



Ethics and Decision-Making in Professional Practice: Part 1

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Objectives: Part 1

- ✓ **Define and identify ethical principles**
- ✓ **Identify personal biases that impact decision-making**
- ✓ **Identify thinking errors that impact decision-making**
- ✓ **Recognize the impact that working and coordinating with other professionals may have on decision-making and actions taken**

Core Ethical Principles

BENEFICENCE AND NONMALEFICENCE

- Obligation to bring about good through our actions and not do harm or minimize the harm that we do

FIDELITY & RESPONSIBILITY

- Aware of our responsibilities to society and the profession and uphold professional standards of conduct


INTEGRITY

- Promote accuracy, honesty, and truth in our work and do what we say we will do

JUSTICE

- Obligation to treat all people equally, fairly, and impartially

RESPECT FOR PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

- Respect others' rights to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination and respect individual differences
- 

Bias in Decision Making

Know yourself: What are your core values and beliefs as a person?

What are your professional values and beliefs?

- Do they differ from your personal ones? How?

Are there certain subject matters that are too charged for you to tackle?

- If you are the child of an alcoholic, would substance abuse be a trigger for you?
- How would your work with a client be impacted if they subscribed to beliefs or choices that went against your personal or professional beliefs?
 - For example: corporal punishment, same sex marriage, birth control/abortion

Cultural competency



Ethical Decision Making

- Answer is not “right vs. wrong”
- Need to look at the comparative ethicality of the options, keeping your personal biases and beliefs in mind
- Need to consider likely outcomes
- Also need to factor in all the rules and mandates of your profession (i.e., informed consent, mandatory reporting, confidentiality, etc.)
- Where does the buck stop?



Ethical Decision- Making Framework

Step 1: Define the parameters of your ethical scenario

- Who are the specific entities, large and small?
- What do you HAVE to do?
- What would you like to do?

Step 2: Define YOUR parameters in your role

- What CAN you do?
- What exactly is your role?

Step 3: Generate possible tactics

CONSULT, CONSULT, CONSULT

Describe this Family...

Destiny is a 14-year-old female who lives with her mom, Yolanda, and her younger brother (age 7). Also in the home is Yolanda's live-in boyfriend of 1 year, Romario. Destiny works part-time 7:30a-4:30p three days a week and Romario is currently unemployed after being laid off from a manufacturing company.

What happens next?

Yolanda took Destiny to the emergency room after finding her passed out on the couch at home. During Destiny's medical examination it was discovered that she had bruises on her upper arms and there was evidence of sexual activity.

Neither Yolanda nor Romario knew how Destiny became drunk but believed that she probably got into the alcohol cabinet. Yolanda had arrived home from work when she found Destiny. Romario said that he was home working in the shop while Destiny and her brother were in the house.

Ask Yourself....

What are your initial thoughts about this family?

What are your concerns?

Where would you rate your level of concern for each family member?

What did you base these concerns on?

What additional information would be helpful to receive?

This is Yolanda



This is Romario



This is Destiny



Their Kitchen



Their Living Room



But what if
this is
Romario,
Yolanda,
Destiny, and
brother?



And this is
their living
room...



Our Thinking

Thinking is not objective due to mental short cuts

- **Stereotyping and bias**
- **Representativeness Heuristic**
 - Estimate probability of an occurrence by comparing it with the mental prototype you have

Our Thinking Continued....

Illusory Correlation

- Perceiving relationship between two things in the absence of an association or overestimating the magnitude of the association

Obstacle: Our Experience

- Our own background/training influences our observation & interpretation.
 - Need to evaluate each situation as if it was a new one
- Keep previous experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions in check to ensure that it is not hindering your objectivity

Obstacle: Our Emotions & Psychological Needs

- Our own psychological needs for certainty, control, simplicity, and causation can hinder our critical thinking skills.
- Affect Heuristic
 - We use our moods to inform our decisions

Emotions and stress cloud your judgements and decisions and guide perceptions on what we attend to.

Common Errors in Reasoning in Child Welfare

Making decisions with insufficient information

Being reluctant to change one's mind/revise even when get new information

- Fixing on one explanation and looking for information that confirms explanation, ignoring other information

Being biased toward remembering information


- First or last information
- Recall information that supports one's belief
- Recall info emotionally charged, concrete easier

What Should You Do If...

You are meeting with a family due to behavioral issues with their 4-year-old son. They indicate that their preferred discipline is to paddle or swat their child for misbehavior. They report they have never left a mark.

- When does spanking or paddling cross the line into physical abuse?
- At what point do you discuss your concerns with the family?
- What reporting considerations might you take into account when deciding next steps?

Something to think about: How do your personal beliefs about spanking influence your thoughts about this case? What if you are supervising someone that has strong beliefs about this topic?



