

Ethics: Review & Practical Application

Come and review foundational principles for ethical practice and principles from the Texas Code of Conduct and then learn how to apply these to ethical situations that arise in practice.
Presented for the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition

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Defining Ethics

- A system of moral principles and perceptions about right and wrong that forms a philosophy of conduct practiced by professionals.
- Codes of Conduct derived from theories & systems of moral principles
- The study of values, customs, or beliefs of a person or group of people
- Standards set by a profession



Theories that underly Ethics

Deontological Ethics

- Certain actions or behaviors are inherently right or wrong regardless of the consequences
- Actions are either good or evil
- Higher order principles- In the case of religion- God has determined what is right and what is wrong

Theories that underly Ethics

Teleological Ethics

- The ends justify the means
- Rightness of an action is determined by the goodness of its consequences
- Act in the manner that produces the most favorable outcome
- Do the most good and impose the least harm

Theories that underly Ethics

Utilitarian Ethics (subset of teleological)

- Proper actions are those that promote the greatest good for the greatest number in society
- Rightness of an action is determined by the goodness of its consequences in that individual case, not concerned with the impact on other cases
- Long term consequences should be anticipated and act accordingly in all similar situations

To Make Ethical Decisions

You must rely on:

- The policies and procedures of your organization
- Relevant laws and regulations
- Code of Ethics
- Models for ethical decision-making



The Issue of Risk

- Defensive practice vs. Good practice models
 - Understanding the profession's ethical standards and using the Code of Ethics to guide practice
 - Avoid practicing in a vacuum
 - **If it isn't documented, it wasn't done**



Important Considerations For Administrators

- Ethical & Appropriate Use of Technology
- Use of Supervision & Consultation
- Concepts of Public Trust & Social Capital



Reflection and Self-Regulation

Three key elements to ethics-related reflection-in-action (Reamer, 2013)

- Knowledge
 - Must have a knowledge base of both ethical code and agency policies
 - Must also be aware of laws and regulations related to the organization if applicable
 - Set an example for the agency
- Transparency
 - Practice in an open and straightforward manner to maintain the trust of the community, board, staff, volunteers and clients
 - Be open about the agency's financial performance, goals, history, outcomes and operations
 - Internal transparency, with staff and board, external transparency with clients and public
- Process
 - Many decisions are complex and require a thoughtful approach



Professional Demeanor

(Adapted from Penny Clarke's (n.d.) collection of accountants' professional attributes)

- Honesty and Integrity versus Dishonesty, Fraud and Deception
- Self-Control and Private Conduct
- Respect for Others and Nondiscrimination
- Professional Image
- Developing a personal brand identity



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Texas Code of Conduct for Social Workers

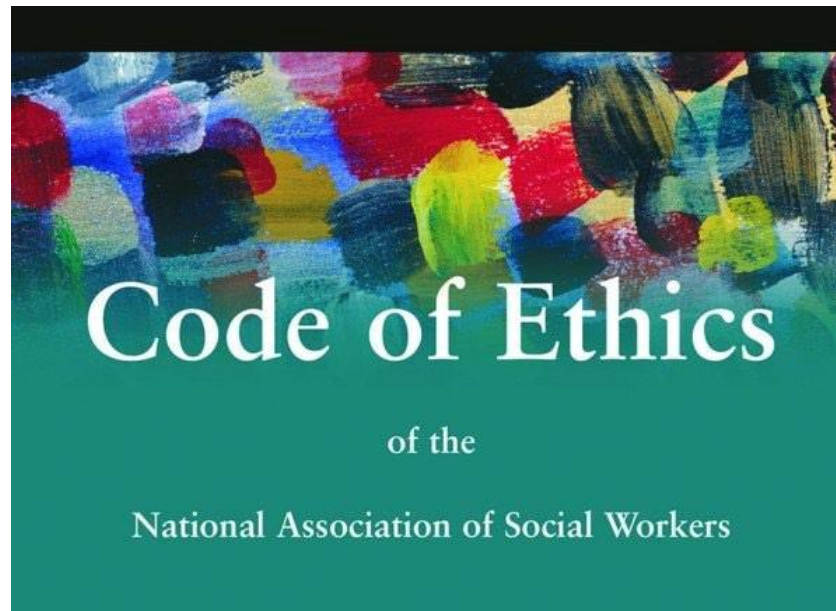
The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the Texas Administrative Code website. The URL is partially visible as 'ate.tx.us/public/readtac\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=22&pt=34&ch=7'. Below the URL is a navigation bar with 'Box | Login' and several social media icons. The main heading is 'Texas Administrative Code'. Below this, a table lists the hierarchy of the code:

