Boundaries and Professionalism

Presenter Barbara Gainer

Indiana Department of Child Services
Healthy Families Indiana (HFI)
Think About It!

1. Consider a current, past, or hypothetical ethical dilemma.

2. This can be a personal experience, one you have heard about, or something you are concerned may arise in the future.

3. Write down your dilemma on a piece of paper. You only need to write enough information to remind yourself of the dilemma later.

4. Consider your dilemma as you work through the presentation today.

5. At the end of the presentation, you will be prompted to use tools developed today to work through the dilemma.
Agency Values

Review the DCS Mission, Vision, and Values:

- **Mission:** The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) protects children from abuse and neglect, and works to ensure their financial support.
- **Vision:** Children thrive in safe, caring, supportive families and communities.
- **Values:**
  We believe:
  - Every child has the right to be free from abuse and neglect
  - Every child has the right to appropriate care and a permanent home
  - The best place for children to grow up is with their own families
  - Children and older youth have the right to permanent and lifelong connections
  - Parents have the primary responsibility for the care and safety of their children
  - In personal accountability for outcomes, including one’s own growth and development
  - Every person has value, worth and dignity

Compare this to the Mission, Vision, and Values of your agency.
Agency Values (continued)

You likely notice similarities in the two agency Mission, Vision, and Value statements.

These statements can establish a foundation for ethics within your agency and in your work with children and families.

As you work through the presentation today, consider how these statements may guide your decisions.
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Metaethics

**Noun**

The philosophy of ethics dealing with the meaning of ethical terms, the nature or moral discourse, the foundations of moral principles

[www.dictionary.com/browse/metaethics](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/metaethics)

This is often used as the criteria to determine what is ethically right and wrong, based on ethical theories and principles.

Consider, ‘Would other people in my field think the way I do about this situation?’
Normative Ethics

Deontological Theory -
Certain actions are either right or wrong, without regard for their consequences. These are usually addressed with rules, policies, and procedures within an organization.

Teleological Theory -
The rightness of an action is determined by the goodness of its sequences. This idea accounts for specific circumstances. The correctness of the action ‘depends’ on the situation.
Deontological or Teleological Ethics Activity

Review each scenario and determine if the ethical dilemma is Deontological (clear right or wrong solution) or Teleological (solution depends on the circumstances).

Click the screen anywhere to reveal the answer, click again to progress to the next scenario.
A New Client

You are visiting a new client’s family in their home for the first time. After visiting with the father and children, the mother arrives home to greet you. You immediately recognize mother as a high school classmate. Since she is now married, you did not recognize the name before seeing her in person. Mother indicates that you look familiar, but does not recall you were classmates. You were not particularly ‘close’ to this person in high school and do not think it will be a barrier in your relationship. Should you continue your work with this family, or ask a coworker to take this client?

Teleological
There are several factors that would determine whether or not you should continue working with this family. Will your prior relationship cause a barrier? Do you know information about the family that may lead to a bias? Are there other staff available to cover or trade new cases with? In this situation, talk to your supervisor before making a final decision.
You have a new coworker who is excited about the work your agency does with families. You like this coworker and have tried to mentor her, you even connected with her on social media. One evening you see a post from your coworker talking about the great progress the Montez family is making, and how much she enjoys her job. The post is positive, does that make it OK to share?

Deontological
It would never be appropriate to share information about families or clients on social media. Even if the ‘sharing’ is positive, it is a violation of the client’s privacy to share any part of their situation publicly.
The Over-Sharing Coworker

You have been working with a single mother and her children for about six weeks. Mom is now employed, cooperating with services, and is making great progress. In a recent session, mom tells you that she has a warrant out in regards to unpaid speeding tickets. She is saving money from each paycheck to pay the fines, but is concerned that she will be arrested before she has the funds she needs. Mom is concerned that you are going to ‘turn her in’ now that you are aware of the warrant.

Teleological
Your agency may have a policy regarding notifying authorities in this regard. If that is the case, this situation would be Deontological – a clear answer is provided. Otherwise, consider child safety. Is mom driving with the child on a suspended license? Can you explain the consequences to that and encourage her to find other transportation? Are there other safety concerns related to this issue? Does mom have a clear plan to take care of the fees? It is possible that you may not need to turn her in if it would be further detrimental to the family and does not compromise child safety.
Good Work!

