

# Child Welfare Ethics and Values

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# Definitions

- **Values:** values pertain to beliefs and attitudes that provide direction to everyday living, whereas ethics pertain to the beliefs we hold about what constitutes right conduct
- **Ethics:** ethics pertain to the beliefs we hold about what constitutes right conduct

# Values Common to All of the Helping Professions

- Autonomy
- Nonmaleficence
- Beneficence
- Justice
- Fidelity
- Veracity



# Core Social Work Values

- Service
- Social Justice
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

# Core Child Welfare Values

- Protection of children
- Preservation of families
- Respect for families
- Respect for persons
- Client self-determination
- Individualized intervention

# Core Child Welfare Values

- Competence
- Loyalty
- Diligence
- Honesty
- Promise-keeping
- Confidentiality

- From “Ethical Child Welfare Practice: A Companion Handbook to the Code of Ethics for Child Welfare Professionals. Volume 1: Clinical Issues.” State of Illinois, Department of Children and Family Services, Office of the Inspector General. © 1999. Used with



# Responding to Ethical Dilemmas in Child Welfare

## What is an Ethical Dilemma?

- ◆ An ethical dilemma presents a choice that must be made between two mutually exclusive courses of action. These may be two goods, or benefits, or values, or principles or the avoidance of two harms. The choices facing the individual or organization must be relatively evenly balanced and of relatively equal worth. If one side of the dilemma is clearly more valuable, right, good, or desirable than the other side, then there is no dilemma, for the choice would obviously lean toward the more desirable side. (Adapted and modified from Rothman, 1998; used with permission).

## The definition has two key parts:

- the notion that the choices presented by the dilemma are mutually exclusive (one cannot exercise both courses of action). If one could take a course of action that would satisfy the “moral should” of both (or however many) principles that are involved, one would not have a dilemma. One would simply take that course of action.

## The definition has two key parts:

- the choices must be relatively balanced and of relatively equal worth. If the good obtained by exercising one of these options far outweighs the good obtained by the other, then there is no dilemma).

# Addressing Ethical Dilemmas: A Problem-Solving Approach

- Background Definitional Work
- Homework
- Decision Making
- Post Implementation Review

# Background Definitional Work

- Identify the problem or dilemma
- Identify the potential issues involved

# Homework

- Review relevant ethical guidelines
- Obtain consultation

# Decision-Making

- Enumerate and consider possible and probable courses of action and their relative outcomes (both intended and unintended)
- Evaluate the process thus far:
  - ◆ Complexity
  - ◆ Conscious awareness
  - ◆ Depth of understanding
  - ◆ Coherence and logic
  - ◆ Reflection
  - ◆ Relational accountability
- Decide on and implement the best course of action

# Post Implementation Review

- Examine outcome(s)
- Reassess
- Repeat needed steps

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-A

- You are an ER worker assessing an allegation of physical abuse. The child clearly has bruising on the back of the legs and on the buttocks. His parents are quite open about having used “physical” discipline with the child. They claim, however, that such practices are justified in different sections of the Old Testament. You are convinced that your clients are quite sincere in their religious beliefs and do not wish to dishonor their spiritual tradition.

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-B

- The foster mother belongs to a local fundamentalist Christian church and it is her practice to take all the children in her home to religious services with her. Your eight-year old client placed in her home and the child's family are Jewish. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-C

- You are investigating a case of medical neglect. The family is from a rural part of Mexico. In good faith, they took their child to see a curandera rather than to see a pediatrician. How do you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-D

- You have a fourteen year-old girl in your long-term foster care caseload. She advises you that she is two-months pregnant and needs your assistance to terminate the pregnancy. Your own deeply held religious tradition teaches that abortion is immoral. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-E

- You are assigned to a home study caseload in your adoptions unit. Your new applicants are a couple who have been together six years. Both are employed at good jobs providing benefits, although one is willing to be a “stay-at-home” parent. Their relationship seems stable and they seem to have sufficient resources (both personal and financial) to support a child. They are a gay couple. You are aware that the law allows for gay couples to apply to be adoptive parents, but your own religious convictions hold that this is immoral. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-E

- One of the parents you are working with confides in you that she is afraid she might be a lesbian. She is no longer living with the father of her children and is troubled because she has far more intense feelings for women than she does men. She is troubled by her own self-assessment because her religion teaches that homosexuality is immoral. She wants you to refer her to a therapist who can “repair” her. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-F

- One of the parents you are working with confides in you that she is afraid she might be a lesbian. She is no longer living with the father of her children and is troubled because she has far more intense feelings for women than she does men. She is troubled by her own self-assessment because her religion teaches that homosexuality is immoral. She wants you to refer her to a therapist who can “repair” her. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-G

- As an ER worker, you are investigating an allegation that a child has been deliberately burned by his parents. The school reported the child coming to class with circular burn marks on one arm. Upon meeting the family, you learn that their cultural healing tradition includes the practice of “coining,” in which a hot coin is placed on the area of the body in which the person is experiencing pain. The heat from the coin, according to their tradition, draws out whatever is inside the body that is causing the pain. How will you respond?

