



Ethics and Boundaries

Jim Seckman, MDiv, MAC, CACII, CCS



What Are The Defining Characteristics Of A Profession?

- A body of knowledge
- A special group of skills
- Addresses a special problem
- Testing for admission
- Lifelong learning
- Reflection on practice
- A code of ethics
- Accountability
- Specific roles, duties, and expectations



Why Do Professionals Need A Formal Statement Of Ethics?

- Everyone knows the expectations, values, and standards of professional behavior
- Corrective influence on personal bias/problems
- Common understanding and obligation among members of the profession
- Responsibility and accountability
- Protect the client and the professional by setting boundaries
- Gives the profession an "anchor"

What Are The Unique Characteristics Of Psychology As A Profession?

- You present yourselves as someone who can help a person work through emotional issues
- You deal with emotionally fragile clients
- Your work is emotionally intimate
- You are trying to work yourself out of a job
- The work with clients tends to be more holistic
- The time frame varies with clients

What Are The Unique Characteristics of The Clients?

- They come to you with a need, but . . .
- They don't always know what the need is
- They often have very complex familial and relational situations that cause problems
- They are often very vulnerable but don't recognize their vulnerability
- They often don't know how to handle their emotional neediness and anxiety

What Makes Clarity About Ethics Challenging?

- The vulnerability of the clients
- The clients often have poor boundaries
- If we reenact their Family/Relational dynamics
- Emotional attachments to the clients
- If we ignore our feelings towards the clients
- Our feelings can influence our decisions
- If we aren't aware of or don't understand our personal ethical decision-making model

What is the Difference Between

RIGHT

WRONG

Values Clarification

A value is something that a person thinks is worth

Doing

Having

Being

Values Clarification

Terminal values

These are ideas/concepts about ultimate goals or end states that are worth doing, having or being

Values Clarification

Instrumental Values

These are ideas/concepts about desirable modes of behavior that are instrumental in the attainment of Terminal Values

Values Clarification

How do we know something is a value?
We must:

- Be able to choose from alternatives
- Be happy with our choice and affirm it publicly
- Act on our choice consistently

Values Clarification

Terminal values

Instrumental Values

Approaches to Ethics

Deontological

Ethical behavior should rest on established rules and rights. Permanently defined principles do not change merely as a result in the change of circumstances. There is a right way to act and that applies to all similar situations.

Approaches to Ethics

Consequential/Utilitarian

This approach is concerned with the greatest possible balance of good over evil. Acting ethically from a Consequential Approach means that the person would, in each situation, ask what effect their behavior/decision would have in terms of maximizing good.

Approaches to Ethics

Situational

Ethical actions are practiced by applying a principle to each situation that arises. The interplay between the situation and the principle determines the ethical decision and action



Approaches to Ethics

Deontological

Consequential/Utilitarian

Situational



APA Code of Ethics

Introduction

The Ethics Code is intended to provide guidance for psychologists and standards of professional conduct that can be applied by the APA



APA Code of Ethics

*Intended to provide **guidance** . . .*

Designed as a statement of the values of the profession and as a guide for making personal and clinical decisions

NOI (necessarily) a list of rules!!!

APA Code of Ethics
Introduction

Serves as a guide designed to assist psychologists in constructing a course of action that best serves those utilizing your services and establishes expectations of conduct with a primary emphasis on the role of the professional psychologist

**APA Code of Ethics:
Fundamental Principles**

- **Beneficence and nonmaleficence:** working for the good of the individual and society by promoting mental health and well-being and avoiding actions that cause harm;
- **Fidelity and Responsibility:** honoring commitments and keeping promises, including fulfilling one's responsibilities of trust;
- **Integrity:** dealing truthfully with individuals with whom we come into professional contact;
- **Justice:** treating individuals equitably and fostering equality;
- **Respect for Rights and Dignity:** respecting the worth of all individuals and their cultural context and working to eliminate the effect of biases and prejudices.

Ethical Decision-Making

Thinking ethically is about changing our mindset.
We often work with clients who are in denial and thinking only of the present

Following ethical principles helps us to look beyond the present to the results of behaviors/decisions

Also, following ethical principles provide a check against denial

An Ethical Decision-Making Model

- Get the facts
 - Get all the information you can
 - Get as much input from others as possible
- Which ethical standards apply?
 - Which principle/standard is the priority?
 - What other principles/standards apply?

An Ethical Decision-Making Model

- Decide what is important
 - Having consistency of rules
 - Maximizing good for the community
 - Maximizing good for the individual
 - Assuring that a principle guides decisions
- Are your issues or feelings influencing the decision? Is there a boundary issue?

