

WHAT
TO
EXPECT
from Ethical Integrative Practice

PUBLIC REVIEW EDITION



A Guide for Students, Clients, Seekers,
Participants, and Community Members

• *Companion to the Integral Code of Ethics* •

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Ethical Integrative Practice

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PUBLIC REVIEW EDITION • DRAFT

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1. Why This Guide Exists

Integrative, developmental, contemplative, and metatheoretical practices can be powerful and deeply valuable. At their best, they help people see more clearly, relate more honestly, understand themselves more generously, and participate in communities and organizations with greater wisdom and care. Many people come to this work looking for insight, healing, orientation, growth, spiritual depth, practical guidance, or a more spacious way of making sense of a complex world.

This guide begins by honoring that promise. Many people who serve in these roles do so with sincerity, skill, humility, and real care. Many students, clients, seekers, participants, and community members have benefited greatly from such work. At the same time, powerful work deserves clear ethical conditions.

These benefits can be quite real. People sometimes find language for experiences they had long carried without a name; they may develop capacities they had not known were available to them – perspective-taking, honest self-examination, the ability to remain present in difficulty, a more spacious way of holding disagreement. Some encounter ideas, practices, or communities that change the direction of a life. When this work is done well, it can deepen honesty with oneself, sharpen attention to others, and enlarge a person's sense of what a life can be about.

The value of this work is precisely what makes its ethical conditions important. The same qualities that allow this work to touch identity, meaning, worldview, and belonging are also what make it sensitive; ethical practice protects that value rather than diminishing it. It helps ensure that insight serves freedom rather than dependency, development serves dignity rather than status, and spiritual depth serves compassion rather than exemption.

The Integral Code of Ethics is written primarily for practitioners and signatories: people who teach, coach, assess, facilitate, lead, publish, consult, or otherwise work with integrative and developmental frameworks. It asks them to accept obligations, practice accountability, and use their interpretive power responsibly. This companion guide is written for people on the receiving side of that work.

You may be a student in a course, a coaching client, a workshop or retreat participant, a member of a spiritual or developmental community, an employee in an organizational intervention, or someone receiving developmental assessment. You may simply want to know what good practice should look like. Or you may have a concern and want language for thinking it through.

A code of ethics tells practitioners what they owe. A guide like this should help everyone else understand what they may reasonably expect.

Your experience, after all, is a form of knowledge. You don't need theoretical training to recognize when you're being treated well or badly. Integrative and developmental work often involves powerful lenses: a practitioner may be helping you interpret not only what you think, feel, believe, or do, but how you make meaning, how you develop, how you respond to conflict, or how you understand yourself. These lenses can illuminate, but they can also distort.

Good practice should be recognizable. It should have a certain feel: clear, respectful, bounded, transparent, humble, and open to question. When work becomes challenging, you should still be

able to ask what is happening, decline what doesn't feel right, seek outside support, and retain your dignity and agency.

2. What Ethical Practice Should Feel Like from Your Side

Ethical practice isn't always easy, soothing, or comfortable. It may challenge you. It may ask for honesty, patience, humility, courage, or discipline. But even when the work is demanding, certain qualities should be present.

The relationship should be clear

You should be able to understand what kind of relationship you are entering. Is this teaching, coaching, therapy, spiritual direction, consulting, facilitation, assessment, mentorship, community participation, or something else? The answer may sometimes be complex, but it shouldn't be vague in a way that benefits only the practitioner. Ethical practice names the container: what is being offered, what isn't being offered, and what falls outside the scope of the relationship.

The lens can be named and questioned

If someone is interpreting your experience through a developmental model, typology, spiritual framework, psychological lens, organizational theory, or metatheoretical map, you should be able to ask what that lens is, what it can and cannot show, and whether there are other ways to understand the same situation.

You should feel like a *person*, in other words, not an example of someone's theory. A framework may illuminate something true about you, but it should never be allowed to exhaust who you are.

You can disagree

Disagreement shouldn't automatically be treated as resistance, immaturity, ego, shadow, or failure to understand the model. Your disagreement may be incomplete; it may even reveal something worth examining. But the practitioner should still be able to respond to the substance of what you are saying, not only interpret why you are saying it.

