



# **CERTIFIED THERAPEUTIC ADVENTURE SPECIALIST CREDENTIALING MANUAL**

1st Edition  
Revised  
September 2025

Editors:  
Federico A. Borroel and Steve Pace

[www.aee.org](http://www.aee.org)

Copyright © 2023 by the Association for Experiential Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments	3
Introduction	3
A. The Association for Experiential Education (AEE)	3

AEE MISSION	3
AEE VALUES	4
B. Certification	4
C. Certification Application Process Overview	6
Initial Certification	6
Recertification	7
D. Application Overview	7
E. Maintenance of Certification	9
Certification Council Actions for Continuing Certification	9
a. Grant Continuing Certification	9
b. Defer Continuing Certification	9
c. Deny Continuing Certification	9
Applicant's Response to Certification Outcome	9
a. Response to Deferred Certification	9
b. Appeals	9
Disciplinary Actions	9
c. Certification Holder's Response to a Disciplinary Action	10
d. Termination of AEE Certification	10
Appeals	10
Misrepresenting Certified Status	10
F. Certification Program Forms	11
G. Glossary of Terms	11
Appendix A: Core Elements of Therapeutic Adventure Specialists Training	12
Therapeutic Adventure(TA) Technical Skills	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Facilitation and Processing in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Therapeutic Alliance Building in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Assessment in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Therapeutic Adventure Interventions	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Therapeutic Monitoring in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Professionalism in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
AT Documentation	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Socio-Cultural/Environmental Considerations in TA	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Appendix B: Ethical Guidelines for CTAS	3
Appendix C: CTAS Applicant Agreement	7
Appendix D: Ethical Guidelines for Certification Council	9
Conflict of Interest	9
Confidentiality	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Appendix E: Responding to Complaints about Certificate Holders	11

Non-U.S. applicants are encouraged to apply if the current certification criteria align with the applicant's needs and the standards of the country where they practice.

## **Acknowledgments**

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of Nicholas Magle-Haberek, Maurie Lung, Patrick McMillion, Jesy Cordle, Christine Norton, Beth Sandman, Dave Mitchell, Juan Antonio (Tony) Dixon, Charles Thomas, Lise Brown, Erin Carpenter, Michael A. Gass, Sky Gray, Ryan Bromberek, Steve DeMille. They were a tremendous help in the creation of this certification.

## **Introduction**

The Certification Council reserves the right, at any time, to evolve and improve the practices outlined in this Program Manual.

### ***A. The Association for Experiential Education (AEE)***

#### **AEE MISSION**

To elevate and expand the global capacity of experiential education by:

1. **Building** an inclusive and accessible community for experiential education professionals firmly rooted in the philosophy, principles, and practices of experiential education.
2. **Supporting** the academic research, publication, and dissemination of authoritative information for promoting, implementing, and advancing experiential education's philosophy, principles, and practices.
3. **Presenting** our collective resources and knowledge to support public audiences to elevate and advocate support for expanding experiential education.

## **AEE VALUES**

1. **Global Community** — This is an essential progression to further experiential education methodologies and practices around the globe.
2. **Adventure and Challenge** — These are two fundamental elements inseparable from applying experiential learning, not only in the natural world but in the classroom, workplace, and beyond.
3. **Reflective Leadership** — Approaching leadership roles with presence and personal mastery is vital in strengthening our best practices as experiential educators.
4. **Social Justice** — Supporting people of diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures is integral to developing successful experiential education programming.
5. **The Natural World** — Conservation of the natural world is critical to protecting the enjoyment and learning of all individuals, communities, and future generations.
6. **Creative Play** — A vital part of life-long development that supports healthy emotional, social, intellectual, and physical growth and enhances engaged learning experiences.

## ***B. Certification***

### **Why Certification?**

As the field of Adventure Therapy progresses, evolves, and gains popularity, professionals from a wide variety of Adventure Therapy settings have come together to express an interest and a need for greater professionalism in the field of Adventure Therapy. After the tremendous efforts of those involved in creating the Adventure Therapy Best Practices, and the advent of specific certification standards that meet the needs of Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Council programs, the growing demand for a therapeutic adventure specialist certification became more and more apparent. The following considerations were a significant part of the decision to offer this credential.

### **Maintaining Flexibility in Training and Approach While Improving Fidelity**

Countless nuances, skills, theories, interventions, and approaches embody therapeutic adventure practice. Therefore, intentionally using adventure activities in a therapeutic setting requires advanced training and experience.

AEE's CTAS enhances fidelity in the field by standardizing core competencies for practice and aligning practitioners' training and experiences with these competencies in order to qualify as a certified therapeutic adventure specialist. The CTAS allows creativity and exploration within the field to be maintained by outlining core competency requirements without prescribing specific training structures. If training falls within the core competencies, it is within the standards of this certification.

