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Strategic Pastoral Counseling

11. Appendix: Ethical Considerations in Pastoral Counseling

This appendix lays out the ethical framework every pastor who counsels should follow, whether or not they belong to a professional counseling body. It offers five core guidelines and points readers to the code of ethics of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (www.aapc.org/ethics.htm).

Key takeaways

- Protect the rights of those you counsel: informed consent, self-determination, freedom from coercion or discrimination, privacy, and confidentiality.
- Avoid dual-role relationships — don't counsel friends, business partners, or others you have ongoing ties with; refer them elsewhere.
- Never allow romantic or sexual intimacy in counseling; any movement toward that boundary means ending the relationship at once.
- Know your limitations and stay within your competence through consultation, supervision, and referrals.

- Stay in relationships of personal accountability, beginning in the church and extending to professional organizations and experienced counselors.