

Ethics in a Rural Context: Application and Case Studies

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Mountain Plains ATTC (HHS Region 8)

ATTC

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA
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The use of affirming language inspires hope and advances recovery.

LANGUAGE MATTERS.

Words have power.

PEOPLE FIRST.

The ATTC Network uses affirming language to promote the promises of recovery by advancing evidence-based and culturally informed practices.



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Objectives

Identify

The steps and processes of effective ethical decision-making.

List

At least two ways in which working in a rural setting impacts limits of competence.

Apply

Ethical decision-making steps to at least three (3) cases.

Ethical Standards and Codes

- ACA: The ACA Code of Ethics (2014)
- APA: Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2016)
- APCB: Ethical Standards for Certified Peer Recovery Specialists (n.d.)
- NAADAC: NAADAC/NCC AP Code of Ethics (2021)
- NASW: Code of Ethics (2021)

Ethical Principles

Autonomy

Beneficence

Non-maleficence
(Non-maleficence)

Justice

Fidelity

Loyalty

Self-Interest

Ethical Decision-Making

Assess

Plan

Implement

Evaluate



Fisher, 2015

Why Rural and Small Communities?

- 97% of US land area is in rural counties
- 60 million people (19.3% of US population) live in rural counties
- Several factors impact ethical decision-making in rural and small communities:
 - Access
 - Culture
 - **Rural Treatment Considerations**



Rural Treatment Considerations

(Smalley et al, 2010)

- Disproportionate impact of suicide & substance abuse
- Delayed initiation of treatment, with greater severity & progression at intake
- Telehealth, school-based and other “out-of-office” treatment modalities
- Role induction into therapy
- Caregiving stress, given aging population
- Prepare to rely heavily on Medicare etc
- Need to counteract stigma
- Create close relationships with schools (clergy and other community leaders)
- Strong referral relationships with PCPs
- Serve as an advocate for mental health in community
- Understand unique aspects of rural culture
- Recognize ethical dilemmas

Competence

- Practice is limited to populations and concerns **only within the boundaries of competence**, based on education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience.
- Competence: having the requisite knowledge to understand and conceptualize a particular clinical issue, the necessary skills to apply this knowledge in effective ways, and the judgment to use such knowledge and skills

(Haas & Malouf, 1989).

- Intellectual competence
- Cultural competence
- Emotional competence

Rural Treatment Considerations

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Competence in Rural Settings

Limited Resources

- *Supervision or support from colleagues*
- *Referral options*
- *Intensive Continuing Education*

The “expert generalist”

- *Rural providers are often expected to be able to treat a wide range of issues among the full range of clients (Allen et al, 2020); Schank & Skovholt, 2006; Stamm, 2003)*

Shelly

- You are in your 8th session with Shelly, a young woman who has recently completed residential treatment and has moved into a sober living house. Your work together has been effective so far, and you've established a solid working alliance and good levels of trust.
- Today, Shelly comes into the session appearing nervous and drawn. When she sits down, she states "I haven't told anyone about this, but I think I'm ready to work on it. I have some real issues with food."
- Shelly proceeds to describe a history of both restricting and bingeing, as well as very intense exercise routines. It becomes apparent to you that she may have an eating disorder, which you have never worked with. You took a 1-credit seminar in eating disorders 15 years ago in your training program.



Discussion Questions

- What ethical principles do you need to consider here?
- What additional information do you want to gather?
 - About Shelly?
 - About your resources or options?
- What information or factors will you weigh most heavily?
- How likely are you to keep seeing Shelly?
- If you keep working with her, what resources do you need?
- If you decide not to keep working with her, how will you ensure she is not abandoned?
- Other questions/worries?

Another Consideration

- According to APA code of ethics 2.02 – “in emergencies, when psychologists provide services to individuals for whom other mental health services are not available and for which psychologists have not obtained the necessary training, psychologists may provide such services in order to ensure that services are not denied.”
- Standard 2.02 also recommends that “The services are discontinued as soon as the emergency has ended or appropriate services are available.”

Another Consideration

- “Something is better than nothing.”
- To what extent does the above quote apply when making decisions about rural practice and competence?

Miles

- You are about to see a new client, Miles. The note from the telephone screening call says: “Miles is a young adult (19) who reported that his family wants him to get help for his substance use. He reports that he regularly uses cannabis and occasionally uses stimulants.”
- You greet Miles and bring him to your office. As you sit down, you say “So, tell me what bring you in today, Miles,” and glance at the intake form he’s handed you.
- Miles has left much of the demographic information on the intake form blank, but has crossed out the options in your race and gender sections and written in “Indigenous” and “Two-Spirit”



Discussion Questions

- What aspects of competence might be at play in this first session with Miles?
- What has potential to become an ethical dilemma in this situation?
- How might you seek consultation as your work with Miles?