Consent is essential

Consent should be informed, ongoing, and revocable, especially when work involves developmental assessment, psychological interpretation, spiritual or somatic practice, breathwork, intensive meditation, altered states, trauma-sensitive material, personal disclosure, or public sharing. You should know what you are agreeing to and have meaningful ways to pause, decline, or stop.

Boundaries are visible

Ethical practitioners do not pressure people into unwanted intimacy, personal disclosure, unpaid labor, financial entanglement, ideological loyalty, sexual contact, secrecy, or forms of dependence that were never clearly agreed to. Healthy boundaries make deep work safer, not shallower.

Competence has edges

No integrative framework, however broad or sophisticated, makes a person competent in every domain. A teacher is not automatically a therapist; a coach isn't automatically a trauma specialist; a spiritual facilitator isn't automatically qualified to treat psychological distress. One of the most trustworthy things a practitioner can say is: "This is beyond my training."

Power should be acknowledged

Power exceeds formal titles. It can come through charisma, expertise, seniority, authorship, spiritual recognition, community influence, access to opportunity, control of information, or the trust others place in someone. Ethical practitioners do not disavow the power they hold simply because they prefer informal or egalitarian language. They make power visible enough that it can be questioned, bounded, and held accountable. *Power denied is power unmanaged.*

There is somewhere for concerns to go

Practitioners and communities should have some answer to the question, "What happens if someone has a concern?" The answer will vary: a supervisor, peer group, board, professional body, ethics council, restorative facilitator, or external authority. The important thing is that the practitioner isn't the only judge of their own conduct.

Above all, you should remain free: free to ask, doubt, pause, disagree, seek outside counsel, and leave. Free doesn't mean untouched, unchallenged, or unchanged, however. It means you retain your agency. Ethical integrative practice should help *deepen* your freedom, not diminish it.

The relationship may be ended at your discretion

A teaching, coaching, spiritual, developmental, or community relationship may have been valuable and still need to come to an end. Sometimes the work is complete; sometimes the fit is no longer right; sometimes your needs have changed; and sometimes trust has weakened. Where circumstances allow, a clear conversation can help bring closure. But you are not required to remain in a relationship in order to explain, justify, repair, forgive, or protect the feelings or reputation of the practitioner or community. A healthy practitioner may feel disappointment or disagreement at your decision to leave, but should respect your decision and avoid pressure, shaming, retaliation, or reinterpretation of your departure as evidence of spiritual or developmental failure.

3. Discomfort, Challenge, and Harm

Not all discomfort is harm. Serious growth often involves discomfort. A teacher may unsettle your assumptions; a coach may expose patterns you'd rather not see; a contemplative practice may bring grief, fear, anger, or confusion to the surface. Development can be demanding. Spiritual practice can be humbling, and honest feedback can sting.

The more useful question is what surrounds the discomfort.

When challenge is ethical, it is held in a container of respect. You can ask why something is being offered, say that an interpretation doesn't fit, decline a practice, ask to slow down, or seek another perspective. Your "no" is taken seriously, and your questions are not automatically treated as proof that you are failing the work.

Harm has a different quality. It constrains rather than challenges. It reduces your agency and makes questioning costly. And it may turn refusal into failure, convert objections into evidence against you, or pressure you to ignore your own perception in order to preserve belonging, approval, access, or spiritual standing.

A useful question is: Am I free within this?

- Am I free to think and feel what I actually think and feel?
- Am I free to ask, refuse, pause, disagree, seek help, and leave?
- Can I question what is happening without being shamed, pathologized, or punished?

Ethical maturity does not require perfection. Practitioners may speak clumsily, misread a situation, overstate a point, miss a cue, or respond defensively on a difficult day. What matters is responsiveness. One of the clearest signs of ethical practice is what happens when something is questioned.

Does the practitioner become curious? Slow down? Take the concern seriously? Make room for repair? Seek consultation? Or do they explain the concern away, make you the problem, or imply that your discomfort proves your lack of development, surrender, trust, or complexity?

