

## **Fact sheet:**

# Professional competencies for psychologists

**Understanding Competency 3:** Exercises professional reflexivity, purposeful and deliberate practice, and self-care

## Background

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* include a focus on practitioners exercising:

- professional reflection and reflexivity
- purposeful and deliberate practice, and
- managing their wellbeing and self-care.

These are all essential components of practising professionally and safely and in a sustainable way that reduces risks to clients, others and the practitioner themselves.

While these competencies are already generally established within the psychology profession, and are noted in some of the Psychology Board of Australia's (the Board) other documents, they have been intentionally strengthened and explicitly included in the *Professional competencies for psychologists*.

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* are in effect from 1 December 2025.

## What are the key features of safe, effective and competent practice?

### Competency 3.1

Understands the parameters underpinning professional competence and can articulate the knowledge, skills and other attributes necessary to practise effectively and safely.

### Competency 3.2

Recognises the limits of own competence and refers on to other practitioners.

### Competency 3.3

Critically evaluates the effectiveness of own professional practice and strengths and weaknesses, including regularly self-assessing against the professional competencies.

### Competency 3.4

Engages in reflection and reflexivity on the impact of one's own culture, values, beliefs and biases, and acts upon such reflection and ensures practice is responsive and adaptive to client, context and culture.

### Competency 3.6

Identifies areas for improvement in their professional practice, competence and conduct, and implements activities to enhance competence and development of professional identity.

### Competency 3.7

Monitors and manages self-care to sustain professional functioning and wellbeing.

## Other competencies that are relevant to Competency 3 include:

Competency 7.4 Recognises the impact of one's own values, beliefs, experiences, positionality and cultural identity on practice and demonstrates an ongoing commitment to culturally responsive practice.

Competency 7.5 Demonstrates the ability to reflect on and learn from clients/relevant others and their unique experiences.

Competency 8.5 Demonstrates the ability to reflect on and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Aboriginal knowledges.

The professional competencies place an emphasis on the importance for psychologists to engage in ongoing reflective and reflexive learning about working with people from diverse groups.

## What does this mean for practitioners?

Psychologists practising in Australia are required to engage in meaningful reflective and reflexive professional practice to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to practise effectively and safely.

We expect practitioners to engage in purposeful and deliberate practice to improve performance within their scope of practice, and to extend scope of practice when expanding or changing their practice or work context.

Practitioners should engage in effective self-care strategies to ensure they are able to sustain their professional functioning and wellbeing.

Reflection, reflexivity, purposeful and deliberate practice and self-care are relevant across all eight competencies. This means that we expect psychologists to be proactive about integrating these competencies across all aspects of their practice.

Practitioners should use their professional judgement when applying these standards.

You are required to meet the *Professional competencies for psychologists* as relevant to your scope of practice.

## What does reflection mean?

**Reflection** is the examination of an event or action to inform and improve a process of continual learning and enhancement of professional practice. It involves the practitioner's exploration of their perspectives about the occasion or event, as well as considering how others may have perceived the situation and the practitioner. The process requires being open to observation and feedback from others and to pursuing new knowledge and information to enhance learning from the reflection.

## What does reflexivity mean?

**Reflexivity** is an examination of the self; questioning and acknowledging our own attitudes, experiences, ways of thinking values and motivation, prejudices and actions, to inform how we understand our impact on and interactions with others. Reflexivity involves pursuing self-awareness of our personal limitations, deficits, biases and how these might intentionally or unintentionally affect others and our practice.

Reflexivity is a continual process that can inform reflection but also goes beyond it to consider how our own realities shape, and are shaped by, our surroundings and broader organisational and societal contexts.

Practitioners are expected to engage in both reflective and reflexive practice.

## What is purposeful and deliberate practice?

**Purposeful and deliberate practice** is a systematic practice that involves focused attention and observation, identifying and breaking down the task to be learned into manageable parts, and mindful and intentional practice (repetition) of the desired skill. It is done with a specific goal of improving performance, and feedback about performance is sought.