## **Efficacy**

Top researchers and practitioners in the field developed, reviewed, and revised the core competencies. As the field of Adventure Therapy and Therapeutic Adventure grows and benefits from a proliferation of research demonstrating its efficacy with a variety of clients, conditions, and in a variety of adventure therapy settings, certification serves as a strategy to ensure new, research-based strategies are being incorporated into ongoing training and practice. AEE's Certification Council will ensure that the core competencies are regularly revised to reflect the most recent research and state of effective practice in the field.

## **Safety & Risk Management**

As evidence for the efficacy of Adventure Therapy and Therapeutic Adventure increases, certification helps maintain high levels of competence in the field. As current trends in North America move towards insurance reimbursement and "evidence-based" labels, the field of Adventure Therapy and Therapeutic Adventure will benefit from clearly delineating who is an experienced, competent practitioner. This can help safeguard high physical and emotional safety standards and rigorous risk management strategies.

Research conducted on wilderness therapy programs shows that participants in accredited programs had lower rates of injury or accidents than the (already low) rates of non-accredited programs\*. While this data is an exciting example of the impacts that professionalization has had on the field of Adventure Therapy [and Therapeutic Adventure], it also serves as an example of how a broader sector of those practicing adventure therapy could benefit from a similar standard that articulates core competencies for effective clinical adventure therapy practice.

\*Gass, M. A., Gillis, H. L., Russell, K. C. (2020). *Adventure therapy: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

\*Javorski, S. E., & Gass, M. A. (2013). 10-Year Incident Monitoring Trends in Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare: Lessons Learned and future directions. *Journal of Therapeutic Schools and Programs*, 112.

## **WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION?**

During the early phases of development, one of the common areas of discussion about the Certified Therapeutic Adventure Specialist (CTAS) credential was precisely what was meant by the term "certification." A vital distinction became apparent -- certifications are different from assessment-based certificate programs but are both often defined as 'certifications.'

The differences between Professional Certifications and Assessment-Based Certificate Programs. A Professional Certification aims to recognize the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience that professionals have already accumulated. An

Assessment-Based Certificate Program seeks to teach a specific body of knowledge and assess the appropriate skills and knowledge learned during the assessment.

These two types of credentialing practices can best be described by offering common examples professionals use. Many CPR and First Aid courses are great examples of assessment-based certificate programs. A particular set of skills and knowledge is taught, and an exam is given at the end of the class so that a certificate may be offered. It provides evidence that at the time of the course, the participant knew everything necessary to perform CPR and First Aid and received the specified training from the organization that taught the course (i.e., the Red Cross, American Heart Association, etc.).

Many credentials currently awarded to therapists are based on a professional certification model. These types of certifications involve acquiring skills, knowledge, and experience not constrained to one specific teacher or organization. To become certified, an individual needs to demonstrate that they have completed all necessary training, have a specific amount of experience using the material from the training and have received supervision to ensure that the practice was consistent with the approach described in the training. AEE's CTAS is a professional certification.

## ***C. Certification Application Process Overview***

### **Initial Certification**

The Certification process is designed and managed by the Director of Standards Development and Certification (Director) and the Certification Council (Council) and includes the following steps:

1. The Certification process begins with a candidate submitting the [CTAS](#) application to the Director, who will track the candidate's progress through the certification process. The Director contacts the candidate within seven days of receiving it to inform them that their application is being reviewed.
2. The Director assigns the application to a member of the Council who will review the candidate's application and contact the candidate within seven days of receiving it. The Council member is then responsible for emailing the candidate whether the required items are missing or that the application is complete and will be reviewed at the next Council meeting. A reviewer may contact and update the candidate by phone but must send a follow-up email, and copy the Director, to document the conversation.
3. The Council member completes the CTAS Candidate Assessment Form when the application is complete and sends it to the Director at least seven days before the next Council meeting.
4. Council will meet monthly to review Candidate Assessment Forms (if applications are to be reviewed). The Council will review and vote on each candidate regarding whether certification will be awarded, tabled because the Council requests additional information about the candidate before a decision can be reached or denied. The Director does not have a vote but may express an opinion. Council decisions are made by a simple majority of those attending a meeting. For a vote to occur, two-thirds of the Council must be present.
5. The Director will notify candidates of the status of their application within seven days of the Council meeting.

6. The Director will:
  - a. Send official notification to the candidate about the candidate's awarded certification; or
  - b. Send official notification to the candidate about the candidate's deferral, denial, or certification with clarifying information about the decision; or
  - c. Update the candidate about the application status if the application is deferred because the Council requests more information.
7. If a candidate is not awarded Therapeutic Adventure Specialist Certification, the candidate can reapply after six months to correct and address deficiencies in the application. If the candidate disagrees with the Council's decision, they can initiate the appeals process. (Please see the [Appeals](#) section below.)