Many situations are mixed. A teacher may have helped you *and* mishandled power. A community may have given you belonging *and* still made dissent too costly. A practice may have opened something valuable *and* still been held without enough care. You don't have to collapse these complexities into a single verdict. It is enough to begin by noticing.

4. Questions You Are Welcome to Ask

Good questions should never be treated as interruptions; they are part of the work. You don't need to ask everything below, and different settings call for different levels of detail. But when someone is exercising interpretive authority, you should feel empowered to seek clarity.

About the work

- What kind of work is this – teaching, coaching, consulting, therapy, spiritual direction, facilitation, assessment, mentorship, or something else?
- What is included, and what is not?
- What outcomes are being promised or suggested?

About the framework

- What model, lineage, or method are you drawing on?
- How are you using it to interpret my situation?
- What are its limits? Are there other ways to understand this?

It's a good sign when a practitioner can tell you not only what their framework reveals, but also what it may miss.

About qualifications and risk

- What training or authorization do you have for this work?
- What is outside your competence?

- What risks should I know about, and what support is available if something becomes destabilizing?
- When would you refer someone to another qualified professional?

About consent and boundaries

- Can I decline this exercise, participate differently, or stop after we begin?
- Will declining affect my standing, role, grade, opportunity, or belonging?
- What are the boundaries around money, labor, friendship, sexuality, intimacy, employment, or other overlapping roles?

A real “yes” requires a meaningful “no.”

About privacy and accountability

- What information about me is private, who may receive it, and what are the limits of confidentiality?
- If someone has a concern about your conduct, where can they go?
- Can concerns be raised without retaliation?
- Is there anyone besides you who can receive them?

Ethical practitioners don’t isolate people from outside support. Serious work benefits from multiple sources of care and perspective.

5. Patterns Worth Attention

A single awkward comment, defensive moment, unclear agreement, or poorly handled interaction may be a mistake rather than a serious ethical problem. What matters is pattern, intensity, context, power, and response. The following patterns are worth noticing because they can distort otherwise valuable work if they persist.

Developmental ranking

Developmental frameworks can describe real differences in capacity, perspective-taking, meaning-making, complexity, or maturity. The problem begins when developmental language becomes a ranking system for human worth or credibility: “You are not developed enough to understand,” “That’s a lower-stage reaction,” or “You will see it differently when you evolve.” Ethical developmental work should never make your basic worth depend on your assessed level.

Framework weaponization

A framework is being weaponized when it is used to win, silence, manage, or dismiss rather than to understand. You raise a concern and, instead of receiving a response to what you said, you receive an explanation of why you said it. Your objection becomes your shadow; your disagreement becomes your lack of complexity; your concern becomes your developmental limitation.

If everything you say is absorbed as evidence of the practitioner’s interpretation, you are no longer in a dialogue. You’re inside a closed loop.

Spiritual bypassing

Spiritual language can help people hold suffering with compassion and relate to difficulty from a wider space. It can also be used to erase what happened: “Your anger is just attachment,” “This is your karma,” “You need to transcend your pain,” or “Real surrender would mean trusting the teacher.” Your inner response may be worth exploring, but it may also be telling you that a boundary was crossed.

Complexity washing

Real situations are often complex. But complexity can also be used to dissolve responsibility. A direct question may disappear beneath so much meta-framing, polarity language, systems language, or conceptual elaboration that the concrete issue is never answered. Used ethically, complexity clarifies; it doesn’t bury the question. It should make responsibility *more* intelligent, in other words, not less visible.

Pressure to defer

Respect for teachers, mentors, elders, or experienced practitioners can be appropriate. Serious study often requires humility. But humility is not submission to unchecked authority. Be attentive when questioning the leader is treated as insufficient trust, when the inner circle is assumed to understand what outsiders cannot, or when questions are welcome only if they eventually confirm the framework.

The dynamics that end in serious harm often begin with unquestionability.

Secrecy and special access

Privacy and confidentiality can be appropriate and protective. Secrecy becomes concerning when it protects power rather than people or depth: hidden financial arrangements, undisclosed relationships, pressure not to talk to outsiders, private instructions that contradict public ethics, or confidential processes that prevent people from comparing troubling experiences.