Ethical Decision Making Framework with Critical Thinking Skills

Step 1: Define the parameters of your ethical scenario

- Who are the specific entities, large and small?
- Does this situation bring up strong emotions or thoughts/biases?
- What do you HAVE to do?
- What would you like to do?

Step 2: Define YOUR parameters in your role

- What CAN you do?
- What exactly is your role?
- What data/facts do you have? Do you need more information? What is the quality and reliability of the information you have?

Step 3: Evaluate your options.

What are alternative explanations?

Would someone else see it the way I see it?

CONSULT, CONSULT, CONSULT

Ethics in Multidisciplinary Collaboration



Multidisciplinary Team Considerations

Ongoing feedback and quality improvement

Recognize each partner's strengths and challenges in addition to the cultures of collaborating agencies

Clarity and synthesis of goals

Some team members are virtual and others are in person

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

- Trying to address problems which are beyond the scope or expertise of any one professional
- Must balance responsibility, values, knowledge, skills and goals with your distinct role
- Ethically, every professional has separate obligations based on their profession and role
- Also have ethical obligation to other professionals to treat them with respect and act professionally
- For child welfare cases, CW is ultimately responsible for the safety of the child – relationships across professionals are not always equal with respect to the family involved.

When the child/family has multiple service providers...

- Sometimes courts order multiple treatments for a family, and referrals are made to different providers/agencies.
- Ethical considerations?
- Clarify goals of each type of therapy.
 - Are the services duplicative or contradictory?
- What is the family's perception/satisfaction of each service?
- Are they feeling overwhelmed?
- Sometimes less is more.
- Should you contact the other service providers?

“Find out what happened.”

A youth's parent reports to you they believe the child has been sexually abused by the parent's former spouse during a weekend visit. The parent and other multidisciplinary team members hope the child will disclose this to you during your service with them.

Ethical considerations?

What is your role? What can/can't you do?

- You are not a forensic interviewer.

Inform the caregiver of your limitations.

How do you proceed in treating the child?

- Child's symptoms should inform your treatment plan, not what others tell you or suspect.

“Give me
your opinion
on visitation/
placement/
reunification.”

The child gets upset after visits/should they be unsupervised/is this family ready for reunification?

Ethical considerations? Biases?

Have you ever met with the birth parents?

- Who is your client?

What *can* you say?

- Child's symptoms and progress
- Comments the child directly said about their parents to you in session
- Observations about parent's participation in child's treatment



Your Ethical Dilemmas



Ethics and Decision-Making in Professional Practice: Part 2

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Objectives: Part 2

- ✓ **Identify personal biases that impact your approach to clients**
- ✓ **Identify different types of boundaries and how they apply to your work**
- ✓ **Recognize how biases may impact boundaries and your decision-making with clients**

What is a boundary?

Boundaries refer to the difference between a professional and personal relationship.



