

**A Problem-Solving Approach to
Making Decisions in Schools**

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Today's Agenda

- Background
- 2010 Revisions to the Ethical Code
- Ethical Decision-making Problem-solving Model
- Practice, Practice, Practice
- Reactions? Solutions?
- Summary & Taking the Next Step

Today's Objectives

- Learn about structure, organization, and content of current NASP ethics code
- Learn about a best-practice problem-solving model to address ethical and legal issues in the field
- Gain skills by applying the model to case examples through small group work

Why are Ethics Important?

- Quality control mechanism
- Protect the public/recipients of SP services
- Self-monitoring and guidance
- Standards used in the resolution of complaints

2010 Revisions
Williams, Armistead, & Jacob (2008)

- Resolves problems/confusion with 2000 principles
- Based on CPA code, aligns with foundational texts in the field (e.g., Jacob, Decker, & Hartshorne, 2011)
- Updated
- Reorganized
- Practical & Applicable

Reorganization

- Four themes
 - Respect for the Dignity of Persons
 - Responsible Caring
 - Honesty and Integrity in Professional Relationships
 - Responsibility to Community and Society
- Seventeen principles
 - 3 to 5 principles subsumed under each theme
- Standards of Conduct
 - Up to 11 specific standards subsumed under each principle

Standards in the Code

- For example, Standard I. 1.2
 - Theme I: Respect for the dignity of persons
 - Principle I.2: Privacy & Confidentiality
 - Standard I.2.6:
 - School psychologists respect the right to privacy of students, parents, and colleagues with regards to sexual orientation, gender identity, or transgender status. They do not share information about the sexual orientation, gender identity, or transgender status of a student (including minors), parents, or school employee with anyone without that individual's permission.

Theme 1: Respect for the Dignity of Persons

School psychologists engage only in professional practices that maintain the dignity of all individuals. In their words and actions, school psychologists demonstrate respect for the autonomy of persons and their right to self-determination, respect for privacy, and a commitment to just and fair treatment of all persons

- Self-determination & autonomy
- Privacy & confidentiality
- Fairness & justice (nondiscrimination)

Theme 2: Responsible Caring

Beneficence, or responsible caring, means that the school psychologist acts to benefit others. To do this, school psychologists must practice within the boundaries of their competence, use scientific knowledge from psychology and education to help clients and others make informed choices, and accept responsibility for their work.

- Professional competence
- Responsibility
 - ✓ Accepting responsibility for actions
 - ✓ Responsible assessment & intervention practices
 - ✓ Responsible school-based record keeping
 - ✓ Responsible use of materials

Theme 3: Honesty & Integrity in Professional Relationships



To foster and maintain trust, school psychologists must be faithful to the truth and adhere to their professional promises. They are forthright about their qualifications, competencies, and roles; work in full cooperation with other professional disciplines to meet the needs of students and families; and avoid multiple relationships that diminish their professional effectiveness.

- Accurate presentation of professional qualifications
- Forthright explanation of professional services, roles & priorities
- Respecting other professionals
- Multiple relationships & conflicts of interest

Theme 4: Responsibility to Community & Society



SPs promote healthy school, family, and community environments. They assume a proactive role in identifying social injustices that affect children and schools and strive to reform systems-level patterns of injustice. They maintain the public trust in school psychologists by respecting law and encouraging ethical conduct. SPs advance professional excellence by mentoring less experienced practitioners and contributing to the school psychology knowledge base.

- Promoting healthy school, family and community environments
- Respecting the law
- Maintaining public trust through monitoring ourselves and each other
- Making professional contributions by mentoring, teaching & supervising
- Contributing to the foundational knowledge of the field

Is this as good as it gets?



- Codes will always be imperfect
 - Broad (somewhat vague) and aspirational
 - Competing principles and issues within code
 - Conflict with laws
 - Conflicting interests of multiple clients
 - Inherent dual role as employee and student advocate
 - Continue to lag behind evolution & innovation & change

For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong.

-H.L. Mencken

Codes vs. Process



- The emergence of “best practice process”
 - Decision-making models as best practice process
 - ✦ Koocher & Keith-Spiegel (1998)
 - ✦ Jacob & Hartshorne (2006)
- Focus on the how, not the what
 - How you reached the decision (and what to do after) rather than on the decision alone.
- Proactive, responsive, defensible

Decision Making Process

Adapted from Williams, Armistead, & Jacob (2009)



1. Describe the situation.
2. Define the potential ethical/legal issues
3. Review/Apply associated principles and guidelines.
4. Identify stakeholders and their rights, responsibilities, & welfare.
5. Consider alternative actions, weighs pros & cons.
6. Make the decision & take responsibility. Monitor outcomes (& be prepared to change course).

Let's practice

scenario adapted from Williams et al. (2009)



Step 1: Describe the Situation

○

Step 2: Define potential ethical/legal issues

○

Step 2: Review guidelines

○

Ethical Issues	Guidelines

Step 2: Consult



- Who could you consult with? Who should you consult with?

Empty box for notes related to Step 2.

Step 3: Evaluate rights, responsibilities & welfare of all affected parties



Who is affected?

Rights? Responsibilities?
Welfare?

Who is affected?	Rights? Responsibilities? Welfare?

Step 4: Consider alternatives



Empty box for notes related to Step 4.

Step 4: Weigh out pros & cons
Proposed solution #1:

Pros	Cons

Step 4: Weigh out pros & cons
Proposed solution #2:

Pros	Cons

**Step 5: Make a decision, take responsibility,
monitor outcomes**

- Can you clearly articulate the decision & the rationale?
- Can you take responsibility?
- How will you monitor outcomes? How will you use future information to confirm your decision or change course?

Practice in Small Groups



- Case examples
- Use the problem-solving model
- Focus on the process
- Monitor your strengths & weaknesses in using the process
- As a group, discuss the model including successes and challenges

Personal Dispositions that Facilitate Ethical Decision-Making



- Principles, values, morals, & character
 - Maturity, discretion, wisdom, integrity, respect
- Collaboration
- Humility
- Flexibility
- Experience

Foundations of Ethical Practice



- Know your ethical code
- Know that your code is not enough
- Use a problem-solving model
- Seek consultation & support
- Make a commitment to continuous improvement