## **Recertification**

Certified Therapeutic Adventure Specialists seeking recertification through AEE must pay the annual fee and send in proof (a signed letter from the organization will suffice) that they are an employee in good standing at a reputable organization that provides ongoing training every three years or provides AEE with proof of 18 hours of CEs specific to the Core Elements of Certified Therapeutic Adventure Training. CTASs will also provide evidence of their first aid certification(s) and re-sign the ethical agreement.

## ***D. Application Overview***

([link to Application](#))

### **1.0 Applicant Information**

Please provide your contact information so we can communicate regarding your application. In addition, this information will be used on your certificate once approved to assist with confirming information within the application.

- 1.1 Behavioral Health/Wellness facilitation experience should include 1,000 hours and a minimum of 6 months working with these populations.

### **2.0 Verification of Education**

Attach a copy of your school diploma or transcript(s) issued by an institution of higher education. The date your degree was conferred must be visible.

Explanation: Associate's degree with a specialization in Adventure Therapy *or* Bachelor's degree or higher degree in Outdoor/Adventure Recreation, Education, Leadership, Therapeutic recreation, or specifically related behavioral health/social services degree from an accredited institution of higher education.

**Or** Equivalent, well-documented general field experience working in a mental health/wellness capacity.

### **3.0 Verification of Therapeutic Adventure Training/Education and Use of Technical Skills Agreement**

Complete the Verification of Therapeutic Adventure Training/Education and Use of Technical Skills Agreement form. Attach evidence of training/education.

- 3.1 Applicants must complete seventy-five (75) hours of therapeutic adventure-specific training/education covering all components of the "[Core Elements of Therapeutic Adventure Training](#)." A maximum of twenty-five (25) hours may be virtual or online.

3.2 Sources of training/education include but are not limited to college or university classes, conference workshops, independently provided training, agency training, web-based training, and staff training at an AEE-accredited program. Please also list locations where training was completed.

3.3 Evidence of training/education includes class syllabi, workshop outlines, agency training guidelines, AEE-accredited program staff training curriculum outlines, or other documentation detailing information of the training/education completed.

3.4 Read and abide by the standards for the primary facilitation of activities requiring technical skill. Read, sign, and abide by the ethical agreement for facilitating therapeutic adventure activities.

#### **4.0 Verification of Direct Therapeutic Adventure Experience, Competency Evaluation, and Plan**

Complete the Verification of Direct Therapeutic Adventure Experience and Competency Evaluation and Plan forms.

4.1 Completion of 300 direct service hours of adventure therapeutic adventure-specific experience accumulated over a minimum of 90 days.

4.2 In addition to the 300 direct service hours, applicants must complete at least 50 supervision hours of therapeutic adventure provision verified by the supervisor. Supervision must be distributed throughout the direct client hours and conducted individually or in a [group](#) setting. (*Total Hours of Therapeutic Adventure Experience: 300 direct service hours + 50 supervised hours = 350 total hours of experience.*)

4.3 Supervisors must complete both forms under which direct experience hours were accumulated. Supervisors are to complete all sections with information on the applicant.

#### **5.0 Application and Annual Fees**

\$ 100.00 non-refundable [application fee](#) for members of AEE, \$150 for non-members. The application fee includes one complimentary year of certification if awarded the credential—an Annual Fee of \$40 for members of AEE and \$80 for non-members. If your organization is AEE accredited, you are considered a member.

#### **6.0 Renewal of CTAS Credential**

To remain in good standing, a CTAS must pay the yearly fee and send in proof (a signed letter from the organization will suffice) that they are an employee in good standing at a reputable organization that provides ongoing training every three years.

#### **7.0 Challenges Documenting Compliance with Certification Criteria**

AEE recognizes that during the initial phase of launching this certification, applicants may need help to reconstruct records of prior training, education, and supervision. In response, AEE invites CTAS candidates to complete this application to the fullest extent possible. In the application, there will be opportunities to explain how the requirements of the CTAS



certification have been met and why the candidate cannot provide records as outlined in this application. The CTAS Council will then decide whether there is enough evidence to grant certification. AEE will consider sunseting this option at the end of 2023.

## ***E. Maintenance of Certification***

### ***Certification Council Actions for Continuing Certification***

After reviewing the application for Continuing Certification, the Certification Council may take any of the following actions:

#### ***a. Grant Continuing Certification***

The Certification Council may grant Continuing Certification.

#### ***b. Defer Continuing Certification***

Council may defer continuing certification vote to applicants whose applications are incomplete.

#### ***c. Deny Continuing Certification***

Council may only allow continuing certification to applicants in compliance with certification requirements. Individuals that have been denied continuing certification are welcome to re-apply.

