Mental Heath in the Schools: Ethical Challenges for School Social Workers

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Workshop Goals

- Understand the prevalence for children with mental health issues in the schools.
- Define what ethical challenges school social workers may face.
- Understand best practices models for dealing with ethical dilemmas.
- Differentiate between Federal Regulations and the challenges a school social workers face when working with systems.
Children with Mental Illnesses: The Facts

- 20% of adolescents have a diagnosable mental health disorder (National Center Children in Poverty)
- An estimated 15 million have diagnosable disorder
  - 7% of youth receive appropriate help (DHHS, 2001)
  - 11% receive counseling services outside of school leaving school social workers to be the primary care for mental health issues
More Data

- 12-22% of all youngsters under age 18 are in need of services for mental, emotional or behavioral problems.

This tends to be broken down for ages 9 to 17 as follows:

- 21% (or one in five children and adolescents) seen as experiencing the signs and symptoms of a DSM-IV disorder during the course of a year
- 11% seen as experiencing significant impairment
- about 5% are experiencing extreme functional impairment (about 4 million young people)
The Prevalence of Common Mental Health Disorders Affecting Children and Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>Number of Children/Youth Affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>8 to 10 out of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>7 out of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>6 out of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>5 out of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>5 out of 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>1 out of 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence Based Practice

- Evidence-based practice is a process of integrating the “best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values”
  (Sackett, Strauss, Richardson, Rosenberg, & Haynes, 2000, p. 1).

- Evidence-based practice integrates individual practitioner expertise with the best available evidence while also considering the values and expectations of clients.
  (Michelle Johnson, MSW, Doctoral Research Assistant, Michael J. Austin, PhD, Professor, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley, February 2005).
Ethical Guidelines

- Be familiar with NASW stated values and principles.
- Be aware of where your personal and professional values may conflict.
- Know and use your sense of self in relation to each client.
- Be sensitive about the degree of professional influence you employ.
- Know your profession’s Code of Ethics thoroughly.
- Be familiar with the federal and state laws that govern your profession’s pupil services practice.

Ethical Decision Making in School Social Work

1. Knowing yourself and your profession’s relevant ethical and legal parameters;
2. Analyzing the predicament;
3. Seeking consultation;
4. Identifying the courses of action;
5. Managing the clinical concerns;
6. Implementing the decision;
7. Reflecting on the process

Ethical Decision Making

1. Knowing yourself and your profession’s relevant ethical and legal parameters
   ◦ Know your personal ethical preferences and biases so as not to influence services to the student(s).
   ◦ Know the state law with regard to the specific situation.
   ◦ Know the school districts procedures for dealing with the specific situation.
Ethical Decision Making

2. Analyze the predicament
   ◦ Identify who, other than the student will be affected by the management of the ethical predicament.
Ethical Decision Making

3. Seeking consultation
   ◦ Consult with those deemed appropriate (for instance another school social worker; supervisor; person who knows specific laws regarding circumstances).
Ethical Decision Making

4. Identify courses of action
   ◦ Avoid “either-or” thinking which may lead to only two possible courses of action.
   ◦ Predict effects on stakeholders, as well as effects for the student(s) involved
Ethical Decision Making

5. Managing clinical concerns
   ◦ Ideally link student with appropriate referral sources to adequately address needs.
   ◦ HOWEVER, you must make sure that the clinical concerns are addressed.
   ◦ Make sure the clinical concerns are addressed in a culturally relevant manner which supports the student.
6. Implementing the decision
   ◦ Avoid adverse outcomes by asking:
     • If I were the student, is this what I would want for myself?
     • Would I treat other students in the same way?
     • Who is my primary client?
     • Would I feel comfortable if my professional colleagues found out how I handled this situation?
     • Would you recommend a professional colleague handle a similar situation in the same manner?
Ethical Decision Making

7. Reflecting on the process to complete the ethical decision making
   ◦ As a practitioner struggling with a predicament means there is a real possibility of less than positive outcomes for stakeholders.
   ◦ Failing to monitor the decision and outcomes is not ethical.
     • Additional services may be necessary; management of adverse outcomes may occur may be necessary.
     • Can help practitioner prepare for next similar situation.
Rank your Ethical Principles

- Individual and partner activity.
  - Please individually rank order the Ethical Principles listed on the handout.
  - Pair with a partner and share the information on listed on page 2.

- Ethical clarification activity.
Federal Legislation as a Guide

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) – (mentions +80 that school-based professionals must use scientific, research-based interventions).
- No Child Left Behind (mentions EBP +100 times that educational service personnel must use scientifically based research to support their intervention(s).
- Family Education and Rights Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Standards of Care, Avoiding Harm, and Optimal Treatment
Clinical Reasons to Use EBP

• Standards of Care
  • Avoid Harm
  • Optimal Treatment
Continuum for Evidence Based Practice

Clinical Wisdom

Qualitative Case Studies

Posttest only research

Pretest Posttest research

Quasi-Experimental designs

Random controlled trials

WEAK

STRONG

Raines, J.C. (2008). Evidence-based practice in school mental health: A primer for school social workers, psychologists, and counselors. Figure 1.1 (page 8).
Know your School’s Culture
Regarding Evidence Based Practice

- Other Professionals
- School (teachers; principals)
- Family
- Mental Health

School Social Worker
Limits of Current Service Arrangements

- Current system is not meeting children’s mental health needs.
  - Mental health system capacity
  - Provider Shortage
  - Insurance Coverage

- Schools have become the de facto source of mental health services for children
Where to Find Best Practices

- The School Success Online website
  http://www.schoolsuccessonline.com

- School Mental Health Project
  http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu

- University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health Assistance
  http://csmh.umaryland.edu/Resources/ClinicianTools/index.html
Internet Resources

- Center for Mental Health Services
  [http://www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/](http://www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/)

- Mental Health: The Surgeon General's Report

- National Institute of Mental Health

- School Mental Health Project
  [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu)

- The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools
  [www.healthinschools.org](http://www.healthinschools.org)

- The School Success Online website
  [http://www.schoolsuccessonline.com](http://www.schoolsuccessonline.com)

- Coordinated School Health in Washington State
  [http://healthyschools.ospi.k12.wa.us/waschool/data_tools/data_decisions.html](http://healthyschools.ospi.k12.wa.us/waschool/data_tools/data_decisions.html)
Other References


Enlisting Appropriate Parental Cooperation and Involvement in Children’s Mental Health Treatment. The Mental Health Desk Reference, 31, p. 219-224.


Standard of Care Case

- Your client is a 17 year old male. He is Christian and has recently told his parents he is gay. Your client’s mother has just met with you regarding this. She feels quite strongly that she wants to put him into Conversion Therapy.

- At your tables please go through the 7 steps toward Ethical Decision Making.
Avoid Harm Case

- Billy, a 13 year old 8th grader manifests behavioral problems in school, with little academic work ever accomplished. He does not pay attention in class and is continually fighting with other children. This behavior has been occurring for the past 2 months. Billy’s teacher refers him to you for services regarding his problematic behavior and lack of turning in work. While speaking with Billy, he tells you his parents are separated and his older brother is living with his father in another state. He misses his father and brother. Billy finds it difficult to talk about this issue and explicitly tells you he does not want anyone else knowing his parents are separated. Shortly after Billy returns to class the teacher approaches you to find out what is going on.

- At your tables please go through the 7 steps toward Ethical Decision Making.