

“Ethics and Practice: A Co-Occurring Perspective”



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Objective



- ❧ Discuss Types of Ethical Issues Encountered
- ❧ Review of Ethical Obligations.
- ❧ Applications to Daily Practice
- ❧ Case Examples
- ❧ Questions and Answers

(Upon completion of presentation, a Post-Test will be provided for those whose licensing boards require them)

Ethics



“Do No Harm”

Why Ethics?



Ethics, or moral philosophy, is a branch of philosophy that deals with the study of what is good, bad, right and wrong and includes values, principles and theories. Ethics includes not only moral matters but also and enterprise of disciplined reflection on moral choice. It confronts questions about principles that underlie judgement and rules. (Guttman, 2006)

3 Necessary Categories of Ethics



1. Moral Commitment. Deals with relationships between individuals and groups, such as relationships between parents and children.
2. Rules of Behavior. Rules guiding the relationships between worker and manager or between a member and the organization.
3. Professional Ethics. The professional and moral behavior of the helping professional in the five areas; clients, role, colleagues, employer and the profession itself. (Levy, 1972)

Code of Ethics

(6 Purposes from NASW)



- ❧ The *Code* identifies core values on which social work's mission is based.
- ❧ The *Code* summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that should be used to guide social work practice.
- ❧ The *Code* is designed to help social workers identify relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise.
- ❧ The *Code* provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable.

Code of Ethics

(6 Purposes from NASW)



- ☞ The *Code* socializes practitioners new to the field to social work's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards.
- ☞ The *Code* articulates standards that the social work profession itself can use to assess whether social workers have engaged in unethical conduct. NASW has formal procedures to adjudicate ethics complaints filed against its members.* In subscribing to this *Code*, social workers are required to cooperate in its implementation, participate in NASW adjudication proceedings, and abide by any NASW disciplinary rulings or sanctions based on it.

Ethical Issues Encountered



- ❧ ALL practitioners will face ethical dilemmas during their career.
- ❧ Most serious situations can be avoided.
- ❧ Most all practitioners are ethical and conduct work in their practice in ethically-prudent ways.
- ❧ Willful actions or neglect can lead to harm to others and can result in career-damaging consequences.

Navigating the Iceberg Field



Potential “Icebergs”

1. Conflict of Conflicted Interest
2. Over Identification
3. Familiarity
4. Outside our Area of Competency
5. Fearful or Dangerous Situations
6. Promises which Cannot Be Offered/Kept
7. Personal and/or Professional Bias

Navigating the Iceberg Field



There are many areas to avoid in working with our clients whereby situations regarding ethical dilemmas can be greatly avoided;

1. Politics
2. World View
3. Religion or Religious Views

Navigating the Iceberg Field



It is important to understand that we are working with our clients and although it is important to understand our client's and respect their views, it is equally important to avoid joining in or engaging in conflict to change these views as both are counter-therapeutic.

Navigating the Iceberg Field



“First Lines of Defense”

1. Attempt to avoid situations in the first place.
2. Decrease further escalation of problems identified.
3. Consult with a colleague/supervisor and document.

Case Example 1



Romantic Relationships with Clients

A new social worker is assigned a case of a man with considerable physical, mental and chemical health problems and who required periodic hospitalizations. This client also was a victim of sexual abuse. Soon after getting the case, the social worker took the client to a medical appointment and afterward drove to a nearby park with the client, climbed into the passenger seat with him and kissed him. She then took him to a friend's home and performed sexual acts on him.

The next day, the social worker was supposed to drive this client to a chemical dependency treatment program several hours away. The social worker took the client to a liquor store during the drive and pulled over one time to again perform sexual acts on him. When the car battery died, the social worker called the treatment facility stating the client would be a day late to treatment and spent the night together in a motel having sex several times.

Several days after dropping the client off at the treatment facility, the social worker drives to the facility and removes the client from treatment despite his not being eligible to leave. During the drive, the social worker pulls off and again performs sexual acts. The following week, the social worker brings the client to her home, gave him four Vicodin and again had sex with the client.

Throughout this time the social worker sent the client love letters, text messages, telephone calls and gifts.

Are there any ethical issues here?

Case Example 2



The Housing Market Boom and Career Crash

“Clyde” a substance use counselor, has a client whom he finds out is selling his home. Clyde, in the market for the purchase of a new home due to his relocation to accept his present position, learns of his client’s current desire to sell, establishes a deal and eventually secures finances and buys the home from the client. As a prideful new home owner, Clyde is naturally excited about his new home and tells his colleagues about it. His supervisor recognizes the seller as a former client whom Clyde was assigned to as the primary counselor. His administration learns of this and as Clyde is on the standard probationary period as a new employee, is subsequently terminated. What went wrong?

Case Example 3



Accepting Gifts from Clients

“Jose”, a young man with whom I worked in a Federal Setting IV School Day Treatment program called and requested to meet with me. He came to the country illegally as a child, and was now an adult – married with 3 young children. A year prior, he was having issues getting his citizenship and he asked that I write a letter in support of his citizenship, of which I happily completed.

During this meeting he presents with his wife and 2 of his children to thank me for my assistance throughout his life as he was starting his own business and doing quite well. He then presented me with a \$100 Applebee’s gift card, stating he would be “insulted” if I did not accept. What should I do?

Case Example 4



Medication (Mis)Management?

“Jenny”, a substance use counselor with a progressive knowledge and understanding of research-based treatments for co-occurring mental health and substances use disorders is working with a client in a residential treatment program. The program contracts with a medication provider who meets the standard required contacts and visits under the licensing rule. Jenny learns that her client, who had been diagnosed with a mental health condition for many years and was treated successfully in the community for that condition, has had the medication removed due to “treatment policy”. Jenny complains to her supervisor who does nothing about it. What should Jenny do next?

Participant Examples



(Audience Members Provide
Examples)

Question and Answers



Synthesis



- ❧ Know Your Specific Agency Policy Regarding Code of Conduct and Reporting.
- ❧ Know Your Particular Professional Association/Licensing Agency with Regard to Parameters and Violations/Reporting.
- ❧ Always Be Aware of Your Own Personal Biases
- ❧ Be Cognizant of Data Practices (i.e. HIPAA, CFR 42 etc.)

Resources



Guttmann, D. (2006) *Ethics in Social Work: A Context for Caring*, New York: The Haworth Press.

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Thank You

