

Ethical Issues in Professional Self Care: *Avoiding Ethical Pitfalls and Professional Impairment*

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Learning objectives

- Identify the principles in the ethical code relevant to self-care
- Analyze the potential impact of failures of self-care
- Discuss case studies and the ramifications of failures in self-care
- Examine interventions and self-care strategies for self and colleagues

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Ethics

Merriam-Webster (2020)

"The discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation"

"the principles of conduct governing and individual or group"

"A guiding philosophy"

"A set of moral issues or aspects"

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APA Ethics Code

(APA, 2017)

- Principal A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence
- Principal B: Fidelity and Responsibility
- Principal C: Integrity
- Principal D: Justice
- Principal E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

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Ethics of helpers

Do no harm	Do not exploit	Be competent	Don't be compromised
Protection	Justice	Equality	Dignity and respect

These are generally accepted and applied principles across disciplines

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Self-care is an ETHICAL IMPERATIVE

Psychologists

Social Workers

Counselors

Lawyers* (essential)

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Risks for helpers

- Burnout
- Vicarious trauma
- Professional incompetence
- Impaired professional
- Client harm or exploitation
- Suicide

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Suicide rates for helpers

- Overall rate: 32 per 100,000 for men; 8 of 100,000 for women
- Personal care and service (general)
 - 47 men (68% more)
 - 16 women (100% more)
- Social work – 30 men; 12 women (50% more)
- One in four psychologists have felt suicidal; 40-60% reported disruption in functioning due to depression/burnout/anxiety
- Psychologists accounted for about 5% of suicides in healthcare pros
- Lawyers – contemplate suicide 3x more than general public (12% v 4%)

• (Susseil, et al., 2021; Sherry, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Krill, et al., 2023)

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Factors for Suicidality

- Stressed
- Lonely
- Overcommitted
- Depressed
- Help-seeking = damaged reputation

Krill, et al., 2023

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What do we face in our work?

- **Vicarious Trauma**
 - The adverse impact of witnessing or sharing someone else's trauma
 - "Transmission" of trauma
 - Can lead to an alteration of one's world view
 - "Secondary Trauma"
 - **Accumulation** of exposure
- **Burnout**
 - The negative impact of the job and the job demands
 - Dysfunctional workplace and work relationships
 - Reduced sense of accomplishment and competency on the job
- **Compassion Fatigue**
 - Emotionally and psychologically depleted
 - Can't "give" any more

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Impaired professional

- Professional abilities are diminished due to personal issues, below an acceptable level of competency
 - Substance abuse
 - Mental health issues
 - Physical health issues
- Quality of work
 - Timeliness
 - Quality
 - Effectiveness
 - Ethical violations

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What makes us susceptible to ethical violations?

- Most ethical violations are not malicious, but in the spirit of "helping"
- Personally
 - Desire to help
 - Opportunity to influence or meet goals
 - Values and vulnerabilities
 - Emotions and education (lack of)
 - Numbness and complacency – "justified neglect"
 - Compromised standards
 - Sense of invulnerability
- Organizationally
 - No discussion of ethics or ignoring
 - Poor leadership/role-modeling
 - Disparity and sense that things are unfair
 - Sense of omnipotence and invulnerability

(Carrucci, 2016; Lustgarten, 2016; Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2019)

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Boundaries

- Boundary violations are the most common ethical complaint AND source of disciplinary action

(Knapp et al., 2013)

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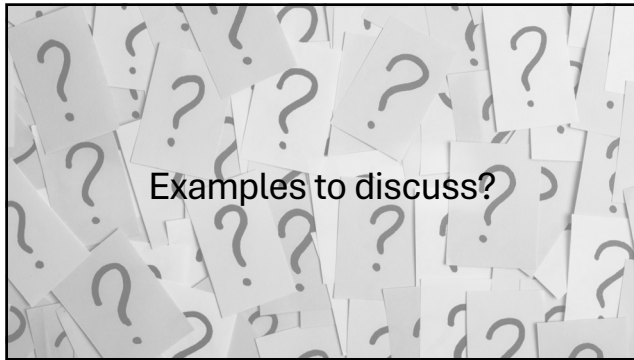
What are examples of boundary violations?