An Ethical Decision-Making Model

- Evaluate possible outcomes
 - Again, get input from others
 - Evaluate possible ramifications of the decision (e.g. legal, personal, professional)
 - Every decision/action carries the potential for benefit or harm
- Make your decision

Developing Appropriate Boundaries

What are boundaries?

A boundary is the emotional or physical space *you allow* between yourself and another person

What are Professional Boundaries?

Professional boundaries are not only the space between you and the client, but also what defines and differentiates our **roles** as counselor and client

Professional Boundaries

- Define who we are as a professional
- Protect the client and ourselves
- Help us take care of ourselves

Define Who We are as a Professional

Why are you in this field?

Unresolved issues will lead to poor boundaries and poor choices

Define Who We are as a Professional

2.06 Personal Problems and Conflicts

Psychologists refrain from initiating an activity when they know or should know that there is a substantial likelihood that their personal problems will prevent them from performing their work-related activities in a competent manner

Define Who We are as a Professional

Effective practice depends upon a clear identity as a psychologist and

A clear delineation of our professional roles

Define Who We are as a Professional

Principle B: Fidelity and Responsibility

Psychologists uphold professional standards of conduct, clarify their professional roles and obligations, accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior, and seek to manage conflicts of interest that could lead to exploitation or harm

Protect the Client and Ourselves

The professional is always in a position to subordinate the client's interests to his/her own interests

Why?

There is ALWAYS a power differential

Protect the Client and Ourselves

5.05 Testimonials

Psychologists do not solicit testimonials from current therapy clients/patients or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence

Protect the Client and Ourselves

Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

Psychologists are aware that special safeguards may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities whose vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision making

Protect the Client and Ourselves

3.05 Multiple Relationships

A multiple relationship occurs when a psychologist in a professional role with a person and at the same time is in another role with the same person.

Protect the Client and Ourselves

3.06 Conflict of Interest

Psychologists refrain from taking on a professional role when personal, scientific, professional, legal, financial, or other interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness

Protect the Client and Ourselves

The professional's influence and the client's vulnerability will ALWAYS be present!

Boundary confusion and boundary violations will reinforce destructive beliefs and behavior patterns and negatively impact the therapeutic relationship

Taking Care of Ourselves

Boundaries help us to:

- Clarify our roles
- Endure the stress
- Let go
- Increase positive outcomes

Myths About Boundaries

- I will hurt the client
- It will lead to conflict
- I will be accused of a power trip
- I will get rejected
- It will be seen as a threat
- I have to get angry to set a boundary
- The client may retaliate

Signs of Weak Boundaries

Thinking:

- No one else can help this client
- The program will fall apart without me
- I really like/hate this client
- This client has got to get help
- My way is the only way
- What I want is what the client needs
- Disclosing personal needs or problems

More Signs of Weak Boundaries

Practicing outside your competence

More Signs of Weak Boundaries

2.01 Boundaries of Competence

Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience

More Signs of Weak Boundaries

- Practicing outside your competence
- Feeling like you must protect a client
 - Bending the rules for a client
 - Overinvolvement with clients
- Overwork and not caring for self
 - Burnout
- Taking a different role with the client
 - Believing the flattery

Even More Signs of Weak Boundaries

- Touching the client
- Feeling overwhelmed by client issues
- Arguing with other staff over clients
 - Staff acting out family roles
 - Acting out client issues
- Acting out your issues with a client
 - Becoming their drug
 - Loss of perspective

Strengthening Professional Boundaries

- Any practice or decision concerning a professional boundary can be assessed based on ethical principles
 - Will the boundary foster client autonomy?
 - Will the boundary promote trust and the attainment of therapeutic goals?

It is ALWAYS the professional's responsibility to maintain appropriate boundaries!

Strengthening Professional Boundaries

Do Not:

- Be their drug
- Take responsibility for their issues
- Work harder than they do
- Act out their anxiety
- Break the rules/structure for them
- Practice outside the scope of your competency

Strengthening Professional Boundaries

Do:

- Let the program structure work
- Separate the urgent vs. the necessary
- Be clear about your own issues
- Be realistic about outcomes
- Be very aware of your physical space
- Work closely with the treatment team

Strengthening Professional Boundaries

- Learn your triggers
- What type of client triggers you, both positively and negatively
- Increase your awareness of your feelings towards the client

Remember:

Strengthening Professional Boundaries

Understanding others is wisdom;
Understanding oneself is enlightenment.

Lao Tzu

Resources

- Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Effective January 1, 2017
- 45 CFR Parts 160 and 164 (HIPAA)
- 2014 ACA Code of Ethics
- AMHCA Code of Ethics, Revised October 2015