# Imposing Values Scenario 1-H

- A young Latino boy has just been ordered for a .26 hearing after spending over two years in the FR program. His white foster parents have had him since before his first birthday and are expressing an interest in adopting him. You have spoken with them before about your concerns about what you perceive as the marginal care they have provided him (e.g., at age 3, he already has significant dental problems). Lately, the foster parents have been expressing concerns about the boy's father driving around their neighborhood and causing trouble ("You know how those Mexicans are, Ms. Jones," the foster mother said to you one day in front of the little boy). You have also on several occasions heard the foster parents refer to him (with the greatest affection) as "our little taco." What will you do about their expressed interest in adopting this child?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-A

- A child welfare worker suspects a parent with whom she has been working on a voluntary basis has been using drugs. She asks the client to submit to a urinalysis test. The client is clearly uncertain whether he should do so. What should (i.e., must) the worker tell the client?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-B

- A father tells his Family Reunification worker that he gets very sad every time he visits his children and is thinking about canceling future visits. The decision to recommend reunification is very borderline and the twelve-month hearing is coming up soon. What are the worker's obligations?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-C

- A schizophrenic mother has had a history of having had several children taken away from her. Ultimately, in most of their cases, her parental rights have been terminated and the children were placed for adoption. The current adoption worker has noticed that the mother has a difficult time keeping her children's circumstances straight (e.g., she doesn't remember which ones are living in kinship care, which have been placed for adoption, and which one died at birth). She comes to visit the adoption worker and announces that she would like to voluntarily relinquish her parental rights to the child whose case is currently scheduled to have a §366.26 hearing. What are the worker's obligations?

## Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities Scenario 2-D

- You have been working with a family in a voluntary Family Maintenance case. The parents tell you that the family is still experiencing considerable stress and would like you to place the children into custody for their own protection. What are your obligations in this situation? How will you fulfill them?

## Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities Scenario 2-E

- A foster care worker has been working for months to earn the trust of the birth mother on one of his cases. He has finally made some inroads in this regard. One day, she tells him that she has some things she would like to share with him, but before she does so, she wants him to promise not to share what she has to say with anyone (including his supervisor) and not to record it in the case file. How should he respond?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-F

- The father in one of the families on your Family Maintenance caseload advises you that he has just been diagnosed as HIV positive. He has not told his wife about his diagnosis and, upon your questioning, reveals that they continue to have unprotected sexual relations. What will you do?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-G

- You encounter one of your clients while you are off-duty in a public place (like a shopping center or a grocery store). How do you handle the confidentiality issues?

## Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities Scenario 2-H (slide 1)

- You need to place a pair of young siblings out of the emergency shelter care facility into a foster home pending Juvenile Court action on an initial petition. You call a prospective foster mother with whom you have not worked before but have heard good things about. She has space for your two little ones. She begins to ask you questions about the children and their background, including the issues that brought the children into custody and the likelihood of reunification should the petition be granted.

## Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities Scenario 2-H (slide 2)

- What do you think the foster mother is entitled to know and why? What should she know? Are these the same things?
- What are your obligations to the birth parents in this situation?
- What are your obligations to the children?

# Client Rights and Worker Responsibilities

## Scenario 2-1

- An ER worker is conducting an investigation on a new family. In the course of the initial conversation, she discovers that the family is of the same religious faith as she (although they are in different congregations). This particular religious tradition has a long-standing reputation of taking care of its own and being there for its members when they are in trouble or have needs. Without seeking the clients' consent, the worker decides to approach the head of the church in that area and seek his help in intervening with the family and providing resources.

Your reaction? Was this an ethically appropriate step for the worker to take or not? Support your opinion.

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-A

- A probationary ER worker has just concluded an investigation on a family for neglect. He feels very sorry for the family and would like to do something to help alleviate their significant financial worries. He decides to hire their eldest daughter to baby sit for his wife and himself while they go out on Friday nights.
- Is this an ethically appropriate thing for the worker to do? Why or why not? Would it make any difference in your assessment of the worker's behavior if you knew whether the case was substantiated or not? If so, why, or if not, why not?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-B (Slide 1)

- The juvenile court judge this afternoon continued a court hearing until 8:00 tomorrow morning so that the six-year old foster child can be present. She lives in a foster home in the outskirts of the county, approximately a three-hour drive each way from the county seat where the worker lives and the hearing will be held. The foster parents are unable to transport, so the worker will have to go and get the child. Under the best of circumstances, if he left now, he would be back in the county seat by 11:00 at night, which the worker decides would be a better course of action than leaving his home at 1:30 in the morning and making the round trip all night.

