



# CODE OF ETHICS

ASSOCIATION OF ESD PROFESSIONALS



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# PREAMBLE & PURPOSE

With this document, the Association of ESD Professionals (Association) provides guidance for the ethical conduct of Empowerment Self Defense (ESD) professionals and clarifies where and how practice behaviors might diverge and therefore be unethical. The Code of Ethics spells out both the duty of beneficence (to do good) and the duty of non-maleficence (to do no harm).

The Association understands that reasonable differences of opinion can and do exist among ESD professionals with respect to ethical decision making and that ethical decision making is a process and answers are not always clear. The Association hopes that ESD professionals will take into consideration the values, principles, and standards in this Code and apply them as well as they can to all ethical decision making.

The Code of Ethics is organized around five pillars:

Pillar One. Responsibility to Participants

Pillar Two. Responsibility to Practice & Performance

Pillar Three: Responsibility to Colleagues

Pillar Four: Responsibility to Profession

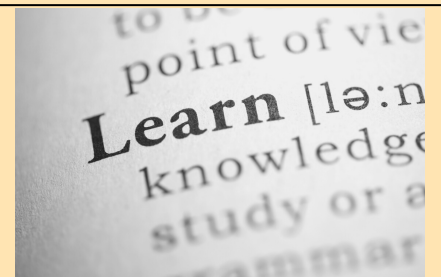
Pillar Five: Responsibility to Society

# THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE ETHICS CODE

**1.** RESPONSIBILITY TO PARTICIPANTS



**2.** RESPONSIBILITY TO PRACTICE & PERFORMANCE



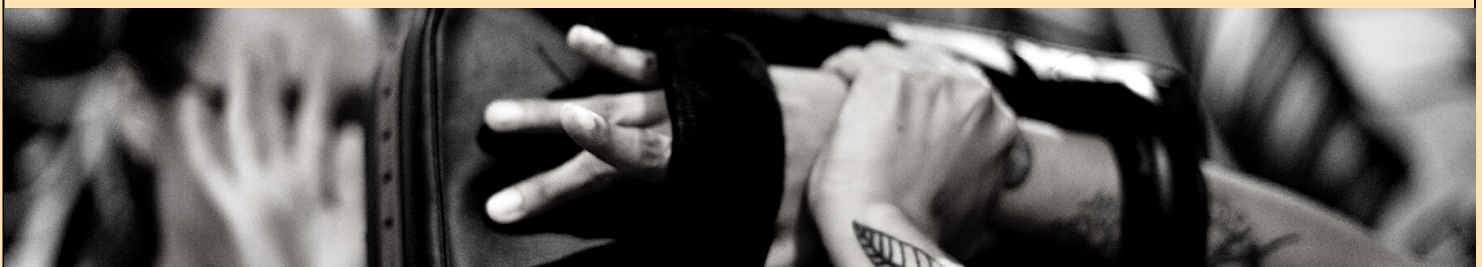
**3.** RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLEAGUES



**4.** RESPONSIBILITY TO PROFESSION



**5.** RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association of ESD Professionals acknowledges the decades of work done by organizations and individuals throughout the world to build the practice of ESD. The Code of Ethics draws on intensive review of multiple, global professional codes and guidance documents from several disciplines. Source citations appear at the end of this document.

# SUGGESTION BOX

The Association welcomes input from the international empowerment self-defense community for the continued evolution of this document. Interested parties are welcome to contact the Association via the Association website to submit ideas to the [Suggestion Box](#) or to find out how to get involved.



# VALUES & PRINCIPLES OF THE ASSOCIATION

The core values of safety, dignity, and empowerment guide ESD professionals in their practice of self-defense and as we cultivate inclusion, diversity, and accessibility. ESD professionals celebrate diverse individual & cultural narratives with hope and a fierce commitment to overcoming violence throughout the world.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The Association of ESD Professionals asserts that the conduct of ESD professionals carries widespread and interdependent implications. Whether we are actively teaching or not, we maintain a commitment to ethical conduct and awareness that even the appearance of impropriety may harm our students as well as the standing of ESD professionals and the ESD profession. Therefore, ESD professionals strive to abide by these acknowledged boundaries and guidelines to uplift the profession as best we can in all our affairs.



