

Date: September 16, 2024

Topic: Coaching vs Therapy

Issue: While there are various educational and certification paths for providing coaching, there is no licensure requirement in the state of North Carolina that governs coaching and protects the public. For Marriage and Family Therapists who hold licensure in North Carolina and wish to provide coaching services, there can be confusion about the role, responsibility and ethics as it relates to providing coaching.

Position Statement:

North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapists are committed to upholding the AAMFT Code of Ethics and N.C. law. The AAMFT Code of Ethics is applicable to licensed Marriage and Family Therapists who provide coaching services as coaching is a procedure related to therapy. (See AAMFT Code of Ethics 1.2) In particular, Marriage and Family Therapists should be especially mindful of 1.2 Informed Consent, 1.3 Multiple Relationships, 1.7 Abuse of the Therapeutic Relationship, 3.1 Maintenance of Competency, 3.2 Knowledge of Regulatory Standards, 3.4 Conflicts of Interest, 3.6 Development of New Skills, 3.10 Scope of Competence, 9.1 Accurate Professional Representation and 9.6 Employee or Supervisee Qualifications. They should also be mindful of N.C. General Statute 90-270.60(a)(4). One of the duties of the North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapy Licensure Board is to investigate any ethical complaints. Therefore, should a Marriage and Family Therapist licensed in the state of North Carolina be investigated for violations as it relates to the therapist providing coaching, that licensee will be held to AAMFT Code of Ethics and the responsibilities that are contained by their license, as well as by N.C. statutory requirements. A licensed Marriage and Family Therapist cannot violate AAMFT Code of Ethics or N.C. law by defining their role and responsibility as coaching.

Recommendations:

- 1) Licensees providing coaching services as a marriage and family therapist in the state of North Carolina must fully differentiate coaching services in their informed consent. It is recommended that the informed consent explain what coaching is and is not. The informed consent should include the risks and benefits of coaching. The documentation of coaching sessions should therefore meet the guidelines of the informed consent under AAMFT Code of Ethics 1.2.
- 2) The informed consent should include the process of terminating coaching. Additionally, should the client decide to pursue marriage and family therapy after the termination of coaching, it is recommended the licensee open a new record for the client(s) including the informed consent for marriage and family therapy.
- 3) Licensees providing coaching services should screen for mental health needs and either provide the appropriate referral(s) for mental health needs or discuss providing therapy before coaching services begin and review the appropriate informed consent if mental health services will be provided in lieu of coaching.
- 4) Licensees providing coaching services should maintain the necessary competency in coaching including any relevant training, education, or certification.

- 5) Licensees should avoid all potential conflicts of interest or multiple relationships with clients. Should a client in coaching decide to pursue marriage and family therapy in addition to coaching, the marriage and family therapist who is providing coaching should provide referrals to the client for marriage and family therapy in order to avoid dual roles.
- 6) Licensees who employ other professionals in their practice shall truthfully represent the licensure and certification of their employees. If an employee is not a licensed marriage and family therapist, their qualifications and thus the services provided should be clearly explained and meet any applicable laws or regulations.
- 7) Regardless of services provided, marriage and family therapists licensed in the state of North Carolina will follow the AAMFT Code of Ethics and N.C. law.

AAMFT Code of Ethics:

https://www.aamft.org/Legal_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics.aspx

General North Carolina Statutes:

<https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/GeneralStatutes>

Laws and Rules for MFTs in North Carolina:

<https://www.ncbmft.org/resources-and-information/professional-resources/statutes-and-rules>