

Ten Best Ethical Decision Making Models

Elaine Congress ETHIC Model of Decision Making

E – Evaluate relevant personal, societal, agency, client and professional values

T – Think about what ethical standard of the NASW Code of Ethics applies, as well as relevant laws and case decisions

H – Hypothesize about possible consequences of different decisions

I - Identify who will benefit and who will be harmed in view of social work's commitment to the most vulnerable

C – Consult with supervisor and colleagues about the most ethical choice

ACA Ethical Decision Making Model

1. Identify the problem.
2. Apply the ACA Code of Ethics.
3. Determine the nature of the dimensions of the dilemma.
4. Generate potential courses of action.
5. Consider the potential consequences of all options, choose a course of action.
6. Evaluate the selected course of action.
7. Implement the course of action.

Reamer and Conrad's Essential Steps for Ethical Problems Solving

1. DETERMINE whether there is an ethical issue or/and dilemma. Is there a conflict of values, or rights, or professional responsibilities? (For example, there may be an issue of self-determination of an adolescent versus the well-being of the family.)
2. IDENTIFY the key values and principles involved. What meanings and limitations are typically attached to these competing values? (For example, rarely is confidential information held in absolute secrecy; however, typically decisions about access by third parties to sensitive content should be contracted with clients.)
3. RANK the values or ethical principles which - in your professional judgment - are most relevant to the issue or dilemma. What reasons can you provide for prioritizing one competing value/principle over another? (For example, your client's right to choose a beneficial course of action could bring hardship or harm to others who would be affected.)
4. DEVELOP an action plan that is consistent with the ethical priorities that have been determined as central to the dilemma. Have you conferred with clients and colleagues, as appropriate, about the potential risks and consequences of alternative courses of action? Can you support or justify your action plan with the values/principles on which the plan is based? (For example, have you conferred with all the necessary persons regarding the ethical dimensions of planning for a battered wife's quest to secure secret shelter and the implications for her teen-aged children?)
5. IMPLEMENT your plan, utilizing the most appropriate practice skills and competencies. How will you make use of core social work skills such as sensitive communication, skillful negotiation, and cultural competence? (For example, skillful colleague or supervisory communication and negotiation may enable an impaired colleague to see her/his impact on clients and to take appropriate action.)
6. REFLECT on the outcome of this ethical decision making process. How would you evaluate the consequences of this process for those involved: Client(s), professional(s), and agency (ies)? (Increasingly, professionals have begun to seek support, further professional training, and consultation through the development of Ethics Review Committees or Ethics Consultation processes.)

Dolgoff, Loewenberg and Harrington – A General Decision Making Model

- Step 1. Identify the problem and the factors that contribute to its maintenance
- Step 2. Identify all of the persons and institutions involved in this problem, such as clients, victims, support systems, other professionals and others
- Step 3. Determine who should be involved in the decision making
- Step 4. Identify the values relevant to this problem held by the several participants identified in Step 2, including the client's and worker's
- Step 5. Identify the goals and objectives whose attainment you believe may resolve (or reduce) the problem
- Step 6. Identify alternate intervention strategies and targets
- Step 7. Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of each alternative in terms of the identified goals
- Step 8. Select the most appropriate strategy
- Step 9. Implement the strategy selected
- Step 10. Monitor the implementation, paying particular attention to unanticipated consequences
- Step 11. Evaluate the results and identify additional problems

Steinman, Richardson and McEnroe Ethical Decision-Making Process

Step 1: Identify the Ethical Standard Involved

- What are the codes or laws that apply? If there are none, then why is it a problem?

Step 2: Determine the Ethical Trap Possibilities

- Possible Ethical Traps to avoid include:

- a. a belief that there is an easy "commonsense, objective" solution
- b. conflicting values, such as between personal or religious values and professional values
- c. the circumstances are so unique they must be taken into consideration, and
- d. confusion about who will benefit from a decision

Step 3: Frame a Preliminary Response

- What does the code and the law say you should do; what circumstances, if any, should influence the response; and what is your preliminary response?