## **Applicant's Response to Certification Outcome**

### ***a. Response to Deferred Certification***

When Council acts to defer a certification, the applicant responds to the action by providing evidence in writing that the required steps have been taken. The response must document compliance with the terms and conditions set forth by Council and describe specific actions taken to address the concerns. The response is sent to the Director and the Council Reviewer.

The Director and the Council Reviewer review the response from the applicant. At that point, the Director may confirm or deny continuing certification.

### ***b. Appeals***

An individual may [appeal](#) a decision of the Certification Council (see Appeals in Section 7)

## **Disciplinary Actions**

The Council is responsible for safeguarding the integrity of the Certification and may need to engage in disciplinary action if an individual is practicing outside the scope of the certification.

### ***a. Warning***

Individuals will be notified of a warning by the Director. A letter or email will be sent by AEE detailing specific conditions of the warning. The Certification Council may warn an individual at any time if:

- There is evidence that an individual is out of compliance with applicable certification criteria or requirements for deferral certification have not been met promptly;
- A deadline set by the Certification Council for any other action is not met; or
- The individual does not disclose information about a significant adverse event to AEE during recertification.

### ***c. Certification Holder's Response to a Disciplinary Action***

The individual will respond to the specific context and conditions of disciplinary action by:

- Providing evidence in writing that the required changes have been made within the specified period.
- We are documenting compliance with the Council's terms and conditions at the time of the disciplinary action.
- Describing specific actions taken to address the disciplinary action.

An individual may withdraw from the certification process by notifying AEE in writing.

### ***d. Termination of AEE Certification***

The Council reserves the right to temporarily delay, suspend, or terminate the certification of any individual for any reason. Suppose it appears that an incident, accident, related circumstances, or any other issues affect the certification process or the individual under review negatively. In that case, the Council will review the status of the individual's certification. This delay, suspension, or termination can occur at any stage in the certification process.

## **Appeals**

Individuals can appeal any decision Council makes regarding a certification denial, deferment, or disciplinary action. The process for appealing a decision is as follows:

1. The individual submits a written intent to appeal to the Director within 30 days of the written decision notification.
2. The Executive Director (ED) of AEE appoints an Appeals Panel within 30 days of written intent to appeal by the individual. The panel includes a Council Reviewer to the individual and no fewer than two additional fair and impartial persons. The ED of AEE appoints a Chair of the committee. The Council Reviewer may not be appointed as Chair. When the Appeals Panel is formed, AEE will notify the individual.
3. The written appeal is sent to AEE and Appeals Panel members within 30 days of written notification of the formation of the panel. The written appeal must indicate the specific focus of the appeal and provide relevant support documentation.
4. The Appeals Panel considers the written appeal within 60 days of receipt. The panel may ask for additional information, meet with the individual, or request a follow-up site visit.
5. The Appeals Panel affirms the Council decision or recommends that alternative action be taken.
6. The Chair of the Appeals Panel sends a written report to AEE and the Council Reviewer, who presents it to Council.
7. Council votes on the recommendations within 30 days of receipt of the report. The decision of the Council is final.
8. The Chair of the Certification Council submits the decision in writing to the individual and AEE.
9. Expenses (if any) related to the appeals process will be reimbursed to the prevailing party by the other upon submission of appropriate documentation of such costs.

## **Misrepresenting Certified Status**

Individuals may not misrepresent their certified status to the public or clients. Council retains the right to release information or reports, when necessary, to correct or clarify inaccurate information released by an individual or other source. AEE maintains a list of certified individuals.

## F. Certification Program Forms

Many of the forms related to the Certification Program may be found on the [AEE website](#).

## G. Glossary of Terms

**Therapeutic Adventure Specialist Experience** refers to applicants' practicum, internship, or field time with clients using an adventure therapy paradigm(s) or therapeutic adventure techniques.

**Therapeutic Adventure Supervision** You may obtain supervision hours for days you work in the field. Supervision focus is on topics relevant to core elements of therapeutic adventure facilitation.

**Therapeutic Adventure Training** refers to the applicants' therapeutic adventure facilitation instruction or education via undergraduate coursework, continuing education workshops, or training at an AEE-accredited organization.

**AEE** refers to the Association for Experiential Education

**Application Fees** are fees paid to have your application reviewed and processed.

**CTAS** is the acronym for the Certified Therapeutic Adventure Specialist credential.

**CE** is the acronym for "continuing education" (or "training") hours earned at conferences, workshops, and other forums.

**License** refers to an individually issued current and active clinical mental health or school-based services license to provide clinical mental health or school-based services independently. Also, it is deemed the highest level of practice for that particular field. Excluded are temporary and learning licenses issued to interns, associates, and those engaged in clinical practice under the supervision of another's license.

**Renewal Fees** are due annually and are to maintain your credential as active. Annual AEE membership dues are unrelated and billed separately.