A useful question is: Who benefits from this being hidden?

Blurred boundaries and coercive intimacy

Integrative and spiritual work can be relationally rich, and not every dual relationship is automatically wrong. But the more roles overlap, the more clarity is needed. Pay attention when a practitioner is simultaneously teacher, employer, coach, spiritual guide, romantic interest, business partner, landlord, assessor, or gatekeeper to belonging.

Deep work may involve trust and vulnerability. Intimacy should still be freely chosen. Pressure to disclose personal material, accept unwanted touch, enter sexual or romantic contact, offer special loyalty, or prove openness through intimacy is a serious concern.

Unpaid or under-recognized labor

Communities often depend on generosity, and voluntary service can be beautiful. It becomes exploitative when labor is expected, pressured, hidden, or spiritualized – especially when service, devotion, loyalty, or “contribution to the evolution of the field” is used to make refusal costly. Expectations should be clear, contributions recognized, and people able to say no without losing belonging.

Inflated claims and borrowed authority

Integrative work often deals in large terms: transformation, awakening, evolution, healing, civilizational renewal, higher consciousness. But large claims require care. Be wary of guaranteed transformation, exaggerated credentials, overstatement of scientific evidence, claims to unique access to truth, or implied endorsement and lineage authorization that may not exist. People make trust decisions based on such signals.

Covert assessment and retaliatory exclusion

Practitioners naturally form impressions and may need responsible consultation. Concern arises when psychological, spiritual, or developmental interpretations are made without your knowledge, circulated behind the scenes, or used to affect your standing, access, role, or reputation. Interpretations that affect your life in a community should not operate as invisible verdicts.

Retaliation may be loud, but it is often subtle: invitations stop, opportunities go elsewhere, warmth cools, and a story about the concern-raiser begins circulating privately. A healthy community may disagree with a concern or conclude that it is unsupported. It doesn't make concern-raising itself a reason for exclusion.

If raising a concern in good faith has cost you standing, belonging, or opportunity, that cost is itself the evidence that something is wrong – with the community, not with you.

Brilliance without kindness

A person may be intellectually brilliant, spiritually articulate, developmentally sophisticated, or charismatic in public and still behave poorly in ordinary relationships. Fluency with frameworks is not the same as ethical maturity. Watch what happens when someone is questioned, how they treat people with less power, whether they can apologize, and whether their presence helps others become more free. When the brilliance and the conduct diverge, believe the conduct.

6. If You Have a Concern

You do not need to be certain that harm occurred before you seek perspective. Ethical discernment often begins before there is a clear conclusion. You may simply feel uneasy, confused, pressured, diminished, or unsure whether something was handled well. That is enough to pause and pay attention.

Start with your perception, not a verdict

You do not have to decide immediately that a practitioner is unethical or a community unhealthy. Something may be wrong. Something may be misunderstood. Or something may be mixed: valuable in some ways, harmful in others. Treat your perception as information.

Write down what happened

A private record can help. Note dates, places, people present, what was said or done, what you asked for, and how others responded. If relevant, save messages, agreements, payment records, screenshots, policies, or public statements. Documentation can support formal processes, but it is also useful for your own clarity.

Talk with someone outside the immediate field

Speak with someone who is not dependent on the practitioner, community, framework, or organization: a trusted friend, therapist, mentor, clergy member, colleague, family member, advisor, or other grounded person. The point is not to find someone who will automatically agree with you. It is to hear the situation outside the same loyalties, language, and incentives.

Try describing what happened in ordinary language. Sometimes translation itself brings clarity.

Match the response to the concern

Some concerns need clarification or a conversation. Some involve a boundary or misattunement and call for repair or clearer agreement. Some involve possible misconduct – breaches of consent, misuse of authority, financial pressure, sexual or romantic boundary violations, coercion, retaliation, or unqualified practice. Some involve immediate safety, legal obligations, professional misconduct, or acute psychological distress and require formal or external support.

Ask yourself: What do I need right now – clarity, support, safety, documentation, mediation, formal review, professional advice, or emergency help?

