



ETHICS IN HUMAN SERVICES: Questions that Matter

1 Am I an ethical practitioner?

Key Points

- ▶ Ethics: principles that govern a person (or a profession)
- ▶ Ethics goes beyond right and wrong
- ▶ Create a shared framework for discussing
- ▶ Establish a process which creates accountability and transparency
- ▶ Understand that information can change quickly and that what might look 'right' today, can look wrong tomorrow
- ▶ Remember to bring a compassionate heart to the process

Reflection Questions

1. What is my background in ethics?
For example, what training do I currently have in ethics?
2. What is my academic background? How might that influence my ethical thinking?
3. Am I an ethical practitioner?
4. How can I 'evidence' my ethical practices to someone else?

2 What do ethical dilemmas look like?

Key Points

- ▶ Ethical dilemmas can extend past the folks we support and involve our coworkers, agency, and even arise within ourselves
- ▶ Ethical issues may be obvious or subtle
- ▶ Ethical insight/practices can evolve over time
- ▶ Ethical issues may be experienced differently by new staff compared to long term staff
- ▶ Newer staff may benefit from more guidance and direction in identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas
- ▶ Experienced staff may benefit from moral support when tackling some of the more subtle ethical challenges they encounter

Reflection Questions

1. What is my experience in supporting people with disabilities? How does this influence my insight into ethical dilemmas?
2. Generate your own personal ethical examples that involve:
 - i. folks you support (and their loved ones)
 - ii. colleagues
 - iii. your agency
3. What would you do....
 - i. If someone you support told you they broke the law on the weekend?
 - ii. if your coworker told you they broke the law on the weekend?

Explain any difference in your responses to these scenarios

3 What information am I supposed to know?

Key Points

- ▶ **Foundation:**
 - ▶ Beneficence, Non-Maleficence, Respect, & Autonomy
 - ▶ **Organizational Info:**
 - ▶ Code of Ethics, Code of Conduct, Policies & Procedures
 - ▶ **Legislation:**
 - ▶ Duty to Report Obligations
- ▶ **Code of Ethics:**
 - ▶ Aspirational and values based
 - ▶ Does not 'tell' you what to do in a situation
 - ▶ Conflict may exist within the code
 - ▶ **Values:**
 - ▶ Respect for the Dignity of Persons
 - ▶ Responsible Caring
 - ▶ Integrity in Relationships
 - ▶ Responsibility to Society

Reflection Questions

1. What ethical information do I know already?
2. What ethical information do I need to find out?
3. What questions do I have about privacy and confidentiality (or other ethical concepts)?
4. Where is the best place to locate this information at my agency?

4 What are the decision making steps?

Key Points

- Advantages of having a documented process:
- ▶ Create transparency and accountability
 - ▶ Evidences a level of intentionality

Reflection Questions

1. Who is involved?
2. What are the issues?
3. Who am I in relationship to this issue?
4. What are my possible options? (look for 4+)
5. Analyze risk/benefits of each option
6. Choose an option
7. Act/ carry out your chosen option
8. Evaluate the outcomes of your option
9. Assume responsibility of your actions
10. Look for way to prevent future similar dilemmas from arising

Sample Case Study

You were recently hired as an employment specialist and have been given your first official intake. You start reading the file and realize you have been assigned someone you worked with 5 years ago. Your previous employment with the individual and family ended in an disagreement which was left unresolved.

5 Where can I get help?

Key Points

- ▶ **Know that you are not solely responsible for fixing anything**
- ▶ Find someone you trust to talk to
- ▶ Self-compassion and self-care are essential
- ▶ Keep good records
- ▶ Invite feedback
- ▶ Consider seeking outside help
- ▶ Repair relationships when possible
- ▶ Know it is ok to let go when repairing is not possible

Reflection Questions

1. What do I know about myself when I encounter difficult situations?
2. When thinking about my current record keeping strategies - what changes might I like to make?
3. What are my self care strategies?
4. Do I show compassion to myself the same way I would to a colleague and/or friend?

Deena M Martin PhD
REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGIST

www.deenamartin.ca