**Supervisors** are professionals who provide oversight, evaluation, and training and are accountable for the actions of their supervisees. Supervisors must be management in an AEE OBH Accredited Program or have at least 5-years' experience as a CTAS/CCAT or equivalent training (documented via resume/CV), **or** certified recreation therapists with two years' experience, fully licensed social workers, counselors, psychologists, or marriage and family therapists that can adequately vouch for the applicant's AT experience. Currently, AEE does not require the supervisor to hold the CTAS or CCAT credential.

# Appendix A: Core Elements of Therapeutic Adventure Specialists Training

## ***Therapeutic Adventure(TA) Technical Skills***

*Definition: This element focuses on the knowledge of technical skills, competencies, and limitations related to TA interventions, risk management protocols specific to therapeutic adventure populations and settings, and environmental practices of therapeutic adventure specialists.*

- Practicing within one's competencies based on technical skills training and assessed competency.  
Competency can be assessed by having a certification or an assessment of skill competency from a reputable training organization or employer.
- Conducting risk analysis of sites and activities that are utilized
- Environmental awareness
- Minimizing and recognizing the impact of TA on the environment

## ***Facilitation and Processing in TA***

*Definition: This element focuses on the effectiveness of the therapeutic adventure experience, assists clients in finding direction and sources for functional change, and creates changes that are lasting and integrated into the clients' lives.*

- Establishing norms
- Engagement and cohesion-building strategies
- Awareness of trauma responses in TA
- Adapting intervention to incorporate isomorphic metaphors
- Utilizing models for stages of change and group development while conducting TA services
- Generalizing adventure experiences to everyday life.
- Matching and facilitating an activity towards a clinical goal with the transfer of skills

## ***Therapeutic Alliance Building in TA***

*Definition: This element focuses on the ability of the therapeutic adventure specialist to co-construct an effective therapeutic alliance with clients. The building of this positive form of therapeutic relationship incorporates the use of natural environment elements and adventure programming concepts. Special attention is paid to various clients' specific and diverse contexts (e.g., social, cultural, systemic, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.*

- Respecting and honoring inclusivity and diversity when providing TA services
- Recognizing the impact of TA on the client-therapist relationship
- Awareness of the breadth of interaction and communication styles during TA services
- Demonstrating empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard
- Repairing ruptured therapeutic relationships during TA interventions
- Ensuring clients' rights when receiving TA services.

## ***Assessment in TA***

*Definition: This element focuses on how the therapeutic adventure specialist examines clients in mental health settings through adventure experiences and uses supportive documentation for screening and creating potential interventions.*

- TA interventions as part of ongoing client assessment
- Adventure-based assessment to inform therapeutic facilitation decisions
- Seeks information about clients from multiple areas to deliver effective TA services
- Evaluation and management of risk (emotional, physical, environmental, trauma-informed)

## **Therapeutic Adventure Interventions**

*Definition: This element focuses on implementing therapeutic adventure strategies and processes to produce functional client change in an appropriate, culturally relevant, lasting manner.*

- Activities and techniques used in TA programming
- Selecting culturally relevant adventure experiences
- Interaction with the therapeutic environment is an integral part of the therapeutic process
- Selecting and conducting TA interventions that are appropriate and individualized to the client.

## **Therapeutic Monitoring in TA**

*Definition: This element focuses on the continual connection to clients involved in therapeutic adventure programming, including ongoing evaluation of therapeutic experiences.*

- Monitoring transfer of learning from adventure activities to “daily life” over time
- The use of adventure activities for formal and informal outcome evaluation purposes.

## **Professionalism in TA**

*Definition: This element focuses on the expected professional behavior of a therapeutic adventure specialist.*

- Will follow all professional regulatory laws and ethics of the region, state, province, or country in which one practices.
- Ethical Standards specific to TA services
- Knowledge of commonly accepted practices in TA
- How to use supervision for developing specific TA interventions.
- HIPAA and confidentiality considerations of providing AT services (e.g., storage of AT documentation and files in the field and in the office)
- Assumption of Risk and Liability Releases Appropriate for Adventure Programming
- Incident and Accident reporting.
- Use of clinical language in notes to reflect the intent of AT interventions and client progress.

## **Socio-Cultural Considerations in TA**

*Definition: This element focuses on the awareness and practices related to diversity needs, power, privilege, and environmental stewardship.*

- Recognition of practitioner biases.
- Practicing reflection to increase awareness and manage bias.
- Practice environmental ethics appropriate to your location and region of practice.
- Advocacy for diversity, equity and equality, and environmental conservation and protection with an awareness of climate change and the history/traditions of indigenous peoples.

## **Environmental Considerations in TA**

- Practice environmental safety and ethics appropriate to your setting, activity, and region of practice.