# PILLAR ONE.

## RESPONSIBILITY TO PARTICIPANTS

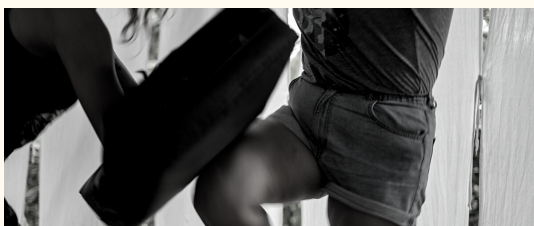
ESD participants can and should expect competent, sound instruction; proactive care and respect; safe and empowering environments; and clear avenues to express their experiences within ESD activities.

- Safety
- Autonomy & Self-Determination
- Privacy & Confidentiality
- Transparency
- Inclusion
- Accessibility

### SAFETY.

ESD professionals prioritize participant emotional and physical safety and well-being, and we strive to create an environment that is free from abuse and harassment, whether in the form of hostile environments or coercion.

- ESD professionals oppose and interrupt all forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and technology-based.
- ESD professionals acknowledge that inherent power dynamics exist in relationships such as teacher-student and adult-youth and navigate these relationships responsibly.
- ESD professionals communicate these expectations transparently and explicitly to participants in a direct way.
- ESD professionals carry the responsibility to intervene in harmful or abusive situations, to follow up every reported or suspected abusive occurrence within ESD activities, and to consider engaging in restorative/transformational justice when possible.
- The duty to intervene and report is heightened with populations such as minor children, elders, persons with disabilities, and individuals who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations. ESD professionals promptly report suspected or disclosed abuse or harassment in accordance with their own organizational policies, local governing laws, and professional duties.



## AUTONOMY & SELF-DETERMINATION.

ESD is based at its core on personal choice and the expansion of options that affirm personal safety and freedom. ESD participants have the right to question, challenge, choose, and safely set boundaries with instructors and organizations without negative consequences.

- ESD professionals respect, honor, and support participant boundaries.
- ESD professionals support each participant's exercise of autonomy and self-determination.

## PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY.

ESD professionals must ensure that all identifying (personal and financial) information, images, and experiences belonging to participants will be respected, properly maintained, and protected. Participants have the right to expect all such identifying information, images, and experiences will be kept confidential, respected, properly maintained, and protected.

- ESD Professionals safeguard participants' privacy rights by keeping confidential all of their information (written, electronic, or verbal), only releasing such information if explicit and specific written consent is obtained from the participant or the minor participant's parent or guardian (in the participant's language) or in the event release of the information is mandated by law.
- ESD professionals carry the duty to exercise care to the technological age. For example, given the far-reach of digital media and the existence of cyber-bullying, posting pictures, videos, or names on social media can take on a life of its own, threatening the privacy and safety of the people represented or named. ESD professionals take care to protect the privacy and safety of participants when considering posting to websites and social media.

**CONFIDENTIAL**



## TRANSPARENCY

ESD professionals inform participants of confidentiality practices as well as the limits of confidentiality.

- ESD professionals provide clear avenues to register complaints, to state grievances, and/or to resolve conflicts.
- ESD professionals affirm that all activities are based on consent, including and not limited to physical touch and the right to end one's participation in any activity and to communicate what is desired.
- ESD professionals inform participants of mechanisms for reporting concerns or complaints regarding safe environments. ESD professionals affirm that there is no repercussion for reporting in good faith.

## INCLUSION

ESD professionals recognize the worth and equality of all persons, without discrimination, and do not engage, condone, facilitate, or collaborate in any unfair differential treatment or arbitrary distinction based on race, creed, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, geography, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental or physical ability, immigration status, economic status, social status or caste, marital status, family size, pregnancy, veteran or military status, political ideology, or other distinguishing identity or status.

- ESD professionals respect and acknowledge trans and nonbinary/gender nonconforming people through the use of appropriate pronouns and the creation of a safe environment.
- ESD professionals strive to include curriculum relevant to the types of violence and abuse that trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming people and members of other marginalized groups experience.



## ACCESSIBILITY

ESD professionals provide instruction that is accessible to learners with differing abilities, learning styles, and needs.

- ESD professionals provide alternatives in learning activities and promote learner choice in classes and trainings.
- ESD professionals ask for and incorporate learner input about instructional strategies and accommodations.
- ESD professionals provide varied instructional strategies and accommodations to support the best outcomes for all students.

## PILLAR TWO.

### RESPONSIBILITY TO PRACTICE & PERFORMANCE

ESD professionals maintain a robust and ongoing commitment to practice competencies and teaching performance, modeling behaviors that reflect the values and principles of the profession. ESD professionals are accountable to listen to, understand, and adapt to constructive feedback.

