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# Values and the Code of Ethics

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Every person is raised with values and beliefs that have been passed down from generation to generation. These beliefs vary greatly depending on demographics, culture, religion, ethnicity and other identifying factors. These values and beliefs are what make a person who they are today and in turn influence how they live their life. It is important to understand our own values and beliefs but to also be open to those of others. People come from many different backgrounds and all place varying degrees of value on certain aspects of life such as religion, gender roles, family and so on. As a social worker we must strive to understand and be competent in the values of our clients. In doing so we must maintain the integrity of the worker-client relationship by putting our own beliefs to the side and focusing on incorporating understanding of the client’s beliefs in our planning process. In order to do this we must focus on our own values and beliefs and assess which will be helpful in the social work profession as well as which values may pose as a conflict. This will allow us to incorporate our own values with the Code of Ethics which will help us to maintain productive relationships with clients, colleagues and the profession as a whole.

**My Values and the Code of Ethics**

I was raised valuing relationships, hard work and the fair treatment of people regardless of their culture, ethnicity or religion. These values that were instilled in me through generations will help me maintain my integrity and competence in the social work field. I value the rights of every individual to fair and equal treatment and will strive to provide that for clients.

The social work values are; service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. These values are all congruent with my own. I am a very compassionate person who values the fact that diversity exists. Without diversity the world would lack so many unique groups of people and their beliefs which I find fascinating. I am one that is eager and willing to learn about my client’s history and culture and will value the importance of human relationships and the learning experience that goes along with working with them. In working with clients I will be sure to provide them with a trusting environment because trustworthiness is something I value greatly. I wouldn’t want to open up to someone if I didn’t trust them so the importance of integrity is colossal in the social work field.

The NASW Code of Ethics includes all of the ethical codes and proper behavior expected of social workers. It includes the responsibilities when working with clients and colleagues as well as responsibilities in practice settings as professionals, as a part of the greater social work profession and society (Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, 2010). The values that I place on maintaining productive, meaningful relationships as well as my value of maintaining a respectable image make abiding by the Code of Ethics seem like common sense. Although I am aware of ethical dilemmas that may arise and conflicts that may occur that may make following the Code of Ethics difficult. If a situation arose such as a teenager that wanted to seek an abortion I would be able to follow the Code of Ethics without thinking twice because I value the right to a woman’s choice in this situation. On the other hand if I was presented with a client that confessed to me that he was molesting his daughter, I would have a harder time putting my values and morals aside in order to help him. I would be obligated to report him to Child Protective Services and abandon code 1.07; Privacy and Confidentiality and code 1.01; Commitment to Clients, in order to protect the well-being of the child involved. I would have no problem reporting him because I view his actions as unacceptable and morally corrupt. Although I would have a harder time going on providing services for this man. I will have to learn to put my feelings aside and focus on the client’s strengths in order to continue services. I understand that if I am unable to resolve this conflict it would be in mine and the client’s best interest to transfer him to another social worker who would be able to provide fair support.

Moreover all of the things that I value are mirrored in the Code of Ethics. The client is your number one priority and giving them a fair, trusting and confidential environment for recovery is the goal of every social worker. If we focus on the values and beliefs of the client and abide by the Code of Ethics we will be able to effectively provide a comfortable environment in which the client will share their feelings openly. My only struggle at this point in my life is my lack of education on diversity; I need to seek out information on cultures other than my own in order to better understand my client’s potentially differing values in the future.

**Implementing Values as a Social Worker**

As a social worker I will first and foremost provide my clients with a fair, trusting, open-minded environment in order to provide grounds for effective worker-client relationship building. Code 1.03; Informed Consent, is an element of social work that is very important. We must initially inform clients of our plans and obligations to them, the field and society and gain permission from them to move forward (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010). Once informed consent is established I will make every effort to understand the client’s values and beliefs and respect their way of thinking. Then, I will provide them with all of the available resources to help them reach their maximum potential as stated by (Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, 2010) and provide equal treatment regardless of cultural diversity or financial situation. These values are key in the success of the worker-client relationship. I will implement the value of Dignity and Worth of the Person by striving to understand the person’s background and valuing their outlook no matter how different it is than my own. Integrity is a value of utmost importance and each relationship I build with my clients I will maintain trustworthiness and provide competent guidance.

When working with clients with beliefs different than my own I will be sure to gain knowledge and become culturally competent in their beliefs and values as defined by Code 1.05; Cultural Competence and Social Diversity (Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, 2010). In situations where clients confess things to me that I find unacceptable and that are against my morals, I will do my best to resolve the conflict and provide them with fair treatment because I value everyone’s right to social justice.

Including my personal values of compassion, equality and open-mindedness with the values of the social work profession I feel that I will provide a fair and unbiased environment for my clients. Clients come to social workers because they are struggling in some way, and I value the fact that social workers are there to help.

**Life Experiences That Have Shaped My Values**

Throughout my life my family and friends have instilled in me values and beliefs. I was raised in a white, Catholic “nuclear” family in a small town where there was very little diversity. I feel that given this situation I was raised valuing family bonds, the church and people from the same culture as my own. The school that I went to was predominately white, with approximately 10 students total being from other ethnicities. I don’t think that there was much a conflict between these individuals and the majority we treated them just the same as everyone else. I was never was really taught about culture and diversity and never asked questions about it, that is until I was older and moved to a bigger city where I was faced with greater diversity. It was then that I began to value differences in people and their unique beliefs and culture.

I am a very compassionate, sensitive person and I feel that social workers need to be compassionate and understanding of their client’s needs. In high school I was having relationship problems with my friends and met with the school social worker. Her compassion and understanding really made me feel comfortable and at ease, I will utilize this value and skill in the social work field in hopes that I can make my clients feel comfortable sharing with me.

I have also had some experience with the social welfare system as it pertained to my sister who has been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and is a substance abuser. Her experiences have made me value social workers commitment to clients. Many of her social workers have really helped in her recovery, although I have seen several social workers terminate services before her goals were met which led to a relapse not long after. The code 1.16; Termination of Services states that, “Social workers should terminate services to clients when goals have been achieved or such services are no longer necessary” (Karen K. Kirst-Ashman, 2010) which was not followed in my sister’s situation. As a social worker I will make sure to not terminate services without referral if the client is not ready. I have also experienced situations with my sister where her financial situation and lack of health insurance has hindered her ability to receive adequate services. This is something I hope to work on at a macro level in order to raise awareness to the need of social services to people without health care or sufficient means. I value everyone’s right to equal services which is no way adhered to in many aspects of the social services field.

**Conclusion**

My values and beliefs have expanded and changed over time. Different life experiences have altered my outlook on certain values. The values and ethics that encompass the social work field are implemented to protect the rights of the clients and colleagues and to maintain the integrity and reputation of the profession and moreover to protect society. These values in correlation with my personal values are what will guide me in the field of social work. There will be conflicts and there will be difficult situations but by maintaining these values and behaving in accordance I will be able to provide clients with effective services and become a respected social worker.

# References

Hepworth, D. H., Rooney, R. H., Rooney, G. D., Strom-Gottfried, K., & Larsen, J. (2010). *Direct Social Work Practice: Theory and Skills.* Brooks/Cole.

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