

Benchmark- Counselor Ethical Boundaries and Practices

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Boundary Issues and Dual Relationships

A multiple or dual relationship is when a counselor has an additional role in a client's life. An example of a dual relationship would be a client and counselor being close friends. As long as a counselor is able to remain objective and unbiased with their client, they are still adhering to the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014). However, it is important for counselors to consider the risks involved with taking on a client that they know personally. They would need to understand the ramifications the dual relationship can have on their personal relationship and their relationship with them as a client. Counselors must consider these factors with current and former relationships. Examples include former colleagues, peers, friends or any individuals the counselor has had a casual or distant relationship with. (Corey, Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2014).

One of the most sensitive ethical situations a counselor might experience is boundary crossing. Similar to a dual relationship, boundary crossing is when a counselor deviates from the commonly accepted practices with the intent to help or benefit their client (Corey, Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2014). For example, a counselor gets an invitation from one of their clients to attend their colleague graduation. The client has expressed to their counselor in the past that they would not have made it to graduation without their support and guidance. So, the counselor is aware that attending the graduation would mean so much to their client. The counselor is honored and excited to go to their client's graduation. However, they need to make sure that their attendance would not be a boundary violation. A boundary violation is a breach that causes harm to the client. So, the counselor is responsible for ensuring that attending the graduation is only going to benefit the client. If the counselor is not confident in their decision, it is best for them to seek consultation with a colleague or supervisor. In the end, if the counselor does attend the

graduation, it is important for them to document this interaction to remain compliant with the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014).

Before a counselor takes on a client they know personally or initiates a dual relationship with their current client, there are multiple aspects the counselor must consider. First, the counselor must understand that having multiple relationships with their client can potentially affect them. If a counselor's multiple relationship creates a close bond with their client, this can make it difficult for them to remain objective. Having a dual relationship can potentially harm the client as well. So, it is the duty of the counselor to ensure the benefits outweigh the harm if a dual relationship is initiated. Even though ethics codes advised against multiple relationships with clients, Boundary crossing can potentially be beneficial. Having multiple relationships gives counselors the opportunity to monitor themselves and examine what motivates them. This can also help the client have improved progress in their sessions (Corey, Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2014).

The ACA Code of Ethics states it is acceptable for a counselor to accept a client that is a friend or family member as long as they are able to remain objective and if it does not cause harm to the client (American Counseling Association, 2014). For example, a counselor might feel they would be able to remain biased with the majority of their loved ones, except their immediate family. Counselors must be self-aware of their own limitations. So, if one of their immediate family members comes to them for counselor services, it would be their duty to refer them to a different counselor. A client referral is also necessary if a counselor were in a position to where a client has a physical attraction towards them, they had an attraction to their client, or if there was a mutual attraction towards each other. A sexual or romantic relationship with a client would be a direct violation of the ACA Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association,

2014). One situation where keeping a client would be an option, is if they had an attraction towards the counselor, but the feeling was not mutual. The counselor can explain to them that it is not uncommon for a client to gain feelings for their counselor. This is because the client is revealing their most personal and sensitive information with them. If this explanation does not stop their feelings towards the counselor, then they would need to be referred a different counselor.

Professional Collaboration in Counseling

Counselors will more than likely work with other mental health professionals. So, it is important to maintain a strong and respectful relationship with every colleague no matter their differing profession and expertise. The quality of counselor interactions with other colleagues influences the quality of services provided to clients (American Counseling Association, 2014). This means that positive working relationships and communication is the key to a successful counseling program. Many counseling programs have multidisciplinary teams in place to help clients with different counseling services. Multidisciplinary teams consist of counselors, social workers, marriage and family therapists and psychiatrist (American Counseling Association, 2012).

Relationships with Supervisors and Colleagues

The role of clinical supervisor is rewarding, but it can come with some challenges. Clinical supervisors are responsible for informing supervisees on all aspects pertaining to the counseling process, policies and procedures, professional and ethical standards and legal responsibilities of a counselor. For example, supervisors must inform all supervisees of the informed consent process, participation requirements, client rights, confidentiality, limitations of confidentiality, who will have access to records, and how records will be stored and transmitted.

Clinical supervisors who offer supervision services are required to continue their education by participating in activities that will enhance their counseling and supervision skills. Similar to the client-counselor relationship, supervisors and supervisees are prohibited from engaging from any sexual or romantic relationships. This includes an electronic romantic relationship as well. Also, clinical supervisors are unable to supervise any individuals they are unable to remain objective with. Many counseling facilities recommend that practitioner start services with their own counselor. Supervisors are able to assist with the process of identifying the appropriate counselor for their supervisee. However, supervisors are prohibited from counseling their own supervisees (American Counseling Association, 2014).

There is going to be a time in which a counselor witnesses' unethical behavior from their colleagues. So, it is important for all counselors to be aware of the policies regarding the complaint process. For example, a counselor is out to dinner with their significant other, and notices that their colleague is also there with one of their clients. The counselor sees that their behavior is flirtatious and intimate, so it is their ethical obligation to act on this situation. The first thing the counselor should do is try and resolve the issue with their colleague. Making them aware they are violating the ACA Code of Ethics and reminding them this can cause the client harm might change their behavior. The counselor should also advise their colleague if they have romantic feelings for their client, they need to refer them to a different counselor. If the counselor confronts their colleague and the behavior still continues, the next step would be to get their supervisor involved. After the supervisor is informed about the issue, if there are no changes in behavior, it is the responsibility of the counselor to inform the state licensing boards or other appropriate institutional authorities (American Counseling Association, 2014).

Development of Your Thinking about Ethics

One of my most important developments I've made during this course is thoughts on counseling friends and family members. Many of loved ones know that I am pursuing my career in counseling. They see my drive and passion with psychology and counseling. This has made loved one bring up the idea of coming to me for counseling services in the future. I have never been opposed to this, because I have always enjoyed being a confidant for my friends and family. However, after examining the ACA Code of Ethics and going in depth with the potential harm it can cause, it has made me cautious with accepting clients whom I have a close relationship with. As a future counselor, it is my responsibility to be self-aware of limitations as a counselor and human being. I would have no qualms with being able to remain objective with the majority of my loved ones. However, close friends and family I will most likely have to refer them to a different counselor. I want to make sure that our relationship does not affect their therapeutic process and not cause them harm later on.

Another concept this course helps me reflect on were my own mental health issues. I have suffered from anxiety and depression for the majority of my life. The psychology courses I have partaken in over the years has helped me to identify, understand and cope with these issues. I have to make sure that these mental health issues are resolved before I can be providing services to others. I can only help people successfully if I am physical and mentally healthy.

References

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