



Guiding Principles for Anti-Oppressive Practice¹

A set of commitments to be upheld by individuals working within therapeutic, training, and organisational contexts. These commitments interconnect and overlap at all times.

*To **guide how we work, learn, and connect with others** within therapeutic, training, and organisational **settings**.*

Context / Overview

Relationships are at the heart of therapeutic work. Anti-Oppressive practice is a way of being in relationship with others. It asks us to pay attention to who has power, and how it's used; to listen deeply to everyone, no matter who they are; to live with respect and integrity in the spaces we share with others. Anti-oppressive practice is a conscious and intentional approach to these relationships.

It happens on many levels at once. It begins with the personal work of reflection and unlearning; grows through the relationships we build with others; and reaches into the systems and structures we help to create or challenge. Each level shapes the others: our self-awareness influences how we connect, and our connections influence how we act in the wider world. Practising anti-oppressively means tending to all three, so that our inner work, our relationships, and our systems become more honest, equal, and humane.

These guiding principles are invitations to reflect; encouragement to speak openly with others and listen openly in turn; and reminders to take accountability for ourselves and the systems we have a hand in shaping. They remind us that everything we do is about relationships, which are in turn shaped by the wider systems in which we live.

10 Principles of Anti-Oppressive Practice

- Naming Structures
- Examine Power
- Centre Experience
- Practise Reflexivity
- Honour Emotional Truth
- Recognise Degrees of Safety
- Seek Equity
- Encourage Belonging
- Act with Integrity
- Share Power, Leadership, and Labour

¹ *These principles have been written and approved by a cross-organisational coalition. See below for full list of members.*

1. We Name the Structures That Shape Us

We begin by acknowledging that systemic and institutional forms of oppression are part of us, our institutions and structures, which are active and ongoing. We acknowledge this through action and pro-active change, by regularly naming and holding spaces to engage in discussing, understanding and dismantling these oppressive structures, and their impact, both in-house and with our members, students and external parties.

Forms of oppression are lived realities that shape how we navigate and experience the world. Recognising these forces helps us understand how power, safety, belonging, and opportunity are distributed, and how our work must challenge those inequities. This might show up as how safe or unsafe we feel in spaces, what we have access to, or how much space we take up or share of our own experience. These structures need to be understood in their social cultural political and historical context.

2. We Examine Power

Power lives in every space and relationship we enter — in our roles, our identities, and our interactions.

We acknowledge the use and abuse of power in relation to individual and organisational behaviour, including in relation to broader social structures like health or education.

Naming power, privilege and marginalisation is not an act of blame, but a necessary step toward justice and mutual respect.

We challenge and change existing ideas and practice. We consider who is harmed by our use of oppressive power. We commit to not continuing to replicate harm, whilst recognising that it may not always be possible to exclude ourselves from structures that harm.

We commit to noticing where power sits or is perceived to sit, how it shifts, and how we might use it with care and transparency.

3. We Centre Lived Experience

Lived experiences are informed through our individual and collective experiences and how we navigate being in relationships and in the world.

These truths must not be sidelined or pathologised, but valued and honoured.

We give equal weight to all voices, noticing especially those that are systemically silenced. All lived experiences are held in equity without any aspect of a person's Truth being marginalised, minimised or discarded. In every space we pay attention to how voices are shared and which voices are centred. We support marginalised voices to be heard in equality alongside majority voices.

4. We Practise Reflexivity For Intentional Action

Anti-oppressive practice is not a fixed skill but a way of being and an ongoing process of reflection, unlearning and learning, growth and action in our individual and organisational relationships. We remain open to feedback, willing to sit with discomfort, and a commitment to personal and professional growth through humility and accountability. We consider how our values affect decision making and actions, and practice self-reflection and awareness to identify our own biases, power and positionality.

5. We Honour Emotional Truth

We welcome, hold space and respect our own different emotions and feelings, and those of others, such as anger, grief, fear and hope. They are part of who we are and how we work. They are an inescapable expression of our humanity, resistance and lived experiences of being in the world.

6. We Recognise Degrees of Safety

We create spaces where degrees of safety can be felt. We can't guarantee that a space will feel safe for anybody. However, we hold the intention for people to experience safety with us. We check in with everyone if they feel safe within it, or not, and we recognise their experiences of safety.

Safety is created through our relational experiences in spaces. It is being honest about where we sit with our values and belief systems and recognising that spaces may not always align with our values and beliefs and may impact our experiences of safety. We communicate and take action about our safety, which may mean we step away when needed.

7. We Seek Equity in All Relationships

Oppression shows up in the spaces between us: in how we relate, respond, react, and communicate with one another, the assumptions we make about ourselves and each other, and who has access to which privileges or not. We commit to transparency, fairness, and attunement, understanding that equitable relationships are built through ongoing repair and care.

8. We Consciously Encourage Belonging

We can't take belonging for granted, and it can fluctuate in different contexts reflected in our experiences of being in the world. Belonging is a felt experience of being welcomed and wanted in a space where we experience equity in those relationships, and where we can share our lived experiences safely, and those shared lived experiences will be honoured, valued and respected.

9. We Act With Integrity, Not Symbolically

Anti-oppressive practice demands more than good intention. We proactively engage in doing the work needed to make effective and sustainable change that aligns with the principles of anti-oppressive practice. We work to influence the profession at all levels, from professional

bodies through to training and practice, within our scope of ability, so that structures and systems embody justice and equity.