The purpose of the activity is not to memorize the two terms, but to understand that some ethical dilemmas have a clear answer, and others depend on the situation.
Standard of Care

What an *ordinary, reasonable, and prudent colleague* with the same or similar training would do under the same or similar circumstances.

Notice this goes beyond the boundaries of your agency to include colleagues in similar agencies, practices, and career fields.
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Standard of Care

**Substantive:**

Refers to specific ethical issues such as handling confidential information, obtaining informed consent, managing boundaries, and terminating services.

For example - It is widely agreed upon that a worker would not share private information regarding one client with another client for any reason.
Standard of Care (continued)

Procedural:

How staff in your field or a similar field who have similar training would process an ethically complex situation.

For example - Professionals at Healthy Families consult with supervisors regularly in regards to specific details of each case.
Standard of Care (continued)

Healthy Families professionals generally agree that these key elements are included in the procedural standard of care:

- Consult colleagues and supervisors
- Consult relevant policies, regulations, and laws
- Consult relevant codes of ethics and ethics committees
- Consult lawyers if legal issues are involved
- Document the process
Professional Negligence

Professional Negligence occurs when an employee has a duty, and breaches that duty in a way that causes harm, damage, or injury. There must be a clear connection between the breach of the duty and harm caused (no other way to explain the harm).
Negligence Activity

Review each scenario and determine if the worker was negligent in their actions. If so, is the negligence **Misfeasance** (acting incorrectly) **Malfeasance** (willfully doing something unethical or illegal) or **Nonfeasance** (not performing an expected duty).

Click the screen anywhere to reveal the answer, click again to progress to the next scenario.
Forms of Negligence

**Nonfeasance:** Failure to complete a duty that is part of your job.

**Example:** Falsely entering visitation notes when the employee did not see the family.
Negligence Scenario #1

Marcus is a new home visitor and is struggling to manage his caseload. During the last home visiting session, his client makes vague references to domestic violence occurring in her home. Marcus hears the comments, but does not respond. Marcus was looking forward to closing this case and using the extra time to catch up on paperwork.

**NONFEASANCE:** Marcus knew he needed to take action by asking more questions about the domestic violence and/or completing a DV assessment. Marcus willingly chose not to provide the service.
Negligence Scenario #2

Destiny is a Family Support Worker (FSW) with the Sanchez family. When Destiny arrived for her meeting this week, the family did not answer the door. Destiny waited 15 minutes and tried again, called both parents (leaving a voicemail), and left a note on the door. The meeting was in the evening, so Destiny left a voicemail for her supervisor, but is concerned that she may be reprimanded for not following through with services she is contracted to provide.

NO NEGLIGENCE: Destiny made an appointment and made several attempts to contact the family. She also updated her supervisor on the issue. Destiny should contact the family as soon as possible to reschedule and notify the supervisor if they are not compliant.
Negligence Scenario #3

Mary is a Family Support Specialist (FSS) for the Baker family. Mary and mom have been building a bond, so when mom brought her new boyfriend home, a registered sex offender. Mary decided that it was important for the boyfriend to get to know the kids if he is going to be a part of their lives.

**MISFEASANCE**: Mary should have contacted her supervisor and completed (or requested completion of) appropriate background and criminal history checks before allowing the boyfriend to participate in the home visit.
Negligence Scenario #4

Drake is a Family Resource Specialist (FRS) for the Jackson family. During a home visit with the family, Drake noticed the mom seems interested in him. Mom is attractive and very friendly. Drake asks the mom out on a date, and she agrees to go to dinner with him this weekend.

**MALFEASANCE:** It is never appropriate for Healthy Families professionals to engage in personal, intimate relationships with a client.
Good Work!