- Advocacy for environmental conservation and protection with an awareness of climate change and sustainability.

## ***Trauma-Informed Practices in TA***

- Practice environmental safety and ethics appropriate to your setting, activity, and region of practice.
- Advocacy for environmental conservation and protection with an awareness of climate change and sustainability.
- of client choice and client ability to set the level of their own participation or change their mind.
- Tracking of client arousal, anxieties, and vigilance.
- Integration of regulatory activities/options.
- Adapting TA services to meet clients' immediate, short-term, and/or long-term needs upon experiencing trauma responses.
- Attune to environmental factors/variables that may induce trauma responses
- Recognition of personal trauma responses as a program/group facilitator
- Recognition and appropriate balance of power differentials inherent in adventure programming
- Promoting trustworthiness, transparency, mutuality, and collaboration during adventure programming

# **Appendix B: Ethical Guidelines for CTAS**

## **Statement of Purpose**

Since Therapeutic Adventure can profoundly affect individual lives, it is the purpose of these guidelines to advocate for the education, empowerment, and safety of those who participate in these programs by establishing a minimum standard of ethical care and operation. Individuals who adhere to these guidelines will be considered as upholding, contributing to, and promoting a high standard of operation and service.

## **1. Competence**

Professionals strive to maintain high standards of competence in their work. They recognize the boundaries of their competencies and understand the potential limitations of adventure activities. Professionals exercise reasonable judgment and take appropriate precautions to promote the welfare of participants. They maintain knowledge of relevant professional information related to adventure experiences and recognize their need for ongoing education. Professionals make appropriate use of professional, technical, and administrative resources that serve the participants' best interests in their program.

### **1.1 Boundaries of Competence**

(1) Professionals provide services only within the boundaries of their competence based on their education, training, supervision, experience, and practice. (2) Professionals provide services involving specific practices after first undertaking appropriate study, training, supervision, and/or consultation from competent persons in those areas or practices. (3) In areas where generally recognized standards for preparatory training do not yet exist, professionals take reasonable steps to ensure their work's competence and promote participants' welfare. (4) Professionals seek appropriate assistance for personal problems or conflicts that may impair their work performance or judgment.

### **1.2 Continuing Training**

Professionals are aware of current information in their fields of activity and undertake ongoing professional efforts to maintain the knowledge, practice, and skills they use at a competent level.

## **2. Integrity**

Professionals seek to promote integrity in the practice of adventure programming. In these experiences, they are honest, fair, and respectful of others. Professionals do not make false, misleading, or deceptive statements when describing or reporting their qualifications, services, products, fees, and research. Professionals strive to be aware of their belief systems, values, needs, limitations, and their effect on their work.

## **3. Professional Responsibility**

Professionals uphold ethical principles of conduct, clarify their roles and obligations, accept responsibility for their behavior and decisions, and adapt their methods to the needs of different populations. Professionals consult with, refer to, and cooperate with other

professionals and individuals to the full extent needed to serve participants' best interests. Professionals are concerned about the ethical professional conduct of their colleagues. When appropriate, they consult with colleagues to avoid unethical conduct. Because of its direct negative influence on participants and the field, professionals are strongly urged to report alleged unethical behavior to appropriate and prescribed channels. Professionals are ethically bound to cooperate with professional associations' inquiries concerning ethical misconduct.

### **3.1 Basis for Professional Judgments**

Professionals have an adequate basis for their professional judgments and actions derived from professional knowledge.

### **3.2 Concern for the Environment**

Professionals conduct adventure experiences in a manner that has minimal impact on the environment. Professionals do not conduct adventure experiences where permanent damage to wilderness environments will occur due to programming.

## **4. Respect for People's Rights and Dignity**

Professionals respect the fundamental rights, dignity, and worth of all people. They respect the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination. Professionals strive to be sensitive to cultural and individual differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference, disability, and socioeconomic status. Professionals do not engage in sexual or other harassment or exploitation of participants, students, trainees, supervisees, employees, colleagues, research subjects, or actual or potential witnesses or complainants in investigations and ethical proceedings.

### **4.1 Policy Against Discrimination**

Professionals do not discriminate against or refuse professional services to anyone based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference, disability, and socioeconomic status.

### **4.2 Ethic of Empowerment**

Professionals respect the rights of participants to make decisions and help them to understand the consequences of their choices. Professionals assist participants in charting the course of their own lives. They respect the rights of participants to make decisions affecting their lives that also demonstrate equal concern for the rights of others.

### **4.4 Informed Consent**

Professionals respect participants' rights to refuse or consent to services and activities. Professionals obtain informed consent from participants, parents, or guardians before videotaping, audio recording, or permitting third-party observation.

## **5. Concern for Welfare**

Professionals are sensitive to real and ascribed differences in power between themselves and their participants, and they avoid exploiting or misleading other people during or after professional relationships.



