



# COUNSELING PRACTICUM I

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN COUNSELING PRACTICE**

**LECTURE 11**

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# Introduction

This lecture will explain the importance of the ethical practice in counseling.

Every counselor conducting counseling should be guided by the ethical requirements in their country and professional bodies they are affiliated to.

This lecture will define counseling ethics and related terms and seek to guide on how a counselor can practice within the counseling ethical boundaries.

# Expected Learning Outcomes

Be

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

Explain

Explain the importance of counseling needs assessment

Identify

Identify key goals and objectives that guide counseling needs assessment

Examine

Examine the benefits of counseling and psychotherapy



# Definition of Terms

Ethics is generally defined as a philosophical discipline that is concerned with human conduct and moral decision making.

Human beings would be quite chaotic without ethical guidelines to follow or guide their behavior. Counselors too are guided by ethical principles and obligations in the counseling field.

Ethics are normative in nature and focus on principles and standards that govern relationships between individuals e.g. counselor and client.

# Common Related Terms

Some of the terms that are commonly used in counseling practice are also used in other professional practices. The overall aim is to promote human dignity through ethical practice. In counseling it begins with the counselor putting clients' needs before their own (McLeod, 2013)

- 1. Morality** – refers to situations or behavior that are judged as good, bad, wrong, ought and should situations. Perspectives of right and proper conduct that involves an evaluation of actions based on some broader cultural context/ religious standard



**2. Ethics** - refer to beliefs we hold about what constitutes the right conduct or basically moral principles adopted by an individual or group to provide rules for right conduct.

**3. Values** - beliefs and attitudes that provide direction for everyday living

**4. Ethical conduct**- It refers to a combination of knowledge and a clear conception of the principles that underlie an ethics code.



**5. Community standards** - They are societal principles that define what is considered reasonable behavior by individuals in a particular area.

**6. Reasonableness** - it refers to the care that is ordinarily exercised by others practicing within that specialty in the professional community

# Types of Ethics

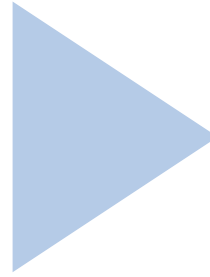


**Mandatory ethics** - They are concerned with behavioral rules wherein counselors act in compliance with minimal standards that acknowledge the basic musts and must nots.



**Inspirational ethics** - They describe to the highest standards of thinking that requires counselors to not apply the codes of ethics but to also understand the spirit behind the code and the principle on which the code rests (Corey, 2009).

**3. Principle ethics** -  
They focus on moral issues wherein they try to answer, "is this situation ethical?"  
Therefore, they attempt to solve ethical dilemmas.