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| TITLE 22 | EXAMINING BOARDS |
| PART 34 | TEXAS STATE BOARD OF SOCIAL WORKER EXAMINERS |
| CHAPTER 781 | SOCIAL WORKER LICENSURE |
| SUBCHAPTER B | RULES OF PRACTICE |
| RULE §781.301 | Code of Conduct |

Below the table, there is a paragraph of text: 'omply with the code of conduct and standards of practice set forth in this subchapter. Any violation of the code of conduct on credits or tends to discredit the profession of social work and is grounds for disciplinary action.'

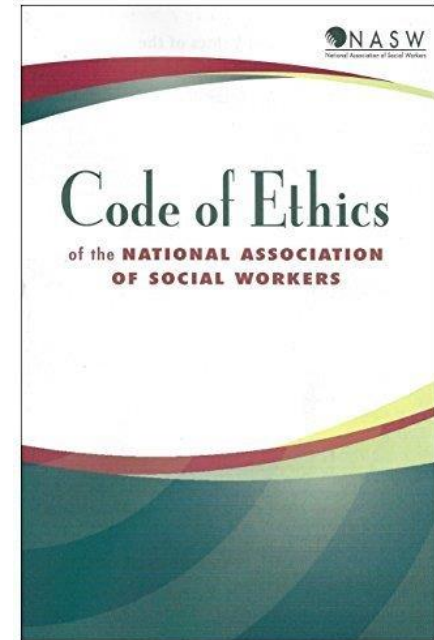
Below that, another paragraph begins: 'to perform any act or service for which the person is licensed solely on the basis of a client's age; gender; race; color; religio sion; or political affiliation.'

Codes of Ethics – NASW



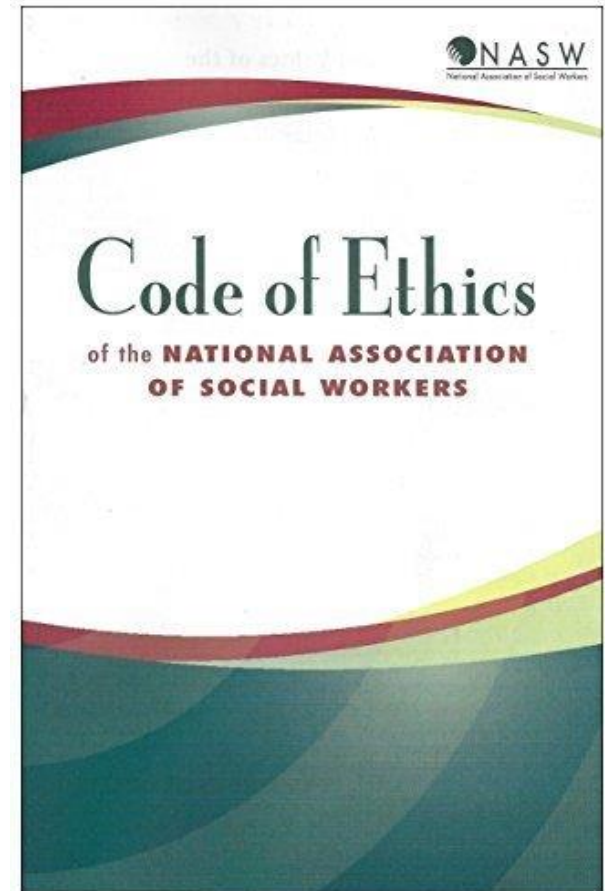
Defining Professional Ethics

- Professional ethics involves situations that occur in the course of professional practice
- It is not just about identifying an ethical dilemma and deciding what to do but also about how we enact an ethical decision—that is critical to success.
- Errors of Omission and Commission



Core Values of the Profession (SCIIDS)

- Social Justice
- Competency
- Integrity
- Importance of the Human Relationship
- Dignity and Worth of the Individual
- Service



Three Core Concepts of Ethics (Denhardt, 1991)

- Honor
 - High sense of duty
 - Pursuing good deeds as ends in themselves
 - Adherence to highest standards of responsibility, integrity and principle
- Benevolence
 - Disposition to do good and promote the welfare of others
 - Motivation to pursue those ends
- Justice
 - Fairness and regard for the rights of others
 - Respect for the dignity and worth of others
 - Develop and preserve the rights of others, help ensure those rights will not be violated



