



Model Language for Standards of Ethical Conduct for Physical Therapy Regulatory Boards

Background

In 2025, APTA's House of Delegates voted to approve a new Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession ("Code of Ethics") drives unity of ethical standards across the profession, provides an easily navigable structure, and sharpens language to increase accountability and guidance on key topics facing today's physical therapists (PTs) and physical therapist assistants (PTAs). Grounded in the profession's ethical principles and ethical commitments, the Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession's new structure delineates enforceable standards of conduct¹ and aspirational illustrative examples for PTs and PTAs.

The Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy (FSBPT) represents 53 regulatory bodies that regulate physical therapy according to each jurisdiction's practice act. Regulatory boards address ethical conduct in three primary ways to regulate the practice of physical therapy to protect the safety and welfare of the individuals in their communities.

A regulatory board may -

- Reference the current APTA Code of Ethics broadly in its statutes, rules, or regulations.
- Cite a specific, older version of the APTA Code of Ethics in its statutes, rules, or regulations.
- Utilize its own code of ethics/standards of ethical conduct, which may consider language and principles from the APTA Code of Ethics.

While acknowledging the many benefits of unifying and modernizing the Code of Ethics, physical therapy regulatory boards have identified three core challenges when considering how they might use the APTA Code of Ethics in their jurisdictions' context:

1. **Enforceability:** Certain components of the new APTA Code of Ethics, as with previous versions, cannot be regulated.
2. **Nomenclature changes:** Some Boards name specific documents and resources regarding ethical behavior in their rules, regulations, or statutes that are now outdated.

¹ Throughout this document, "standards of conduct" refers to the standards of conduct described in the APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession (January 2026). "Standards of ethical conduct" refers to the model rule language in Appendix A recommended by the Model Language for a Code of Ethics for Licensing Boards Task Force.

3. Potential loss of PT and PTA-focused resources: With the movement to a joint PT/PTA Code of Ethics for the PT profession, the former resources used to support boards' regulation of PTs and PTAs (e.g., Standards of Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant and Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant) may face limited long-term availability or access (i.e., APTA website).

In May 2026, FSBPT convened the Model Language for a Code of Ethics for Licensing Boards Task Force (“Task Force”) to assess these challenges and recommend model language and guidance to support physical therapy regulatory boards. The Task Force began its work with the solid foundation of the APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession. Task Force members then discussed regulators’ specific challenges and needs, as well as legal considerations, to develop the guidance and model language outlined in this document.

Purpose

Professional ethics is foundational to the practice and regulation of physical therapy. Physical therapy regulatory boards play a critical role in ensuring safe, competent patient care by licensing qualified physical therapists and physical therapist assistants and enforcing standards of ethical conduct as well as state laws and regulations. The “Model Language for Standards of Ethical Conduct for Physical Therapy Regulatory Boards” aims to support FSBPT’s members in establishing, refining, and regulating standards of ethical conduct as best suits their jurisdiction and in alignment with the profession’s values, principles, and commitments.

Guiding Principles

Task Force members identified five guiding principles to shape its recommended model language for standards of ethical conduct.² As each regulatory board considers and modifies the model language for its unique context, the Task Force recommends that the selected standards of ethical conduct align with these principles.

- **Enforceable** – Enforceable is defined by three criteria:
 - The regulatory board has the authority to regulate and enforce the standards of ethical conduct specific to the practice of physical therapy.
 - The board can clearly determine a licensee’s adherence to the standards.
 - The standards are specific and have a nexus to the practice of physical therapy.
- **Comprehensive** – The standards of ethical conduct include all relevant stakeholders and practice settings and anticipate ethical challenges.

² Please reference Appendix A for the model language for standards of ethical conduct.

- Clear and Usable – The standards of ethical conduct are commonly understood, unambiguous, and directive.
- Durable – The principles underpinning each standard of ethical conduct stand the test of time, even when specific details change.
- Consistent – The standards of ethical conduct align with other guidance and resources developed by FSBPT.