## 5.1 Professional Relationships

Professionals provide services only in the context of a defined professional relationship or role.

## 5.2 Dual Relationships

Professionals are aware of their influential position concerning participants and avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of such persons. Because of this, professionals make every effort to avoid dual relationships with participants that could impair professional judgment (e.g., business, or close personal relationships with participants). When dual relationships exist, professionals take appropriate precautions to ensure that judgment is not impaired, and that no exploitation occurs.

## 5.3 Sexual Relationships

Sexual intimacy with participants is prohibited during the time of the professional relationship. Professionals engaging in sexual intimacy with past participants bear the burden of proving that no exploitation occurs.

## 5.4 Physical Contact

Adventure activities often include various forms of physical contact between professionals and participants or among participants (e.g., spotting, checking climbing harnesses, holding hands). Professionals are sensitive and respectful of the fact that participants experience varying degrees of comfort with physical contact, even when it is offered for safety, encouragement, or support. Whenever possible, professionals inform, explain, and gain consent for usual and customary forms of physical contact. Professionals are aware of individual needs when initiating physical contact, especially if the contact is meant to communicate support (e.g., hugs, pats) and is otherwise not required for a particular activity. Except when safety is a factor, participants have the right to limit or refuse physical contact with professionals and participants.

## 5.5 Behavior Management

Each program and professional will approach managing behavior with a concern for dignity and safety for participants and professionals. Definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors of participants should be made clear before any adventure programming commences. Professionals and participants should clearly understand professional responses to inappropriate behaviors and carry them out appropriately. There should be clear documentation of staff training and awareness about program policies concerning managing unsafe behavior. Policies should never advocate the use of restraint unless participant(s) impose a threat to themselves or others. Restraint should never be used as a punishment or to frighten, humiliate, or threaten a participant. Whenever possible, restraint should be avoided and as passive as possible. All behavior management should be accurately documented.

## 5.6 Physical Needs of Participants

Participants will be provided with the necessary water, nutrition, clothing, shelter, or other essential needs they require for the environment they are living in unless there is prior mutual consent between participants and professionals. It is recognized that this will serve a useful purpose (e.g., solo). During any program, withholding these needs will not be used as a punitive measure.

### 5.7 Physical Treatment of Participants

Participants will not be asked to perform excessive physical activity as a punishment. There should be a direct relationship between the amount of participants' physical activity levels and the objective of the experience.

### 5.8 Appropriate Use of Risk

The amount of actual emotional and physical risk participants experience in adventure activities will be appropriate for the objectives and competence level of participants. Professionals use appropriate judgment when choosing activities that expose participants to actual or perceived physical and emotional risks.

### 5.9 Confidentiality

Professionals respect the right of participants to decide the extent to which confidential material is made public. Professionals may not disclose participant confidences except (a) as mandated by law; (b) to prevent a clear and immediate danger to a person or persons; (c) where the professional is a defendant in civil, criminal, or disciplinary action arising from services (in which case participant confidences may be disclosed only in the course of that action); or (d) if there is a waiver previously obtained in writing, and then such information may be revealed only by the terms of the waiver. Unless it is contraindicated or not feasible, the discussion of confidentiality occurs at the onset of the professional relationship.

## 6. Social Responsibility

Professionals know their responsibilities to the community and society where they work and live. Within the limitations of their roles, professionals avoid the misuse of their work. Professionals comply with the standards and laws in their particular geographical and professional areas. Professionals also encourage the development of standards and policies that serve the interests of participants and the public.

\*Adapted from the original work of the Therapeutic Adventure Professional Group Ethics Committee, 1991

## Appendix C: CTAS Applicant Agreement

Applicants sign this agreement when submitting an application.

This acknowledgment and agreement must be read, understood, and signed by Applicant as a condition to Applicant's certification as an adventure therapist by the Association for Experiential Education (AEE). Applicant acknowledges and agrees as follows:

Therapeutic Adventure requires various skills to facilitate adventure activities, including, but not limited to, games and initiatives, low ropes courses, and high-level challenge and adventure activities (including challenge courses at height, rock climbing, paddling, and other outdoor adventure pursuits). Regardless of the type of therapeutic adventure activity, the primary facilitator of the activity should have training in the technical skills required to reasonably manage its risks, including the level of emergency medical training appropriate to the setting (front country or wilderness).

A primary facilitator must meet one or more of the technical skill conditions described below to lead adventure activities:

- Certified / Licensed – Hold certifications or licenses appropriate to leading the adventure activity and received from professional training organizations that follow professional and commonly accepted practices for their discipline and are consistent with the laws and regulations for the jurisdiction in which activities are conducted; or
- Professional Training – Have received appropriate adventure activity training from professional organizations that follow commonly accepted practices for their discipline. Examples include organizations accredited by the Association for Experiential Education, American Mountain Guides Association, Association of Challenge Course Technology, and Colleges and Universities; or
- Organizational Oversight - Training received is part of a program with commonly accepted risk management practices, staff training, and appropriate activity protocols.

