California Dental Hygienists' Association
The Voice of Dental Hygiene

# CODE OF ETHICS FOR DENTAL HYGIENISTS

*Updated November 2026*

## 1. Preamble

California Dental Hygienists' Association (CDHA) is committed to improving the public's total health by advancing the art and science of dental hygiene, promoting disease prevention, expanding access to quality oral healthcare, and supporting the highest standards of education, research, licensure, and professional practice.

Dental hygienists are a community of essential health care providers devoted to the promotion and improvement of public health through the prevention of disease. They provide educational, clinical, preventive, therapeutic and collaborative services in a variety of practice settings. Through their actions, behaviors, and professional judgement, dental hygienists are consistent with their commitment to promote oral health while serving the public with integrity, compassion, accountability, and respect.

Members of CDHA agree to uphold the principles and values embodied in the CDHA Code of Ethics.

## 2. Purpose

The CDHA Code of Ethics serves as the ethical framework that guides dental hygienists throughout their career to achieve high levels of ethical consciousness, decision-making, and practice by the members of the profession.

The objectives of the CDHA Code of Ethics are to:

- Promote ethical awareness and a sense of professional responsibility.
- Lead in recognition of ethical issues and choices and to guide in making more informed ethical decisions.
- Establish standards for professional judgement and conduct.
- Communicate ethical behavior the public can expect of dental hygienists.
- Support ethical practice consistent with professional standards, applicable laws, and regulations.

3. **Code of Ethics Overview**
   The CDHA Code of Ethics provides the ethical foundation for the dental hygiene profession. It is intended to guide the professional conduct and decision-making of dental hygienists throughout their professional careers by inspiring continual ethical reflection and supporting professional judgement to cultivate community trust and safeguard the public.

4. **Ethical Principles**
   As health care providers, dental hygienists uphold five core ethical principles: Nonmaleficence, Beneficence, Autonomy, Justice, and Veracity.

   Ethics are moral principles defining right from wrong. They guide behavior to promote good, minimize harm, and respect dignity. For dental hygienists, these principles direct professional duties to promote health and prevent disease.

   **Nonmaleficence**
   Nonmaleficence is the ethical obligation to "do no harm". Dental hygienists deliver preventive care that minimizes risks, protects patient safety, and meets accepted standards of practice.

   **Beneficence**
   Beneficence is defined as acting in the patient's best interest to maximize benefits and minimize harm. Dental hygienists practice beneficence by providing compassionate, evidence-based care that prevents disease and promotes community health.

   **Autonomy**
   Autonomy mandates that patients have the right to self-determination and to accept or refuse treatment. Dental hygienists must provide clear information to support informed choices, while practicing within professional and ethical boundaries.

   **Justice**
   Justice requires that dental hygienists provide fair, equitable, and impartial care to all individuals without discrimination. Dental hygienists promote equal access to oral healthcare, allocate resources responsibly, and respect the dignity and needs of every individual

   **Veracity**
   Veracity is the ethical obligation to communicate truthfully, honestly, and transparently. Dental hygienists will provide accurate, complete, and understandable information to support informed decision-making, foster trust and respect individual autonomy.

5. **Core Values**
   Dental hygienists acknowledge the following values to guide their choices and actions.

   **Confidentiality**
   Confidentiality is the ethical obligation to protect a patient's personal and protected health information and respect their right to privacy. Dental hygienists will safeguard confidential information and disclose it only with the patient's authorization or when required or permitted by law. Maintaining confidentiality is essential to fostering trust in the provider–patient relationship.

   **Societal Trust**
   Societal trust is the confidence the public places in the integrity, competence, and ethical conduct of the dental hygiene profession. Dental hygienists will uphold behaviors that maintain and strengthen public trust, recognizing that confidence in the profession depends on their ethical actions, professional judgement, and accountability.

   **Informed Consent**
   Informed consent is the ethical and legal process by which a patient with decision-making capacity voluntarily authorizes care after receiving sufficient information to make an informed decision. Dental hygienists shall provide information in a manner the patient can understand, respect the patient's right to accept or refuse treatment, and recognize that informed consent is an ongoing process throughout the course of care.

   **Capacity**
   Capacity is an individual's ability to understand, appreciate, reason, and communicate informed decisions regarding their care. Dental hygienists should recognize that capacity may fluctuate and, when appropriate, take reasonable steps to ensure patients can meaningfully participate in decisions regarding their care.

6. **Application of the Code**
   Dental hygienists are accountable for applying the principles and values of this Code in all aspects of professional practice. Ethical decision-making extends beyond patient care and includes interactions with colleagues, employers, students, researchers, organizations, and the public. These principles are intended to guide professional judgment, support ethical decision- making, and promote conduct that upholds the integrity of the profession and protects the public.