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# **Humanist** **Canada**

## *Officiant Code of Ethics*

Prepared by the Humanist Canada  
Ceremonies & Officiants Committee – Ontario

The Ceremonies & Officiants Committee—Ontario (COCO; the Committee), is a standing committee of Humanist Canada (HC; the Organization) that strives to honour the public trust in Humanist Canada Officiants (HC Officiants; Humanist Officiants; Officiants;) by setting standards for ethical practice as described in this Code of Ethics (the Code). These ethical standards define professional expectations and are binding on Humanist Officiants licensed under the auspices of Humanist Canada.

The absence of an explicit reference to any specific behaviour or situation in the Code of Ethics does not mean that the behaviour is not covered by the Code of Ethics, as the examples given are not meant to be exhaustive. Any allegation of unethical behaviour by an HC Officiant may be reported to the Committee. Officiants who are uncertain about the ethics of a particular course of action are encouraged to seek advice from the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee or Humanist Canada.

The Officiant Code of Ethics is expressed in eight principles with specific examples of the conduct expected of HC Officiants:

1. Respect & Appropriate Conduct
2. Privacy & Confidentiality
3. Competence & Integrity
4. Responsibility to Humanist Canada
5. Responsibility to Fellow HC Officiants
6. Responsibility to the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee
7. Honesty in Financial Arrangements
8. Truth in Advertising

The principles are followed by a set of procedures for resolving allegations of violations of any of these principles. In the event that a client, or fellow Officiant, or member of the public, believes that a Humanist Canada Officiant has violated any of these principles, they may send their concerns to the Committee or to Humanist Canada. The COCO complaint procedure includes actions the Committee may take to respond to a complaint. The complaint procedures have been developed to safeguard the interests of client, the Officiant, the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee, and Humanist Canada, and to treat all involved with care and respect.

## **Principle 1: RESPECT & APPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

- 1.1 In the acceptance of clients, Humanist Canada (HC) Officiants do not discriminate on the basis of race, age, culture, ethnicity, colour, national origin, health status, sexual orientation, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, political affiliation, or religion.
- 1.2 HC Officiants are not obligated to perform any ceremony that requires religious content. Religious content includes, but is not limited to, reference to a deity.
- 1.3 HC Officiants demonstrate respect toward clients and others by delivering their services, and responding to queries, concerns, or complaints in a respectable, timely, and reasonable manner.
- 1.4 HC Officiants provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature, and limitations of their services, and obtain signed agreements for services to be rendered.
- 1.5 HC Officiants charge reasonable fees for their services and do not compromise their relationship with their clients for personal gain.
- 1.6 HC Officiants comply with all applicable laws; including, but not limited to, the Marriage Act and the Income Tax Act.
- 1.7 Any HC Officiant who offers services other than officiating (e.g. therapeutic counseling, legal services, wedding planning, photography, videography, music services) shall maintain these services as separate from affiliation with Humanist Canada.
- 1.8 HC Officiants do not engage in harassment. Harassment includes, but is not limited to: improper conduct by an individual, that is directed at and offensive to another individual at any event or any location related to work, and that the individual knew, or ought to reasonably have known, would cause harm. It comprises objectionable act(s), comment(s) or display(s) that demean, belittle, or cause personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat. It also includes harassment within the meaning of the Canadian Human Rights Act (i.e. based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and pardoned conviction). It also includes unwanted behaviour with sexual connotations (e.g. sexist comments, invasion of personal space, unwanted physical advances). HC Officiants treat everyone with respect, regardless of faith or political affiliation.
- 1.9 HC Officiants, while acting in a professional capacity or otherwise, do not engage in misconduct that reflects negatively on the Officiant's honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, or suitability as a member of the profession.

## **Principle 2:      PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY**

2.1      HC Officiants respect the privacy of clients and their families. Officiants shall not reveal any information shared in confidence by a client to third parties unless permission is granted by the client to do so. If required by law (e.g. by subpoena), Officiants shall seek legal counsel and do as much as they can within the confines of the law to protect client privacy and confidentiality.

2.2      Any HC Officiant whose licence is revoked, or who voluntarily discontinues offering officiating services, shall return their Marriage Register(s) to the Marriage Office of the Registrar General (ORG). This should be done within 30 days of the date the licence is revoked or returned. Marriage Registers are the property of provincial governments.

## **Principle 3:      COMPETENCE & INTEGRITY**

3.1      HC Officiants commit themselves to professional development as Officiants. This includes, but is not limited to, attending one out of every two annual HC officiant conferences. The purpose of the annual conference is to promote collegiality and knowledge exchange among HC Officiants, to encourage individual contributions to the group, and to provide professional development opportunities. For this reason, it is not sufficient to attend only the business meeting portion, or only the professional development portion, of the annual HC Officiant conference.

Officiants who are unable to attend both portions of the conference must inform the COCO Chair. Officiants who miss two consecutive annual conferences without notice to the Committee, may be subject to immediate review of their Officiant status and may be subject to such remedies and/or penalties as the Committee deems fit.