Types of Boundaries


- Physical Boundaries

- Personal space – usually 2-3 feet around a person
- Also can be things you own

- Mental Boundaries

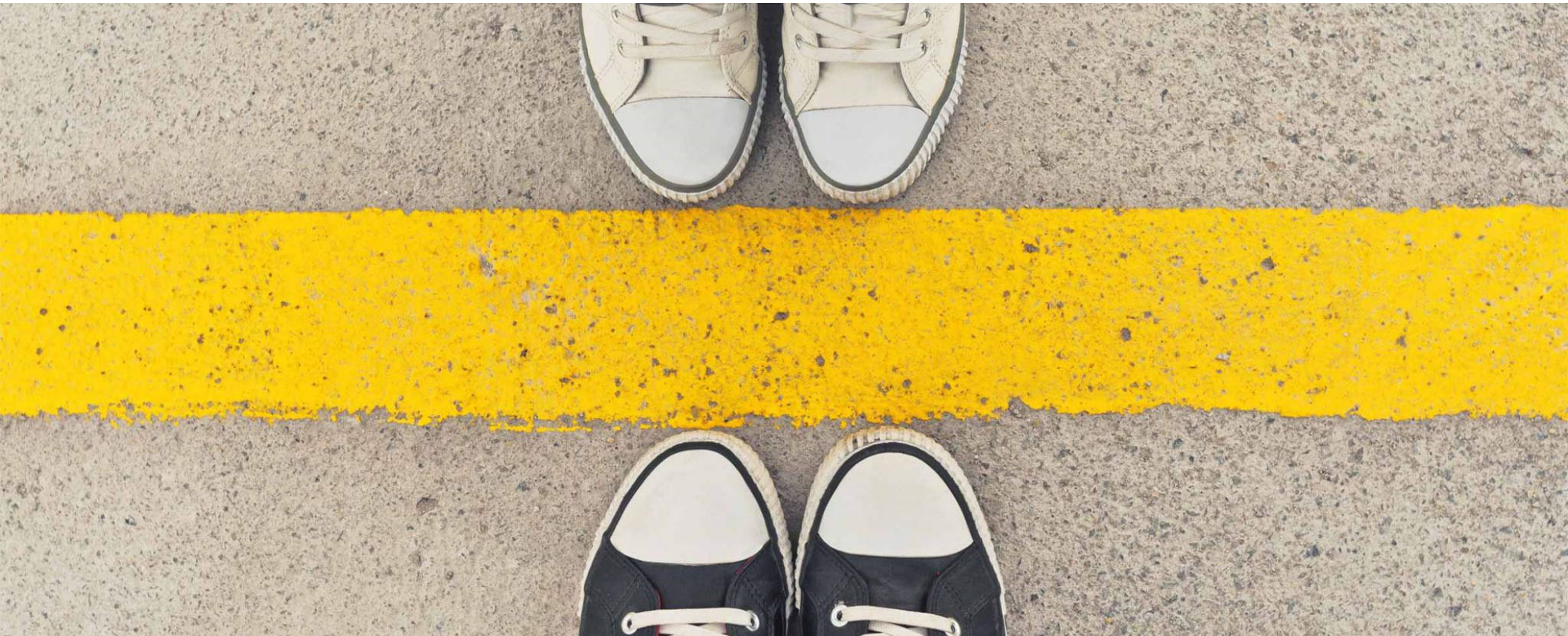
- Beliefs, thoughts, decisions

- Emotional Boundaries

- A person's self-esteem and feelings
 - Feelings can flow both ways – others sharing too much and your ability not to take on too much from the other person
- 

Things that Impact Boundaries

- Being in the home can lead parents to feel more comfortable and contribute to a less professional feel in the relationship
- Working for an extended period of time with a family can blur boundaries
- The helping nature of providers
 - Being able to know when they don't have the expertise to help



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What factors directly guide and shape how you set and maintain professional boundaries?

Does it matter?