How to Read This Document

This document is separated into three sections, reflecting the three core methods in which FSBPT’s members use the APTA Code of Ethics:

- Use Case 1: References the current APTA Code of Ethics broadly in its statutes, rules, or regulations
- Use Case 2: Cites a specific, older version of the APTA Code of Ethics in its statutes, rules, or regulations
- Use Case 3: Utilizes its own code of ethics/standards of ethical conduct, which may consider language and principles from the APTA Code of Ethics

Each section provides an understanding of regulatory boards’ needs, guidance, and recommended model language (where appropriate). Appendix A provides model rule language for standards of ethical conduct that any jurisdiction may adopt or adapt.

Resource Reference Table

Several resources are referenced throughout this document. The table below provides the name, year, and link for these resources.

Resource Name	Year
Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession	2026 (current)
Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist	2020 (outdated)
Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant	2020 (outdated)
APTA Guide for Professional Conduct	2020 (outdated)
APTA Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant	2020 (outdated)
FSBPT Model Practice Act, Seventh Edition	2022 (current)
FSBPT Informed Consent Task Force resources	Various
FSBPT’s Sexual Misconduct and Boundary Violations Committee resources	Various

Key Definitions

- “Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants” refers to persons with legal authorization to practice physical therapy in the jurisdiction.
- “Persons over whom a PT or PTA has supervisory, evaluative, or other authority” refers to patients and clients, immediate family members of patients and clients, students, supervisees, research participants, and employees.
- “Standards of physical therapy practice” refers to examining, evaluating, and testing patients/clients with mechanical, physiological, and developmental impairments, functional limitations, and disabilities or other health and movement-related conditions in order to determine a diagnosis, prognosis, and plan of treatment intervention, and to assess the ongoing effects of intervention.

Introduction

The Model Language for a Code of Ethics for Licensing Boards Task Force developed the “Model Language for Standards of Ethical Conduct for Physical Therapy Regulatory Boards” to support regulatory boards in establishing, refining, and regulating standards of ethical conduct as best suits their jurisdiction and in alignment with the profession’s values, principles, and commitments. The Task Force strongly encourages each jurisdiction to review this guidance and model language and consider how to utilize the recommendations provided in its context.

Use Case 1: References the current APTA Code of Ethics broadly in its statutes, rules, or regulations

Some jurisdictions reference the APTA Code of Ethics broadly by stating that grounds for action include acting in a manner contrary to the APTA Code of Ethics. Others cite the “profession’s core values and ethical standards” in their statutes, rules, or regulations as the governing standards of ethical conduct for PTs and PTAs. The guidance and model language outlined below aim to support these jurisdictions in reviewing and updating their rules, as needed.

A. Guidance

The APTA Code of Ethics contains both enforceable standards of conduct and aspirational illustrative examples. They are both grounded in the profession’s ethical principles and its nine ethical commitments, and together, they support PTs and PTAs in cultivating and advancing an ethical practice. For regulators, distinguishing between the two is critical in holding licensed practitioners accountable. The current APTA standards of conduct provide concrete, verifiable standards of ethical behavior that PTs and PTAs should follow in their patient and client management, research, business administration, and engagement with peers and other employees. The aspirational illustrative examples provide directional guidance to PTs and PTAs towards ethical behaviors but may not be enforceable in regulatory proceedings.

If a jurisdiction that broadly references the APTA Code of Ethics decides to update its rules and regulations, there are two options for consideration: 1) statutory or rule language that points to the profession’s standards of conduct, or 2) model rule language for standards of ethical conduct.

Legal opinions exist suggesting that delegating authority to a trade organization, or similar outside entity, is problematic. By referencing the APTA Code of Ethics as the standard for ethical conduct in one’s jurisdiction, the board is delegating responsibility to an outside authority, which could result in legal challenges, such as the overturning of a board’s decision

for disciplinary action. When considering the two options listed above, the Task Force recommends speaking with the board’s legal counsel.

Regardless of the option selected, the Task Force recommends that the regulatory board consider including knowledge of the jurisdiction’s standards of ethical conduct in its Jurisprudence Assessment Module or other jurisprudence requirements.

B. Model Language Options

1.1. *Statutory or Rule Language that Points to the Profession’s Standards of Conduct*

“A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall adhere to the recognized standards of conduct of the physical therapy profession as established by rule.”

