

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The Ethics of Care



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INTRODUCTION

COUNSELLING CHAMPIONS MANY VALUES



‘Ethics and morals are about how we treat other people and interact with the world around up; they are the stuff of life’

(Procter, 2014, p.1)

The work of the profession needs to be respectful, inclusive, empowering, democratic, fair. We want to uphold those values in all of our interactions with clients. Yet it's not always clear how to do that, especially when values seem to be pulling against each other in different situations. To help practitioners, the intention below is to set down a framework or structure for members of the Counselling organisation to follow. This framework represents the standards of the Counselling profession and is there to help and support both clients and practitioners in ensuring that the profession as a whole is at all times acting ethically and working to best practice guidelines.

In line with the caring activity associated with Counselling, this ethical framework is built on the foundational values inherent within the Care Ethics, which include:

- *That humans are relational*
- *That ethical decisions are based on emotional motivations*
- *That ethical decision making can not be impartial*

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Ethics express the professional values foundational to the profession. Ethical standards reflect the standards of our culture and society that are acceptable to most people. Ethical standards are what the majority accepts as good, and the way they behave without imposed rules and regulations. 'Ethics framework' here means a set of values, priorities, and principles that provide ongoing guidance to an individual or to the people in an organization. Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, it is a frame of reference that gives a person or an organization ongoing guidance about what to do or how to behave. This framework is compiled in the understanding that we can unexpectedly face an ethical dilemma when unusual situations occur and guidance is needed to work through a possible course of action. An ethics framework can strengthen a profession's credibility, confidence and trust with service users and can give people in other agencies greater confidence in referring client to the service.

Because the Counselling profession has a particular aim for its profession, it has developed a set of specific values in relation to working practice.



BEHAVIOURAL ETHICS

To help develop this framework the work of a new field within the world of ethics has been referred to. In the past ethics has been considered a part of moral philosophy, but in the twenty first century a new discipline has emerged, which combines moral philosophy with psychology to try to explain human behaviour around the choices and actions we make with regards to ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. This framework is developed alongside the 5 steps associated with Behavioural Ethics. They are:

- *the recognition that humans have moral agency;*
- *that becoming a ‘best self’ has associated with it the ability to ‘do the right thing’;*
- *that there is a process associated with moral decision making*
- *which is closely aligned to moral intent and moral action.*

COUNSELLING CONTEXT

Counselling and psychotherapy developed during the twentieth century, and in recent decades have become increasingly used as responses to a diverse array of issues and conditions (Bondi 2006a; Furedi 2003; McLeod 2003; Rose 1990). People may be offered some form of counselling or psychotherapy for diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health problems such as depression and anxiety, for work-related stress and other workplace problems, for addictions and their consequences, for the impacts of abuse, to help resolve relationship difficulties and to help deal with the impacts of ordinary life events such as bereavement. Thus, although psychotherapy is often presumed to be primarily a treatment for mental health problems, these practices are used much more widely, and counselling in particular initially developed in contexts unconnected to health-care, as in the case of marriage or relationship counselling (Lewis *et al.*, 1992). Today, counselling services are located in a diverse range of settings across the private and non-profit sectors, sometimes within primary or specialist health care systems, sometimes as part of in-house support systems provided by employers, colleges and universities, and sometimes community-based where they often straddle distinctions between health and social care (Bondi with Fewell 2003; McLeod 2003). This proliferation and diffusion suggests that counselling has become quite widely used as a way of taking care of, or offering care to, people perceived to be in need.



COUNSELLING AIMS

- *Counsellors seek to assist clients to increase their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others*
- *To develop more resourceful ways of living,*
- *To bring about change in their lives.*
- *Counselling includes relationships formed with individuals, couples, families, groups, communities and organisations.*
- *Counsellors express their skills and professionalism in their approach that values the integrity, authority and agency of the client.*

(Jones, 2018, p.32)



Counselling Values

Values are the expression of the esteem with which a person or society regards a person and it is with this esteem or valuing that we Counselling is mainly concerned. The fundamental values of this framework are formed from the following beliefs:

- *respecting human rights and dignity*
- *alleviating symptoms of personal distress and suffering*
- *recognising and supporting the quality of relationships between people*
- *Persons are understood to have varying degrees of dependence and interdependence on one another.*
- *Individuals impacted by the consequences of one's choices deserve consideration in proportion to their vulnerability.*
- *Details determine how to safeguard and promote the interests of those involved.*
- *facilitating a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned within their personal and cultural context*
- *appreciating the variety of human experience and culture*
- *ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships*

ETHICS OF CARE: THE FOUNDATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

The **ethics of care** (alternatively **care ethics** or **EoC**) is a [normative ethical theory](#) that holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and care or benevolence as a virtue. EoC is one of a cluster of normative ethical theories that were developed by [feminists](#) in the second half of the twentieth century.^[1] While [consequentialist](#) and [deontological](#) ethical theories emphasize generalizable standards and impartiality, ethics of care emphasize the importance of response to the individual. The distinction between the general and the individual is reflected in their different moral questions: "what is just?" versus "how to respond?".^[2] Gilligan criticizes the application of generalized standards as "morally problematic, since it breeds [moral blindness](#) or indifference."^[3]

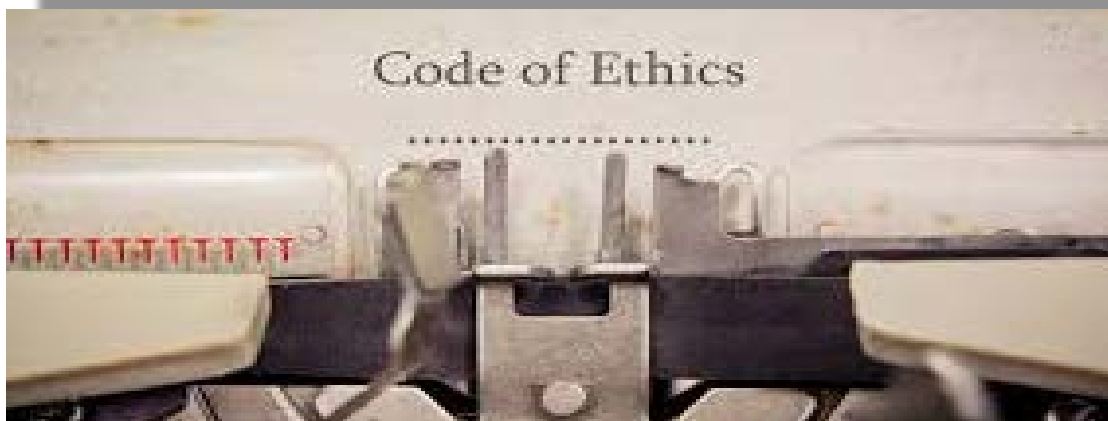


WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO COUNSELLING?

The central focus of the ethics of care is (Held, ?, p.4)

