

**Professional Ethics and Values in Contemporary Social Work Practice:
Ethical Dilemmas in the Age of Digital and Social Media
Alabama Department of Public Health**

Goals for Workshop Participation

Workshop participants will review the integration of professional ethics and the core values of the social work profession as they relate to contemporary practice with children, families, and other at risk populations.

Participants will receive information on the pragmatic use of social work ethics when confronted with ethical dilemmas in contemporary professional practice.

Participants will receive information on the complex intersection of morals, ethics, and professional values.

Participants will discuss the challenges to ethical social work practice in the age of digital and social media including confidentiality, client privilege, and monitoring of one's online identity.

Why Mandate Ethics as Continuing Education?

Ethical behavior is the foundation for effective social work practice

Ethical behavior influences the lives of at risk or vulnerable populations

Public health is an evolving and ever changing area of social work practice

Ethical dilemmas are ever present in social work practice

Other professional disciplines require continuing education in ethics and ethical behavior.

Morals and Ethics:

Moral: acquired values, feelings, and thoughts that lead to behaviors that are consistent with standards of what is right and wrong.

Professional Ethics: a function of morality; duty bound rules and procedures concerning the conduct and standards of the profession

Professional Values: grouping or ordering of values within a professional context

Core Values: NASW Code of Ethics

Service

Social Justice

Dignity and Worth of all human beings

Importance of Human Relationships

Integrity

Competence

Standards of Professional Conduct and Ethics (ABSWE)

- Responsibility to Clients
- Responsibility to Colleagues
- Responsibility to the Agency
- Responsibility to the Profession
- Responsibility to Society

What is an Ethical Dilemma?

A situation placing the social worker in a position to make a professional decision (often with multiple options) on behalf of a client or family with a potentially negative outcome for one or more parties.

Common Ethical Dilemmas for Social Workers

- Boundary relationships
- Self-disclosure
- Client privilege
- Mandated Reporting
- Duty to Warn
- Confidentiality
- Informed Consent
- Gift Accepting
- Record Keeping

Social Media and Ethics: Practice with Vulnerable Clients

- Potential for harm could increase when there is a lack of face to face interaction
- Sensitive information is often stored on mobile devices (HIPAA or FERPA)
- Not everyone is proficient in the virtual world
- Credentialing and misuse of social media by non-qualified professionals
- Electronic disclosure of information
- Are online or text encounters considered best practice or even accountable practice

Social Media and Ethics: Practice with Vulnerable Clients

- Opportunities for dual relationships with clients (ie... "friend requests")
- Should you Google search a client? Do you need consent to do this?
- Access to client information without consent?
- Shared computers in the office contain search histories.
- Quality of material when referring clients to online resources (blogs)

Ethics and Online Identities: Professional Implications

- Identifying as practicing social worker
- Potential impact on employment opportunities
- Professional boundaries help maintain the emotional safety of the client
- Identifying your place of employment
- Responsibility for online content and third party postings
- Public spaces provide outlet for self-disclosure
- Digital footprints are hard to erase

Privacy is hard to maintain

Ethics and Online Identities: Personal Implications

Using online sites for social networking with outside client access

Social networking while at work (Facebook, twitter, online shopping)

Proper use of privacy and security settings

Monitoring postings on the location of family, friends, and co-workers

Monitoring devices for underage minors

Framework for Analyzing Ethical Dilemmas (Mattison, 2000)

1. Gather background information and case details
2. Separate and document ethical practice considerations
3. Identify value tensions
4. Identify principles in the code of ethics which bear on the case
5. Identify possible courses of action:
 - a. Benefit/cost
 - b. Projected Outcomes
6. Assessment and justification of foremost priority/obligation
7. Resolution
8. Implement Decision

Mattison, M. (2000). Ethical decision making: The person in process. *Social Work*, 45 (3), 201-212.

Take Time for a Purposeful Pause

Contemplative Practice

Pause purposely before speaking

Remain open to each side of the conversation

Listen attentively not legalistically

React based on a holistic assessment of the situation

Use professional ethics as your guide to making the best decision on behalf of the client, colleague, and the agency.

Contact Information

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