

OFFICIANT CODE OF ETHICS

BRITISH COLUMBIA HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

Adopted by the BCHA Board on 2 May 2011.

This document has been prepared in consultation with the executives of the Ontario Humanist Officiant programs maintained by Humanist Canada and the Ontario Humanist Society.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

PREAMBLE

The British Columbia Humanist Association (BCHA) strives to honour the public trust in Humanist Officiants governed by the BCHA Officiant Program by establishing regulations for ethical practice as described in this Code of Ethics. These standards, which define professional expectations, are binding on Humanist Officiants and enforced by the Officiants Committee (OC), a committee of the Board of Directors of the BCHA. Specific behaviours or situations not mentioned in the Code of Ethics may or may not be considered ethical by the OC. These standards are not exhaustive. Officiants who are uncertain about the ethics of a particular course of action are encouraged to seek guidance from the Chair of the OC.

PRINCIPLE 1: RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS

- 1.1 Humanist Officiants do not discriminate based on sexual orientation, race, age, ethnicity, disability, gender, health status, or national origin, but may refuse service if proposed ceremony content is contradictory to humanist philosophical tenets espoused by the BCHA.
- 1.2 Humanist Officiants demonstrate respect toward clients and others without regard to sexual orientation, race, age, ethnicity, disability, gender, health status, national origin, or religious affiliation.
- 1.3 Humanist Officiants provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature, and limitations of their services.
- 1.4 Humanist Officiants deliver their services and respond to client queries, concerns, and/or complaints in a timely and reasonable manner.
- 1.5 Beyond charging an agreed upon fee for services, Humanist Officiants never use their relationship with clients for their own advantage or personal gain.
- 1.6 Humanist Officiants obtain documentation or a signed agreement for all services to be rendered.
- 1.7 Humanist Officiants comply with all applicable laws including, but not limited to, the Marriage Act and the Income Tax Act.
- 1.8 Unless professionally qualified to do so and in a contracted counselling relationship, Humanist Officiants refrain from offering counsel or advice, and do not engage in ministerial or chaplaincy counselling functions.
- 1.9 Humanist Officiants do not engage clients or former clients in sexual relations, including touching, other behaviour, or remarks of a sexual nature.

PRINCIPLE 2: CONFIDENTIALITY

2.1 Humanist Officiants respect the confidences of clients and their families, unless required to by law.

2.2 A Humanist Officiant whose license is revoked or who discontinues services shall turn over all Marriage Registers in their possession to the Governing Official of the BCHA.

PRINCIPLE 3: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY

3.1 Humanist Officiants commit themselves to maintaining competence as officiants.

3.2 Humanist Officiants seek appropriate assistance for any personal problems or conflicts that may impair their functioning as officiants.

3.3 Humanist Officiants maintain accurate financial records including but not limited to statements of income and expenses related to their activities as officiants.

3.4 Humanist Officiants do not harass, sexually or otherwise, their clients or former clients.

3.5 Humanist Officiants are in violation of this Code and subject to disciplinary action up to and including revocation of their license for any of the following:

- i. being convicted of any felony;
- ii. engaging in conduct which could lead to conviction of a felony or misdemeanour related to their qualifications or functions;
- iii. continuing to officiate while no longer competent to do so because of physical or mental impairment or the abuse of alcohol or other substances; or
- iv. failing to cooperate with the OC or an ad hoc Complaint Review Committee following any complaint and until the completion of due process and resolution of the complaint.

3.6 Officiants shall maintain proper dress and deportment that respects the dignity of the office.

3.7 Officiants shall faithfully and legibly complete all documents with regard to a Marriage Ceremony required by the Vital Statistics Agency including the Marriage License and Register.

3.8 The right of a Humanist Officiant to conduct wedding ceremonies ceases when the officiant retires, withdraws, or is discharged for any reason.

PRINCIPLE 4: RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

4.1 Humanist Officiants commit themselves to the respectful and responsible performance of their duties as set out in the BCHA Code of Ethics.

4.2 The practice of Humanist Officiants in the name of the Association is limited to the performance of rites of passage such as namings, marriages, and funerals, and the attendant care to those involved in these rites. This excludes providing counsel or advice, or engaging in ministerial or chaplaincy functions, even if qualified, unless engaged in a prior contracted counselling relationship or affiliated with another professional association for those purposes.

