



ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING GUIDELINES

June 2025

Purpose of the Guide

This framework is designed to support Registered Clinical Counsellors in navigating ethical dilemmas with clarity, confidence, and alignment to the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Code of Ethical Conduct and Standards of Clinical Practice, 2023. It integrates reflective questions, consultation strategies, and structured decision-making steps to promote safe, ethical, and culturally responsive care.

Decision making in all areas of practice requires 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 Standards of Clinical Practice;
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.

Step 1: Clarify the Ethical Concern

What could affect the decision-making process and the final decision

- What is the ethical dilemma or concern?
- Who is affected? (client, clients' family, colleagues, community)
- What assumptions or biases might I be bringing?
- What is the specific decision I need to make?
- What information is missing or unclear?

Step 2: Gather Context and Consult

Gather information on what policies, procedures, legislation are relevant for your specific circumstances.

- Review relevant legislation and policies (e.g., PIPA, CFCSA, Duty to report)
- Consult BCACC Code of Ethical Conduct and Standards of Clinical Practice
- Seek supervision or consultation—especially for complex or high-risk situations

- Engage with your employer or manager if working within an organizational setting
- Consider cultural, relational, and systemic factors that may influence the situation

Step 3: Identify Ethical Principles and Considerations

Reading through the Code of Ethical Conduct will support you in orienting to the priorities of the principles.

BCACC Code of Ethical Conduct

1. Respect for the Dignity of All Persons
2. Respect for the Dignity of All Peoples
3. Responsible Caring
4. Integrity in Relationships
5. Responsibility to Society

Other Considerations

- Client preferences and autonomy
- Therapeutic goals and quality of life
- Cultural and community values
- Risks and potential consequences
- Legal and professional obligations

Step 4: Explore Options and Make a Decision

Explore 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.

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 and the values underlying each alternative

Develop 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 internal responses to the issue. These steps could include:

- List 2–3 viable options
- Use the Ethical Checklist:
- Have I gathered all relevant information?
- Have I involved all appropriate parties?
- Are the consequences considered?
- Is the decision fair and values-aligned?
- Would I be comfortable if this decision were made public?
- Reframing the situation in time.
- 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.

Step 5: Implement and Document

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

- Developing a clear action plan
- Communicating with all relevant parties
- Documenting your process, including:
 - Clinical and ethical reasoning
 - Consultations and supervision
 - Final decision and rationale

Step 6: Reflect and Evaluate

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.

- Reflect on the outcome?
- Were there any unintended consequences?
- Is there any moral distress that needs to be addressed?
- What did you learn?
- What might you do differently next time?

BCACC Ethical Practice Expectations

- Continuously assess the ethical dimensions of your practice
- Seek supervision and peer consultation
- Address unethical conduct appropriately
- Accept feedback and take steps to resolve concerns
- Cooperate with BCACC committees when required
- Uphold the dignity and reputation of the counselling profession

Links

[BCACC-COEC-Effective-Nov.-1-2023.pdf](#)

[Standards of Practice - BC Association of Clinical Counsellors](#)

Ethical Decision - Making



CLARIFY

01

Clarify the ethical concern, who is affected, internal biases, any decisions needed and missing information.

GATHER CONTEXT AND CONSULT

02

Review relevant legislation and policies, discuss with your employers, regulatory body and supervisor.

IDENTIFY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

03

Reflect on the Code of Ethical Conduct and the principles. Integrate any other considerations.

EXPLORE OPTIONS AND MAKE DECISIONS

04

Explore alternative courses of action. Develop a course of action.

IMPLEMENT AND DOCUMENT

05

Take all appropriate and necessary steps to ensure the ethical issue is dealt with to the best of your ability. Document all action taken with rationale and who was consulted.

REFLECT AND EVALUATE

06

Evaluate, identify and remedy any behaviours or circumstances which may facilitate and perpetuate unethical practices.