Direct conversation can help, but it is not always required

A direct conversation may be useful when the concern is specific, the power difference feels manageable, you feel safe speaking, and there is reason to believe the practitioner will respond in good faith. A good response may not be perfect, but it usually moves toward curiosity, seriousness, clarification, responsibility, and repair.

If there is a significant power difference, a history of retaliation, fear of being shamed or reinterpreted, possible abuse, legal concern, or reason to believe the practitioner will not engage fairly, use another channel first. You are not ethically required to place yourself in a conversation that feels unsafe or futile.

Use outside channels when they are needed

Depending on the setting, there may be a program director, board member, ethics committee, ombudsperson, supervisor, professional association, human resources office, lineage representative, school administrator, retreat center director, or community process.

Some situations should not be handled only through community dialogue or a voluntary ethics process. Where immediate safety, legal obligations, professional misconduct, medical or psychological crisis, employment, discrimination, harassment, financial wrongdoing, or other serious issues are involved, appropriate external resources remain necessary.

Using outside resources is not a betrayal of spiritual, developmental, or community work.

7. What the Code Can and Cannot Do

The Integral Code of Ethics is a voluntary covenant and code of practice. Practitioners and organizations who sign it accept its principles, standards, evaluation practices, and accountability processes as binding ethical commitments.

The code is not a court, licensing board, employer, school, professional association, regulatory body, police agency, or religious judicatory. It cannot impose legal penalties, revoke licenses,

award damages, enforce contracts, or replace public systems of protection. Its authority comes from commitment, recognition, and community accountability.

People affected by a signatory's work have standing whether or not they are signatories themselves. A student, client, seeker, participant, employee, collaborator, volunteer, reader, listener, or other affected person may raise a concern about how the covenant is being upheld.

The process is meant to be graduated. Not every concern requires formal review. Some may be addressed through clarification, direct conversation, peer reflection, consultation, mediation, or restorative process. Serious or repeated misconduct, retaliation, exploitation, abuse, or ongoing risk may require formal review or external recourse.

Retaliation against people who raise concerns in good faith is prohibited. Confidentiality may be requested, though no process can promise absolute confidentiality when fair review, safety, legal duties, or risk to others require information to be shared.

The code has a restorative orientation, but restorative process is an option, not an obligation. A person who was harmed doesn't have to meet with the person who harmed them, forgive, reconcile, return to the relationship, or help someone else learn from the harm they caused.

The code should not be used as a weapon. It is not a tool for settling intellectual disputes, enforcing theoretical orthodoxy, punishing disagreement, attacking reputations, or consolidating factional power. Ethical language itself can be misused; a code designed to prevent framework weaponization must guard against the weaponization of ethics.

At this stage, the code remains a developing covenantal framework. Its signatory community, stewardship structures, and accountability bodies may still be evolving. It should offer what it genuinely has – shared language, standards, public commitments, and emerging processes – without pretending to possess institutional capacities it doesn't yet have.

A note for when there is no professional or institutional oversight:

Many valuable teachers, guides, coaches, facilitators, and community leaders work outside licensed professions or institutions with formal ethical and grievance procedures. By itself, this isn't a sign of poor practice. What it *does* mean, however, is that you may need to ask more directly how accountability is handled. Who can receive a concern besides the practitioner? Is there supervision or peer consultation? What happens if a disagreement cannot be resolved? Are there people outside the immediate relationship whom both parties trust? The less external structure there is, the more important it becomes to make these agreements explicit in advance.

8. Repair, Restoration, Reconciliation, Forgiveness

These four words are often used interchangeably, and communities can pressure people to move quickly among them. The Integral Code of Ethics asks that we keep them apart.

Repair means taking responsibility for what happened and addressing its effects – through acknowledgment, apology, changed behavior, restitution, role limitation, further training, public clarification, or structural changes that reduce the chance of recurrence. Repair is owed by those who caused harm or bore responsibility for the conditions that allowed it. *Restoration* means a process of truth, accountability, learning, and changed conditions; it should require the informed consent of those who were harmed and should never compel their participation. *Reconciliation* means renewed relationship, and can be meaningful when it arises freely – but it cannot be

required as proof of maturity, compassion, development, forgiveness, or spiritual attainment. *Forgiveness* is personal. It may come quickly, slowly, partially, indirectly, or never, and no council, community, process, or spiritual principle can demand it from someone who was harmed.

