

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD

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DISCUSSION QUESTION

When service needs of the client population conflict with the ethical code of the profession. How do you respond?

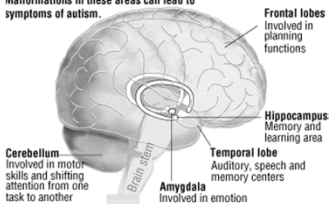
- A. Do you not provide services for the client.
- B. Do you provide services outside the scope of the ethical code.
- C. Do you provide services within the scope of the ethical code.
- D. Do you advocate for changing the ethical code.

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WHAT IS AUTISM?

Many children with autism have anomalies in some of the brain structures shown below. Malformations in these areas can lead to symptoms of autism.



Frontal lobes
Involved in planning functions

Hippocampus
Memory and learning area

Temporal lobe
Auditory, speech and memory centers

Amygdala
Involved in emotion

Cerebellum
Involved in motor skills and shifting attention from one task to another

Brain stem

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WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autistic Disorder Asperger's Disorder Childhood Disintegrative Disorder Rett's Disorder Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified

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RISING WAVE OF AUTISM

- 1 in 68 and 1 and 50 (CDC 2016)
 - Fastest growing developmental disability in the world
- Emerging field with large growing population
 - Interventions, Diagnosis, all still being defined
- The ethical implications of working with this client are still undetermined or ambiguous.
 - But we do have a code to guide us as social workers

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THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTION

Absolutism (Objective) Deontological (Objective) Meta-Ethics Normative Ethics Relativism (Subjective) Teleological (Subjective)

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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- Ethical Context – The determination of what is right or wrong, or the rightness and wrongness of an action, is greatly influenced by the environmental context in which ethical decisions are made.
- Contextual Perspective – The determination of the rightness and wrongness of an action is based upon the totality of the information known at the time of the decision.
- Consequential Context – The determination of the rightness and wrongness of an action is manipulated based upon the avoidance of a negative outcome or the desire of a highly valued positive outcome.



REFLECTION STATEMENT

- *For social work to remain relevant and effective as a profession rooted in human relatedness; the Code of Ethics must be continuously revised to reflect our technological advances and changing social environment.*
- *How does the Code inform us today when working with individuals with ASD?*



INFORMED CONSENT

Question #1

Would you provide services to a client without informed consent?

- A - Yes
- B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Cognitive or social impairments might limit ability to comprehend services, intent, participation, etc.
- Treatment considered beneficial by all care team members.
- Client is deemed not competent but treatment goals are moving in that direction.



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Informed consent must be provided using clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purposes of services.
- If a client, because of age or mental condition is not competent to provide informed consent, the social worker shall obtain consent from the parent, guardian, or court appointed representative.
- Given the different ways in which individuals with autism may interact and communicate with others, conventional approaches to obtaining consent may not be appropriate.



DIAGNOSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Question #2

Is it always necessary to share the results of a diagnosis with your client?

A - Yes

B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Parents may not want to know the results of a diagnosis of ASD.
- The disclosure of results may be harmful to a client (another deficit).
- Research indicates that a diagnosis of ASD may be gender biased based upon stereotyped sex role expectations.
- Social workers need to be aware of implicate bias and gender bias.



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Results of all assessments must be shared with the client, parent or guardian.
- Social workers may withhold results from an assessment if an explicit exception to this right has been agreed upon in advance.



SELF DETERMINATION

Question #3

Would you place restrictions on a client's right to self-determination?

- A - Yes
- B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Balancing autonomy with concerns about realistic harm.
- Our perception of quality impacts their quality of life.
- How much do we allow others to make what we perceive to be “bad or good” decisions?
 - Balance between empowerment and restrictive behaviors
- Assessment of the client’s capacity for self-determination may vary based upon timeframe and type of intervention.



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Self determination is an inherent value of the social work profession, but there are no provision guiding that principle.
- Social workers can limit the client’s rights to self determination when the client’s actions or potential actions may pose a serious imminent harm to self or others.



BOUNDARIES

Question #4

Would you invite a client to be a Facebook friend?

- A - Yes
- B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Social deficits are implicate with disability
- Modeling appropriate social skills in the actual environment is an evidence-based strategy
- Normalizing the socialization experience will increase client's ability to interact appropriately in online settings



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- A multiple relationship exists if the is a social media or personal virtual friendship with a client.
- The code does not explicitly prohibit the sharing of personal information or disclosures with client. Therefore, it left to the subjective judgment of the social worker.
- The foundation of personal and professional relationships are increasing based upon some form of virtual platform. The expectation of relatedness is being redefined.



CONFIDENTIALITY

Question #5

Would you share information with a parent that is not the client's guardian?

A - Yes

B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATION

- Nature of relationship with client and parents.
- Benefit of sharing information with other care team members.
- Intent of obtaining information:
 - Tracking towards individual service plans
 - Crisis planning



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Social workers must be able to distinguish between privacy vs. confidentiality
- ASD persists throughout the lifetime, the parameters of confidentiality may change from childhood, teen into adulthood.
- Determination or definition of the client, care team and community support systems.
- The traditional limits of confidentiality may be broadened or restricted due to the nature of relationships between the client, parents or guardian.



RESEARCH

Question #6

Would you recommend participation in a research study knowing they would not personally benefit the client?

- A - Yes
- B - No



PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Can convey their ability to help their (autism) community
 - The gap in knowledge is immense, every individual with ASD can contribute to the pursuit of a better understanding of the disorder.
- Mindfulness that good science protects all involved
- Heightened awareness of best practices and possible outcomes for client



ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Know the requirements for protecting vulnerable populations and the elements of informed consent.
- Social workers need to be mindful of what is quality research and what isn't.
- Balance the best interest of our clients with the best interests of the larger client population.
- Be mindful of best practices and the latest research.



REFLECTION STATEMENT

Inherent in the resolution of an ethical dilemma is the possibility of violating an ethical standard.