10. We Share Power, Leadership and Labour

Transformative and sustainable change towards equity happens when power is shared. We commit to co-production, and to ensuring all voices are at the centre of decision-making, leadership, and the shaping of our collective future. We give equal weight to all voices, noticing especially those that are systemically silenced, and creating space for equity of voices. We recognise the unequal distribution of labour, which includes the tasks and it's connected emotional labour, to marginalised and minoritised communities. The work is often unrecognised and unpaid. We intentionally re-distribute that labour, and financial remuneration, to no longer perpetuate those inequalities. This also includes collectively holding the emotional labour of everybody, equitably.

There are currently 11 member organisations of the Coalition for Inclusion and Anti-Oppressive Practice.

- [Association of Christian Counselling and Linked Professions \(ACC\)](#)
- [Association of Child Psychotherapists \(ACP\)](#)
- [Black Psychotherapy](#)
- [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#)
- [College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists \(COSRT\)](#)
- [Contemporary Institute of Clinical Sexology \(CICS\)](#)
- [Muslim Counsellor and Psychotherapist Network \(MCAPN\)](#)
- [National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society \(NCPS\)](#)
- [Place2Be](#)
- [Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility \(PCSR\)](#)
- [UK Council for Psychotherapy \(UKCP\)](#)

Glossary

Attunement

When we talk about *attunement*, we mean paying close, compassionate attention to another person. We pay attention to their words, their tone, body language, and emotions. Attunement also means being sensitive to how power, culture, and lived experience shape what people need from us in relationship. For instance, a trainer or therapist might notice when someone withdraws in a group and gently check in, rather than assuming disinterest.

Belonging

Belonging is the felt sense of being welcomed, respected, and valued for who you are without having to hide or change parts of yourself to fit in. For example, someone might be 'included' in a meeting but still not feel they belong if their ideas are ignored or their identity isn't respected. Belonging happens when people feel both seen *and* safe to contribute.

Co-Production

Co-production means working *with* people rather than *for* them; creating ideas, decisions, or services together, as equal partners. It means sharing power so that the people most affected by decisions help to shape them. In anti-oppressive practice, co-production honours lived experience as expertise and ensures that change is built with, not imposed on, communities.

Embodying justice

Embodying justice means living our values of fairness and equity in real, everyday ways. It's about making sure our actions, relationships, and decisions reflect the kind of world we want to create: one where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. For example, an organisation might *embody justice* by ensuring that people with lived experience help shape policies, or by addressing harm openly rather than hiding it.

Equity

Equity means recognising that not everyone starts from the same place, and that true fairness sometimes means giving more support to those who have had less access or opportunity. In practice, equity is about removing barriers and sharing power so everyone can participate and belong fully. For example, offering flexible training times or accessible formats makes sure everyone has an equal opportunity to engage and succeed.

Institutional oppression

When we say *institutional oppression*, we mean the ways that organisations like training schools, workplaces, health services, or professional bodies can have rules, traditions, or cultures that keep inequality in place, even when the people within them don't intend to cause harm.

Integrity

We have integrity when what we say we believe matches what we actually do. Are we truthful, transparent, accountable, even when nobody is watching? In anti-oppressive practice, integrity means following through on our commitments to others, even when that requires courage or change. For example, a training provider might show integrity by addressing feedback about bias in course materials openly and making changes, rather than defending the status quo or ignoring the issue, especially if they say they're listening and open to change.

Marginalisation

By this we mean the ways that some people are left out, unheard, or made unsafe by the systems and cultures we live in. This can happen because of things like race, class, disability, gender, sexuality, or other parts of identity. It's not always intentional, but it shapes whose voices are centred and whose are not. For instance, when buildings are designed without ramps or lifts, many disabled people are marginalised. The same can happen in conversations, policies, or professional spaces when certain experiences or voices are overlooked.

Pathologised

When we *pathologise* something, we label someone's experiences or ways of coping as a problem to be fixed, rather than understood in the context of what they've lived through. Pathologising can silence or shame people, instead of listening to the meaning behind their pain. For example, if a person's anger about injustice is described as 'aggressive' or 'unstable' rather than recognised as a response to harm, their feelings are being pathologised.

Power Dynamics

This is about the ways power flows between people: who gets heard, who makes decisions, and whose needs or feelings are centred. These dynamics can shift depending on identity, role, or setting. For instance, one person may naturally hold more power, through their role, level of training or depth of experience. This can be equally true in therapy, teaching, management or other situations.

Privilege

When we talk about *privilege*, we mean the ways that some of us move through the world with certain advantages because of how society values parts of our identity. For example, someone might have the privilege of not worrying about being judged because of their accent, skin colour, or income.

Reflexivity

This means being able to consider our thoughts and actions, and adjust them based on new information. It means to reflect, learn, grow, and change from our experiences. In anti-oppressive practice, it means to listen to all perspectives and experiences, and to consider whether and how we might adjust or adapt our approach to structures, systems, and relationships in order to move towards equity and justice.

Reflexivity is an active, ongoing process to intentionally participate in every day.

Systemic

Systemic oppression means that some barriers are built into the systems we live and work within. These barriers aren't always visible, but they shape who feels safe, heard, and included, and who doesn't.

Unlearning

This is the ongoing process of recognising the beliefs or habits we've picked up from our culture or training that might cause harm or exclusion and consciously choosing to do things differently.