- Competence
- Accessibility and Inclusion
- Cultural Humility
- Confidentiality
- Scope of Practice
- Duty of Self-Care
- Responsiveness to Trauma
- Explicit Consent Regarding Touch
- Financial and Economic Fairness
- Duty to Protect
- Ethical Behavior in Conflict
- Research-Informed Practice & Practice-Informed Research

### COMPETENCE.

ESD professionals obtain foundational and ongoing training in the knowledge base, skills, and capacities that ensure high standards of instruction. These standards include but are not limited to curriculum design, teaching methods, classroom management, trauma-sensitive instruction, and collegial relationships. ESD professionals seek out mentoring and consultation on a regular basis in support of effective practice and continued growth. ESD professionals do not practice outside their scope of training.

## ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION.

ESD professionals intentionally center the experiences of culturally diverse individuals based on age, race, gender, ethnicity, color, ability, creed or religion, sexual preference or orientation, LGBT status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, social origin, class, caste or other historically oppressed groups.

## CULTURAL HUMILITY.

ESD professionals embrace opportunities to work with individuals from backgrounds that are culturally, ethnically, racially, and otherwise diverse. To that end, ESD professionals engage in lifelong self-reflection, self-critique, and dialogue with others to learn about others' cultures, starting with an examination of their own beliefs and cultural identities (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).



## CONFIDENTIALITY.

ESD professionals keep students' experiences confidential, not sharing images or identifying information without explicit written consent. ESD professionals do not share personal or contact information with others without participant or minor participant's parental or guardian consent. ESD professionals carry the duty to exercise care to the technological age. For example, given the far-reach of digital media, posting pictures, videos, or names on social media represents a decision that can take on a life of its own, threatening the privacy and safety of the people represented or named.

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE.

ESD professionals understand the transformative power of ESD instruction. ESD professionals do not engage in dual or self-serving relationships with people they teach. ESD professionals provide support and convey deep respect for the dignity and worth of the individuals they teach. ESD professionals acknowledge that trauma-sensitive teaching is critical, and therefore stay informed and maintain resources for the continued healing of participants.

## DUTY OF SELF-CARE.

ESD instructors proactively pursue optimal wellness, embracing the challenge to meet our own personal, professional, and business needs separately from ESD professional work. ESD professionals utilize support systems and explicitly refrain from putting responsibility for fulfilling self-care needs onto students.

## RESPONSIVENESS TO TRAUMA.

ESD professionals make genuine and ongoing efforts to design classes that are sensitive to trauma. Six principles of trauma-sensitive programs include: Safety (both internal and external), Trustworthiness & Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration & Mutuality, Empowerment & Choice, and Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues Awareness (CDC, 2020).

## EXPLICIT CONSENT REGARDING TOUCH.

ESD professionals understand and respect that every individual retains the inalienable human right to personal body space. ESD professionals present options during instruction that allow choice as to whether and how physical touch will occur. ESD professionals do not engage in or allow non-consensual touch to occur during or around ESD activities and gatherings.

## FINANCIAL & ECONOMIC FAIRNESS.

ESD professionals provide straightforward and transparent details about fee arrangements for classes. ESD professionals actively seek to expand access to instruction to individuals with financial limitations. Alternative fee arrangements are made privately and without coercive pressure and do not place undue burden on participants. ESD professionals abide by local employment laws, provide fair wages, and conduct financial transactions with integrity. ESD professionals do not borrow money or accept business investments from active participants or their families.

## DUTY TO PROTECT

ESD professionals affirm and act on their ethical responsibility to intervene in harmful or abusive situations with populations such as minor children, elders, or persons with disabilities. ESD professionals promptly report suspected abuse in accordance with their own organizational policies, local governing laws, and professional duties and document that they did so.

## ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN CONFLICT

ESD professionals utilize principles of de-escalation and proactive, respectful communication when conflict arises. These include but are not limited to mindful communication, truthfulness, direct conversation over gossip, and utilization of a neutral, supportive facilitator when needed and possible. ESD professionals refrain from character assassination and defamation.

## RESEARCH-INFORMED PRACTICE & PRACTICE-INFORMED RESEARCH.

ESD professionals seek to share and support the development of accurate and reliable knowledge regarding interpersonal and community safety skills. ESD professionals regularly seek information about the outcomes of their work and participate when possible in rigorous scholarly inquiry that proceeds in an ethical manner. ESD professionals actively resist and refute misinformation and deception regarding ESD.

