

Counselor Ethics and Responsibilities

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As counselors know, our first ethical guideline is to respect the dignity and welfare of our clients and to avoid doing harm (Stolsmark, E., 2015). As a professional counselor you have a duty to ensure that you enter a counseling relationship with a client who is autonomous in all decisions, who is informed of their rights and participation of services, who agrees with the record keeping guidelines and who understands your ethical responsibilities to their mental health treatment and care. Furthermore, as a professional you have a duty to protect the client relationship by utilizing record keeping, privacy, ensuring that you are well versed in cultural practices. A professional counselor should also seek further education and knowledge of topics and have the responsibility to seek guidance when needed. A professional counselor will maintain and improve their own mental health by utilizing self-care methods and advocating for future change in excellent services to protect those with securing excellent mental health. Counselors create, safeguard, and maintain documentation necessary for rendering professional services (ACA, 2014).

Client Rights

As a client enters a professional counseling realm, it is a requirement to know, understand and approve their rights as a client. There are five core principle terms that are used to ensure clients rights are protected. A counselor must ensure that they are encouraging a member to use autonomy and controlling the direction of services and gaining control over their lives. Independently making decisions, being involved in the decisions related to care and attending meetings regarding treatment direction to provide input and make decisions. As counselors we are to abide by justice and ensure that each client is treated fairly and equally. Counselors will respect, encourage and facilitate independence in clients by practicing fidelity and ensuring they

are practicing in good faith. A counselor will maintain healthy relationships with co-workers, clients and therapeutic staff in the field. Counselors will practice with beneficence by promoting the well being in others, encouraging good mental health techniques and ensuring participation in community wellness. Finally, all counselors will avoid non maleficence and avoid actions that can cause harm (ACA, 2014). In doing so counselors will ensure clients privacy is maintained and documents are secure. Counselors are responsible for protecting confidential information knowing that “trust is the cornerstone of the counseling relationship” (ACA, 2014)

Informed consent involves the right of clients to be informed about their therapy and to make autonomous decisions pertaining to it (Corey, G., et al., 2015). Informed consent is an ethical and legal requirement for practice. All clients need to be aware of the treatment they will be receiving, to be involved in the treatment, to make changes to the treatment and to discharge from treatment. It is imperative to document the informed consent and document the clients understanding. Informed consent can include topics of assessment, diagnosis, treatment goals, and limits of confidentiality. Informed consent should be reviewed at the first session with the client as there are very critical topics that need to be agreed upon before the counseling relationship can be agreed upon. The client must have the informed consent available to review and written in plain terminology and client must demonstrate understanding. The counselor must identify information that will be shared with insurance company and how that information will be shared, currently Arizona uses a company called Health Current to share electronic data about a client. A client can decide to opt out of this program and the client must be made of aware of this possibility. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is a federal protection that gives clients the right to understand where their information will be and how it

will be shared, stored and accessed. Licensed professional counselors are taught to follow HIPAA guidelines and maintain the ACA Code of Ethics (Stolsmark, E., 2015).

Responsibility to Warn and Protect

Mental health professionals have come to realize that they have a dual professional responsibility to protect other people from potentially dangerous clients and to protect clients from themselves (Corey, G., et al., 2015). Professional counselors need to know when the line is crossed with a potentially harmful client and the need to warn is initiated. This can be an extremely difficult ethical decision that should not be done lightly. Having excellent documentation in client records and ensuring the client is aware of the potential to release information is critical. Protecting clients from themselves and ensuring they are safe and free from harm at all times is critical. If a client suggests or reports suicidal or homicidal ideations or plans this must be considered as a crisis and crisis protocol must begin. Understanding that protocol is important. As equally important as the clients understanding of the counselor's role in reporting.

Client Record-Keeping

From an ethical, legal, and clinical perspective, an important responsibility of mental health practitioners is to keep adequate records of their clients (Corey, G., et al., 2015). Practitioners are required to keep records of service in doing so those records should accurate information about progress and treatment goals. They should be thorough and accurate and be easily understood and comprehensive to the reader. The law requires clinicians to keep a client record (progress note) on all clients, but the law does not require clinicians to keep process (psychotherapy) notes (Corey, G., et al., 2015). However, all notes should be written as if the member may read the notes at some time. It is important to remember in clinical settings that if

the incident isn't logged or written in the notes then it is nonexistent. Each client record should include assessments, service plans, current risk factors, informed consent, billing information and the discharge plan, along with other critical information. According to the HIPAA law all records will need to be in an identified secure facility such as electronic health records or locked file cabinets, there are specific requirements to storing records including maintaining records after client has discharged from treatment, it is best to understand those laws of practice.

