



Worksheet 5e.A2

Competency: Integrity/Honesty —Ethical Dilemma

The following approach comes from Murphy's (1997) work on resolving ethical dilemmas.

Note: Since child welfare is within the realm of social work, child welfare typically abides by the ethics code established by the National Association of Social Workers.

When thinking about how to resolve a particular ethical dilemma, it is helpful to ask and formally answer the following questions. This can be done individually or in a group process such as a multidisciplinary team or a department meeting. The steps represent a modification of those found in K. Lowe-Phelps (1988) and Reamer (1990):

1. Who are the key players? Who is involved? Who is/will be affected?
2. What is the proposed action that needs to be evaluated as ethical or unethical? Are there relevant legal issues to consider? Are there other standards that apply?
3. What is the context of the proposed action?
4. What is the purpose of the proposed action? What is expected to be achieved by either taking or not taking a certain action?
5. What are the alternative actions? What are the consequences of each alternative?
6. What are the social work values that are in conflict? Is there any way to rank order the values (i.e., the prevention of harm takes precedence over enhancing self-esteem)?
7. What other values and/or moral philosophy pertains to the dilemma? (Be sure to include the personal values of the client and the professional values of other involved parties.)
8. Who has the responsibility to make the decision? Who has the right to make the decision? Who should participate in the decision? Why?
9. What are the possible resolutions (include at least two)?
10. Resolution of choice: Specify the moral reasoning behind the resolution of choice regarding how and why any given action contends with the conflict of values.

References

- Lowe-Phelps, K. (1988). Truth-telling: An ethical dilemma. *Caring*, 7(1), 4–12.
- Murphy, K. E. (1997). Resolving ethical dilemmas. *FOCUS Newsletter*. Retrieved from <http://www.naswma.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=114>
- Reamer, F. G. (1990). *Ethical dilemmas in social service: A guide for social workers*. (2nd ed.) New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

