

PREFACE

Is it ethical to pray with a client?

My agency has a policy against accepting gifts. Does this mean I shouldn't accept a jar of pickles when I visit my home-bound client?

My client is fascinated by disturbing video games involving workplace violence. Do I have a duty to warn someone?

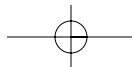
My teenage daughter is dating a former resident of the psych ward where I used to work. What can I do?

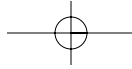
My client is asking me not to keep records of his treatment because he is in the military. Isn't it in his best interest if I agree?

I used to treat a fellow professional in my bereavement practice. Is it unethical for us now to refer clients to each other?

If these examples are any indication, ethics is a complex and high-stakes area of professional practice. Too often, though, when practitioners think of ethics, they think of high-minded philosophical discussion far removed from the challenges of their daily lives. Or they become overwhelmed considering so many options that they simply throw up their hands and say, "I'll trust my gut." Or they become so preoccupied with avoiding risk that they make their decisions guided by the question, "Whom would I rather be sued by?" None of these is a recipe for sound ethical decision making. None accounts for the fact that ethical and clinical excellence are intertwined. None of these gives credence to the standards of professional practice exemplified in our codes of ethics. I hope that after reading this text, your take on ethics will be different.

This book discusses risk but is not driven by it. It examines the ethical standards governing social work practice as they might be applied in a variety of situations. It offers a nimble, useful framework for considering ethical dilemmas to help you develop your capacity for critical thinking in arriving at ethically sound decisions. It equips you,



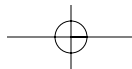


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the reader, with well-grounded tools to use in preventing ethical difficulties or in weighing options if ethical challenges do arise. It acknowledges and addresses the fact that often the challenge of ethics lies in having the courage to do the right thing, not the ability to discern the right thing. It is written in a lively and conversational manner intended to make ethics accessible to students and experienced practitioners alike. It employs practical guidance, sound resources, and authentic cases featuring an array of roles, settings, and issues. It doesn't just present dilemmas but guides you through the critical thinking needed to resolve them. It doesn't just stick to the easy right-wrong dilemmas, either. Together, we'll address the spectrum of ethical challenges, including the challenges in choosing between competing "goods" and competing "bads." While many of the dilemmas are drawn from direct practice examples, the book covers a variety of ethical dilemmas that arise for supervisors, managers, and planners and in other roles and settings.

How is it organized? The book begins with a discussion of what ethics means and what it means to be ethical. This section lays an important foundation for all that follows, and it contains useful case material as well. The second chapter offers a framework for examining ethical dilemmas and weighing your options for addressing them, and it gives you examples that apply that framework.

Each of the remaining chapters focuses on a particular area of ethics—confidentiality, self-determination, informed consent, and so forth. Each of these chapters uses a consistent format that provides an overview of the ethical concept and the related standards, a case example in which the standard is violated, and another where the standard is upheld. The rest of the chapter is devoted to ethical decision making in a more complex dilemma utilizing the critical-thinking framework introduced in the third chapter. Sometimes there will be one "right" answer; sometimes several will be revealed by the analysis. Sometimes (maybe often) you'll dispute my view of the case or disagree with the outcome. Wonderful! To take a differing perspective, you must be engaged with the question, striving to find a way out that fits with your understanding of ethical practice. Such engagement with ethics can only make us stronger as we consider the views of others and articulate and advance our own. I hope to hear from you as you use this



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book. Let me know the insights it raised, the dilemmas it brought to mind, and the ideas you have for improving ethical practice in our profession. I am certain we'll all be better for it.

As you read the cases, you may feel you recognize the characters involved. Each case is a composite of a commonly occurring dilemma, a case that has been created from an actual dilemma, or a case that has been made up. No case in the book is, in and of itself, a "real" case, though I hope you find them all realistic and useful. In addition to sending your feedback, please send me your dilemmas so that others can benefit in the future from novel, life-like examples.

Many people deserve credit for the inspiration and creation of this work. Heartfelt thanks go to Beth DuMez for her abiding concern for ethics in our profession; to Kerry Sugrue and Joette Woody for their research and bibliographic wizardry; to Edie Klecka and Tom Meenaghan for invigorating the writing and thinking process; to Joanne Caye, Tina Souder, and Elaine Stevens for sharing their ethical and clinical expertise; to Martin Hall for his research and insights on moral development; to the UNC social work IT staff for responding to all forms of computing crises; to all the people who have revealed their ethical wisdom and struggles at workshops, classes, and consultations so that we all can learn and grow stronger from their examples; to Cyd Wiford for the use of the North Topsail Beach writing sanctuary; to the members of my writers' groups for their support; and to my husband, George Gottfried, for all the sacrificed evenings and weekends and for his abiding enthusiasm for this work.