PRINCIPLE 5: RESPONSIBILITIES TO OTHER OFFICIANTS

5.1 Humanist Officiants maintain and demonstrate respect for Humanism and for the work of the Officiants, refraining from any actions, words, or behaviours that may be destructive to the perception of Humanism or the work of the officiants.

5.2 Humanist Officiants support their colleagues and maintain confidences offered by colleagues.

5.3 Humanist Officiants work with their colleagues in a respectful, cooperative, and consultative manner.

PRINCIPLE 6: RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE CEREMONIES PROGRAM

6.1 Humanist Officiants work cooperatively with the BCHA in communicating with the public and refrain from any actions, words, or behaviours that slight the Officiants Program or the BCHA.

6.2 Humanist Officiants have a duty without prejudice to report to the Chair of the OC any complaints reported to them regarding non-compliance with the Code of Ethics by themselves or other officiants. Confidentiality of complaint reports will be maintained.

PRINCIPLE 7: FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

7.1 Humanist Officiants do not offer or accept kickbacks, rebates, bonuses, finder's fees, or other remuneration for referrals.

7.2 Humanist Officiants who in the event of an emergency ask another Officiant to substitute for them in the performance of a ceremony may make whatever financial arrangements are deemed acceptable by them without prejudice to the client.

7.3 Humanist Officiants clearly disclose to potential clients all financial arrangements and fees related to their services and the procedure for obtaining payment.

7.4 Humanist Officiants who must cancel arrangements for a ceremony shall refund all monies received from the client.

PRINCIPLE 8: ADVERTISING

8.1 Humanist Officiants accurately represent their competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their role, including their affiliation with the BCHA.

8.2 Humanist Officiants ensure that advertisements, including but not limited to business cards, office signage, letterhead, websites, and directories, convey information that promotes informed choice by clients; do not compare their services in any way to those offered by other officiants; and keep within standards of good taste and discretion.

8.3 Humanist Officiants do not make claims that are false, fraudulent, misleading, or deceptive.

8.4 Humanist Officiants make themselves known as a "Humanist Officiant" and use no other title associated with this title or instead of it, unless authorized to do so and approved by BCHA in writing.

8.5 Humanist Officiants correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information and representation made by others concerning their qualifications or services.

8.6 Humanist Officiants do not represent themselves as providing specialized services unless they have the appropriate education, training, or supervised experience.

8.7 Humanist Officiants do not solicit prospective clients in ways that unfairly disadvantage other officiants.

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

BACKGROUND

1. This document is excerpted from the Officiants Committee Charter. For more details on conditions of engagement and dismissal of officiants, please refer to that document.
2. The BCHA Officiant Code of Ethics are posted on the BCHA website along with this statement:

Concerns relating to the performance of a Humanist Officiant as set out in the British Columbia Humanist Association Officiant Code of Ethics may be directed in writing to: Chair, Officiants Committee, BC Humanist Association, current address or by email.

3. Humanist Officiants are required to provide the following statement to clients and to submit a sample of how this is done to the OC:

If you have a concern relating to the performance of a Humanist Officiant as set out in the British Columbia Humanist Association Officiant Code of Ethics may, please direct your concern(s) in writing to the Chair, Officiants Committee, BC Humanist Association, current address or by email to officiants@bchumanist.ca.

4. The ethical and complaint resolution procedures below are intended to protect the public, the Officiant, and the integrity of the BCHA Officiant Program. The complaint shall remain confidential to the Committee, the complainant, and the Officiant in question until the nature of public disclosure is determined by the Committee and the Board.

PROCEDURES

1. Upon receipt of a complaint, the OC Chair seeks from the complainant any missing information, such as whether the complaint was discussed with the Officiant; clarifying information, such as important details not contained in the original statement; and any suggested resolution to the complaint.

NOTE: In the event that the Chair of the Ceremonies Committee is the Officiant in question, the Chair immediately relinquishes the position of Chair to another member of the OC.

2. Within 48 hours of receiving a complaint, the OC Chair informs the Officiant in question and requests a written statement of facts within 30 days. The complainant is given an opportunity to respond to this statement to provide further information or clarification. This response is provided to the Officiant in question who may also respond. Wherever possible, resolution of the complaint through the Chair in this manner is the desired outcome.
3. Where the complaint is not resolved in the above manner, the OC Chair will strike an *ad hoc* Complaint Review Committee, which shall have the authority to review the complaint and seek a resolution. All documentation pertaining to the complaint shall be forwarded to the members of this Committee.