3.2      If HC Officiants experience personal problems or conflicts that may impair their functioning as Officiants, they must seek appropriate assistance from a trusted and knowledgeable source. Any Officiant needing to take a leave of absence from officiating must inform COCO accordingly.

3.3      HC Officiants maintain accurate financial records including, but not necessarily limited to, statements of income and expenses regarding their activities as Officiants.

3.4      HC Officiants maintain proper attire and professional deportment that respect the dignity of the office and their clients, and refrain from wearing religious attire and religious symbols.

3.5 Any HC Officiant who is convicted of an indictable offense, or who is no longer licensed to officiate, or who officiates while impaired (under the influence of alcohol, prescription medication, or any other substance), or who is not competent to officiate due to cognitive impairment, or who refuses to cooperate with COCO in investigations of complaints against them, are considered to be in violation of this Code and subject to disciplinary action, including revocation of their licence.

## **Principle 4: RESPONSIBILITY TO HUMANIST CANADA**

4.1 HC Officiants commit themselves to the respectful and responsible performance of their duties as set out in this Code of Ethics, the Officiant Charter, and COCO Policies and Procedures.

4.2 The practice of Officiants in the name of Humanist Canada is limited to the performance of life passage rites, such as namings, marriages, funerals, and related ceremonies.

4.3 Humanist Officiants commit themselves to acquiring a thorough knowledge of Humanism, its history and its relevance to today's society. This may be achieved through independent reading, through attending Officiant conferences and other similar events, and/or through the completion of courses, seminars, or workshops on this subject.

4.4 HC Officiants are ambassadors of Humanism and shall be prepared to answer questions and speak positively about Humanism and Humanist Canada to individuals or groups.

4.5 HC Officiants are not, in any way, disrespectful or disparaging of Humanism (in general) or Humanist Canada.

## **Principle 5: RESPONSIBILITY TO FELLOW HC OFFICIANTS**

5.1 HC Officiants maintain and demonstrate respect for Humanism and for the work of their Officiant colleagues and shall refrain from using words or engaging in actions or behaviours that may be destructive to the perception of Humanism or to the work of Humanist Canada Officiants.

5.2 HC Officiants support their colleagues and maintain confidences offered by their colleagues that are not inconsistent with legal duties or this Code of Ethics.

5.3 HC Officiants work with their colleagues in a respectful, cooperative, and consultative manner. Section 1.8 also applies to Officiant colleagues.

## **Principle 6: RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CEREMONIES & OFFICIANTS COMMITTEE**

6.1 HC Officiants shall work cooperatively with COCO in communicating with the public and shall refrain from actions, words, or behaviours that may disparage the HC Officiant Program.

6.2 HC Officiants have a duty to report to COCO complaints regarding non-compliance to this Code of themselves or other Officiants. The Committee shall hold any complaint in confidence.

## **Principle 7: HONESTY IN FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

7.1 HC Officiants do not offer or accept kickbacks, rebates, bonuses, finder fees, or other remuneration for referrals.

7.2 HC Officiants who ask another Officiant to substitute for them in the performance of a ceremony may make whatever arrangements they deem acceptable without negative consequence to the client.

7.3 HC Officiants clearly disclose to potential clients all financial arrangements and fees related to their services and the procedures for obtaining payment for services.

7.4 HC Officiants who must cancel a service for a client shall refund all monies received from that client for that service.

## **Principle 8: TRUTH IN ADVERTISING**

- 8.1 HC Officiants accurately represent their competencies, education, training, and experience relevant to their role, including their affiliation with Humanist Canada.
- 8.2 HC Officiants ensure that promotional material (e.g. websites, business cards, or brochures) references Humanist Canada as the licensing body, conveys information that promotes informed choice by clients, does not disparage other HC Officiants, and is in keeping with standards of good taste, professional conduct, and discretion.
- 8.3 HC Officiants do not make claims in their advertising or in other materials that are false, fraudulent, misleading or deceptive.
- 8.4 HC Officiants make themselves known as Humanist Officiants and use no other title associated with their services unless otherwise approved to do so by COCO.
- 8.5 HC Officiants make efforts to correct, wherever possible, false, misleading, or inaccurate information and representations made by others concerning their qualifications or services.
- 8.6 HC Officiants do not use their affiliation with Humanist Canada to advertise services other than their Officiant services. See also section 1.7.
- 8.7 HC Officiants do not solicit prospective clients in ways that disparage or are antagonistic to other HC Officiants.