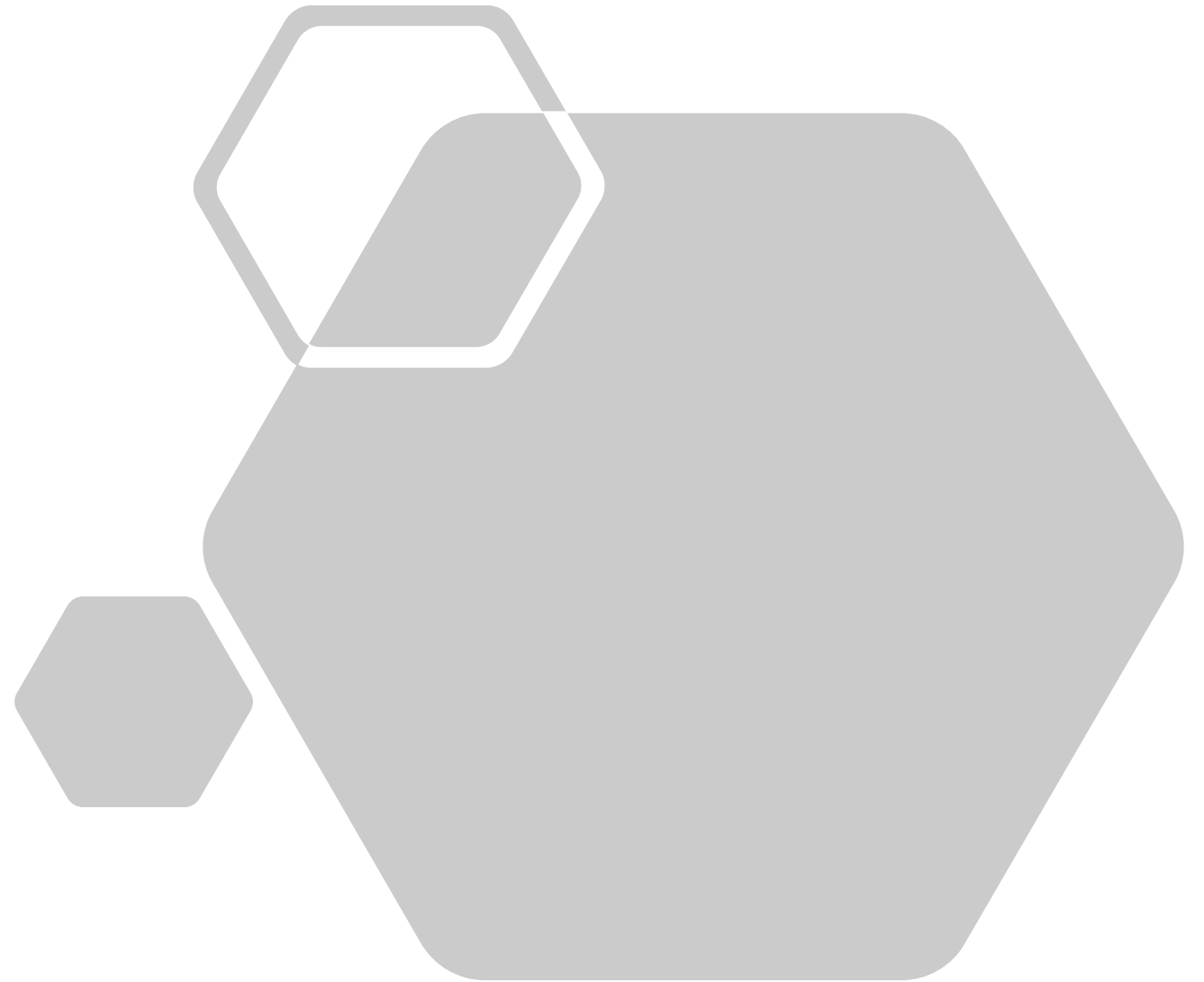


**4. Virtue ethics** - They focus on the character traits of the counselor and try to answer the question, "Am I doing what is best for my client?"

Professional counselors however need to integrate virtue and principal ethics to reach better ethical decisions and develop good policies. It is important to remember that the purpose of ethics code is to safeguard the welfare of clients by providing what is in their best interest. Therefore, client needs are only met when a counselor can monitor his/her own ethics (Corey, 2009).

# Importance of Ethical Codes

For a group of people with similar interests to be called professionals we need a code of ethics which, provide guidelines for ethical professional behavior of members, protect the profession from the government (autonomous), help to control internal disagreements thus promoting stability within the profession and protect counselors from the public especially regarding malpractice suits.




# Limitations Concerning Codes of Ethics

- Some issues cannot be handled exclusively by relying on ethics codes
- Some codes lack clarity and precision
- Knowing ethics codes does not necessarily make you practice ethically- a code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behavior

- There are limitations and problems that professionals encounter as they strive to be ethical. As a counselor, it is good to be well equipped and aware of such. The ones discussed below may apply.

# Limitations

- Clients may not have the knowledge or experience to determine whether a counselor is practicing ethically
  - Conflicts sometimes emerge within ethics codes as well as among various organizations' codes
  - Professionals who belong to different professional associations may have numerous codes of ethics, which may not be uniform.
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# Limitations

A practitioner's personal values may conflict with a specific standard within an ethics code

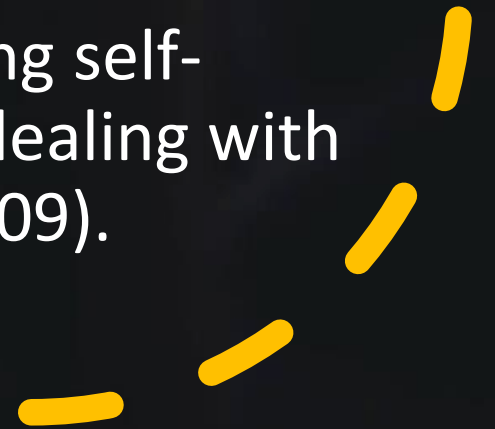
Codes may conflict with institutional policies and practices

Ethics codes need to be understood within a cultural framework; hence they need to be adapted to specific cultures

## Limitations

- Codes may not align to state laws or regulations
- Due to diverse viewpoints within any professional organization, not all members will agree with all proposed ideas concerning codes of ethics.