NOTE: The Complaint Review Committee shall consist of three Officiants, one of whom is chosen by the Officiant who is the subject of the complaint. The second is chosen by the Ceremonies Committee Chair, and the third is chosen by these two appointees.

4. The Complaint Review Committee shall make one of the following determinations within 120 days of receipt of the complaint and communicate such to the Officiants Committee, the Officiant, and the complainant in writing forthwith.
 - a. Find the complaint is unjustified and dismiss the complaint;
 - b. Find the complaint is justified and initiate one of the following remedies: remind, counsel or caution the Officiant in writing if the Committee believes the Officiant would benefit from some advice or direction as to future conduct, and inform the complainant of such. Assign a mentor to the Officiant for a period of not less than one year to provide support to address issues related to the complaint and inform the complainant of such; or
 - c. Recommend to the OC the immediate revocation of the Officiant's appointment, either for a designated period of time, or permanently. If the OC agrees, the Chair will direct the Officiant to cease practice as a Humanist Officiant; request the Governing Official to inform the province of BC to revoke the Officiant's license; and inform the complainant of such. For a temporary revocation, the Officiant will be required to reapply for appointment at the end of the designated time period.
5. APPEAL PROCESS: If the Officiant subject of the complaint is dissatisfied with the decision of the Complaint Review Committee that results in disciplinary action or decertification, the Officiant may appeal such decision in writing to the OC Chair. The appeal must be submitted within 30 days of receipt of notice of the Complaint Review Committee decision. On receipt of the notice of appeal, the Chair shall constitute an Appeal Panel comprised of three members: the OC Chair; another member of the OC; and an Officiant selected by the appellant. Neither the appellant nor the Officiant requesting disciplinary action may sit on the appeal panel. OC members, including the Chair, must not serve on the Appeal Panel if they are seen to be in conflict of interest, as determined by the other members of the Panel. A BCHA board member may serve in place of the OC Chair.

The Appeal Panel shall adjudicate the procedural dispositions of the review process to ensure that it followed standards of procedural fairness.

If the Appeal Panel finds that the standard of procedural fairness was met throughout the review process, the decision of the Complaint Review Committee will stand. In the event that the Appeal Panel finds that the standard of procedural fairness was not met in the review process, the Ceremonies Committee Chair will inform the members of the Complaint Review Committee. Where possible, the Complaint Review Committee will reconvene to rectify any unfairness that has been noted. In the event that the Complaint Review Committee is unable to provide a standard of procedural fairness, a new Complaint Review Committee will be constituted by the OC Chair, and a new Complaint Review process will be undertaken.

6. If the OC appeal body rules against an Officiant, the Officiant may take their case to the BCHA Board. When considering appeals, the Board must first decide whether or not the procedures followed were correct, and secondly whether or not to support their decision. The decision by the Board shall be final.
7. All documentation related to a complaint remains on file as long as the Officiant is appointed by the BCHA and licensed by the province, and may be used in considering responses to any subsequent complaints.

8. The Complaint Review Committee shall determine whether both the decision of the Review and the content of the statement should be published on the BCHA website. A decision to revoke an Officiant's appointment permanently shall be so published.

HUMANIST OFFICIANT CRITERIA

All Officiants shall possess the following qualifications, which may be waived by unanimous vote of the OC. The Officiant:

- a. supports the principles of the BCHA and is familiar with the history of Humanism;
- b. has been a member of the BCHA for at least one year before becoming an Officiant and continues to maintain his or her membership as long as he or she remains an Officiant;
- c. displays a record of active involvement in the Humanist movement in BC and continues to be actively involved;
- d. is a compassionate and fair-minded individual who respects and values human diversity. He or she presents his or herself in a professional manner, has well-developed interviewing skills and can engage in empathetic, non-judgemental working relationships;
- e. has well-developed verbal and written communication skills and is comfortable speaking before small and large groups;
- f. has well-developed organizational skills, which include keeping up-to-date and accurate records of his or her services;
- g. has experience or skills related to running a small business;
- h. demonstrates a commitment to continuing education;
- i. has access to effective modes of transportation;
- j. understands that, regardless of past experience, his or her application to become an Officiant must be evaluated on the same basis as any other, and he or she may be required to take training before approval;
- k. will commit his or herself to establishing a humanist group, if there is none near his or her home; and
- l. agrees to engage in professional development activities, including, but not limited to, attendance at an annual Officiant Conference.