OR

1.2. *Model Rule Language for Standards of Ethical Conduct*

(Please reference Appendix A)

Use Case 2: Cites a specific, older version of the APTA Code of Ethics in its statutes, rules, or regulations

Several jurisdictions cite a specific year or version of the APTA Code of Ethics in their statutes, rules, or regulations. Some jurisdictions also name supporting resources, such as the Guide for Professional Conduct, which do not yet have a counterpart alongside the new APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession. The guidance and model language outlined below aim to support these jurisdictions in updating their statutes, rules, or regulations, where appropriate.

A. Guidance

Lack of enforceability: The APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession contains both enforceable standards of conduct and aspirational illustrative examples. They are both grounded in the profession’s ethical principles and its nine ethical commitments, and together, they support PTs and PTAs in cultivating and advancing an ethical practice. For regulators, distinguishing between the two is critical in holding licensed practitioners accountable.

As stated in Use Case 1, legal opinions exist suggesting that delegating authority to a trade organization, or similar outside entity, is problematic. By referencing the APTA Code of Ethics as the standard for ethical conduct in one’s jurisdiction, the board is delegating responsibility to an outside authority, which could result in legal challenges, such as the overturning of a board’s decision for disciplinary action. When considering whether to name the APTA Code of

Ethics specifically in statutory language or create one's own code of ethics/standards for ethical conduct, the Task Force recommends speaking with the board's legal counsel.

If, upon review, regulators choose to reference an older version of the APTA Code of Ethics, they should consider entering the text of the specific version of the APTA Code of Ethics into their rules to address the delegation challenges noted above.

If regulators choose to cite the APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession, they should consider entering specific standards of conduct into their rules. The standards of conduct outlined in the APTA Code of Ethics provide concrete standards of ethical behavior that PTs and PTAs should follow in their patient and client management, research, business administration, and engagement with peers and other employees. The aspirational illustrative examples provide directional guidance to guide PTs and PTAs towards ethical behaviors but may not be enforceable in a regulatory setting.

Nomenclature changes: As noted, the APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession brings together the guiding ethical practices for both physical therapists and physical therapist assistants in a single guiding document. For jurisdictions that choose to update their rules and regulations to reference the new Code of Ethics, they will need to change the names of the previous Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapist and the Standards of Ethical Conduct for the Physical Therapist Assistant to the Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession. Moreover, they will need to remove the reference to the Guide for Professional Conduct and Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant, as these guides no longer correspond directly to the current Code of Ethics.

Potential loss of PT and PTA-focused resources: Jurisdictions that choose to cite the current Code of Ethics should acknowledge its authority over both PTs and PTAs. While the 2020 Guide for Professional Conduct and Guide for Conduct of the Physical Therapist Assistant are now outdated, they continue to provide thoughtful, thorough guidance to support regulatory proceedings. These resources can currently be found in the Appendix of FSBPT's Model Practice Act.

The model language below provides two options for consideration for jurisdictions that currently reference a previous version of the APTA Code of Ethics: 1) statutory or rule language that points to the 2026 APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession, or 2) model rule language for standards of ethical conduct.

Regardless of the option selected, the Task Force recommends that the regulatory board consider including knowledge of the jurisdiction's standards of ethical conduct in its Jurisprudence Assessment Module or other jurisprudence requirements.

B. Model Language Options

2.1 Statutory or Rule Language that Points to the 2026 APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession

“A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall adhere to the standards of conduct in the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession dated January 2026 as established by rule.” [Recommendation: state the specific standards of conduct from the APTA Code of Ethics for the Physical Therapy Profession in the rules.]

OR

2.2 Model Rule Language for Standards of Ethical Conduct

(Please reference Appendix A)

Use Case 3: Utilizes its own code of ethics/standards of ethical conduct, which may consider language and principles from the APTA Code of Ethics

Several jurisdictions have their own code of ethics, and while they may consider the APTA Code of Ethics in forming their own, they do not cite the APTA Code of Ethics in their rules, statutes, or regulations. The guidance below aims to support these jurisdictions if they consider reviewing and updating their own code of ethics to reflect changes in the profession and its standards of ethical conduct.

A. Guidance

For jurisdictions that have their own code of ethics or standards of ethical conduct, the Task Force recommends cross-referencing the alignment of their statutes, rules, and/or standards with the model language for standards of ethical conduct found in Appendix A. Other jurisdictions may be working to create their own standards of ethical conduct or code of ethics. These jurisdictions should review and consider the model language for standards of ethical conduct in Appendix A as they determine their own standards of ethical conduct.