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-B (Slide 2)

- Rather than try to arrange a one-night stay in a foster home or the children's emergency shelter (which is on the opposite side of the city), he decides (with his wife's consent) simply to take the girl to his home, allow her to sleep there, feed her breakfast, and get her to court on time from his home.
- Are there any **ethical** issues involved in this story (on the part of the worker)? If so, what are they and how should they be addressed?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-C

- The supervisor of the county's therapeutic foster home program works closely with a local child psychologist who is on a year-to-year contract to provide testing and therapeutic services for children in the program. While the child welfare program manager is ultimately responsible for awarding the contract each year, the supervisor has significant input into the decision.
- Towards the end of the calendar year, the supervisor receives a Christmas card from the psychologist with a \$30.00 Macy's gift certificate. What ethically appropriate responses are available to the supervisor?

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-D

- As a foster care worker, you become aware of your sexual attraction to the parent of some children on your caseload. What are the ethical issues here? What might your responses be?

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-E

- A single parent in one of your cases makes it quite clear to you that he or she would be interested in more than a professional relationship with you. What is your response?

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-F

- A single foster parent with whom you have placed several children in the past indicates that he or she would be interested in having more than a professional relationship with you. What are the issues here? How are they different from and similar to the issues when a client would make the same desires known? What is your response to the foster parent?

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-G

- You become aware that you are developing a sexual attraction to a single foster parent with whom you have placed several children in the past. What are the issues here? How are they different from and similar to the issues when a client would make the same desires known? What is your response?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-H

- You have just been promoted to supervisor and assigned to a unit in which some friends of yours work. What are the potential problems with this situation?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-I (Slide 1)

- You are a CWS worker for the county. You also happen to own rental property. Consider each of the following possibilities:
- a former client of yours applies to rent one of the apartments you own.
- a current client of yours applies to rent one of the apartments you own.
- an individual known to you to be a current or former CWS client of the agency (but not one of your own) applies to rent one of the apartments you own.

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-I (Slide 2)

- an individual known to you to be a current or former client of the agency (but not a CWS client) applies to rent one of the apartments you own.
- What are the ethical issues involved with each case? What are your possible courses of action?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-J

- You, as an FM worker, are getting ready to close out a case that is at the statutory time limit for providing voluntary services. The family has been especially problematic, requiring at least weekly contacts and sometimes even more frequent than that. They have made significant progress and are appreciative of your efforts on their behalf.
- The family's ethnic background is different than your own. It is a tradition in their culture that one extend one's thanks for assistance by having the helper be the guest of honor at a family dinner. To decline this honor is considered a serious insult. Your agency, however, has some fairly strict rules about conflicts of interest, one of which states that your salary and benefits are to be the only compensation you receive for your work. You ask your supervisor for advice, but his only reply is "tough call. I am sure you'll figure it out."
- What choice will you make and why?

## Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-K

- One of your co-worker tells you that she has been dating one of her clients whose case is about to come up for a twelve-month hearing in Juvenile Court. You are concerned that her judgment about what is best for her client's children may be clouded by her relationship with their parent.
- What are the ethical issues in this situation for YOU (not your co-worker)? What are your options?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-L (Slide 1)

- Under the permanency planning philosophy, child welfare workers are instructed to do their best to minimize the length of time that a child's permanent home setting is under question. In the "front-end" services, workers strive to help clients address problems so their children can remain in their own homes safely. Once the children are in out-of-home care, workers are charged with finding the child a permanent home as quickly as possible, whether that be the home of origin, a kinship home, or a permanent placement with a guardian or adoptive parent.

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-L (Slide 2)

- As an FR worker, you are charged with assisting your clients to do everything they can to ameliorate the problems that brought their children to the attention of the Juvenile Court so the children can be returned. However, under the philosophy of concurrent planning, you are also charged with planning simultaneously for an alternative permanent placement in the event that the efforts to reunify are unsuccessful.
- Are there any ethical issues in this arrangement (specifically, are there issues with dual relationships)? If so, how might you manage them?

# Dual Relationships - Scenario 3-M

- The Adoptions Office is frequently a very pleasant place to be on finalization day. Appreciative adoptive parents have been known, following the court hearing, to send such things as flowers, cakes, boxes of candy, or individual gifts to their worker (such as a pen and pencil set or perhaps a framed print by the worker's favorite artist). How appropriate ethically is the receipt of such gifts? What are the issues involved? How might they be resolved?