

Ethical Dilemma Group Activity

Purpose

This activity gives students a chance to explore the professional ethics of human services using real-life scenarios. Students can discuss their own responses, and decide which professional ethical standard might be involved, and suggest possible responses.

Instructions For The Activity

In groups of 3-4, students will review each of the following scenarios (each group can be assigned just one scenario if time is limited or you wish the groups to have a more in-depth discussion). After reviewing the scenario, students must decide which ethical standard(s) are involved in each dilemma. Students will need access to either the NOHS Code of Ethics or the NASW Code of Ethics (or both). As a group, the students should come up with at least one response to the dilemma that they feel addresses the ethical question.

Ethical Dilemma Scenarios

1. You are dropping off holiday food baskets for your agency. You have two families to see today, and you have food baskets for each. Another worker at your agency has put together a box of extras for the first family, because he had worked with them in the past, and felt this family needed the extra. You have been working closely with the second family, and know they are also hard-pressed to feed their children. While dropping off the first basket, you notice that this family has also received food baskets from some other local agencies. What do you do with the extra box of food?
2. You are an intern at a social service agency, and have had a hard time with your supervisor. She has been late to meetings, and has made it difficult for you to get any regular supervision. You already complained to the agency director, but the director clearly stated she felt your supervisor was an outstanding employee. Your supervisor finally shows up for your weekly supervision, a half hour late, and you smell alcohol on her breath. What do you do?

3. You are the activity director at an assisted living facility, and one of your favorite residents has stopped eating food. When asked about it, he states that he is 95 years old, and ready to “go with God”. The family is very distraught, and has discussed having him tubefed to keep him alive. The patient has gone 6 days without eating, and is getting weaker. He is now bedbound, and when you visit him, he asks you quietly to make sure his family does not take him to the hospital when he becomes unconscious. What do you do?
4. You are the teaching assistant in a local preschool. You notice that one of your students has been coming in with unusual bruises, and you mention this to your lead teacher. She states that she is friends with the child’s mom, and knows that the child is clumsy at home. You feel the bruises look suspicious and should be reported. When you express your concerns, the teacher states that she is the one to handle it, and if you pursue it further, she will have you fired for insubordination. You need to keep your job in order to fulfill your CWE requirements for the next three weeks, until the end of the term. What do you do?
5. You are interning with a community agency that helps homeless families. A local sportswear company has donated boxes upon boxes of new coats for adults and children. You are actually worried about getting your child a new coat this year, since you are on financial aid and have no other income. Your supervisor tells you to go ahead and pick a coat for your son, since there are plenty available. What do you do?

Criteria For Success

The goal of this activity is to give you an opportunity to take the ethical standards and explore how they may apply in real-life situations you may come across in your work. A successful outcome of the activity is for each student to become aware of the complexities of professional ethics in the field of human services.