- Sexual
- Emotional
 - Getting own needs met
 - Corruption/Collusion
 - Failure to challenge or confront
 - Doing what is easy versus what is right
- Financial – billing, gifts, loaning/borrowing/bartering, coupons
- Social – texting, social media, dating apps
- Professional – confidentiality, role blurring, using client info, referrals,

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What issues related to self-care can contribute to boundary violations?

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Ethical Principals for Self-Care

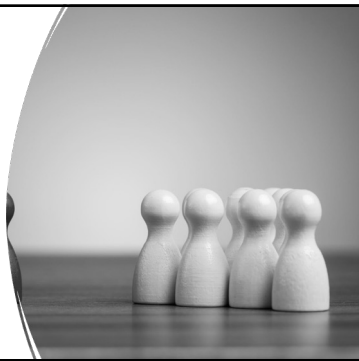
- Respect for yourself and your dignity
 - Violation of this impacts your integrity and trust
- Responsibility for self-care
 - Solely on you and you cannot justify neglecting this
- Duty to perform
 - Helper must recognize that they cannot help others without caring for themselves
- You have a right to wellness
- You have a right to rest and separation from work
- You must show self-restraint so your self-care does not impact your work
- Make a commitment to yourself

SAMHSA, 2014

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Resiliency

- Adapting to stress, trauma, and tragedy
- Reframing the bad as learning experience or something good
- Traits to develop resiliency
 - Support from others
 - Self care
 - Autonomy and sense of purpose
 - Tangible goals/progress
 - Make decisions, do not avoid them
 - Learn from mistakes, do not dwell on them
 - Flexibility
 - Adaptation
 - Humor



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Self Care that Builds Resilience

- Make connections to others that are authentic.
- Ask for and accept help – share the load.
- Crises are temporary – look forward!
- Set REALISTIC goals and move forward, even a tiny bit.
- Make decisions, don't avoid them.
- Understand your role and maintain the boundaries.
- Have realistic expectations of yourself and others.

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Remember -

- There is a pull to rescue - your job is not to save anyone.
- Caring and listening are verbs – they are enough.
- Victims can feel helpless and maintain that role – facilitate their strength.
- Do not personalize the hostility. You are working with trauma and it sucks.
- If you don't set and maintain boundaries, you will get sucked dry and angry.
- Be self-aware – monitor your reactions. Ask for guidance and supervision.
- Vent, get support, but do not get in a cycle of complaining and negativity.
- Do things that satisfy you and protect that – exercise, draw, massage, pray.
- Always remember that what you do matters.

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Tools I Can Use:

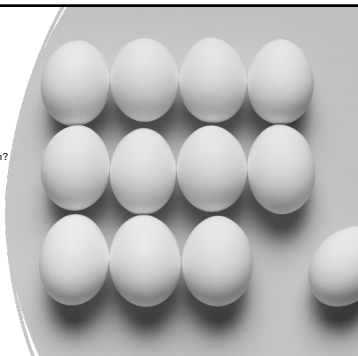
- It's not about me
- Increase how I tolerate my own helplessness
- Patience
- Thick skin/resiliency
- Be open to feedback
- Be honest and forgive yourself when you don't like working with certain youth
- Do not personalize
- Communicate with providers
- Learn more about the youth's treatment/safety plan and what you can do
- Take your time, go slow
- Empathy
- Relationships can be the threat and the vehicle to healing
- Learn individual needs and triggers, do not expect them to carry over to other youth
- Vicarious trauma
- Burnout
- Compassion fatigue
- Creative methods of connection
 - Kindness and attention are not always the answer
- Avoid Splitting. Get info from multiple sources

Valliere & Beckwith, 2023

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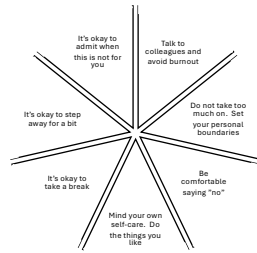
Self-Inventory and Check-in

- Am I acting out of pity/guilt/feelings of obligation?
- Am I worried about their reaction if I say "no?" eggshells?
- Do I worry they may feel rejected?
- Do I worry that I will not be of value?
- Am I the person to rescue this youth?
- Am I doing for them what they can do for themselves? Enabling?
- If I can't save them, what good am I?
- Do I see their potential and have my own goals for their future?



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Take Care of Yourselves and Each Other



Barnett & Homany (2022)

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