

Ethical Decision Making

Embedded Counselling Practices

A seven step framework for ethical decision making.

(McLeod and McLeod, 2011)

1. Collect all relevant information about the situation, the preferences and resources of the person seeking help and yourself as the helper, and the possible views of other people who might be affected by the outcome.
2. Consider who benefits from different courses of action. Identify the benefits of what could be done from the point of view of the person, the helper and others.
3. Consider the consequences. Identify the consequences of any action from the view point of the person, the helper and others.
4. Identify duties. To whom does a duty exist in the case being examined? For example, does the helper have a primary duty or responsibility to the person, or to a wider group, such as the person's family or society as a whole? To whom does the organisation within which the helper is employed have a duty or responsibility? What is the helper's duty to him/herself?
5. Consult. Use consultation with others; for example, a counselling supervisor or mentor, or published sources, to develop a more complete understanding of duties, benefits and consequences, and to check out your own assumptions in these areas.
6. Decide. Bring together these various factors into a preliminary plan of action.
7. Test the plan. Consult again to check how the plan appears to the other people (including the person being helped). Evaluate your plan from the perspective of Stadler's (1986) tests of 'universality', 'publicity' and 'justice' by reflecting on the following questions:

Framework for Ethical Decision Making

- Would I recommend this course of action to anyone else in similar circumstances? Would I condone my behaviour in anyone else? (Universality)
- Would I tell other counsellors/helpers what I intend to do? Would I be willing to have the actions and rationale for them published on the front page of the local newspaper or reported on the evening news? (Publicity)
- Would I treat another client in the same situation differently? If this person was a well-known political leader, would I treat them differently? (Justice)

Exercise

- In small groups, apply ethical decision making to the scenarios provided.

Ethical Dilemmas

- The scenarios illustrate the potential complexity of situations that may be ethically problematic in embedded counselling. In each case, the person seeking help was trying to get what they needed but did so in a way that placed the counsellor in a difficult position. The task for these counsellors was to acknowledge the dilemma, while remaining focused on maintaining an ongoing counselling relationship with the person. The story of Ian exemplified the importance of anticipating potentially difficult situations – Ian chose to ignore an aspect of the counselling relationship (his own health status), that had the potential to undermine his capacity to provide a safe space for counselling. The longer that time went on the harder it became for him to do anything about the situation.
