

Ethical Dilemmas and Ethical Decision Making

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Ethical Dilemmas

- Conflicts between two or more ethical principles or standards

Ethical Decision-Making Tools

- Rank-order conflicting principles to determine which principle(s) is of most importance

Ethical Rules Screen

1. Protection of Life
2. Equality and Inequality
3. Autonomy and Freedom
4. Least Harm
5. Quality of Life
6. Privacy and Confidentiality
7. Truthfulness and Full Disclosure

Using an Ethical Rules Screen

- Child with treatable, but deadly form of cancer
- Doctors have prescribed chemotherapy and radiation
- Mother is a member of a religious group that believes in prayer as a cure for illness and is opposed to western medicine
- Father does not have legal custody; he wants his daughter to receive treatment.

Conflicting Values, Principles, Laws

- Self-determination of parent and child
- Dignity and worth of the child
- Consent
- Freedom of religion
- Child custody

Ethical Rules Screen

1. Protection of Life
2. Equality and Inequality
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Supervisor's Role in Ethical Decision-Making

- Supervisors play in an important role in modeling, coaching, and engaging workers in discussions relating to ethics and ethical decision making.

Sample Ethical Dilemmas

- Write down what you believe are the conflicting ethical principles or standards involved in each scenario.
 - How could you use the ethical rules screen to assist you in ethical decision making?
- Write down how you would respond if you were the supervisor involved in this scenario?
- Pay attention to your own personal values, your supervisee's values, the clients' personal values, societal values, agency policy and the professional values and ethics of social work and child welfare.

Sample Ethical Dilemma #1

Two **deaf** children have been removed from the home of their **deaf** parents because of neglect and have been placed in the home of hearing foster parents who do not know American Sign Language.

The children's doctor says that the children would gain partial hearing if they were given cochlear implants,.

Your supervisee wants to recommend the implants as she believes implants will enable the children to communicate better now with their foster parents, as well as prepare them to be productive members of society.

The parents want their children to remain immersed in the Deaf culture and are strongly against the implants.

Guiding Questions for Sample Ethical Dilemma #1

- What are the conflicting ethical principles or standards in this scenario?
- How could you use the ethical rules screen to assist you in ethical decision making? Rank order the conflicting ethical principles or standards.
- Write down how you would respond if you were the supervisor involved in this scenario?

Sample Ethical Dilemma #2

You are a child welfare supervisor in a fairly remote, rural location, and there are only two other child welfare workers in your office.

A 15 year old girl in long-term foster care recently disclosed that she was pregnant and desired an abortion.

Both of the social workers you supervise have told you that they are morally opposed to abortion and are not comfortable working with this teenager.

Guiding Questions for Sample Ethical Dilemma #2

- What are the conflicting ethical principles or standards in this scenario?
- How could you use the ethical rules screen to assist you in ethical decision making? Rank order the conflicting ethical principles or standards.
- Write down how you would respond if you were the supervisor involved in this scenario?

Sample Ethical Dilemma #3

An allegation has been made regarding educational neglect of five brothers between the ages of 9 and 16. None of the boys has ever been to school, and all are unable to read or to do all but the simplest math problems.

The parents are both college graduates. Their reasons for not sending their children to school:

Both parents are firm believers that schools harm children by requiring conformity, and believe that their children will be better moral citizens by avoiding school.

The parents are also opposed to the concept and practice of home schooling, and refuse to participate in any state requirements for home schooling parents.

The boys are all well-fed, polite and friendly.

The social worker assigned to this case has come to you for guidance in this case.

Guiding Questions for Sample Ethical Dilemma #3

- What are the conflicting ethical principles or standards in this scenario?
- How could you use the ethical rules screen to assist you in ethical decision making? Rank order the conflicting ethical principles or standards.
- Write down how you would respond if you were the supervisor involved in this scenario?

Sample Ethical Dilemma #4

- You are a child welfare supervisor in a public child welfare agency. You have a number of young case workers in your unit, and you know they are all active in using text messaging and social networking to communicate.
- One of your supervisees just invited you to be her “friend” on a social networking website. Curious, you view who her other friends are on the website, and are surprised to recognize two of her “friends” as being her former clients.

Guiding Questions for Sample Ethical Dilemma #4

- What are the conflicting ethical principles or standards in this scenario?
- How could you use the ethical rules screen to assist you in ethical decision making? Rank order the conflicting ethical principles or standards.
- Write down how you would respond if you were the supervisor involved in this scenario?

Review

- Defined values and ethics
- Discussed ethical issues related to supervision and child welfare
- Introduced and ethical rules screen

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[The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare](#)

[Ethics in Child Welfare Supervision](#) online module

Thank you!