Again, the purpose of the activity is not to memorize these terms, but to understand that there are a variety of types of professional negligence that may occur. It is important to avoid all of them!
Dual (or Multiple) Relationships

Participating in more than one relationship with a client is not *always* an ethical violation, but the professional must be very careful. Boundaries need to be established between the professional and the client to avoid a violation of commonly accepted ethical standards. When boundaries are violated, it is commonly in the areas of intimacy, personal benefit, emotional needs, altruism, or unavoidable circumstances. The following slides will overview each theme.
Boundary Violations: Intimate Relationships

- Sexual relationships
- Intimate contact
- Providing services to former lover
- Sexual relationships with clients’ relatives or acquaintances
- Sexual relationships with supervisees, trainees, colleagues
- Intimate gestures such as notes or gifts

Anything that somehow suggests the relationship is more than professional is a boundary violation.
Boundary Violations: Personal Benefit

- Monetary gain (paid supervision, overseeing client affairs, etc.)
- Business and financial relationships
- Goods and services (Trading)
- Advice and services (e.g. client who is a mechanic)
- Favors, gifts, meals, social invitations
- Conflicts of interest (soliciting clients for your direct sales business)
Boundary Violations: Emotional Needs

- Friendships with current or former clients
- Community contact with clients (organizations or groups)
- Self-disclosure
- Unconventional Interventions
- Affectionate communications
Boundary Violations: 
Altruism

- Giving clients gifts
- Offering clients favors
- Meeting clients in social settings
- Providing personal contact information to clients
Boundary Violations: Unavoidable Circumstances

- Geographical proximity
- Cultural, social, ethnic gatherings
- Conflicts of interest
- Professional encounters
- Social encounters
Examine Your Boundaries

Given the opportunity, did the home-based service provider fail to clarify that the action was a personal one?

The following are questions to ask yourself to help determine whether an action does or does not fall within the professional role of the home-based service provider.

Click anywhere to begin, and again to advance to the next question.
Tips to Avoid Crossing Boundaries

- Establish boundaries early in the relationship, such as “Will we see each other in public?”
- Consider whether the dual relationship in any form is warranted or justifiable.
- Pay special attention to incompatible roles (secretary, student, faculty member, etc.).
- Consult with colleagues, ethical standards, agency policies, regulations, statutes.
- Work with your supervisor when boundary issues (beyond typical situations) occur and risk is evident.
- Document key aspects of decision-making processes and consultations.
Documentation Tips

- Know and understand your agency’s documentation policies
- Balance information to ensure best interests of client, colleagues, agency, and courts; be thorough without providing too many details
- Avoid defamation (slander and libel)
- Handle errors with great care
- Avoid ambiguous phrases and abbreviations
- Include evidence to support statements
- Document what you know, not what you think
- Respond to subpoenas according to your agency policy
- Handle personal notes carefully
- Be familiar with laws, regulations, and ethical standards
Recall the ethical dilemma you noted at the beginning of this training. Work through the questions on the following slides, making notes as you go. At the end of the process, you should have a better idea of the most ethically responsible solution, or know who to talk to next for guidance.

Click the screen anywhere to progress to the next question.
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Review Your Ethical Dilemma

Is the dilemma *Deontological* (clear right or wrong) or *Teleological* (solution depends on circumstances)?
Review Your Ethical Dilemma

Have you considered *Procedural Standards of Care*, such as consulting coworkers, policy, ethics, and legal?

Does your agency have documented policy and/or procedures to address your ethical dilemma?

Consider a colleague you trust. How would they handle a similar situation? Can you talk to them about your dilemma? Have you talked to your supervisor about it?
Review Your Ethical Dilemma

Is any form of Negligence involved?

**Misfeasance:** Completing a task improperly that could have otherwise been completed correctly

**Malfeasance:** Acting in an unlawful or wrong manner

**Nonfeasance:** Failure to complete a task expected of you
Review Your Ethical Dilemma

Can you identify any past or potential boundary violations in your ethical dilemma? How can you work with the client and/or your supervisor to address those violations now?
Review Your Ethical Dilemma

Have you thoroughly and properly documented your interactions with the client, including your knowledge and supporting evidence? Remember to be careful in your language and content in order to protect your client!
Summary

In-Home service providers work intensely with families in their own homes and build relationships with clients. Ethical issues in this field can be complicated, and there are often no clear answers. This training is not intended to teach you how to avoid ethical dilemmas, however, you now have knowledge and tools to address ethical issues as they arise in your work. Remember to consult your agency’s policies, ethical standards, your colleagues, and of course, your supervisor!

Thank you for participating!
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Barbara Gainer
Prevention Coordinator
Department of Child Services
302 West Washington Street,
Room E 306
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 234-4209 office
(317) 650-6575 cell