## CONCERNS ABOUT HC OFFICIANT CONDUCT

The Officiant Code of Ethics is posted on the Officiant pages of the Humanist Canada website and it is viewable by HC Officiants in good standing. Those who wish to send a complaint may contact the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee or the Board of Humanist Canada. Contact information for this purpose is provided in the Officiants-only section of the HC website, and on the publicly-accessible pages of the website with the following statement:

*Concerns about the conduct of a Humanist Canada Officiant must be directed in writing to:*

Chair, Ceremonies & Officiants Committee  
Humanist Canada  
251 Laurier Ave West, Suite 900  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J6  
Email: [info@humanistcanada.ca](mailto:info@humanistcanada.ca)

Humanist Canada Officiants shall inform their clients about the complaint resolution procedures as follows:

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of a Humanist Canada Officiant, please direct your concerns in writing to:*

Chair, Ceremonies & Officiants Committee  
Humanist Canada  
251 Laurier Ave West, Suite 900  
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J6  
Email: [info@humanistcanada.ca](mailto:info@humanistcanada.ca)



# COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

The complaint resolution procedures outlined below are intended to protect the public, Humanist Canada Officiants, and the integrity of the HC Officiant Program. Any complaint shall remain confidential to the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee, the complainant, the HC Officiant, and other relevant parties involved, during the course of any investigation.

Upon completion of the investigation, the extent of disclosure of the Committee's decision and relevant details shall be recommended by the COCO and the Board for appropriate action.

1. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Committee shall seek a complete account from the complainant, including whether the complaint was discussed with the Officiant in question, and what suggested resolution was made by said Officiant.

**Note:** In the event that the Officiant in question is on the Ceremonies and Officiants Committee, said Officiant shall step down from COCO for the duration of the investigation and the Committee may choose to appoint another Committee member in the interim.

2. Within 48 hours of receiving a complaint, the Chair of the Committee shall inform the HC Officiant named in the complaint and request a written response within thirty (30) days. The complainant will be given an opportunity to respond to the complaint. The complainant will then be informed of the response and given an opportunity to add any additional information. Said Officiant will also be given an opportunity to present and/or respond to any new information including information provided by the complainant. Wherever possible, resolution of the complaint will be managed by the Chair of COCO.
3. In the event that the complaint cannot be resolved by the Chair, all written documentation on the complaint shall be forwarded by the Chair to the rest of COCO. If the issue remains unresolved, then the Board of Humanist Canada is notified. The Board may appoint an ad hoc sub-committee, consisting of three HC Officiants in good standing (one of whom may be chosen by the subject of the investigation) who have no previous involvement with the complaint. The COCO Chair shall provide the ad hoc committee with all the documentation related to the complaint and empower them to review the complaint and seek a resolution.

4. The Ceremonies and Officiants Committee, or the ad-hoc sub-committee, shall make one of the following determinations within ninety (90) days of receipt of the complaint and communicate their decision to the Officiant in question and to the complainant in writing:
  - a) Find the complaint is unjustified and inform both the complainant and the Officiant of this decision;
  - b) Find the complaint is justified and inform both the complainant and the Officiant of the recommended resolution based on the nature and severity of the behaviour in question:

**Minor incidents** (e.g. behaviour causing temporary or isolated stress and/or inconvenience) warrant actions such as:

- ▶ Sending a letter of reprimand to the Officiant in question requiring a formal apology to be issued to the complainant.
- ▶ Requiring the Officiant make other compensation to the complainant if indicated (e.g. full or partial refund of payment for services).
- ▶ Direct the Officiant to take remedial professional development at the Officiant's own expense as determined by COCO.

**Major incidents** (e.g. behaviour causing lasting or serious stress or harm) warrant additional actions such as:

- ▶ Directing the Officiant to attend the next available HC Officiant training at the Officiant's own expense.
- ▶ Recommending to the Board that the Officiant's license to solemnize marriages be temporarily or permanently revoked.
- ▶ Notifying the proper authorities if illegal or criminal behavior is suspected in the context of the complaint.

5. Decisions of the ad hoc sub-committee, and/or COCO, may be appealed by either the complainant or the Officiant if they have new information or evidence they believe will affect the Committee and/or the Board's decision. An appeal shall be heard by three (3) Officiants who have not been previously involved in the inquiry. Their decision, pending HC Board approval, shall be final.

6. If the determination is made that the HC Officiant's licence be temporarily or permanently revoked, the COCO Chair shall recommend this action to the HC Board. The Board shall review the report from the Committee and decide whether to approve the revocation. If the HC Board does not approve, they may suggest another course of action.
7. To temporarily or permanently revoke an HC Officiant's licence, the COCO Chair shall ask the Governing Official to inform the Marriage Office of the Registrar General. After the Registrar indicates that the licence has been revoked, the Governing Official shall ensure that the HC Officiant in question no longer appears on the provincial list of registered officials authorized to solemnize marriages.
8. Should an HC Officiant's licence be temporarily revoked by Humanist Canada, the COCO Chair and the HC Board shall come to an agreement about the duration of the suspension. At the end of this period, the Officiant in question may be required to re-apply for appointment with Humanist Canada.
9. Should an HC Officiant's licence be permanently revoked by Humanist Canada, the HC Board may publish this decision at their discretion.
10. All documentation related to a complaint remains on file as long as the Officiant is licensed by Humanist Canada and may be used in considering responses to any future complaints.