

# B.C. ASSOCIATION OF CLINICAL COUNSELLORS

## GUIDELINE FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING (October 2008)

Decision making in all areas of practice requires a consideration of the ethical principles. The BC Association of Clinical Counsellors believes that all practitioners need to continually:

1. Be aware of the values governing their practice, including those required in the Code of Ethical Conduct and Practice Standards;
2. Be aware of personal values, the values of others, and the implications for their professional practice.
3. Assess how their personal and professional values interface in their professional practice.

In situations where the ethical solution appears to be ambiguous, or where values or interests conflict, the use of an ethical decision making process such as the one outlined below is appropriate. Sometimes a resolution may be reached quickly, whereas at other times the complexity of issues may require considerable deliberation and consultation.

The BCACC strongly encourages RCCs to seek professional consultation and emotional support during the process of making ethically difficult decisions.

### **An Ethical Decision Making Process**

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#### **WHO is involved? Identify:**

- All the individuals and groups affected by the decision.
  - The rights and interests of these individuals and groups.
  - Any relevant characteristics of these individuals and groups.
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#### **What is (are) the ethically relevant ISSUE(s)?**

- Seek additional information as needed.
  - In what context or circumstances did the issue arise?
  - What legal, community, or societal standards are engaged?
  - Are there applicable Ethics and Practice Standards, or Guidelines?
  - Is there conflict between different values or the interests of different parties?
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#### **SELF AWARENESS. Identify your own:**

- Personal biases;
- Life stressors; and
- Personal interests;

That could affect the decision making process and the final decision.

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#### **ALTERNATIVES**

- Develop alternative courses of action. Consult with others as appropriate, remembering that sometimes this may include the parties directly involved. It may also include interdisciplinary team members.
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**CONSIDER...**

- The risks and benefits of each alternative on the individuals and groups involved, in the short and long terms, and on an ongoing basis.
- The values underlying each alternative.

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**CHOOSE**

A course of action, individually or collectively as appropriate in the situation. As part of this step, RCCs should take steps to address and acknowledge their feelings and intuitions about the issue. These steps could include:

- Checking in with and identifying the source of any internal uneasiness;
- Taking time to consider (“sleeping on it”);
- Finding quiet space to allow emotional material to become fully in awareness and to be processed;
- Reframing the situation in time – how does one want to remember having acted? What will the significance of the matter be in six months, a year, five years?
- Seeking feedback from several different perspectives if possible in the circumstances and if it can be done while also maintaining the various privacy interests involved;
- Asking for help;
- Accessing one’s emotional supports and resources. What is needed to stay centered and grounded in this situation?

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**COMMIT and take action.**

*Individually:*

Take all appropriate and necessary steps to ensure that the ethical issue is dealt with to the best of your ability.

*As a group or organization:*

Where the issue is a collective one the course of action chosen will often also require collective action. In this case one person should be given the overall responsibility for implementation.

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**EVALUATE the results.**

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**Take RESPONSIBILITY**

- For the consequences of the action.
- To correct so far as possible any negative consequences of the action.
- To re-engage in the decision making process if the issue remains unresolved.

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**Prevent FUTURE OCCURRENCES**

- Evaluate the organizational systems in which the issue arose in order to identify and remedy, if possible, the circumstances that may facilitate and reward unethical practices, e.g., poor communications, inadequate resources, restrictive policies, and arbitrary procedures.
- Evaluate which, if any, of your own behaviours or circumstances may have contributed to the development of the ethical issue and take appropriate steps to address these.