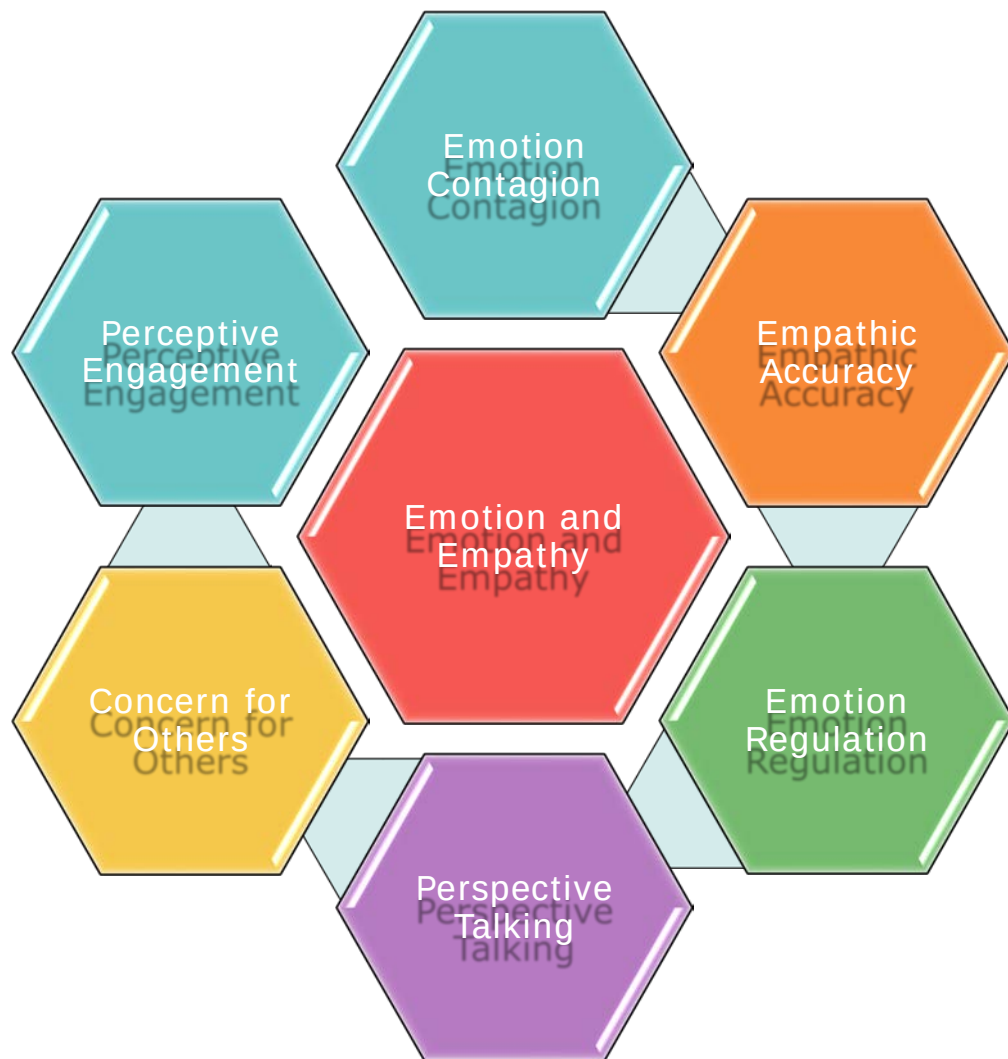
1. *The compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility.*
2. *The ethics of care recognizes that human beings are dependent for many years of their lives, that the moral claim of those dependent on us for the care they need is pressing, and that there are highly important moral aspects in developing the relations of caring that enable human beings to live and progress.*
3. *Prospects for human progress and flourishing hinge fundamentally on the care that those needing it receive, and the ethics of care stresses the moral force of the responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent.*
4. *The ethics of care starts with the moral claims of particular others, for instance, of one's child, whose claims can be compelling regardless of universal principles.*

Central to this is the understanding of human needs as relationship, this focus of the ethical framework lies with building and maintaining an ethical working relationship.



EMPATHY AND EMOTION

The responsibility of practitioners is therefore to ensure that they have the skills and ability to work in the following ways to ensure the building and maintenance of strong ethical relationships with clients:



1. **Emotion Contagion:** Before empathy can take place, you need to sense that an emotion is occurring – or that an emotion is expected of you. There is currently great debate about how emotion contagion occurs, and how we realize that emotions are required from us, but it is agreed that the process of empathy is dependent upon our capacity to feel and share emotions. Empathy is first and foremost an emotional skill.
2. **Empathic Accuracy:** This is your ability to accurately identify and understand emotional states and intentions in yourself and others.
3. **Emotion Regulation:** In order to be an effective empath, you've got to develop the ability to understand, regulate, and work with your own emotions; you've got to be self-aware. When you can clearly identify and regulate your own emotions, you'll tend to be able to function skillfully in the presence of strong emotions (your own and others'), rather than being overtaken or knocked out of commission by them.
4. **Perspective Taking:** This skill helps you imaginatively put yourself in the place of others, see situations through their eyes, and accurately sense what they might be feeling – so that you can understand what others might want or need.
5. **Concern for Others:** Empathy helps you connect with others, but the quality of your response depends upon your ability to care about others as well. When you feel emotions with others, accurately identify those emotions, regulate them in yourself, and take the perspective of others – your sensitive concern will help you engage with them in a way that displays your care and compassion.
6. **Perceptive Engagement:** This skill allows you to make perceptive decisions based upon your empathy and to respond or act (if necessary) in a way that works for others. Perceptive engagement can be considered the pinnacle of empathic skill, because it combines your capacity to sense and accurately identify the emotions of others, regulate your own emotions, take the perspective of others, focus on them with care and concern, and then do something skilful based upon your perceptions. Notably, in perceptive engagement, you'll often do something for another that would not work for you at all – and might not even be in your best interests. Perceptive engagement is about the other person's needs.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION



To ensure this, on a practical basis we will usually provide clients with the information they ought to know in advance in order to make an informed decision about the services they want to receive, how these services will be delivered and how information or data about them will be protected.

Where the urgency or seriousness of the situation requires us to intervene before providing such information, we will do so at the first appropriate opportunity.

We will give careful consideration to how we reach agreement with clients and will contract with them about the terms on which our services will be provided. Attention will be given to: a. reaching an agreement or contract that takes account of each client's expressed needs and choices so far as possible b. communicating terms and conditions of the agreement or contract in ways easily understood by the client and appropriate to their context c. stating clearly how a client's confidentiality and privacy will be protected and any circumstances in which confidential or private information will be communicated to others d. providing the client with a record or easy access to a record of what has been agreed e. keeping a record of what has been agreed and of any changes or clarifications when they occur f. being watchful for any potential contractual incompatibilities between agreements with our clients and any other contractual agreements applicable to the work being undertaken and proactively strive to avoid these wherever possible or promptly alert the people with the power or responsibility to resolve these contradictions.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ETHICAL DILEMMAS OCCUR

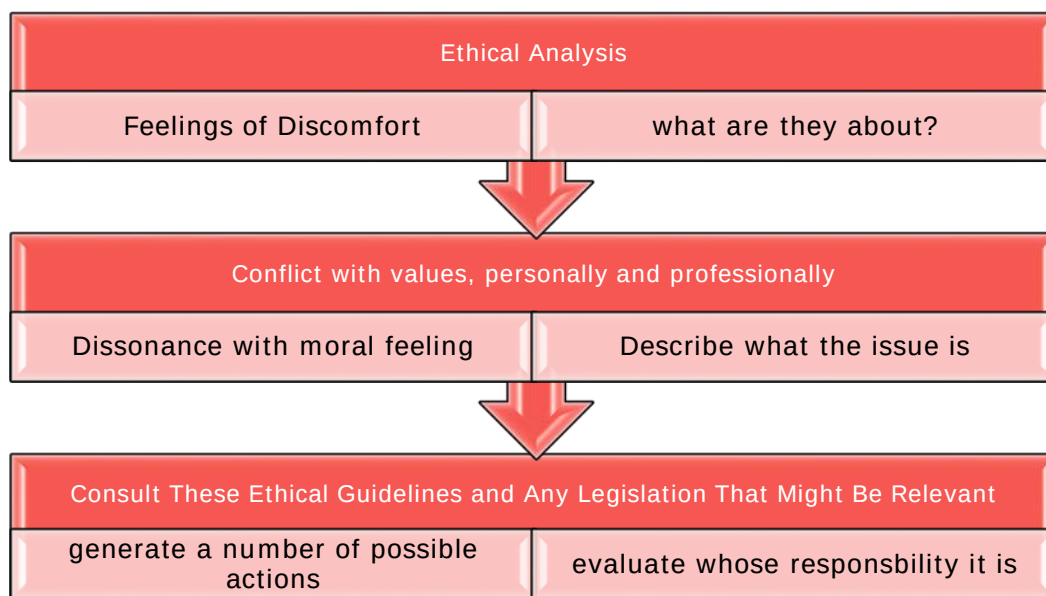
Practitioners are encouraged to develop their own ethical mindfulness:

Bond (2012, p.242)

‘A commitment to professional and personal integrity by acting in ways that are informed by ethical sensitivity and thoughtfulness in response to the complexity and diversity of contemporary social life’



ANALYSIS



REFERENCES