Step 4: Consider the Consequences

- What will happen if you take that action? What are the short and long term consequences? Could there be any unintended consequences? Are the consequences ethically defensible?

Step 5: Prepare Ethical Resolution

- a. What is the situation, including possible relevant circumstances?
- b. What ethical codes or laws are involved?
- c. What do these codes or laws suggest I or others do?
- d. If I have consulted with colleagues, supervisors, or professional ethics boards, at this point, what do they suggest I or others do?
- e. What are the consequences of taking this action on the client, on me, on my employer, and on others in the community?
- f. In light of these considerations, here is what I propose.....

Step 6: Get feedback

- Discuss with your supervisor, respected peer, and/or attorney if legal issues involved

Step 7: Take Action

- Use feedback to amend the resolution as needed and then take action.

The Principles and Interests Involved in Ethical Decision Making

The First Principle: Do No Harm

Evaluate whether the decision will either bring direct harm to the client, or insufficiently protect the client or the public from harm.

In order of importance:

- 1) Does the decision threaten the life or physical safety of the client or others?
- 2) Does the decision threaten the client with profoundly damaging and non-therapeutic emotional consequences?
- 3) Does the decision threaten the client with life altering and irreversible social, material or monetary hardships?
- 4) Does the decision exploit the client in ways that harm his/her well being?

The Second Principle: Protect the Integrity of the Profession

Evaluate whether the decision will harm or preserve the integrity of the counseling profession.

- 1) Does the decision harm the professional or ethical reputation of the mental health professions?
- 2) Does the decision harm the capacity of other mental health professionals to perform their tasks successfully?
- 3) Does the decision hinder the larger public from profiting from the benefits of the mental health profession?

The Third Principle/Component One: Client Autonomy

Evaluate whether the decision serves to promote or hinder autonomy in the client.

- 1) Does the ethical decision include involving the client in important decisions at all times, an important consideration called "informed consent"?
- 2) Does the ethical decision include consideration for the values, goals, needs, wants, ideas, and choices of the client at least equal to consideration for the same items of the counselor?
- 3) Does the ethical decision promote increased responsibility for the client, except where such responsibility may harm the client?

The Third Principle/Component Two: Promotion of Growth

Evaluate whether the decision serves to promote the well being of the client and/or advance the course of treatment.

- 1) Does the decision promote the physical/emotional/spiritual health and well being of the client?
- 2) Does the decision help the client to reach the agreed to treatment goals?
- 3) Does the decision protect the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and the treatment process?

The Fourth Principle: Clinician Autonomy

Evaluate whether the decision serves to promote the well being and autonomy of the clinician.

Steinman, Richardson and McEnroe Ethical Assessment Screen

1. Identify your own relevant personal values in relation to this ethical dilemma
2. Identify any societal values relevant to the ethical decision to be made
3. Identify the relevant professional values and ethics

What can you do to minimize conflicts between personnel, societal, and professional values?

4. Identify alternative ethical options that you may take
5. Which of the alternative ethical actions will protect to the greatest extent your client's and others' rights and welfare?
6. Which alternative action will protect to the greatest extent possible society's rights and interests?

What can you do to minimize conflicts between your client's, others' and society's rights and interests?

7. Which alternative action will result in your doing the "least harm" possible?
8. To what extent will alternative actions be efficient, effective and ethical?
9. Have you considered and weighed both the short and long term ethical consequences?

Steinman, Richardson and McEnroe Ethical Rules Screen

Examine the Code of Ethics to determine if any of the Code rules are applicable. These rules take precedence over the worker's personal value system.

If one or more of the Code rules apply, follow the Code rules.

If the Code does not address the specific problem, or several Code rules provide conflicting guidance, use the Ethical Principles Screen.