# PILLAR THREE.

## RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLEAGUES

ESD professionals embrace the richness of our diversity generally and among colleagues. ESD professionals respect differences, make the effort to be inclusive in meaningful ways, and exchange knowledge and share histories to respectfully bring meaning and acceptance to inclusive practices. ESD professionals are highly encouraged to share concepts and principles to lift up the profession. In all things, ESD professionals promote safe, healthy, and harassment-free environments.



- Safety
- Respectful Differences
- Exchange of Knowledge
- Author Integrity

## SAFETY.

ESD professionals promote safety and well-being among colleagues and strive to create inter-professional relationships and organizational environments that are free from harassment and abuse. ESD professionals oppose and interrupt all forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and technology-based, and support each other in doing so.

## RESPECTFUL DIFFERENCES.

ESD professionals have differing views and a responsibility to engage with colleagues in resolving conflict, respectfully and in good faith. ESD professionals have the responsibility to embrace varied, non-harmful perspectives within the profession.

## EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE.

ESD professionals acknowledge the synergistic nature of the field, sharing techniques and exchanging ideas. ESD professionals freely share universal principles and strive to give due credit to originators for ideas, techniques, concepts, and research wherever possible.

## AUTHOR INTEGRITY.

ESD professionals share data, research, and curriculum materials respectfully and responsibly by providing source citations and verbal credit.

# PILLAR FOUR.

## RESPONSIBILITY TO PROFESSION

ESD professionals strive to uphold and act according to the values and principles of ESD in their instruction, promotion, research, and all manners of ESD practice.

- Standards
- Respect
- Equity
- Competence
- Professional Integrity
- Scope of Practice
- Inter-Professional Collaboration
- Research
- Research-Informed Practice & Practice-Informed Research

## STANDARDS.

ESD professionals continually seek to maintain, improve and expand their professional competence through training, experience, and education. ESD professionals strive to improve their proficiency in working with culturally diverse individuals based on age, race, gender, ethnicity, color, ability, creed or religion, sexual preference or orientation, LGBT status, socioeconomic status, immigration status, social origin, class, caste or other marginalized, exploited or oppressed groups.

### THE MISSION

It is the mission of the Association to help further the mission of ESD—to prevent violence worldwide.

## RESPECT.

ESD professionals recognize the worth and equality of all persons, without discrimination and do not engage in, condone, facilitate or collaborate in unfair differential treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person's race, creed, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, geography, gender or gender identity, sexual orientation, age, mental or physical ability, immigration status, economic status, social status or caste, marital status, family size, pregnancy, veteran or military status, political ideology, or other distinguishing identity or status.

## EQUITY.

ESD professionals and their organizations actively promote antiracism and anti-discrimination policies and practices. They seek to learn from, listen to, and support all communities, especially those which are marginalized, exploited, and oppressed. ESD professionals actively mentor, train, and promote the leadership of individuals from marginalized and exploited communities when welcomed to do so. ESD professionals use any privilege they may have to raise up and promote marginalized and exploited communities through collaborations.

## COMPETENCE.

ESD professionals obtain foundational and ongoing training in the knowledge base, skills, and capacities that ensure high standards of instruction. These standards include but are not limited to curriculum design, teaching methods, classroom management, and collegial relationships. ESD professionals seek out mentoring and consultation on a regular basis in support of effective practice and continued growth. ESD professionals do not practice outside their scope of training.

## PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY.

When identifying their qualifications, expertise, experience, training, awards, and any other credentials to participants and the general public, in any form (print, electronic, or verbal), ESD professionals do so accurately.

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE.

ESD professionals understand the transformative power of ESD instruction. ESD professionals do not engage in dual or self-serving relationships with people they teach and train. ESD professionals provide support and convey deep respect for the dignity and worth of the individuals they teach and train.

## INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION.

ESD professionals promote cooperation among professionals in related disciplines, encouraging professional growth and discussion, advocating for ESD and related changes to law and policy, and participating in other professional activities and within communities.

## RESEARCH.

ESD professionals aid and encourage the advancement, development, and continued growth of ESD through their contribution of relevant research, evaluation, study, and discussion. ESD professionals will adhere to ethical principles and recognized scientific standards for the protection of human subjects while conducting, participating, or reporting on research and evaluation.

## RESEARCH-INFORMED PRACTICE & PRACTICE-INFORMED RESEARCH.

ESD professionals strive to stay informed of the most current, accurate, and reliable research regarding the instruction of personal and community safety and to update instruction accordingly. ESD professionals regularly seek information about the outcomes of their work and participate when possible in the rigorous scholarly inquiries that proceed in an ethical manner. ESD researchers adhere to applicable protections for human subjects in research. ESD professionals and researchers correct misinformation and actively resist and refute disinformation.



