



## Standards for Assessment in Substance Abuse Counseling

These training standards provide a description of the knowledge and skills needed by substance abuse counselors in the areas of assessment and evaluation. Because effectiveness in assessment and evaluation is critical to effective counseling, these training standards are important for substance abuse counselor education and practice. Consistent with existing Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards for preparing counselors, they focus on standards for individual counselors and the content of counselor education programs. The standards, which represent aspirations for competent professional practice, can be used by counselor and assessment educators as a guide in the development and evaluation of substance abuse counselor preparation programs, workshops, in-services, and other continuing education opportunities. They may also be used by substance abuse counselors to evaluate their own professional development and continuing education needs.

---

During training, substance abuse counselors should meet each of the following assessment standards and have the specific skills listed under each standard.

***Standard I. Substance abuse counselors are able to assess the effects and withdrawal symptoms of commonly abused drugs. Substance abuse counselors can:***

1. Assess for and recognize acute intoxication syndromes for commonly abused chemicals (i.e., alcohol, benzodiazepines, marijuana, cocaine).
2. Assess for and recognize withdrawal complications (i.e., seizures, delirium tremens, hallucinations).
3. Assess for and recognize the effects of cross-addiction and dual addiction disorders.
4. Assess for and recognize symptoms of inhalant use (e.g. the smell of fuel on clothes, red eyes, runny nose, cough).

***Standard II. Substance abuse counselors can assess the broad spectrum of concomitant disorders. Substance abuse counselors can:***

1. Assess for other addictive disorders (i.e., gambling, food, sex).
2. Determine if a psychological disorder (i.e., anxiety, depression, panic, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) was present prior to, or the result of, clients' substance use.
3. Assess for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (AD/HD).
4. Assess for suicidal or homicidal ideation.
5. Assess for the presence or possibility of domestic violence.
6. Use and interpret the results of adult and adolescent intelligence instruments.

***Standard III. Substance abuse counselors are skilled in evaluating the technical quality and appropriateness of testing instruments. Substance abuse counselors can:***

1. Identify acceptable reliability levels for instruments.
2. Identify appropriate types of validity for commonly-used instruments.
3. Evaluate the procedures used to validate commonly-used instruments.
4. Locate testing instruments and information about instruments for special populations (e.g. visually impaired, nonreaders).
5. Use computerized assessment instrument.
6. Articulate the limitations of commonly-used instruments within the substance abuse counseling field.

***Standard IV. Substance abuse counselors are knowledgeable regarding qualitative assessment procedures including structured and semi-structured clinical interviews. Substance abuse counselors:***

1. Are familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of structured and semi-structured clinical interviews.
2. Are familiar with qualitative assessment procedures (e.g. role playing, life line assessments, direct and indirect observations).

3. Understand the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative assessment procedures.
4. Understand the concepts of continuous assessment and wraparound services.

**Standard V. Substance abuse counselors employ multiple methods when assessing clients and monitoring the efficacy of treatment. Substance abuse counselors:**

1. Use paper and pencil or computerized instruments and structured interviews, as appropriate.
2. Whenever possible, consult with and interview family, friends, and other corroborating sources of information, while always obtain written consent to gather information from sources other than the client.
3. Monitor client progress throughout the counseling process.

**Standard VI. Substance abuse counselors are skilled in interpreting assessment results with clients. Substance abuse counselors can:**

1. Interpret assessment results in a helpful manner that emphasizes clients' strengths as well as possible problem areas.
2. Explain to clients the steps that are necessary to share testing results with others (e.g. informed consent).

**Standard VII. Substance abuse counselors are skilled in using assessment results to develop and evaluate effective treatment interventions. Substance abuse counselors can:**

1. Accurately score, analyze, and interpret the results of testing.
2. Create specific treatment plans based upon the results of testing.

**Standard VIII. Substance abuse counselors are aware of the need for professional development within the assessment area. Substance abuse counselors:**

1. Participate in training needed to keep abreast of new assessment instruments, procedures, and issues.
2. Keep up to date with advancements in the field of assessment by reading the appropriate professional journals, test manuals, and reports.
3. Join professional associations that provide relevant assessment and substance abuse information.

**Standard IX. Substance abuse counselors are aware of the appropriate use of assessment instruments in research. Substance abuse counselors use assessment instruments:**

1. To determine the efficacy of their interventions.
2. Appropriate for the intended population/clients.
3. In accordance with the American Counseling Association's *Ethical Standards, Code of Fair Testing Practices, Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests, and Test Takers Rights and Responsibilities*.

**Standard XI. Counselor educators and supervisors of substance abuse counselors-in-training are able to effectively train counselors in the area of substance abuse assessment. Counselor educators and supervisors:**

1. Keep current with scholarship related to how to teach counselors-in-training how to best use assessment instruments in their work with clients.
2. Are knowledgeable in the selection, use, evaluation, and interpretation of assessment instruments.

---

**Definitions of Terms**

**Assessment:** active collection of information about individuals, populations, or treatment programs.

**Instruments:** standardized or nonstandardized tests, interviews, rating scales, inventories, or checklists used by mental health counselors to better understand the client, the client's past history, the client's current social, employment, physical or interpersonal environment, the client's intellectual functioning, the client's personality, or the client's presenting concerns.

**Standards:** minimal levels of skill, knowledge, or training.

**Structured clinical interviews:** clinical interviews to individuals, couples families, or groups in which the mental health counselor asks questions precisely as directed by the instrument's author(s). Questions are posed in the order defined by the authors and responses are recorded according to specific directions.

**Unstructured clinical interviews:** clinical interview in which the mental health counselor is free to pursue related lines of inquiry to gain needed or pertinent information.

---

These standards were developed as a joint effort between the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE) and the International Association of Addictions and Offenders Counselors (IAAOC). The joint committee included Dr. Bradley T. Erford (Chair), Dr. Gerald Juhnke, Dr. Russell Curtis, Mr. Joe Jordan, Dr. Kenneth Coll.