The case of the media coverage

- Jim Carter is a successful licensed addiction counselor with a thriving practice in a town of 10,000 that serves many rural counties. He volunteers for the local firefighter's association and is an active member of the high school booster's club.
- Jim's daughter, Briana, is in her mid-20s. She was a well-known high school athlete who left for college when she was 18. She moved back home last year, after she lost her job in a city in another state.
- Last week, Briana was arrested for drug possession with intent to distribute. The news was reported in both the local newspaper and the regional television station. Given the high rate of substance abuse and overdoses in the region, this is news that will stay in the local media cycle for quite some time.
- Today, three of Jim's clients mentioned the article. One said, as he departed the session, "Hey, I was really sorry to hear about Briana. Guess none of us are safe from drugs."

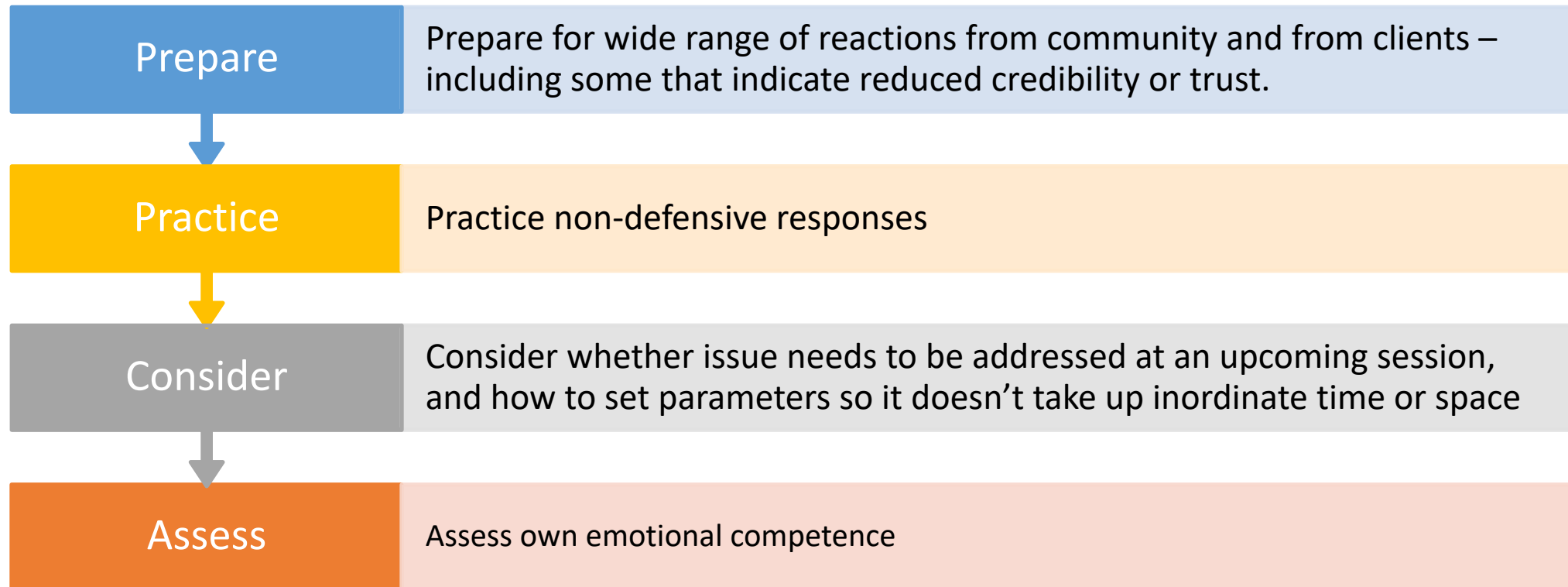


Discussion Questions

- Is there an ethical issue here?
- What ethical issues could emerge?

Considerations

Juntunen et al, 2018



Concluding Comments



Understanding the culture and diversity of rural communities is critical to providing effective services



Providers in rural and small communities need to create multiple source of support for ethical practice



Personal judgment is paramount, given isolation, and needs to be protected through self-care and rigorous self-assessment



Psychologists can minimize risk through prevention and effective responses to ethical dilemmas

Concluding Comments

Prevention

- Informed consent
- Public mental health literacy
- Role in community

Response

- Minimize harmful impact
- Rely on consultation network
- Prepare standard reactions
- Evaluate effectiveness



Questions?