There are many challenges that come concerning making ethical decisions. It is important to keep consulting to be able to effectively deal with them. Applying self-compassion helps in a big way in dealing with difficult ethical issues (Germer, 2009).



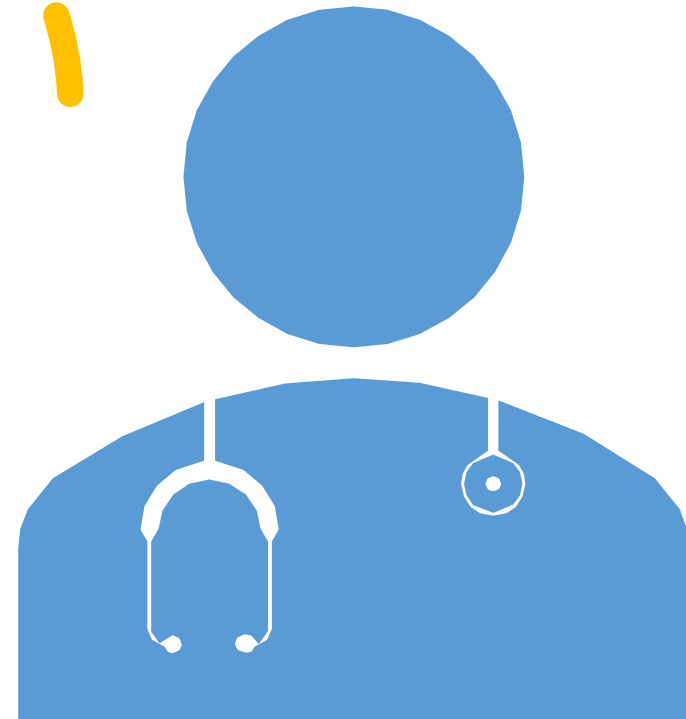


## Ethics Codes and the Law

It is essential to recognize that ethical issues in the mental health profession are regulated not only by ethics code but also by the laws governing a particular country. Neither law nor professional codes provide clear – cut answers to situational problems. While ethics govern the conduct of its professional members, the law governs the affairs within a community, state, or country.

Counselors often have a problem determining when they have a legal problem, or what to do with a legal issue once it has been identified. At times, a counselor may experience a conflict between the law and ethical principles. When such happens, the counselor may need to apply his/her values. Also, in such a case, it is important to seek legal advice.

The best way to deal with ethical issues is to resolve conflict in a way that complies with the law and at the same time most nearly conforms to the codes of ethics (McLeod, 2013).





# Moral Principles in Ethics

## **Principle A: Autonomy (respect for people's rights and dignity)**

Autonomy is basically the will to engage in one's actions/ freedom. Counselors should always respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination (Corey, 2009).

### **Counselors are aware:**

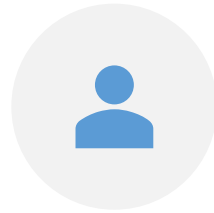
- of special safeguards that may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities whose vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision- making.

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- of and respect cultural, individual and role differences including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status. Counselors should always be keen to consider these factors when working with members of such groups to eliminate their own biases and to avoid participating in activities that promote these prejudices.
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Treating clients in a way that shows autonomy may involve the following:



EDUCATE THEM ON THEIR RIGHTS



GIVE THEM RESPONSIBILITIES TO SEE HOW THEY CAN DO IT



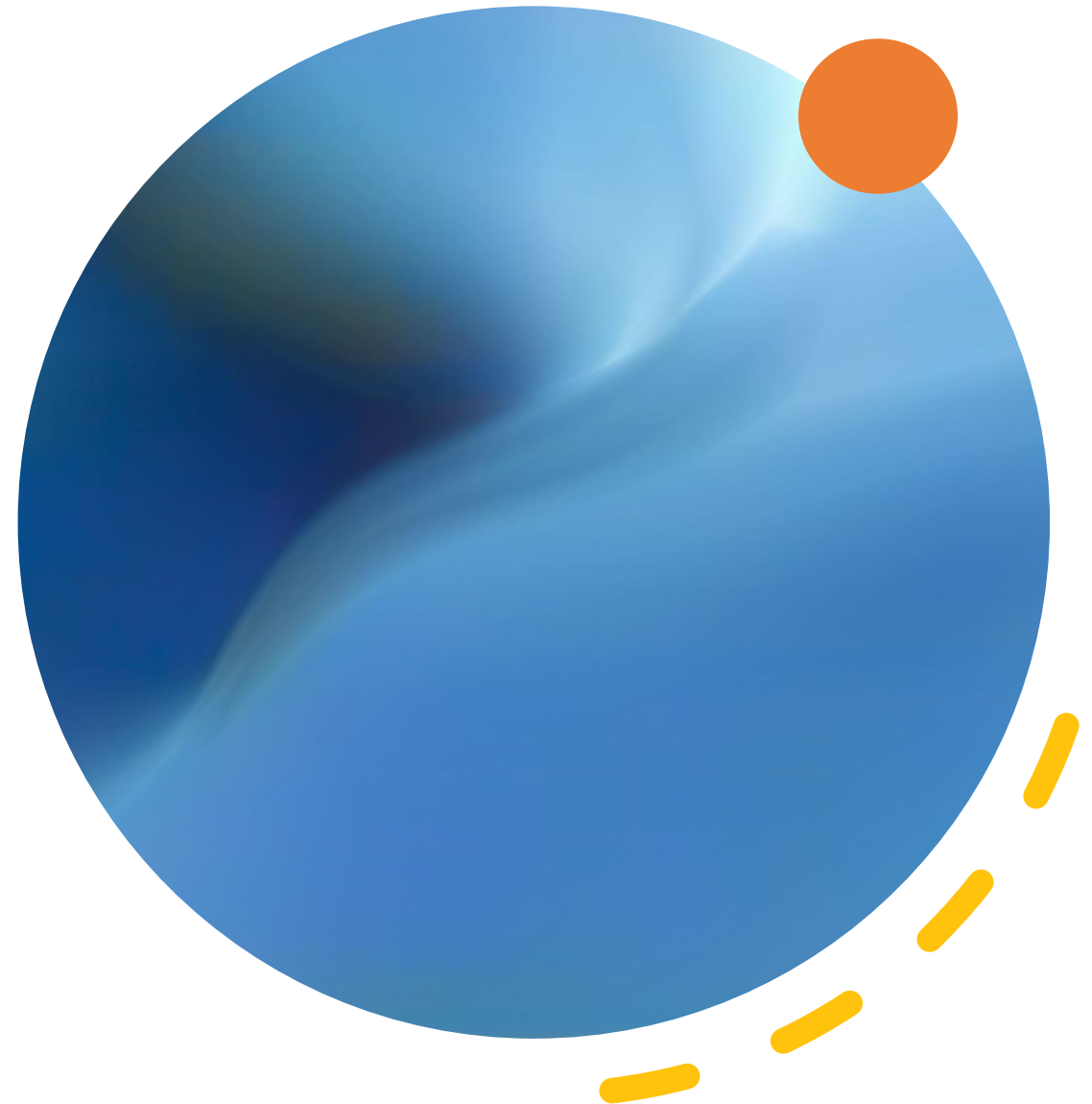
PROVOKE THEM TO ACTIVE THOUGHTS




GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES, THEIR FEARS THEN ENCOURAGE THEM.



BE PATIENT AND LISTEN TO THEM.





However, there are restrictions to a client's freedom.

A client's freedom should not affect the rights of other people.

The client should understand the implication and consequences of the choices they make They are competent and can take responsibility for their actions and consequences

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# Principle B: Justice

**Counselors ought to recognize fairness and justice; Counselors therefore need to:**



Ensure that all the people in need of counseling can access the service equally.



Be aware of their potential biases, the boundaries of their competence and the limitation of their expertise so that they do not accommodate unjust practices.

