

Ethical Training and Development Practice in Child Welfare

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The Regional Training Director begins the session by saying “I have the pleasure of introducing our first trainer. She is a Licensed Independent Social Worker with more than 20 years of public child welfare experience and a national expert on today’s topic.”

However, the trainer is a Licensed Professional Counselor with more than 19 years of experience working with children, adults, and families in an out-patient community mental health setting and less than one year of public child welfare experience. Not wanting to “correct” the Regional Training Director in front of the group nor adversely affect her credibility with the group, the trainer does not clarify her credentials and the session begins ethically compromised.

One of the most important factors that influence outcomes for children, youth, and families is the quality/competence of the workforce, regardless of practice setting or practice model. A child welfare training and development professional must recognize one’s potential influence as a leader and take responsibility in promoting service to others. Providing this leadership is one of the core values of the National Staff Development and Training Association (NSDTA) [Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals in Human Services](#).

This leadership begins well before workshop introductions. With the volume of statewide training, it may sometimes be tempting to take shortcuts in the planning and scheduling of training, which can adversely affect the impact of training. For example, when a trainer is contracted to provide training, is it clear that a legitimate training need has been identified? Does the trainer have a responsibility to clarify the training need as well as begin to plan for ways to promote transfer of learning even prior to finalizing a contract to train? Or is it sufficient to agree to provide one’s canned workshop assuming the person scheduling the training has already determined that the training will address the training issue and the planning of strategies to promote learning, skill acquisition, and transfer of learning can wait until later (if at all)?

The NSDTA Code would suggest that multiple responsibilities exist before, during, and after formal training. But, you say that you are not a member of the NSDTA and therefore the Code does not apply to you. Perhaps. But then what standards are you upholding as a child welfare training and development professional?

NSDTA standards also indicate that you have responsibilities toward multiple entities--the service recipient/user, learner, employer, profession, and society. These multiple responsibilities and multiple standards sometimes entail ethical dilemmas for the human service training and development professional. For example, you may have a responsibility to the organization to ensure that clients are being served by highly competent practitioners. But when training participants are still in their probationary periods, do you also have a responsibility to protect the training participant, who is vulnerable to losing one’s job during this period, regarding

information to be shared or not shared with the participant's supervisor? The NSDTA Code indicates that roles and responsibilities to all relevant parties should be clarified along with potential possibilities of conflicting loyalties. Program policies are often established to help better manage many potential dilemmas, but not all dilemmas can be predicted. On those occasions, the NSDTA suggests using an ethical assessment and decision-making process-answering the following questions:

1. Do I have sufficient background information? What additional information do I need? Do I know enough about the context of the situation?
2. Which facets of the case pertain to practice issues and which are ethical? What research pertains to the situation? Do any "generally accepted practice standards" apply? What is considered best practice?
3. What are my personal values on this issue and which ones are in conflict? How have I responded in the past to a similar value conflict? Is there a pattern?
4. Are there multiple responsibilities associated with this situation (e.g., responsible to client, supervisor, funding source, etc.)? What are the competing interests? Who are the stakeholders (i.e., individuals or groups affected by the decision)? What are the key variables that could influence my decision?
5. What are the relevant ethical standards that apply to the case? Do the ethical standards conflict?
6. What are the possible choices of action? What are the consequences of those choices? Which choices benefit the training participant or client? Which benefit me? Which benefit the organization? Which benefit larger society?
7. Which priority/obligation should I honor foremost? Am I prepared to justify my decision? Can I explain my decision-making approach regarding this case situation?
8. What have I learned from this case about my ethical decision-making style?

While going through this process, it is often helpful to seek consultation from one's supervisor or other human service training and development professional. Below is a brief case study that you can use to "try out" the process with a few colleagues. Try to answer each question going through the eight steps.

You have been asked to present to a group of foster parents on the topic of discipline and behavior management. At the beginning of the session, the agency foster parent training coordinator introduces you and your wonderful credentials and states that the content of the training session is confidential and should "remain in the room."

During the session, a foster parent states that she does not agree with agency's policy that prohibits the use of corporal punishment. During a break in the session, you overhear this foster parent telling another foster parent that she has used a belt with her foster children in the past and it has always "worked." Note: Case scenario adapted from handouts from the Child Welfare Trainer Development Certificate Program, Northeast Ohio Regional Training Center, and the NSDTA Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals in Human Services.