Ethics

Ethics involve our sense of what is right and wrong, what should and should not be done in certain situations in our personal lives and in our professional work.

- Ethical dilemmas are not right vs. wrong

Plan for the Session

- Introductions and Overview
- Ethical dilemmas
- The NASW Code
- Core ethical standards
- Ethical decision making
- Acting on ethics: Moral courage
- Applying the concepts
- Wrap-up and evaluation

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Five Sources of Ethical Dilemmas

• When standards conflict with each other
• When standards conflict with institutional demands
• When there are conflicting loyalties
• When good solutions seem unattainable
• When a professional finds it difficult to adhere to an ethical standard

The NASW Code of Ethics

• 1st Unified Code 1965
• Revisions 1979, mid-80s, early 90s, 1996, 1999
• Aspirational and enforceable tenets
• Application beyond membership
• Opportunities for errors of omission as well as commission

Six Purposes of the NASW Code

• Identify core values
• Summarize ethical principles and specific standards to guide practice
• Identify relevant factors when obligations conflict or uncertainties arise
• Inform the general public for professional accountability
• Socialize new practitioners
• Articulate standards that the profession can use to assess unethical conduct.
Features of the NASW Code

- Six Core Values & Ethical Principles
  - Service
  - Social Justice
  - Dignity & Worth of the Person
  - Importance of Human Relationships
  - Integrity
  - Competence
- 155 Standards
  - Organized by responsibilities to clients, colleagues, practice settings, as professionals, to the profession, to society
- Not hierarchical

Core Ethical Standards

- Self-Determination / Autonomy
- Informed Consent
- Professional Competence
- Conflicts of Interest
- Dual and Sexual Relationships
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Supervision
- Nondiscrimination
- Professionalism

Ethical Action or Reaction?
Sample Dilemmas

• A SW suggests, for efficiency, having supervisory meetings over lunch at a local café.
• A client complains to her new SW that her previous worker (the SW’s supervisor) was “horrible” and “just didn’t get it” about cultural differences.
• A SW, enjoying a large cold beer at a local blues festival, runs into two of her teen clients.
• A SW on a home visit about truancy is greeted with a meal and the entire extended family present.

Ethical Decision Making Model (It’s more than codes and laws)

• Who
  – can be of help?
• What
  – are my choices?
• When
  – have I made a similar decision?
• Where
  – do principles, standards, laws and policies lead me?
• Why
  – am I choosing this option?
• How
  – will I carry it out?

Who?

• Consultation
  – Supervisor
  – Colleagues
  – Specialists
  – Resources
  – Generate options, evaluate options, plan process, practice, debrief
• Before or after
• Inappropriate resources and required discretion
What?

- Generate alternatives, including non-action
- Pros and cons? For whom?
- Timing
- Fit with principles:
  - Beneficence, nonmaleficence
  - Justice
  - Fidelity
  - Veracity

When?

- Examine past dilemmas
  - Effective?
  - If not why not?
- How is this similar to past choices?
- How is it different?
- Have personal “policies” been developed for this issue?

Where?

- Codes: NASW, Licensure Boards, Accrediting bodies
- Laws and rules: Case, administrative, agency policies
- Principles:
- Standards: practice standards, ethical standards, NASW
- The dilemma of multiple destinations
Why?
• Examine motives
• Self-understanding
• The right thing for the wrong reason
  – Misapplication of valid concepts
  – Self-interest
  – Counter-transference
  – Relativism
• Principle of publicity

How?
• Process matters!
• Consider ultimate objectives
• Use social work knowledge and skills
  – Human behavior
  – Strategy
  – Empathy
  – Communication
  – Culture

Moral Courage
• Action in the face of fears
  – Different forms of courage
  – Different forms of costs
• “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends” (Dumbledore, in Rowling)
• Without it, what are any other virtues worth?
Challenges to Ethical Action

- Lack of awareness
- Discomfort
- Fear of exposure
- Sense of futility
- “Groomed for submission”
- Confusion/complexity
- Complacency/Apathy
- Personal cost
- Bystander effect

The Costs of Inaction

- Personal
- Professional
- Organizational
- Societal
- Moral cowardice

Practice through Dialogue

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?
Seven Favorite Resources

- www.globalethics.org (Ethics Newsline)
- Cohen, R. (2002). The good, the bad and the difference: How to tell right from wrong in everyday situations. NY: Doubleday.