Ethics Committee after a 60-day public comment period concerning two versions of a proposed revision of Standard 3.04. Following the end of the public comment period, the Ethics Committee engaged in a detailed review of the resulting public comments by approximately 275 individuals or groups. In response to public comment concerning the proposed alternatives, the term *torture* was defined by the Ethics Committee as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person.” In addition, the focus of the revision is on the behavior of the psychologist rather than on the setting in which the behavior occurs.

Ethics Code Standard 3.04 (Avoiding Harm) has been revised to include subsection (b) as follows:

Standard 3.04 Avoiding Harm

(a) Psychologists take reasonable steps to avoid harming their clients/patients, students, supervisees, research participants, organizational clients, and others with whom they work, and to minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.

(b) *Psychologists do not participate in, facilitate, assist, or otherwise engage in torture, defined as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person, or in any other cruel, inhuman, or degrading behavior that violates 3.04(a).*

References

- American Psychological Association. (2002). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct. *American Psychologist*, 57, 1060–1073. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.12.1060>
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct (2002, Amended June 1, 2010)*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>