If referencing an ethical document is not acceptable in one’s jurisdiction, regulatory boards could require that licensees demonstrate their knowledge of standards of ethical conduct in the Jurisprudence Assessment Module or other jurisprudence requirements.

Appendix A: Recommended Model Rule Language

These standards of ethical conduct establish the ethical foundation for licensed physical therapists and physical therapist assistants practicing in [jurisdiction name]. The board may have grounds for action against physical therapists and physical therapist assistants or deny their license on the basis of unethical conduct as defined by the following standards of ethical conduct.

Patient and Client Care

1. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall protect all individuals' confidential information and not access or disclose confidential information without documented authorization or unless otherwise required by law.
2. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall obtain ongoing informed consent from the patient/client or their legally authorized representative.
*** Each board should consider the resources developed by the [FSBPT Informed Consent Task Force](#).*
3. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not abandon patients/clients. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall provide reasonable notice and complete documentation if terminating the provider relationship for any reason, and coordinate notification about alternative services for obtaining care, if the patient or client continues to need physical therapy services.

Accountability

4. A physical therapist shall retain full responsibility for managing all aspects of the physical therapy care of each patient/client.
5. A physical therapist is responsible for the clinical supervision of physical therapist assistants and support personnel providing physical therapy services.
6. A physical therapist assistant shall work under a physical therapist's supervision.
7. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall practice within their scope of practice consistent with their individual training and qualifications and in compliance with jurisdictional standards.
8. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant, when identifying patient needs for care that are outside their jurisdictional standards and individual training and qualifications, shall refer to other health providers, as necessary.
9. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall cooperate fully with requests from their jurisdiction's physical therapy regulatory board.

***Each board should define the scope of requests for which they expect cooperation (e.g., complying with a subpoena issued by the board; appearing and providing information at an interview requested by the board; disclosing requested information; providing truthful and accurate information on an application or during the application process for a license or renewal)*

Integrity

10. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall practice in a manner consistent with standards of physical therapy practice and jurisdictional law.

11. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall comply with self-reporting guidelines as established by the jurisdictional board.

***Each board should establish the appropriate time frame for self-reporting and the types of infractions that should be self-reported (e.g., conviction of a felony or intervention in lieu of a felony; the termination, revocation, or suspension of membership by a jurisdiction or national physical therapy professional association).*

12. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall report a licensed healthcare provider to the appropriate licensing board when there is reasonable cause to believe that the licensed healthcare provider has engaged in illegal, unethical, or unprofessional conduct, or is unfit to practice.

13. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not engage in discriminatory actions against, abuse, neglect, harass, exploit, or exert undue influence over patients, colleagues, students, or any individuals over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or other authority.

14. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall report suspected cases of abuse, neglect, or exploitation involving children or vulnerable adults to the appropriate authority, subject to law.

15. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not practice:

- while impaired by drugs, chemicals, or alcohol;
- with a mental or physical condition that impairs the ability of the licensee to practice with skill and safety.

16. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall comply with applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations.

17. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not engage in sexual misconduct or sexual relationships with their patients and clients, supervisees, or students.

***Each board should consider the resources developed by the [FSBPT Sexual Misconduct and Boundary Violations Committee](#).*

18. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not cheat or assist others in conspiring to cheat on the National Physical Therapy Examination, the Jurisprudence Assessment Module, other jurisprudence examination requirement, other post-licensure examinations, or continuing education requirements.

***Each board should list the relevant exams or assessments for its jurisdiction.*

Responsible Business Practices

19. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall provide relevant information and documentation and shall not make misleading, deceptive, untrue, or fraudulent representations in any form of communication, including billing.
20. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not engage in any conflicts of interest that interfere with professional judgment and decisions.
21. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall not, at any time, accept gifts or other considerations that influence or give an appearance of influencing their professional judgment and decision-making.
22. A physical therapist and a physical therapist assistant shall fully disclose any financial interest they have in products or services that they recommend to patients and clients or to the public.

Acknowledgements

The Model Language for a Code of Ethics for Licensing Boards Task Force served from April to May 2026. Acknowledgement and appreciation are extended to them for their dedication, service, and thoughtful contribution to this work.

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