While there are specific deliberate practice models in the literature, the Board uses a broader definition, and does not require adherence to a particular model.

Purposeful and deliberate practice involves:

- active learning
- self-assessment of performance and identifying learning goals
- seeking advice from your colleagues and supervisor on performance
- deliberately working on areas of your practice that need improvement
- addressing areas of practice that you might prefer to avoid attending to
- practising skills just beyond your current level of skills
- reflection and reflexivity, and
- self-care.

Strategies that encourage deliberate practice include:

- direct observation of your work by a supervisor or colleague/s
- review of audio or video recordings of your work
- using client outcomes to identify learning areas
- role playing with your supervisor and/or colleagues

- intentional conversations with your supervisor and/or colleagues
- intentional practice of skills you want to improve, and
- immersive training (e.g. master class) with follow-up consultation and performance review.

## What is self-care?

Self-care is the process of taking care of oneself with behaviours that promote health and wellbeing in both a personal and professional capacity and includes active management of illness when it occurs. Self-care strategies are value-driven and principle-based and support different aspects of health and wellbeing, including professional, psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual, social and lifestyle.

Self-care is important for safe and effective psychological practice because it:

- enables a sustainable work-life balance
- mitigates the work stressors for psychologists (e.g. vicarious traumatisation, burnout)
- helps manage practitioner health and mental health issues (e.g. addictions, health impairment)
- ensures best practice when working with clients, and
- avoids situations that could result in impaired judgement, interfere with the ability to benefit and not harm clients, or lead to sub-par practice or professional misconduct.

## Case study

After a recent workplace review, Marsha discovers that she has a higher client dropout rate than some of her colleagues. She is surprised and concerned about this and decides to discuss it with her supervisor. Together they decide to take a deep dive into the client files to investigate why. She uncovers that in almost all of the cases, her clients stopped coming to therapy after strongly expressing anger.

On reflection and discussion with her supervisor, Marsha realises that she feels highly anxious when her clients become angry, particularly if they express frustration towards her. She is concerned that her response to her client's anger is unintentionally affecting her clients. Marsha wants to enhance her professional practice, so she includes managing her own anxiety and responding therapeutically to her client's anger on her learning plan. Since Marsha has a pretty good idea where her own anxiety is coming from, she also instigates a plan for her own self-care.

After reading the *Professional competencies for psychologists*, Marsha decides to engage in purposeful and deliberate practice around this learning goal. To begin, Marsha role plays with her supervisor, where Marsha is the 'therapist' and her supervisor is the 'angry client'. She practices managing her anxiety (breathing, talking slowly, keeping eye contact) while actively listening to her 'client' expressing anger and validating their concerns.

Marsha also investigates different techniques to help clients express their anger (and manage her anxiety) by reading the literature, attending an immersive master class about managing client frustration and anger with her colleagues, and watching a couple of relevant videos of master practitioners in action.

Later, to increase the learning challenge, Marsha videotapes some of her sessions (with client permission) where she trials these new techniques, and discusses her performance and learning with her supervisor. Initially she feels nervous about this, but she gains valuable insights about her performance, and it helps her improve her skills, resulting in a sense of achievement and pride.

Marsha continues to monitor her client dropout rate throughout this process and is pleased to observe that it is beginning to reduce.

## CPD guidance

Psychologists have an ongoing commitment to learning, education and training as outlined in the Board's [Continuing professional development \(CPD\) registration standard](#).

Practitioners who identify learning needs for Competency 3 may wish to consider focusing CPD activities in the following areas:

- understanding the difference between reflexivity and self-reflection
- improving self-care strategies
- engaging in purposeful and deliberate practice in your scope of practice, and
- having regular meaningful conversations with your supervisor in relation to Competency 3.

CPD includes a variety of learning modes such as: reading, workshops, seminars, conferences, professional podcasts or DVDs, active CPD, master classes, supervision, and includes reflective and reflexive professional practice.

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* were made after wide-ranging public consultation, to ensure they are contemporary and relevant to safe and effective psychology practice.