Nico Pelosi
Grand Canyon University
CNL-505 - Professional Counseling, Ethical, and Legal Considerations
Professor Tanisha Guy
July 16, 2023

Counseling is a career path that requires a person to navigate through difficult dilemmas, especially when working with controversial issues like abortion, suicide, adultery, domestic violence, child abuse, and many more. These ethical considerations have a much greater impact, even more so when the counselor and the client have significantly different opinions on these topics. This paper will break down the ethical complications of a counselor and client and how one might

express personal values to a client. It will also discuss the actions a counselor could take when facing these values and conflicts. It will also examine legislative and policy considerations, as well as steps for ethical decision making. This is a controversial topic with many schools of thought on the correct way to approach it.

One of the main ethical considerations in counseling is the likely impact of the counselor expressing their personal values or morals to a client. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (A.4.b) explicitly states that counselors should not impose their personal values on clients. When a counselor openly expresses their values, especially on sensitive subjects, it may create an atmosphere of judgment and potentially impede the therapeutic relationship, undermining the client's autonomy and ability to make personal decisions (Corey, Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2014). Normally, a counselor tries to keep an open mind and use their training to withhold judgment and hear out their client regardless of the circumstance. However, this becomes difficult for counselors when they work with a client who has significantly different morals that come into conflict with their own. It can be extremely demanding for them to set those views and values aside. To some extent, it could be argued that it's impossible as they would have to turn off all emotion to do so. It is likely for a counselor to feel discomfort in these situations. Still, it is key for the counselor to do their very best to remain nonjudgmental and open, homing in on understanding the client's worldview and life experiences rather than casting judgment, for the benefit of both the client and the counselor. This is where a counselor should go back to their own training or learning and aim to create a therapeutic environment of empathy, understanding, and acceptance, unaffected by personal views.

Many laws and policies affect the clinical mental health counseling and school counseling fields. For instance, HIPAA is in place to protect clients, including their privacy and the confidentiality between counselor and client. This is a core value of ethical counseling that needs to be held to the highest standard. Other legal and ethical obligations are also crucial in counseling. Another core one is mandatory reporting, which applies to situations that involve child abuse or if a client threatens to harm themselves or others. This is something all counselors must abide by (ACA, 2014).

As previously stated, some situations conflict so strongly with a counselor's values that they impair the counselor's ability to provide appropriate counseling for the client. In these cases, it may be appropriate to consider referring the client to another professional, ideally one who can better serve them in their circumstances. However, there is something crucial to consider: the ACA Code of Ethics (A.11.b) emphasizes that referral must be based on the best interests of the client and not due to the counselor's personal discomfort. If referral is not an option, a counselor needs to use an ethical decision-making model to guide their actions. One of the most used ones is the ethical decision-making model developed by Forester-Miller and Davis (1996). This model encourages counselors to find the root of the problem, consider the participants involved or affected by it, review relevant ethical codes to go over, and then determine the best possible course of action. It would also be useful for them to consult with coworkers or supervisors, along with the other steps in this process.

In conclusion, dealing with moral values and controversial issues in counseling requires a deep understanding of ethical considerations. It also calls for a commitment to respecting the client and their well-being. The ACA and ASCA Codes of Ethics provide essential guidelines for navigating these complex scenarios. None of this is easy for a counselor, as there are many obstacles and dilemmas one will face. It is fair to say they will be tested, and becoming a great counselor is going

to take some time. It is important to continue ongoing education, as it is a major benefit. Supervision can also be a great help in managing some of these challenges. With all of these things to consider, counselors should continue to learn and never stop pushing themselves.

References

ACA 2014 code of ethics - american counseling association. (n.d.). https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf

Clay, R. A. (n.d.). *Coping with challenging clients*. Monitor on Psychology. https://www.apa.org/monitor/2017/07-08/challenging-clients

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., Corey, C., & Callanan, P. (2014). *Issues and ethics in the helping professions* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Forester-Miller, H., & Davis, T. E. (1996). *A practitioner's guide to ethical decision making*. American Counseling Association.

Rollins, J. (2022, August 1). *Managing resistant clients*. Counseling Today. https://ct.counseling.org/2010/02/managing-resistant-clients/

Team, G. E. (2018, August 1). *Ethics in therapy*. Code of Ethics for Counselors and Therapists. https://www.goodtherapy.org/ethics-therapy.html

Nuna. (2021, June 3). *How to refer a client to another therapist*. Nuna blog for mental healthcare experts. https://expert.holanuna.com/practika/when-how-refer-client-another-therapist/