

## Ethics

Psy 454 - Clinical Psychology  
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## APA Ethics

- First established in 1953
- Most recent revision in 1992: "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct."
- 2003 Version disseminated in Jan 2003; takes effect in June 2003.
- Other related documents
  - Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants (1982)
  - Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1985)
  - Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services (1987)
  - Specialty Guidelines (Clinical, Counseling, I/O, and School, 1981)

## APA Ethical Violations

- APA ethics code only applies to APA members.
- Violations by non-APA members can be handled by other entities, including state licensing boards and Departments' of Consumer Affairs
- Violations are only considered if filed within 1 year by an APA member, 5 years by a non-member

## APA Ethics Violations - Consequences

- **Remand:** matter is sent for further investigation.
- **Dismissal:** matter is dismissed, no ethical violation found.
- **Sanction:** censure or reprimand, no formal charge.
- **Formal Charge / Stipulated Resignation:** APA membership terminated.

## Structure of APA Ethics Code

- Introduction
  - If an ethical principle establishes a higher standard of conduct than is required by law, a psychologist must meet the higher ethical standard.
- Preamble
  - primary goal is to "ensure the welfare and protection of individuals and groups with whom psychologists work"
  - the client is most important, followed by non-clients, the profession, and society.

## Structure of APA Ethics Code

- General Principles
  - Aspirational goals
- Ethical Standard
  - Enforceable rules

## General Principles

- Competence
- Integrity
- Professionalism / Scientific Responsibility
- Respect for People's Rights and Dignity
- Concern for Others' Welfare
- Social Responsibility

## Competence

- Psychologists Strive to maintain high standards of competence in their work.
- Also regulated by state psychology boards.
- Applies to teaching, research, and clinical work.

Students have complained that a certain psychology professor's lectures are boring, unimaginative, and are filled with long-out-of-date references and studies.

Is this an ethical violation?

Dr. A has just taken a weekend workshop on a specific psychological test, designed to assess for levels of dementia in order to make recommendations for supportive living arrangements.

On the following Monday, a geriatric client is referred to Dr. A for a court-ordered evaluation to determine this client's competency regarding her financial decisions.

Should Dr. A take the case? Use this measure?

## Integrity

- Psychologists seek to promote integrity in the science, teaching, and practice of psychology.
- No false/misleading statements.
- Psychologists avoid improper and potentially harmful dual relationships.

Dr. S, who holds a Ph.D. in quantum physics, decides to seek a second doctorate in clinical psychology after becoming bored while smashing atoms.

She is currently in graduate school and working at an internship site where her patients regularly call her "Dr. S" and Dr. S does not correct them.

Is this an ethical violation?

## Professional and Scientific Responsibility

- Psychologists uphold professional standards of conduct, clarify their professional roles and obligations, accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior, and adapt their methods to the needs of different populations.
- Consultation is key, as is supervision.
- When appropriate, consultation with peers regarding unethical conduct.

## General Standards

- Competence
  - General Principle A and...
  - 1.04: Provide services within boundaries of competence (§1396 of CA Psych Regs)
  - 1.7: Changing specialties
  - 1.04, 1.05: Adding new techniques or skills
  - 1.04: Use of new techniques
  - 1.08: Recognizing individual differences

Dr. B is a licensed clinical psychologist who has strong religious beliefs against the use of abortion. She has just taken on a 16-year old adolescent girl who has informed Dr. B, in the second session that she is pregnant and feels overwhelmed. She states that she cannot imagine carrying this baby to term as her parents would likely become violent towards her and her boyfriend. When the patient discusses the possibility of terminating the pregnancy, Dr. B feels horrified.

What should Dr. B do as an ethical psychologist?

## General Standards

- Supervision, Consultation, Referral
  - 1.20: Welfare of client is paramount in determining when appropriate consultation is necessary.
- Personal Problems
  - 1.13: Appropriate actions need to be undertaken when personal problems interfere with effectiveness of therapy (§1396.1 of CA Psych Regs)

## Stressors Associated with Impaired Practice

- Therapist's divorce & other marital/relationship problems (most stressful personal issue)
- Major illness/injury (causes greatest impairment)
- Malpractice claims & changed work situation (most distressful work event)
- Malpractice claims & HMO restrictions (most impairing work issue)
- Serious illness/injury of close family member & working with difficult clients (most common stressor) *(Sherman & Thelan, 1998)*

## General Standards

- Psychologists must not only recognize the existence of individual differences, but also avoid harassing and discriminatory behavior.
- 1.11 Prohibits sexual harassment
- 1.19 Prohibits sexual relationships with "students and supervisees in training over whom the psychologist has evaluative or direct authority."

## General Standards

- 1.17 Prohibits multiple relationships when the therapist is “[in]sensitive to the potential harmful effects.”
- 1.18 Bartering is generally unethical except when not clinically contraindicated or exploitive.

## General Standards

- Supervision
  - 1.22 Delegation of activities to subordinates needs to take into account the responsibilities they are competent to perform.
- Recommendations for adequate supervision (Vesper & Brock, 1990)
  - Predetermined schedule of supervision meetings
  - Method for identifying client problems
  - Careful delineation of treatment plan
  - Clear description of how plan will be implemented
  - Discussion of desired outcomes & potential problems
  - Video/audiotaping sessions & providing feedback

C is an employee of a major corporation who was thought by his supervisor to have a problem with alcoholism. C frequently shows up late for work, often appears tired or sluggish, and has submitted restaurant receipts with several alcoholic beverages listed as expenses. In addition, C's coworkers have complained that they must drive C to and from work because he has lost his license due to numerous DUI infractions. C's manager refers C to the psychologist (you) at the Employee Assistance Program for treatment for alcoholism. Two weeks later, C's manager calls you to confirm that C is, in fact, complying with treatment.

What should Dr. B do as an ethical psychologist?

## General Standards

- Third-party requests for services
  - 1.21 Psychologists must clarify nature of the relationship with all parties at the outset of therapy.
    - Court-ordered evaluation vs. client-origination
    - Role of HMO/PPO/Insurance Agencies & confidentiality
    - Employee Assistance Programs
    - Military Psychologists on Base

## General Standards

- Record Keeping
  - Specifically addressed in APA's Record Keeping Guidelines (1993)
    - Complete records kept for 3yrs
    - Summary records kept for 12yrs
    - State laws supercede these limitations
    - Age of majority issues
  - Also found in 1.24, 5.09, 5.10, and 5.11

Dr. D is a licensed clinical psychologist who has been seeing her patient for 2 years working on issues related to chronic, low-level depression (dysthymia). The patient reports that they have just been laid-off and are currently paying for their own insurance and that the premiums are incredibly expensive, especially when her \$25/session co-pay is involved. She asks if Dr. D. if she could waive the co-payment until she gets a new job.

What should Dr. D do as an ethical psychologist?

## General Standards

- Financial Arrangements
  - 1.25 Psychologists must work out agreements regarding fees and other financial matters “as early as feasible.”
  - Waiving insurance co-payments?
  - Referral fees?
    - Individuals
    - Referral services