



Ethical Principles in Embedded Counselling

Embedded Counselling Practices M5X00962





*Do you remember the first time we met?
You told me about confidentiality and you
asked me if I had ever felt
At risk, you said
Of harming myself
You know
Once and for all
Well
I can tell you now that of course I do,
I think about it a lot,
Doesn't everyone?
In my situation?
(McLeod and McLeod, 2011)*



The Ethical and Moral Basis of Professional Practice

Why are ethics important in health and social care, education and other professional contexts?

The Ethical and Moral Basis of Professional Practice

Embedded Counselling presents potential ethical issues that are challenging for practitioners. Discuss?

- Confidential information on service users and individuals are held by practitioners
- Decisions made by practitioners can change an individual's life fundamentally
- Simultaneously legal professionals, service user groups, insurance companies etc can pursue client claims of negligence and unfair practice

- Almost all moral judgements about right or wrong appear open to debate
- Continuous vigilance concerning ethical issues needs to be maintained in any counselling relationship
- The client is vulnerable

- The client and counsellor have their own assumptions concerning morals and how life should be lived
- Professional counselling associations have their own code of ethics
- Primary roles such as teachers, social workers , nurses are guided by their own professional codes

Core Ethical Principals

- Grounded in common-sense appreciation of the 'right' thing to do
- Informed by a set of core values
 - Respect for the person
 - Belief in a person's capacity to develop and learn
 - Reflected in personal virtues such as
 - Honesty and integrity

Five fundamental moral constructs of ethical principals

- *Autonomy* : right to the freedom of action and choice as long as the pursuit of these freedoms do not interfere with the freedoms of others.
- *Non-maleficence*: the ruling to all helpers or healers that they must 'above all do no harm'

- **Beneficence:** the intention to promote human welfare
- **Justice:** the fair distribution of resources and services
- **Fidelity:** being loyal and reliable, and acting in good faith

(Karen Kitchener, 1984)

Working within the law

Confidentiality

- a practitioner may be required by the law to testify as to whether a client has conformed to court mandates.

For example:

- drug or alcohol abuse
- Supporting a contested claim for retirement on the grounds of ill health

- In these cases confidentiality has no special legal status – the wider social good (represented by the legal system) is placed above the individual.

Duty of Care

- Refers to a situation where there is risk of harm to the client or others.

- E.g. – an individual may tell the practitioner they are so angry with someone they intend to hurt them

The ethical dilemma here - is this just letting off steam?

Duty of Care

- For example– an individual may indicate harm by a third party
 - such as having been subject to sexual abuse
 - someone who is working under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Working within the law is heightened in many embedded counselling contexts such as nurses, teachers and social workers are bound by quasi-legal professional boundaries – they are always required to report on any suspicion of a case of sexual abuse. A private practice psychotherapist or counsellor has some discretion

Informed consent

- Before any counselling begins, it is the practitioner's responsibility to ensure that the service user understands what is on offer, and what may happen
- For example: youth club leader is approached by a 15 year old about school based problems

- For example:
- Jenny starts telling her social worker why she has moved out of the marital home.

Confidentiality

- Central to professional counselling practice
- Can be difficult in embedded counselling where the employer/organisation expects that all information on a client is shared across a team or central file.
- Possibly colleagues should be informed that a particular client is speaking to you but not the exact content of discussion

Limits of competence

- Consideration must be taken regarding whether they are capable in terms of:
 - Time
 - Their ability
 - They are temporarily impaired
- It may be better for:
 - The client to be referred on, or
 - The embedded helper to ensure adequate supervision for themselves

Dual relationships

- Biggest challenge for counselling dual relationship
 - The counsellor must be alert that their counselling response is not based on *what is right for them*, rather than whether it is in the best interests of *the person/client*
- e.g. a nurse may be under pressure to administer medication to twenty patients, one patient may need time to discuss their fear of dying – the client may be confused about their relationship with the helper – “is this just another ward round? Why can’t I talk now?”

- Be as clear as possible about what is happening at different times, as different roles are activated
- Avoid harm, frustration when shifting between roles
- E.g. "I thought that when I said these things, it was part of the counselling, ...that no one else would need to know..."

Complaints

- The client in embedded counselling makes a definite choice regarding who they are prepared to talk to based on previous contact
- The client is usually in contact with other professionals to whom they can complain, or turn to for alternative help, if things go wrong with the embedded helper.

Cultural differences

- Western cultures tend to view life from the individualistic viewpoint – the perspective of the individual
- Most other cultures tend to view life from the collectivist viewpoint – the perspective of what is best for 'us', what should 'we' do?

Risk and self-harm

- Forms this may take are:
 - Planning to take their own life
 - Be engaging in self-harming behaviour such as cutting, purging, starving, alcohol or drug abuse, unsafe sex etc
 - Be engaged in or planning to inflict harm on another person through physical, verbal or sexual violence, harassment, criminal activity or unprotected sex (i.e. in cases of HIV/AIDs infection)

Risk and self-harm

- When clients refer to risky behaviour to a counsellor they are almost certainly asking for help to avoid doing anything harmful.
- The counsellor needs to decide whether to proceed or seek some form of intervention
- Strategies for dealing with this kind of situation include an alarm system, colleague availability, de-escalation techniques, where the client is responded to in a calm, accepting manner.

Using touch

- Sensitive and problematic for embedded helpers
- Health professionals routinely engage in physical contact with patients
- Teachers and social workers fear that touch may be interpreted as sexual or disciplinary
- There has been a tendency in recent years to for the counselling profession to err on the side of safety and to avoid counsellor-client contact

Ethical decision making

- Collect all relevant information about a situation
- Consider who benefits from different courses of action
- Consider the consequences
- Identify duties. To whom does the duty exist in the case being examined?
- Consult. Use consultation with others to check understanding of duties, benefits and consequences
- Decide – bring together factors make a plan
- Test the plan. Consult how the plan appears to others

Concept of boundary

- Particularly important in an embedded role.
- There is always some level of dual relationship, and some degree of improvisation with regarding time, space and access issues.
- It is absolutely essential to do as much preparation as possible in thinking through boundary issues and defining personal and organisational limits.
- It is also crucial to use supervision and support regularly to review boundary issues

Reading

- Bond, T. (2016) Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action. London: Sage
- McLeod, J., and McLeod, J., 2011. Counselling Skills: A practical guide for counsellor and helping professions 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Chapter 7
- www.bacp.co.uk