# PILLAR FIVE.

## RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

ESD professionals promote, recognize, and respect the inherent rights, fundamental freedoms, and dignity of all people without distinction at local, national, and international levels. The mission of ESD professionals is to prevent violence through empowerment in the practice of ESD in local communities and worldwide.

### ESD TO COMBAT VIOLENCE

ESD professionals advocate and facilitate informed discussion among colleagues and in the public sphere to promote public policies, projects, and programs that promote the use of ESD to combat violence.

### HUMAN RIGHTS & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

ESD professionals advocate and facilitate informed discussion among colleagues and in the public sphere to promote public policies, projects, and programs that protect and promote human rights, self-determination, criminal justice, and social justice at all government levels.

### ENDING INEQUALITIES & DISPARITIES

ESD professionals acknowledge social and institutional structures and systems that perpetuate oppression, repression, and the propagation of trauma and suffering to individuals and communities throughout the world and work towards ending these inequalities and disparities.

## VIOLATIONS

Violation of standards in this Code does not automatically imply legal liability or violation of the law. Such determination can only be made in the context of legal and judicial proceedings. Alleged violations of the Code would be subject to a peer review process. Such processes are generally separate from legal or administrative procedures and insulated from legal review or proceedings to allow the profession to counsel and discipline its own members.

# DISCLAIMER

The Association of ESD Professionals intends for this Code of Ethics to be used by Association members and hopes that ESD professionals everywhere will choose to abide by it and organizations adopt it. Violations of the provisions of this Code do not imply violations of law or legal liability as those the determinations are made by appropriate officials in law and law enforcement. Alleged violations of the Code can be subjected to peer review and discipline by ESD organizations, however those proceedings are separate from legal proceedings and do not carry with them the weight of the law. In addition, this Code does not make any guarantees regarding the ethical behavior of ESD professionals. Rather, its ethical standards serve to guide ESD professionals in their professional conduct and ethical decisions. It is recommended that ESD professionals confer with authoritative materials and/or professionals in the fields of mental health, social work, law enforcement, law, accounting, and social justice when confronted with ethical and other difficult decisions and situations.

# REFERENCES

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6. National Education Association, "Code of Ethics for Educators," <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/code-ethics-educators>.
7. Self Defense Discussion Group on Facebook, "Code of Ethics," <https://www.facebook.com/groups/319566518178729>.

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## ETHICS & CONDUCT COMMITTEE



### MICHELE ELEFANTE

CHAIR, ETHICS & CONDUCT COMMITTEE

Michele is a founding Board Director for the Association of ESD Professionals, Chair of the Ethics & Conduct Committee, and member of the Credentialing Committee. For over 30 years, Michele's love of martial arts, teaching, and supporting others has been a driving force in her life. Michele has combined these loves in her work with non-profit programs providing therapy to people from diverse populations and teaching youth de-escalation skills, mindfulness, and compassion for themselves and their world. She conducts workshops across the country on topics ranging from stress reduction to dealing with trauma to empowerment self-defense (ESD) and has experience working with LGBTQ+ community, youth, and US Navy service members.

### DR. SALLY JOHNSON VAN WRIGHT

MEMBER, ETHICS & CONDUCT COMMITTEE

Sally is a founding Board Director for the Association of ESD Professionals, Secretary of the Board, and a member of the Executive, Credentialing, and Ethics & Conduct Committees. Sally is a martial artist of 34+ years who teaches women and girls Shuri Ryu Karate, Modern Arnis (Philippine martial art), and Empowerment Self Defense through The Leopard School of Martial Arts. Sally holds a PhD in social work, focused on pro-social learning among justice-involved adults. She is a licensed social worker and addictions counselor, as well as a long-term correctional leader.



### ONYEMMA OBIKEKA

MEMBER, ETHICS & CONDUCT COMMITTEE

Onyemma Obiekea is a founding Board Director for the Association of ESD Professionals, member of the Finance and Ethics & Conduct Committees, and future Chair of the Communications & Legislative Affairs Committee. Onyemma is a public health advocate and attorney who works at the intersection of law and health. Onyemma has examined the impact of intimate partner violence on community health, and currently works with Black Women for Wellness where she focuses on reproductive justice and women's freedom.

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ASSOCIATION OF ESD PROFESSIONALS