

Marriage, Couple and Family Counseling Assessment Competencies

The Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling Assessment Competencies provide a description of the knowledge and skills counselors aspire to possess in order to be effective in assessment and evaluation. These assessment competencies, which represent aspirations for competent professional practice, can be used as a guide in the development and evaluation of counselor education programs, workshops, in-services, and other continuing education opportunities. The competencies are the result of collaboration between the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE) and the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC) professionals in the field and represent the only existing assessment competencies for marriage, couples and family counselors to date.

Competency 1. *Counselors understand the historical perspectives of systems concepts, theories and assessment methods that are fundamental to marriage, couple and family counseling. Marriage, couple and family counselors can...*

- a. Understand and articulate systems concepts, theories and historical perspectives that provide the conceptual foundation for marriage, couple and family assessment.
- b. Compare and contrast various models of marriage, couple and family assessments, and explain their unit of measure and the meaning of the results.
- c. Assess issues of gender development, human sexuality, intergenerational dynamics, and couple processes.
- d. Assess marriages, couples and families across the family life cycle (i.e., premarital, newlyweds, parents with young children, parents with adolescents, parents with adult children and relationships in later life).
- e. Assess a broad spectrum of concomitant disorders, such as addictive disorders (e.g. alcohol, drugs, gambling, food), and psychological disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression, panic,).
- f. Use and interpret the results of child, adolescent and adult intelligence instruments.
- g. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of various theoretical models of marriage, couple and family assessment and diagnosis.

Competency 2. *Counselors understand basic concepts of standardized and non-standardized testing and other assessment techniques. Marriage, couple and family counselors can...*

- a. Explain the differences between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment.
- b. Articulate the need for and use of environmental assessment.
- c. Understand and use performance assessments.
- d. Understand the use of individual and group test and inventory methods.
- e. Effectively make and document behavioral observations during assessment.
- f. Understand the limitations of computer-managed and computer-assisted assessment methods.

Competency 3. *Counselors understand quantitative and qualitative concepts of assessment. Marriage, couple and family counselors can...*

- a. Carefully evaluate the specific theoretical bases and characteristics, score validity, score reliability and appropriateness of the instrument being used.
- b. Understand statistical concepts including scales of measurement, measures of central tendency, indices of variability, shapes and types of distributions, and correlations.
- c. Use qualitative assessment procedures including unstructured, semi-structured, and structured clinical interviews.
- d. Select, use, evaluate, and interpret assessment instruments.

Competency 4. Counselors understand the strengths and limitations of models of assessment and diagnosis, especially as they relate to the assessment and evaluation of individuals, groups, and specific populations. Marriage, couple and family counselors can...

- a. Demonstrate clinical competence when assessing marriages, couples and families of various cultural backgrounds including differences in age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, disability, culture, spirituality, and other factors related to the assessment and evaluation of individuals, groups, and specific populations.
- b. Evaluate the accuracy and cultural relevance of behavioral health and relational diagnoses.
- c. Use various assessment methods that identify clients' strengths, resilience and resources.
- d. Ensure that computer-generated test administration and scoring programs function and are interpreted properly so that clients are provided accurate test results.
- e. Screen and develop adequate safety plans for substance abuse, child and elder maltreatment, domestic violence, physical violence, suicide potential, and dangerousness to self and others.
- f. Provide assessments and deliver developmentally appropriate services to clients, such as children, adolescents, elders, and persons with special needs.
- g. Apply individual, marital, couple and family assessments appropriate to specific presenting problems, practice settings, and cultural contexts.
- h. Accurately score, analyze, and interpret the results of standardized testing instruments.
- i. Conduct structured clinical interviews, obtain an accurate biopsychosocial history and assess intergenerational dynamics and contextual factors related to clients' family of origin (e.g., genograms).
- j. Apply qualitative assessment procedures (e.g., role playing, family sculptures, life-line assessments, direct and indirect observations) and understand their advantages and disadvantages.

Competency 5. Counselors use various ethical strategies for selecting, administering, and interpreting assessment and evaluation instruments and techniques in marriage, couple and family counseling. Marriage, couple and family counselors can...

- a. Act in accordance with the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2005), *Code of Fair Testing Practices* (Joint Committee on Testing Practices, 2004), *Ethical Code of the International Association for Marriage and Family Counselors*, (IAMFC, 2005), *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), *Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests* (Association for Assessment in Counseling, 2003), and *Rights and Responsibilities of Test Takers* (Joint Committee of Testing Practices, 2002).
- b. Select appropriate standardized measures based on developmental stage and interpersonal processes (e.g., couple, partner, family, system dynamics, or severity of presenting problems).
- c. Identify psychometric limitations when selecting and using an instrument.
- d. Follow all directions and researched procedures for selection, administration and interpretation of all evaluation instruments and use them only within proper contexts.
- e. Maintain test security and avoid prior coaching or dissemination of test materials, which can invalidate test results.

Note. In an attempt to create a comprehensive list of competencies, the list was compared to four existing documents: (1) Assessment standards under the "Clinical Mental Health Counseling" and "Marriage and Family Counseling" headings in *CACREP Standards* (The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009); (2) "Domain 2: Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis" in the *AAMFT Core Competencies* (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 2004); (3) "Section E: Evaluation, Assessment, and Interpretation" in the *ACA Code of Ethics* (American Counseling Association, 2005); and (4) "Section D: Measurement and Evaluation" of the *NBCC Code of Ethics* (National Board for Certified Counselors Code of Ethics, 2005).

References

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These standards were developed as a joint effort between the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (ACE) and the International Association of Marriage and Family Counselors (IAMFC). The joint committee included Dr. Jeffrey W. Garrett (Chair), Dr. Richard. S. Balkin, Dr. James M. Devlin, Dr. Bradley T. Erford, Brandé Flamez, Samantha Mendoza, Dr. Robert Smith, and Dr. Janet Wall.