Self-Care

Counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities (ACA, 2014). Maintaining a healthy balance between my professional and personal life is extremely important as a counselor. My professional role as a counselor is subjected to transference and countertransference and this can have a negative impact if not identified. I will ensure that I identify boundaries in work and home to keep the two units separated. Setting those boundaries and working between them is the hardest part, however the most important. I am not aware of a headstone that says, "She was a great worker". I enjoy personal care; I pride myself in manicures and scheduling alone time. I enjoy my family and have learned to spend individual time with each of them to maintain the loving, communicative relationships that I have with each of them. I have considered crafting in my self-care skills; however, I have found trouble identifying one that I can enjoy and sustain. Clinicians who do not engage in self-care practices are at risk of not being able to completely fulfill their professional duties (Corey, G., et al, 2015).

Some red flags that may be identified when my self-care is in jeopardy is my lack communication with family and co-workers. I will have shortened my communication and will refrain from speaking up when needed in certain situations. I will find myself completing tasks

late or leaving them for a family member to complete (even though enjoyable). Typically, my red flags are easy to identify personally, and I can take a moment to reflect and renew my personal path. I feel that every counselor needs a counselor, and my self-care is just as important as those I serve. I am not involved personally with counseling at this time, but I feel that when the time has been identified, for my benefit, I should seek support. Currently, I have friends and co-workers that we share opinions and beliefs personally and professionally to create a release of stress and worry. Sharing information can be done confidentiality and appropriately under the right circumstances. Again, the separation between professional and home life is imperative when sharing information. Since I am from a small town and have been in the area for several years, I believe utilizing a counselor in the valley would be more beneficial. Additionally, I have an employee assistance program that is available to me, if needed.

Advocacy

Advocacy is extremely beneficial, if you want to make change in governmental affairs you must be willing to advocate. One area that I am passionate about is advocating for additional school funding for counselors and education for teachers on adolescent behavioral health needs. I have seen many instances in Pinal County in which the school system has ultimately failed our students by a lack of resources readily available that addresses mental health issues. Adolescents rely on peers and social media and have built fears around asking for help. I believe there needs to be additional training for teachers and school staff to address inclusion, substance use and signs and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other disorders. Many times, our teachers are the only resource for our youth and if we as a nation cannot provide training to the teachers, then we have missed the point. We need to stop losing our children to substance use and suicide and get them the help they so desperately need but are afraid to ask for. Currently there is the Save

Education Jobs Act of 2021 in action that will permit the school districts to use up to 10 percent of funding to support teacher training (Le, Danny, 2021). While this is a small amount, I think there needs to be funding directly towards improving the mental health of adolescents.

Counselor Values

In the case of abortion, it is critically important to adhere to the ethical regulations and facilitating the decision made by a client. I am not at liberty to change the views of the client's family members. In family counseling, counselors clearly define who is considered "the client" and discuss expectations and limitations of confidentiality (ACA, 2014). I can treat the client and assist the client in moving forward with communication skills and how to develop an understanding relationship with her parents. Ultimately the health and wellness of my client is my sole responsibility. However, if the process of therapy shifts to the family unit, then upon start of service there needs to be a new family goal. This family driven goal will be designed to incorporate the family unit as a whole and not an individual goal. Balancing the rights and well-being of the individuals with the family as a whole is one of the most challenging aspects of ethical family practice (Corey, G., et al. 2015).

In the case of gay adoption, both men have been involved in a committed relationship have decided to start a family. Counselors honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural context (ACA, 2014). The only decision that needs to be made is the process they will agree upon to start the family. I would assist both men in processing the pros and cons to identify an agreed upon solution. I think this can be a very difficult decision for any couple, it does not apply to only same sex couples, many families struggle with starting families and how to go about the process. I believe having in-depth conversations with the couple to examine benefits of

both parties and coordinate the decision-making process would be most valuable. Counselors need to listen carefully and be willing to explore whatever concerns the clients bring to the counseling relationship (Corey, G., et al., 2015).

Summary

In summary, it is ethically important to follow guidelines and seek support when needed to maintain solidarity and compassion in your role as a professional counselor. Respecting client rights, protecting the community and ensuring that all are safe. Documentation plays an important role in delivering a high standard of care and ensuring the counselors liability.

Ensuring that I am taking care of myself by identifying professional and personal boundaries and participating in routine activities to promote good mental health which can include peer support and self-advocating for mental health support. Advocating is an important part of resolution whether it is for my client, myself or for government affairs. Understanding the core values and ethics is my responsibility and ensuring that I am abiding by professional values and identifying my personal values will be imperative to my success. Ongoing education on those things that I know and those things that I do not know will have a positive impact on my performance and self-empowerment. It will also ensure I am practicing in a competent and ethical manner (ACA, 2014).

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