I, Applicant, will:

- Comply with the terms of this Agreement, and uphold the ethical and legal standards of a professional pertaining to the licenses/certifications I hold;
- Facilitate therapeutic adventure activities in a manner consistent with my competence and training;
- Reasonably ensure that technically competent instructors act as primary facilitators of the technical aspects of the adventure activities I offer if I am not certified or professionally trained and assessed as competent to facilitate.

I represent that information, statements, and documents accompanying my application for certification or renewal is accurate, including my experience, education, training, and expertise. I

am solely responsible for the accuracy of such information, statements, and documents, and AEE is not responsible or liable for any inaccurate or misleading information.

I agree to notify AEE if I immediately:

- Have any disciplinary action taken against me by an applicable licensing or certifying authority;
- Have my license or certification suspended or revoked or a condition placed on my license or certification;
- Am convicted of a crime related to my providing mental health services or a crime that would adversely affect the interests, effectiveness, reputation, or image of AEE;
- I voluntarily relinquish my license or certification.

Failure to report any of the four conditions described above may result in the denial or revocation of my AEE Certified Therapeutic Adventure Specialist (CTAS) credential.

I have read and am familiar with the AEE Certification Credentialing Manual and acknowledge and agree to the requirements of CTAS certification set forth therein.

I acknowledge and agree that certification as a CTAS by AEE is not intended to be and is not a representation or promise by AEE of my knowledge or competency, in my profession or otherwise, and that such designation confirms only that information and documentation received (which is not independently verified by AEE) reflects that the education and training requirements of AEE have been satisfied.

I understand that if AEE receives a complaint against me, AEE will request that the complainant bring their concern to the overseeing body of the state license(s) I hold. After a formal resolution of the complaint, AEE reserves the right to take disciplinary action if it believes such is warranted.

I hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless AEE from and against any and all claims, losses, actions, costs, and expenses, including attorneys' fees and insurance deductibles, incurred by AEE as a result of or arising out of a) my acts or omissions in my treatment of patients; b) my failure to abide by the code of ethics, standards of practice and legal standards and requirements promulgated by my primary licensing authority; c) any falsification, including by omission or inclusion, of information on my CTAS application or any supporting documents; d) my conduct or actions that are prejudicial to the purpose, interests, effectiveness, reputation, or image of therapeutic adventure and/or AEE; and/or e) any other action or omission relating to my CTAS credential or my performance there under.

# Appendix D: Ethical Guidelines for Certification Council

## ***Conflict of Interest***

**Definition:** to derive personal or professional benefit from decisions made in your Certifying capacity.

AEE staff and volunteers associated with the Certification Program, including Council members, act as agents of AEE with an interest in enriching lives through experiential education. The Certification program has a further interest in advancing the professional practices of members offering adventure therapy/outdoor behavioral healthcare through helping them meet Certification standards. AEE's shared interest is to help members meet certification criteria; any deviation from this interest should be disclosed and discussed with the Director for guidance. The foundational ethics in such work are both fairness and transparency. As such, situations in which a conflict of interest may occur (or potentially undermine fairness and transparency) must be reported to the Director.

In cases where a conflict of interest cannot be avoided, Council members will recuse themselves from related Certification processes and deliberations. The Council will determine if there is a conflict of interest in consultation with the Director. The Director will remove any Council members who compromise the integrity of the Certification Program.

In order to avoid situations that could be perceived as a conflict of interest, Council members will:

- Disclose to AEE any current or prior relationships with a member seeking initial or continuing Certification.
- Avoid developing any type of relationship with members engaged in the Certification process that could impair professional judgment or negatively affect the Certification Program,
- Decline to serve as a reviewer, with direction from the Council, for applicants with whom they have a relationship that would bias their judgment or offer personal gain.

## ***Confidentiality***

Any information provided by the member for the purpose of Certification will be considered confidential and will only be used by the Certification Council and AEE staff in the Certification process. Any documents provided for the purpose of Certification must be safeguarded and maintained in confidence. The deliberations, status, and results of Certification are reported only to the applicant, the AEE Certification Program Staff, and the Certification Council.

A full summary of AEE Ethical Guidelines can be found on the 'AEE Code of Conduct' document.



## **Appendix E: Responding to Complaints about Certificate Holders**

Complainants are requested to file a complaint with the overseeing body of the state license(s) the therapist holds. After a formal resolution of the complaint, the AEE Certification Council will review the findings of the state licensing board and take appropriate action if AEE believes such action is warranted. Please see [Disciplinary Actions](#) in Section E above.