Aspirational Ethics

- What does it mean to have aspirational ethics?
- Core values suggested:
 - Community – members of a group with shared histories and established practices
 - Excellence – commitment to the cause beyond profit, perform well and have a positive impact
 - Membership – develop an identity through the organization where you spend the most time
 - Integrity – the desire and enthusiasm to do the right thing
 - Judgment – Aristotle found good judgment to be the most important consideration in ethics
 - Holism – Consider your business and personal life as a whole person, do not isolate the two



Ethical Dilemmas

“Situation in which an action is required that reflects only one of two values or principles that are in opposition to one another”

(Beckerman, 1997, p.6)



Characteristics of Ethical Dilemmas

- A choice must be made between 2 courses of action
- There are significant consequences for taking either course of action
- Each of the 2 courses of action can be supported by one or more ethical principle
- The ethical principle(s) supporting the un-chosen course of action will be compromised



**THE ETHICAL
DILEMMA**

Errors in Critical Thinking

| Error | Thought |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Am I acting in self interest? | IF a client tells me anything upsetting, I have to notify the authorities. I won't have any troubling information on my conscience. |
| Am I using all or nothing reasoning? | Selena is working really hard. If I report her for neglecting her kids, she'll lose hope & all that effort will go down the drain. |
| Is my attraction (or aversion) to people biasing my judgment? | Katy is such a sweet & friendly girl. Maybe I can find her a summer job with one of my friends, even if I'm not doing that for the others on my caseload. |
| Am I following the crowd? | Everyone in my unit discusses cases in the lunchroom. It's where we get to let off steam. |
| Am I playing the odds that a wrong won't be discovered? | What are the chances this client will find out that I showed a tape of his session in my interviewing class? |

Resolving Dilemmas

- There is no absolute right and wrong course of action to take when faced with an ethical dilemma
- The nature of ethical dilemmas is such that good reasons can be provided for either of two courses of action
- Critical thinking before critical action
- More objective subjective decisions



Why use any Decision-Making model?

A professional is acting in a responsible manner if he or she has maintained personal and professional honesty, coupled with

- the best interests of the client,
- without malice or personal gain, and
- can justify his/her actions as the best judgment of what should be done based on the current state of the profession.



Decision-Making Process

- **Who will be helpful?**
- **What are my choices?**
- **When have I faced a similar dilemma?**
- **Where do ethical and clinical guidelines lead me?**
- **Why am I selecting a particular course of action?**
- **How should I enact my decision?**

Ethical decision making is a cognitive process that considers various ethical principles, rules, and virtues or the maintenance of relationships to guide or judge individual or group decisions or intended actions.



Ethical Decision-Making Model

Inspired by Forester-Miller and Davis (1996) and research from Cottone and Clause (2000)

1. Identify the problem

- What are the facts? Weed out assumptions, suspicions and rumors
- Do you need legal advice or law enforcement assistance?

2. Apply the code of ethics

- Be clear about your professional obligations
- Uphold the principles of your organization
- Seek consultation from your professional organization

Ethical Decision-Making Model

3. What is the nature of the ethical dilemma?

- Is it in fact a dilemma? Or is it clear-cut with no competing values?
- Does the situation require action that reflects only one of two values that are in opposition to one another?
(Beckerman, 1997)

4. Generate several scenarios of potential decisions

- What are all the different decisions that you might make?
- Consult with a colleague, if you can do so without violating confidentiality

Ethical Decision-Making Model

5. Consider the potential consequences
 - What will be the impact of your decision on
 - The individuals involved?
 - People you serve?
 - The community?
 - What will be the impact on you and your career?
 - Would you be willing to make the obvious ethical decision, if it meant you would lose your job?

Ethical Decision-Making Model

6. Choose the course of action and evaluate it

- Consider the following questions
 - Is it just?
 - Does it meet your own standard of fairness?
 - Would you expect to be treated the same way?
 - How would your action look reported on the news?
 - Would you recommend the same action to another?

7. Implement the action

- Stakes can be high, implementation can be difficult
- Go back and reassess after time passes, would you do the same thing, if given the chance?

Ethical Decision-Making Model

1. Identify the problem
2. Apply the code of ethics
3. What is the nature of the ethical dilemma?
4. Generate several scenarios of potential decisions
5. Consider the potential consequences
6. Choose the course of action and evaluate it
7. Implement the action

Wrap-up/Questions?

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