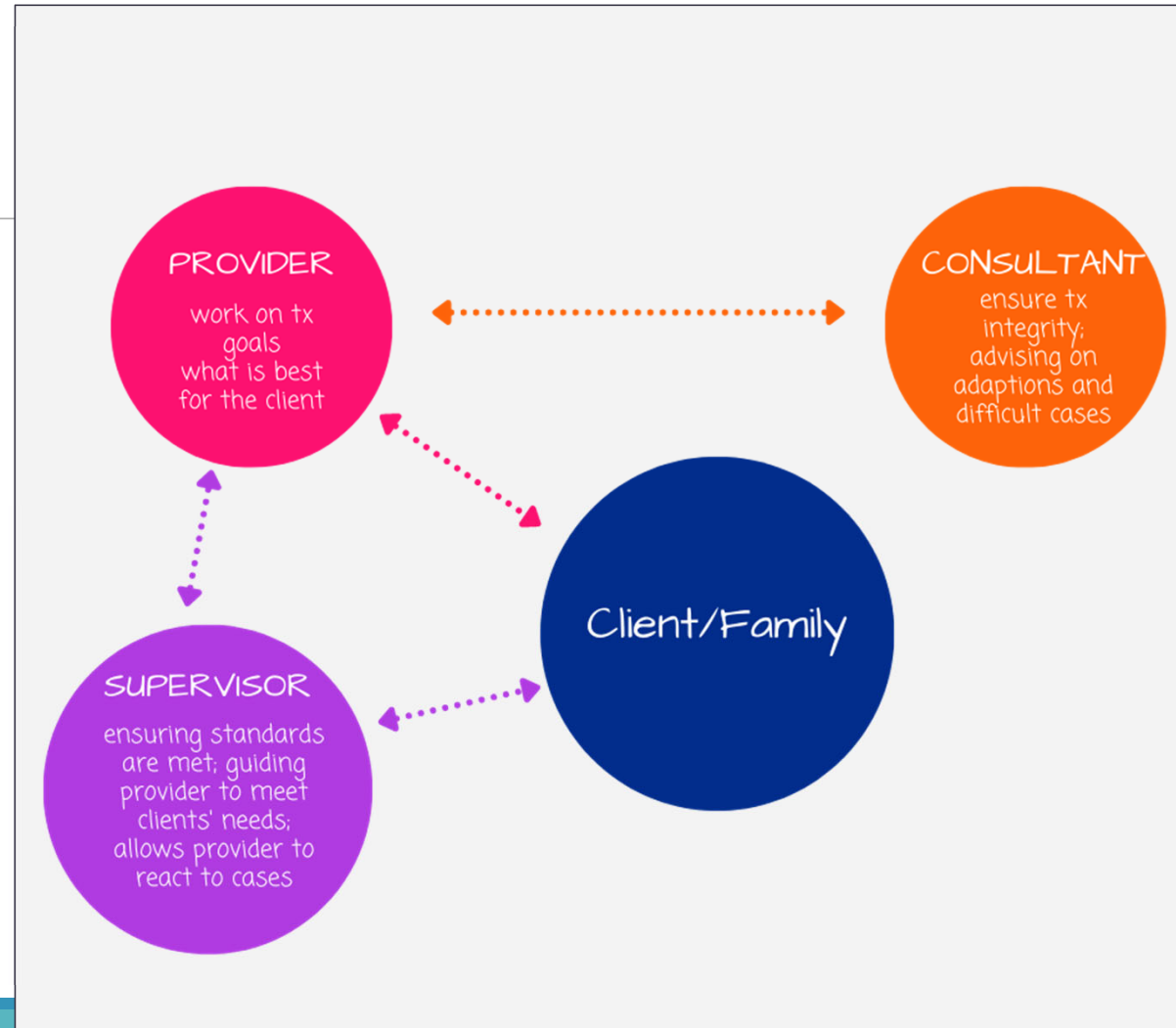
In-home vs. Office Setting



What is Your Role?

Who can step in and offer assistance to family?


Who *should* step in and offer assistance?




What family or system factors have the potential to **indirectly** influence how you set and maintain professional boundaries?



Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries in Clients

- Tells all, especially at first meeting or early on
 - Takes as much as possible regardless of need
 - Gives as much as s/he can for the sake of giving
 - Believes others should anticipate their needs
 - Falls apart so someone will take care of them
 - Self-abuse
 - Goes against personal beliefs to please others
 - Allows others to take advantage of them
- 

Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries in Providers

- Giving private number to client and telling them to call anytime
 - Sharing intimate information with client
 - Believing only you can save this person
 - Only you understand, not the system
 - Believing colleagues don't understand when you discuss/defend client
 - Lending clients money
 - Taking sides in arguments between clients
 - Considering yourself part of the family
- 

Model Healthy Boundaries

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

- Identify what is unhealthy, discuss with client how the behavior is inappropriate and how to avoid in the future
- Offer a substituted behavior in place of the unhealthy one
 - With children – a handshake for a hug
- Set firm limits with clients and reinforce them, but with care
- Refer to other services as needed

TRAINING



Supervision




Engagement: Successful Strategies and Pitfalls



Examples of written agreements

Limitation to our services:

- Parent Educators do not diagnose developmental, psychological, or medical conditions, but they can refer you or connect you with a professional.
 - Transportation is offered on a case by case basis and with supervisor's approval.
 - Participation in activities such as family gatherings, festivities, sharing meals, buying/selling items or receiving gifts is not permitted.
- 

Parties, Food, and Other Invitations



Social Media



Public Meetings



Politics, Religion, and Other Sensitive Topics



Physical Boundaries



Sharing Personal Information



Electronic Communications from Families



Need for Connection/to Share



Issues in Rural Areas/Small Communities



Questions to Consider in Examining Potential Boundary Issues

- ❖ Is this in my client's best interest?
- ❖ Whose needs are being served? The client's or mine?
- ❖ Will doing this have a potential negative impact on the service I am delivering?
- ❖ **If I *don't* do it, will there be a negative impact?**
- ❖ How would my action be viewed by the client's family?
- ❖ **Am I treating this client differently than other clients?**
 - For example: appointment time & length, use and extent of personal disclosures, modifications to intervention, etc.

Questions to Consider in Examining Potential Boundary Issues

- ❖ Does this client mean something 'special' to me?
- ❖ Am I taking advantage of the client?
- ❖ Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with a colleague?
- ❖ How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
- ❖ Am I comfortable in documenting this decision/behavior in the client file?
- ❖ Does this contravene my professional code of ethics?

What might you want to do in this situation?

You are working with a family that, among other things, has several cats and dogs, including a litter of puppies.

The caregivers share that the number of animals is overwhelming and they want to reduce the number they have.

You've been considering adopting a puppy and you know of possible resources for re-homing pets.

What if this was their kitchen?



Or this was their living room...



How might you be feeling?

How might your emotional response impact your decision-making?

How could you use supervision/consultation for support?

Imagine if...

- A tornado impacted your home community, including your friends and loved ones. You're asked to work in a temporary resource center to support impacted community members.
- A threat of harm occurred when a gunman entered the school district where your family and friends attend. Your agency is providing support to the children in the school.
- One of your close friends confided in you that they were recently sexually assaulted. You are providing in-home services to a family when the caregiver disclosed that they were also sexually assaulted.
- During adolescence you were bullied by multiple peers and this caused you to experience depression and anxiety. One of the children on your caseload is experiencing similar bullying in his school.

Other Topics/Thoughts?