Steinman, Richardson and McEnroe Ethical Principles Screen (EPS)

1. Protection of life
2. Equality and inequality
3. Autonomy and freedom
4. Least harm
5. Quality of life
6. Privacy and confidentiality
7. Truthfulness and full disclosure

The Steps or Stages of the Ethical Decision Making Process

The Knowledge Stage

The Identification Stage

The Evaluation Stage

The Selection Stage

The Assessment Stage

The Adaptation Stage

1. IDENTIFY THE KEY FACTS

“Role play” key stakeholders to see what they see as facts.

Watch out for assuming causative relationships among coincidental facts.

2. IDENTIFY & ANALYZE THE MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS

Make sure to identify both direct and indirect stakeholders.

Genuinely “walk in their shoes” to see what they value and want as a desired outcome.

3. IDENTIFY THE UNDERLYING DRIVING FORCES

Think like a M.D. – look for what’s beneath the presenting symptoms.

Use these driving forces to develop your Step 8 preventive component.

4. IDENTIFY/PRIORITIZE OPERATING VALUES & ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Think of this step as determining the up-front “design parameters” for an effective solution.

Don’t rush this step – building consensus here will pay off later.

5. DECIDE WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN MAKING THE DECISION

All stakeholders have a right to have their best interests considered.

If you can’t actually involve all stakeholders, have someone “role play” their point of view.

6. DETERMINE & EVALUATE ALL VIABLE ALTERNATIVES

Critical: all possible alternatives must pass the 3-part review-gate criteria.

Imagine possible consequences of each alternative cascading down on each stakeholder.

7. TEST PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE WITH A WORST-CASE SCENARIO

This step helps prevent a “rush to judgment” towards a wrong solution.

Emphasize this step when all stakeholder interests are not being adequately considered.

8. ADD A PREVENTIVE COMPONENT

“Problem-solving heroes” want to get on to the next problem and won’t take time for this step.

Only immediate-solution decisions usually come back to bite you.

9. DECIDE AND BUILD A SHORT & LONG-TERM ACTION-PLAN

The devil’s usually in the details – take the time needed to be detailed and comprehensive.

Make sure that the means used in your action-steps correlate with your desired ends.

10. USE DECISION-MAKING CHECKLIST

Become thoroughly familiar with this end-point checklist before you get started in Step 1. Don’t allow group-think here -- make sure everyone involved fills this out individually.

Relevant Information Test. Have I/we obtained as much information as possible to make an informed decision and action plan for this situation?

Involvement Test. Have I/we involved all who have a right to have input and/or to be involved in making this decision and action plan?

Consequential Test. Have I/we anticipated and attempted to accommodate for the consequences in making this decision and action plan?

Fairness Test. If I/we were assigned to take the place of any one of the stakeholders in this situation, would I/we perceive this decision and action plan to be essentially fair, given all of the circumstances?

Enduring Values Test. Does this decision and action plan uphold my/our priority enduring values that are relevant to this situation?

Light-of-Day Test. How would I/we feel and be regarded by others (working associates, family, etc.) if the details of this decision and action plan were disclosed for all to know?

The user is asked to rate each item on a Likert-like scale from 1 to 5, with "1" = not at all and "5" = totally yes. The scores for each of the six tests are added up to arrive at the Total Ethical Analysis Confidence Score. Scores in the lowest range, starting at around 7, mean that there is not a great deal of confidence that the decision is ethical, while towards the upper range of 35, the user is very confident that the decision is ethical.

Pearce & Littlejohn's Transcendent Discourse

1. Uncover the communities' basic assumptions
2. Develop categories to compare incommensurate differences
3. Seek to explore rather than convince
4. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of both worldviews
5. Seek to reframe the conflict into more productive terms

Brown's Diversity Ethics Process Model

1. Make a proposal (What should we do?)
2. Identify observation (Why should we do it?)
3. State values (Why is this the right thing to do?)
4. Align personal, client, professional, societal values
5. Explore the alternative views (with the participation of the client)
6. Uncover the assumptions (for the client's values, the clinician's values, the profession's values and society's values)
7. Find the best option (in concert with the client)
8. Perform a consequence analysis (in concert with the client)