These distinctions are especially important in developmental and spiritual communities, where pressure to reconcile can arrive dressed as growth or compassion, and where refusal to forgive can be interpreted as a sign of stuckness rather than of clarity. Repair is an ethical obligation. Reconciliation is a relational possibility. Forgiveness is a personal gift. Each deserves its own freedom.

9. “To See More Is to Owe More”

The Integral Code of Ethics rests on a core claim:

To see more is to owe more.

Greater interpretive power brings greater ethical responsibility. If a practitioner claims the ability to see more deeply into your development, shadow, worldview, spiritual life, leadership capacity, psychological patterns, organizational role, or community participation, that claim increases what they owe you.

- Greater humility.
- Clearer consent.
- More careful speech.
- Stronger boundaries.
- Honest acknowledgment of limits.
- Accountability to others.
- Attention to the effects of their interpretations.
- Protection against the misuse of their own authority.

A wider lens should make a practitioner more careful, more answerable, and more open to correction. It should deepen their respect for the person before them.

Integrative and developmental frameworks can create unusual forms of authority.

Interpretations of stage, shadow, trauma, ego, resistance, worldview, spiritual realization, leadership capacity, or readiness can affect how you understand yourself and how others see you. They can affect belonging, opportunity, reputation, and confidence in your own perception. Such interpretations should be offered with care.

Seeing more should mean listening more. It should mean asking: How might my framework be shaping what I notice? What might it be hiding? How might this person experience my authority? Have I explained the lens I am using? Have I asked consent? Am I responding to what they said, or interpreting around it? Have I made it safe for them to disagree? Who can help me see my blind spots?

For the person receiving the work, the same principle means this:

- You don’t have to earn dignity by reaching a higher stage.
- You don’t have to become more awakened before your boundaries matter.

- You don't have to master the framework before your questions count.
- You don't have to accept someone's interpretation in order to deserve respect.

Your dignity is already present. Whatever anyone's framework makes of you – whatever stage you are assigned, whatever your reactions are said to reveal – you are owed honesty, transparency, consent, care, and respect for your dignity and freedom.

The principle also applies to communities:

- A community that speaks often about development owes more attention to how it handles disagreement.
- A community that speaks about shadow owes more humility about its own.
- A community that speaks about integration owes more care for the people and traditions it gathers.
- A community that speaks about love owes more honesty when harm occurs.
- A community that speaks about evolution owes more protection for those with less power.

At its best, integrative work enlarges the field of responsibility. It helps people see more connections, more consequences, more voices, more histories, more forms of vulnerability, and more possibilities for repair.

For students, clients, seekers, participants, and community members, this means something practical:

- You deserve work that deepens your agency rather than diminishes it.
- You deserve challenge without coercion.
- You deserve guidance without domination.
- You deserve community without enforced loyalty.
- You deserve spiritual or developmental support without the loss of your own voice.
- You deserve recourse when something needs to be questioned.

To see more is to owe more: more care, more humility, more truthfulness, more answerability, and more protection for the dignity and freedom of those one sees.

Quick Reference

Keep these questions in mind before entering a relationship, while participating in a program or community, or when reflecting on something that has already happened.

- Do I understand what kind of work this is, what it offers, and what lies outside the practitioner's role?
- Can I ask what framework is being used and question the interpretation?
- Can I say no, set boundaries, pause, seek outside support, and leave?
- Are qualifications, risks, fees, labor expectations, privacy, and overlapping roles reasonably clear?
- Is power acknowledged rather than denied?
- Can disagreement be heard without being pathologized?
- Is there somewhere for concerns to go besides the practitioner?

- When concerns arise, does the response move toward clarity, responsibility, and repair – or toward pressure, reinterpretation, secrecy, or retaliation?

The measure of a framework is not only what it helps us see, but how it teaches us to meet what we see. A teacher should remain answerable to those they guide. A community should make room for honest concern without making silence the price of belonging. And the wider the view we claim, the greater the care with which we should hold one another.

To see more is to owe more.