



THE BRITISH COLUMBIA POLICE CODE OF ETHICS

The people of British Columbia expect the police to serve with courage, fairness, impartiality and integrity and to apply democratic principles that honour human dignity in the pursuit of justice. Recognizing that the policing profession is distinguished by the character and values of the individuals within it, the British Columbia Police Code of Ethics reflects the commitment of all Police Officers in British Columbia, regardless of their rank or position, to ethical principles and values, and acceptance of the responsibilities and privilege that accompany public service. Moreover, it is recognized that the Police Code of Ethics applies both individually and collectively, and as such applies equally to the organizations and agencies that make up the policing profession in British Columbia.

Fundamental Principles

Police Officers in the Province of British Columbia, along with their respective organizations and agencies, embrace the following Fundamental Principles, which underpin the Guiding Values, Primary Responsibilities and Decision-Making framework.

- democracy & the rule of law
- justice & equality
- protection of life & property
- safeguarding the public trust
- that the police are the public and the public are the police
- the principles of the Constitution of Canada
- the rights enshrined in the Charter of Rights & Freedoms

Guiding Values

Police Officers in the Province of British Columbia, along with their respective organizations and agencies, look to the following Guiding Values, which should direct all our decisions. Moreover, we recognize that our decisions will be judged according to how well they correspond to these values.

- ☞ citizenship ☞ courage ☞ fairness ☞ impartiality ☞ integrity
- ☞ loyalty ☞ public service ☞ respect

Primary Responsibilities

Police Officers in the Province of British Columbia, along with their respective organizations and agencies, affirm the following Primary Responsibilities, which are defined in terms of three key relationships. First, there is the Public, for whom we serve. Next there are Professional Partners, with whom we work, and ourselves Personally, to whom we must be true. Moreover, we recognize that responsibility occurs personally and collectively, and that accountability must accompany responsibility for it to be effectual.

The Public

Our basic policing duties are to protect lives and property, preserve peace and good order, prevent crime, detect and apprehend offenders and enforce the law, while at the same time protecting the rights and freedoms of all persons as guaranteed in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In fulfilling these duties, we must strive for excellence, which includes the exercise of professional discretion and judgment in a manner consistent with our Fundamental Principles and Guiding Values. Recognizing, however, that the ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval, support and willing cooperation, we must also provide open, responsive, impartial and accessible service. In other words, to safeguard the public trust, we will be responsible to the public and accountable publicly for what we do.

The Policing Profession and Partners

Consistent with our duties and responsibilities to the public, we are also responsible to the policing profession. First, we must always respect and to the best of our abilities abide by the standards of the profession, while at the same time seeking to improve them. To accomplish this, we will demonstrate a willingness to engage in open dialogue, which raises important issues and significant opportunities that can advance the profession for the purpose of providing better policing service to the public. This entails an openness to change and recognition of the need for the policing profession to develop informed, collaborative and participative police officers.

In addition to the policing profession, we are responsible to other professions that also serve the public. We must always cooperate with other police and law enforcement professionals, and with all those in the criminal justice system, in order to develop an open, just, and impartial justice system. As well, we must always strive to cooperate with other public service professionals in order to advance the public good. This involves the sharing of information in a relationship-building manner that celebrates the interdependent nature of professionals in promoting the goals of the justice system. This information sharing must balance confidentiality needs and due process with the needs of professionals, who are working for justice and the common good.

Personally

We accept personal responsibility for acting legally and ethically. The Police Officer is a model of discipline under trying circumstances, but to achieve this we must practice humility and a desire to learn from our experiences and mistakes and those of others. As individuals we must have a clear idea of how to separate private advantage from public service and to make decisions that avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of personal gain. As well, ethical behavior entails duties that we owe to ourselves personally. In addition to reflecting upon what is right and what is wrong in the context of policing, we must as individuals develop a proper balance between our work and our personal life.

Ethical Decision-Making

Acting responsibly towards the Public, the Policing Profession and its Partners, and to ourselves Personally, will reduce the number and severity of ethical difficulties faced in policing, but it will not eliminate them. Ethical difficulties emerge when Police Officers, either as individuals or collectively, act in a way that is not defensible on legal and ethical grounds. To avoid such difficulties, Police Officers, along with their respective organizations and agencies, should ask themselves the following questions, which help to identify ethical issues and to test decisions on ethical grounds.

1. Is the activity or decision consistent with organizational or agency policy and the law?
2. Is the activity or decision consistent with the British Columbia Police Code of Ethics?
3. What are the outcomes or consequences resulting from the activity or decision and whom do they affect?
4. Do the outcomes or consequences generate more harm than good? Do they create legitimate controversy?
5. Is the activity or decision likely to raise actual or perceived conflicts of interest where a personal advantage is gained because of one's professional position?
6. Can the activity or decision be justified legally and ethically? Would the activity or decision withstand public scrutiny on legal and ethical grounds if it resulted in problems that became known generally?

If the answers indicate that there may be a question of professional ethics, then consultation should occur with someone trustworthy and experienced who can provide reasonable direction and advice.

Policing is serious work and there are important issues at stake. It requires not only technical competence but also a willingness to take difficult action in trying times. As well, it requires a recognition that we must act with a concerted commitment to serve and protect using democratic principles in the service of the law while honouring human dignity in the pursuit of justice. And it is this commitment to principled policing that distinguishes us as professionals, both to ourselves and to the public.



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