



Comparing the BACP Ethical Framework 2018 and 2025

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework provides the ethical foundation for professional counselling and psychotherapy practice in the UK. The 2018 framework set out clear principles, values, and good practice standards. There is now a 2025 **draft** revision that reflects developments in ethical reasoning, collaborative practice, and contemporary issues (e.g. digital tools and power dynamics).

The framework is currently **not final**, a draft has been sent out for consultation, allowing members to give feedback.

Overview

Feature	2018 Framework	2025 Framework (Draft)
Title / Position	Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions	Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions 2025
Effective Date	1 July 2018	1 July 2025

Structure	Commitment to clients; Ethics (values, principles); Good Practice	Working ethically within relationships; Ethical principles; Core responsibilities
Emphasis	Duty-based commitments and good practice standards	Ethical decision-making and collaborative processes
Language	More instructional and prescriptive (“we will...”)	More process- and reasoning- oriented

Structural Changes

- 2018 focused on commitment to clients and specific good practice areas (confidentiality, supervision, endings, etc.).
- The 2025 draft moves to a three-part structure:
 1. Working ethically within relationships
 2. Ethical principles
 3. Core responsibilities

👉 This reflects a shift from fixed rules to a more reflective and relational model, encouraging practitioners to explain and justify their reasoning.

Ethical Principles

2018 Principles	2025 Principles (Draft)	Notable Shift
Being trustworthy	Trust	More explicit emphasis on trust as foundational

Autonomy	Respect	Broader, less technical language
Beneficence	Best interest	Simplified, more accessible
Non-maleficence	Do no harm	Clearer, direct language
Justice	Fairness	Consistency with wider equality legislation
Self-respect	(Embedded)	Integrated across principles
(New)	Confidentiality, Transparency, Collaboration, Anti-oppression, Compassion	Reflects contemporary practice

💡 Key advantage: Principles are clearer, more inclusive, and reflect current social and technological contexts.

Core Responsibilities vs Good Practice

2018 'Good Practice' areas have been streamlined in the 2025 draft into four Core Responsibilities:

1. Build appropriate relationships
2. Keep ourselves and those using our services safe
3. Understand and act on legal responsibilities
4. Deliver services to high professional standards

This removes some duplication and clarifies expectations for ethical reasoning.

Ethical Reasoning and Collaboration

- 2018: Practitioners guided to follow commitments.
- 2025: Practitioners must explain ethical reasoning - why decisions were made and how collaboration was attempted.

🟡 Advantage: Recognises the complexity of real-world ethical practice.

Power, Inclusion, and Anti-Oppression

- The 2025 draft introduces Anti-Oppression as an explicit ethical principle.
- Greater emphasis on relational power dynamics, equity, and diversity.
- Stronger expectations around adjustments, non-discrimination, and inclusion.

✅ Benefit: Aligns ethics with social justice and equality movements.

Legal & Digital Responsibilities

The 2025 draft strengthens expectations around data protection, digital platforms, AI, transparency, consent, and financial responsibility.

Supervision & Accountability

2018: Emphasised supervision as essential to sustaining ethical practice.

2025: Maintains this but embeds supervision within ethical reasoning and accountability.

Summary Table – Key Differences at a Glance

Theme	2018 Version	2025 Draft	Benefit
-------	--------------	------------	---------

Overall tone	Instructional	Reflective, reasoning-based	Empowers practitioner judgement
Structure	Commitments, Ethics, Good Practice	Working ethically, Principles, Responsibilities	Simpler, more flexible
Ethical reasoning	Implied	Explicit requirement	Greater accountability
Digital/AI	Minimal	Strong, clear expectations	Future-proofing
Anti-oppression	Implied	Explicit principle	Stronger inclusion
Supervision	Strong emphasis	Integrated into reasoning	Supports reflective practice

Final Remarks

The 2025 Ethical Framework as of now:

- Reflects a modern, relational, and reflective approach.
- Emphasises ethical reasoning and collaboration.
- Provides clearer expectations around digital practice and legal compliance.
- Supports practitioners to be accountable and adaptable.

 For counsellors and psychotherapists, this means integrating ethical reasoning into daily practice, recording decisions transparently, and staying current with digital, legal, and social developments.