BACP Ethical Framework 2026: what changes and what to do now

A two-page summary for UK counsellors · Checked 13 October 2026

The short version

There is no separate "BACP AI framework". The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions 2026 is BACP's full revision of the framework every member signs up to. For the first time, it says something specific about AI and digital tools.

Key dates

4 August 2026 · Done.	BACP publishes the framework and opens three months to read it and prepare.
August to October · Done.	The familiarisation period, for reading it, comparing it with the 2018 version and taking your questions to supervision.
Tuesday 3 November 2026 · In effect.	All BACP members have had to work to the 2026 framework since Tuesday 3 November 2026.

What changes, in three parts

1. **All your professional relationships.** The same ethical commitments now cover colleagues, supervisors, supervisees, trainees, employers, organisations and the public, not only clients.
2. **A rationale for your decisions.** Be able to explain in writing what the ethical issue was, what shaped it, what you decided, what happened and how you reviewed it.
3. **Core responsibilities, including AI.** Clause 2.1(e) names AI and digital tools for the first time.

The AI clause 2.1(e) in plain English

Before you use any AI tool, digital tool or online platform, assess the risk. Then be able to show five things.

1. **You are competent to use it.** You know what goes in, what comes out, where it ends up, and how to correct or stop it.
2. **You understand how data are handled and stored.** Which country, who else touches it, whether it trains AI, how long it is kept, how you delete it.
3. **You are open with clients about it.** What it does and doesn't do, where their information is, and that they can say no.
4. **You have informed consent before any of their data goes in.** A separate, explicit yes, recorded before the first use. Before means before.
5. **The decisions stay yours.** You read every output before it becomes part of a record or a decision.

The clause names no product and approves no tool. A "BACP-approved" AI tool does not exist.

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What to do now

Most of it is writing down what you may already do.

Checklist

- [ ] **Read the framework itself**, not a summary.
- [ ] **List every digital and AI tool that touches client information:** notes, dictation, scheduling, video, cloud storage, and any general AI assistant you use for admin.
- [ ] **For each tool, answer the five points** and date the answers. Where the vendor can't answer, write that down too. "Asked on [date], no answer yet" is a legitimate entry.
- [ ] **Update your privacy notice** so it names the digital tools that may collect or store client data (clause 3.1).
- [ ] **Add consent to the tool to your client agreement**, as a separate, explicit yes. Already using an AI tool with existing clients? Have that conversation before any more of their data goes in.
- [ ] **Write a rationale for each tool you keep:** what it does, what you checked, the risks and how you reduce them, what clients are told, and when you'll review it. Five lines is enough.
- [ ] **Take it to supervision** and put a review date in the diary: a year out, or sooner if the vendor changes its terms.
- [ ] If you belong to more than one body, check what the others say about AI.

What you don't need to do

Stop using digital tools, buy anything, or wait for a product to call itself "compliant". The framework sets requirements for you.

Free course: the 2026 framework and AI

You leave with a draft rationale and a first risk check of one tool.

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Notes

Checked 13 October 2026 against BACP's Ethical Framework 2026 and its "Preparing for the 2026 Ethical Framework" page (no longer publicly available). The 3 November date was checked again on 9 November 2026 against the framework itself and BACP's Ethical Framework page. Short quotations reproduced for explanation; the framework is © 2026 BACP. Made by Joy Solutions AB. Not affiliated with or endorsed by BACP. General information, not legal or ethical advice. Out of date? hello@joy.day