Ethical Issues & Spirituality in Social Work Practice

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Spiritual/Ethical Dilemmas

- Write down a specific ethical dilemma you or a colleague has faced that had a spiritual dimension (please be specific AND maintain confidentiality)
- Write down some of your opinions regarding the use of spiritual practices in social work settings (prayer, meditation, use of religious literature/dogma, referrals to clergy, disclosure of personal spiritual beliefs, etc.)

Agenda

- Housekeeping & Intros (15)
- The Code of Ethics & Spirituality (75)
- Break (15)
- Ethical Dilemmas & Spirituality (30)
- Research in Spirituality & Social Work (30)
- Wrap-up/Q&A (15)

Introductions

- Name
- Area of Social Work you are engaged in
- What you hope to get out of this class besides meeting the ethics requirement
- 3 brief words, memories, or thoughts that come to mind when you think of “spirituality”

About Your Instructor

Credentials
- BSSW from BYU - 2004
- MSW from Wash U in St. Louis - 2005
- LCSW in AZ - 2007
- MPA from ASU - 2009

Current Work
- Private counseling practice in Avondale
- Part-time therapist for LDS Family Services

Spirituality
- Lifelong and currently active member of the LDS/Mormon Church

Learning Objectives

Participants will:
- Renew their understanding of and commitment to the NASW Codes of Ethics
- Enhance their ability to navigate ethical dilemmas that involve elements of spirituality
- Learn about some of the latest scholarly findings regarding spirituality and social work, as well as how to learn more
The NASW Code of Ethics

Preamble

“The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.”

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. “Clients” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice.”

“A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.”

“These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation.”
The NASW Code of Ethics

Preamble

“Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals’ needs and social problems.”

“...This constellation of core values reflects what is unique to the social work profession. Core values, and the principles that flow from them, must be balanced within the context and complexity of the human experience.”

Purpose

1. The Code identifies core values on which social work’s mission is based.
2. The Code summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession’s core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that should be used to guide social work practice.
3. The Code is designed to help social workers identify relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise.

4. The Code provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable.
5. The Code socializes practitioners new to the field to social work’s mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards.
6. The Code articulates standards that the social work profession itself can use to assess whether social workers have engaged in unethical conduct.

Ethical Principles
The NASW Code of Ethics

Ethical Principles

Grow out of the 6 Core Values:

- Service
- Social Justice
- Dignity & Worth of the Person
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

Ethical Principles

Value: Service

Ethical Principle: Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.

Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice.

Value: Dignity & Worth of the Person

Ethical Principle: Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.

Value: Importance of Human Relationships

Ethical Principle: Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.

Value: Integrity

Ethical Principle: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.

Value: Competence

Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

Ethical Standards

Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities:

- To Clients
- To Colleagues
- In Practice Settings
- As Professionals
- To the Social Work Profession
- To the Broader Society
The Code & Spirituality

• Define spirituality.
• Define religion.
• Is there a difference between the two?

The Code & Spirituality Group Activity

• Split into 6 groups
• Review your assigned portions of each of the 4 sections of the code
• Answer and prepare to discuss:
  • Are there spiritual elements/ramifications to this part of the code?
  • How does this portion of the code address the spiritual needs/issues of clients, if at all?
  • How might a practitioner’s spirituality influence their interpretation of this portion of the code?

Ethical Dilemmas & Spirituality

• Split into 6 groups
• 2 ethical dilemmas each, answer the following for each dilemma:
  • What are the ethical issues?
  • What are the spiritual issues?
  • How can the dilemma be addressed effectively?

Latest Research

• There is a large evidence base that demonstrates the efficacy of prayer and meditation in improving health and mental health outcomes
• Social workers are split in their opinions on whether the use of spiritual interventions (prayer in particular) is appropriate at all
• Social workers who consider themselves religious are far more likely to feel religious interventions are appropriate and to use them

Latest Research

• Many social workers pray FOR their clients without permission
• Many social workers utilize meditation and prayer WITH clients with permission
• Still no widely accepted framework for determining how/when/if to utilize spiritual interventions in social work
Latest Research - Discussion

• What are your feeling about the use of spiritual interventions with social work client?
• What is our ethical obligation to the spiritual health of our clients?
• Is praying FOR a client without their permission ethical? Why or why not?
• Why has social work deviated so far away from its spiritual roots? Is it good? Why or why not?

Latest Research - Discussion

• Why do you suppose we are sometimes hesitant to address spirituality directly with clients unless they bring it up first?
• What would you want from a social worker in terms of spirituality, if you were a client?
• What about social workers who are non-believers or consider themselves non-spiritual?
• What about clients who are non-believers or non-spiritual?

Wrap-up/Q&A

To Learn More...

• societyforspiritualityandsocialwork.com