



spiritual directors international

# Guidelines for Ethical Conduct

REVISED EDITION

## Spiritual Directors International Mission Statement

Throughout human history individuals have been called to accompany others seeking the Mystery we name God. In this time, Spiritual Directors International responds to this call by tending the holy around the world and across traditions.

## The Purpose and History of Spiritual Directors International

Spiritual Directors International is an inclusive, global learning community that serves and supports the ministry and service of spiritual direction emerging from the contemplative traditions of many faiths.

Spiritual Directors International strengthens the multi-faith community of colleagues and those seeking spiritual guidance by developing programs, publications, and contemplative practices.

Spiritual Directors International began in 1989, in a gathering of spiritual directors of Christian faith at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California, USA. In the ensuing years, the community has become one of many nations and faiths.

Spiritual Directors International is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit religious education organization incorporated in California, USA.

## Guidelines for Ethical Conduct

Ethical conduct flows from lived reverence for all of Life, self, and others but is not inevitably the reality of every spiritual direction relationship. Therefore, these guidelines are meant to inspire members of Spiritual Directors International toward integrity, responsibility, and faithfulness in their ministry and service of spiritual direction.

### I. The Spiritual Director and the Self

#### *Personal Spirituality*

1. Spiritual directors assume responsibility for personal growth by:
  - a. participating in regular spiritual direction
  - b. following personal and communal spiritual practices and disciplines.

#### *Formation*

2. Spiritual directors engage in ongoing formation and continuing education by:
  - a. continuing to discern their call to the ministry and service of spiritual direction
  - b. nurturing self-knowledge and freedom
  - c. cultivating insight into the influences of culture, social-historical context, environmental setting, and institutions
  - d. studying sacred texts, theology, spirituality, psychology, and other disciplines related to spiritual direction.

#### *Supervision*

3. Spiritual directors engage in supervision by:
  - a. receiving regular supervision from peers or from a mentor
  - b. seeking consultations with other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.

### *Personal Responsibility*

4. Spiritual directors meet their needs outside the spiritual direction relationship in a variety of ways, especially by:
  - a. self-care, wisely balancing time for spiritual practices, work, leisure, family, and personal relationships
  - b. recognizing and addressing the difficulties multiple roles or relationships pose to the effectiveness or clarity of the spiritual direction relationship
  - c. removing oneself from any situation that compromises the integrity of the spiritual direction relationship.

### *Limitations*

5. Spiritual directors recognize the limits of:
  - a. energy by restricting the number of spiritual directees
  - b. attentiveness by appropriate spacing of meetings and spiritual directees
  - c. competence by referring spiritual directees to other appropriately qualified persons when necessary.

## **II. The Spiritual Director and the Spiritual Directee**

### *Covenant*

1. Spiritual directors initiate conversation and establish understandings with spiritual directees about:
  - a. the nature of spiritual direction
  - b. the roles and responsibilities of the spiritual director and the spiritual directee
  - c. the length and frequency of spiritual direction sessions
  - d. the compensation, if any, to be given to the spiritual director or institution
  - e. the process for evaluating and terminating the relationship.

### *Dignity*

2. Spiritual directors honor the dignity of the spiritual directee by:
  - a. respecting the spiritual directee's values, culture, conscience, spirituality, and theology
  - b. inquiring into the motives, experiences, or relationships of the spiritual directee only as necessary
  - c. recognizing the imbalance of power in the spiritual direction relationship and taking care not to exploit it
  - d. establishing and maintaining appropriate physical and psychological boundaries with the spiritual directee
  - e. refraining from sexualized behavior, including, but not limited to: manipulative, abusive, or coercive words or actions toward a spiritual directee.

### *Confidentiality*

3. Spiritual directors maintain the confidentiality and the privacy of the spiritual directee by:
  - a. protecting the identity of the spiritual directee
  - b. keeping confidential all oral, electronic, and written matters arising in the spiritual direction sessions
  - c. recognizing and disclosing to the spiritual directee the limitations of confidentiality of electronic communications
  - d. conducting spiritual direction sessions in appropriate settings
  - e. addressing legal regulations requiring disclosure to proper authorities, including but not limited to, child abuse, elder abuse, and physical harm to self and others.



### III. The Spiritual Director and Others

#### *Colleagues*

1. Spiritual directors maintain collegial relationships with other spiritual care providers and professionals by:
  - a. developing intra- and interdisciplinary relationships
  - b. requesting a spiritual directee who is in therapy to inform his or her therapist about being in spiritual direction
  - c. securing written releases and permission from spiritual directees when specific information needs to be shared for the benefit of the spiritual directee
  - d. respecting ministers, clergy, spiritual care providers, and other professionals by not disparaging them or their work.

#### *Faith and Spiritual Communities*

2. Spiritual directors maintain responsible relationships by:
  - a. remaining open to processes of corporate discernment, accountability, and support
  - b. appropriately drawing on the teachings and spiritual practices of spiritual communities
  - c. respecting the spiritual directee's relationships to his or her own communities.

#### *Society*

3. Spiritual directors, when presenting themselves to the public, preserve the integrity of spiritual direction by being in right relation with persons and organizations:
  - a. representing qualifications and affiliations accurately
  - b. defining the particular nature and purpose of spiritual direction
  - c. seeking opportunities to be spiritually available to the underserved
  - d. living in an ecologically responsible and sustainable manner
  - e. respecting all persons regardless of race, color, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, religion, spiritual tradition, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical handicap, any preference, personal characteristic, condition, or status.

### **For Reflection**

Spiritual Directors International recognizes that cultural and environmental factors may require these guidelines to be contextualized for different types of spiritual direction experiences. Spiritual Directors International encourages individuals, formation and training programs, religious institutions, health care systems, spirituality centers, supervision circles, and peer groups to review and re-appropriate these guidelines. To facilitate dialogue and re-appropriation of these guidelines, Spiritual Directors International offers these questions for reflection:

- a. How do you and your community define terms such as “spiritual direction,” “formation,” and “supervision”?
- b. How do you and your community understand potential difficulties associated with “multiple roles and relationships,” “imbalance of power,” “boundaries,” and “confidentiality”?
- c. How might the various guidelines contribute to the authenticity of your ministry and service of spiritual direction? Your community's ministry and service of spiritual direction?
- d. How might you adapt these guidelines in your particular cultural or organizational setting?
- e. What ethical concerns in spiritual direction do you and your community foresee that these guidelines do not address?

## Ethical Guidelines Task Force

Spiritual Directors International is indebted to the following people who served on the original or revision Ethical Guidelines Task Force:

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## Adoption Resolution of Ethical Guidelines of Spiritual Directors International

“There is unanimous consensus by the coordinating council that these are the official Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Spiritual Directors International. It is our joy to promulgate these guidelines for distribution. We hope that our colleagues will strive to accept these as their personal guidelines.”

*—adopted by  
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