

Ethical Decision-Making

Why do we need an ethical decision-making model?

- A step-by-step logical procedure will assist in reducing the emotional impact on our ability to think rationally.
- To be in compliance with ACA (2005) Ethical Codes of Conduct.
- More support in situations when you have to testify in a civil or criminal action.

Ethical Decision Making Model Adapted from Welfel (2012):

Step 1: *Be sensitive to the moral dimensions of counseling.* Have insight into how your own personal principles, values, and worldview will impact your decision-making process.

Step 2: *Define dilemmas and options.* What is the situation? Who is your client? Who are the stakeholders? What are the cultural considerations?

Step 3: *Define the central issue and options.* What is the ethical issue(s) and what are the options?

Step 4: *Refer to the professional standards (e.g., ACA, ASCA, NBCC) and examine relevant laws and regulations, if any.*

Step 5: *Search out ethical scholarship.* What does the literature provide regarding how other counselors have dealt with this type of issue?

Step 6: *Consult with supervisors and colleagues.* An option at any point. Ensure consultation does not violate confidentiality. Ask:

- What have I not considered?
- What do you think my blind spots are?
- Is my interpretation of the ethical codes and laws accurate? What am I missing?
- What other resources should I look at?
- Have I adequately considered the ethical principles?
- Have I considered all responsible options?
- How would resolve this dilemma? Why?

Step 7: *Deliberate and decide.* What are you going to do? Consider your options. Identify competing values. Determine the best course of action. It is often touch to make ethical decisions, remember to engage in *ethical courage!*

Step 8: *Inform supervisor and document.* After deliberation, if you have a supervisor, discuss your decision with your supervisor before engaging in chosen action, and document, document, document!

Step 9: *Reflect on the experience.*

- **“Experience without reflection is wasted” (Welfel, 2012, p. 54).**
- **Did I act timely?**
- **Was I educated enough about the ethical codes?**
- **What ethical resources should I have available to me?**
- **Did I utilize consultation effectively?**
- **Did I adequately identify my competing values?**
- **Would I have done anything differently?**
- **What did I do that I liked?**
- **How can I pay it forward?**

Source: Welfel, E. R. (2012). *Ethics in counseling and psychotherapy* (5th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.