

Ethical Dilemmas in Mental Health – Week Four – answer and discussion notes

Scenario 1: Confidentiality Breach

Case Study

Dr Evans is a clinical psychologist working in a hospital. During lunch in a busy café, she discusses a particularly challenging client with a colleague. She does not mention the client's name, but describes their age, occupation, and a highly unusual medical condition.

A person sitting nearby overhears the conversation and realises the client is their neighbour.

Discussion Questions

- Has confidentiality been breached?
- Could the client be identified even without their name being used?
- What harm might result?
- How should psychologists discuss cases safely?

Key Ethical Themes

- Confidentiality
 - Professional conduct
 - Privacy
 - Public trust
-

Scenario 2: A Young Person's Disclosure

Case Study

Mia, aged 15, is attending counselling for anxiety. During a session she tells the psychologist:

"Sometimes my mum's boyfriend gets really angry and pushes me when nobody is around."

Mia becomes upset and says:

"You can't tell anyone. If you do, my family will be angry with me."

The psychologist wants to respect Mia's wishes but is worried about her safety.

Discussion Questions

- What concerns does this disclosure raise?
- Does confidentiality still apply?
- When should safeguarding procedures be followed?
- How could the psychologist involve Mia in any next steps?

Key Ethical Themes

- Safeguarding
 - Duty of care
 - Young people's rights
 - Protection from harm
-

Scenario 3: Dual Relationships

Case Study

Tom is a counselling psychologist in a small rural community. A new client, Sarah, contacts the service and is assigned to him.

At their first appointment, Tom realises Sarah is the captain of the local football team that he plays for every weekend.

Tom worries that refusing the client could delay support, but continuing the therapeutic relationship may create complications outside therapy.

Discussion Questions

- What problems might arise from this dual relationship?
- Could objectivity be affected?
- What boundaries would be difficult to maintain?
- Should Tom continue seeing Sarah?

Key Ethical Themes

- Professional boundaries
- Conflicts of interest
- Objectivity
- Client welfare

Scenario 4: Social Media Contact

Case Study

After several counselling sessions, a client sends their psychologist a friend request on social media along with a message saying:

"You've helped me so much. I feel like we're friends now."

The psychologist wants to be supportive but is unsure how to respond.

Discussion Questions

- Should the psychologist accept the request?
- What boundary issues could arise?
- How could they decline professionally?
- How might social media affect the therapeutic relationship?

Key Ethical Themes

- Professional boundaries
 - Online conduct
 - Therapeutic relationships
 - Confidentiality
-

Scenario 5: Gifts from a Client

Case Study

A long-term client who is ending therapy brings their psychologist an expensive watch as a thank-you gift.

The client appears genuinely grateful and says refusing the gift would upset them.

Discussion Questions

- Should the psychologist accept the gift?
- How might accepting or refusing affect the relationship?
- Could accepting create ethical concerns?
- What factors should influence the decision?

Key Ethical Themes

- Boundaries

- Professional integrity
 - Power imbalance
 - Cultural considerations
-

Scenario 6: The Camera-Off Client

Case Study

Leah, a counselling psychology client, attends online therapy sessions from her bedroom. During several sessions, she keeps her camera turned off and gives very short answers.

One day she says:

"I'm fine, honestly."

However, her voice sounds shaky and upset. The psychologist cannot see her facial expressions or surroundings and is concerned that important signs of distress may be missed.

Discussion Questions

- What challenges does online therapy create in assessing risk?
- Should clients be required to use their cameras?
- How might the psychologist explore concerns appropriately?
- What professional responsibilities exist when information is limited?

Key Ethical Themes

- Client welfare
- Risk assessment
- Quality of care
- Informed consent