# Principle C: Integrity

All counselors need to promote accuracy, honesty and truthfulness while engaging in counseling services. Therefore counselors:

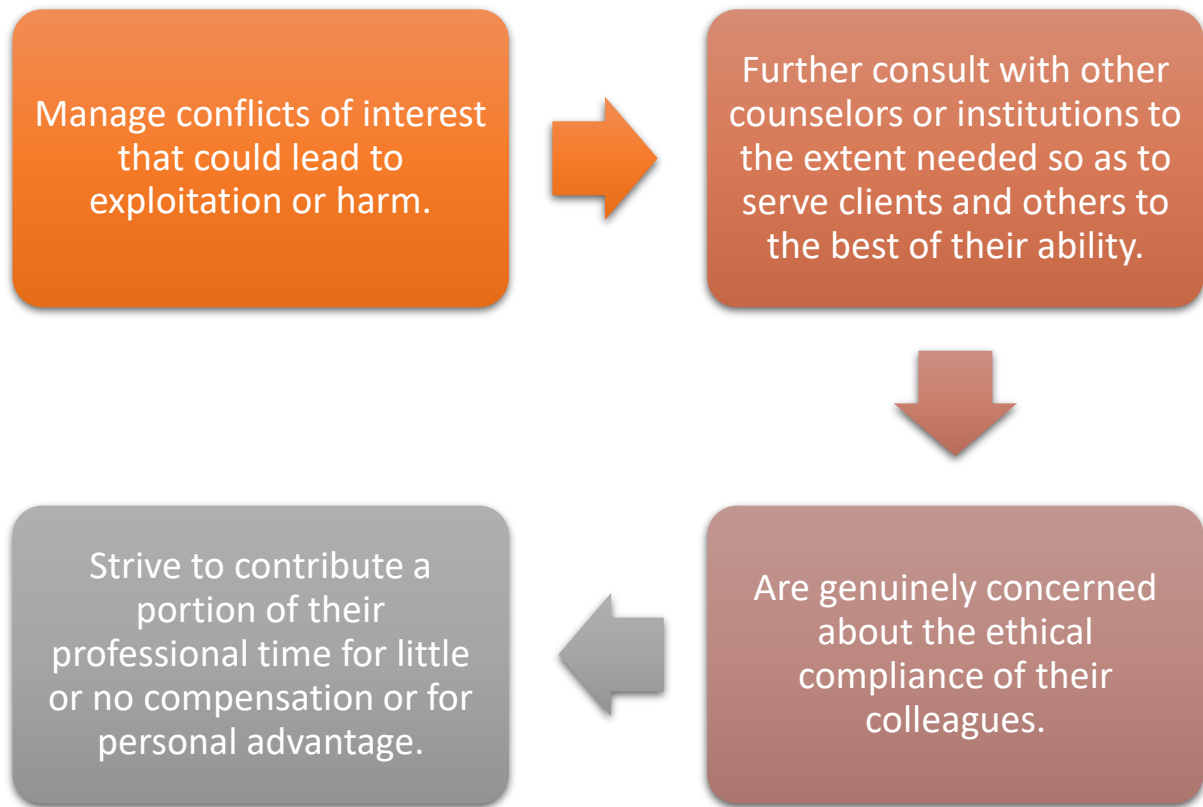
Do not cheat	do not cheat clients, steal from clients or
Do not engage in	do not engage in fraud or intentional misinterpretation of facts
Do not break	Do not break promises or get into unwise or unclear commitments with clients

# Principle D: Fidelity and Responsibility

Counselors should always establish a relationship of trust with those with whom they work meaning loyalty should be key. They should also remain aware of their professional and scientific responsibilities to society and to the specific communities in which they work.

Thus counselors:

- Uphold professional standards of conduct and hence accept appropriate responsibility for their behavior.



# Principle E: Beneficence and Non-maleficence

Counselors should strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. Therefore, counselors seek to:

- Safeguard the welfare of those with whom they interact professionally.
- Minimize or avoid harm by solving conflicts with others in a rational manner
- Guard against any personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence.
- Look after their own physical and mental health to gauge how fit they are to help others.

# Unethical Behavior in Counseling

- Unethical behavior can take many forms

- Violation of confidentiality
- Exceeding one's level of professional competence
- Negligent practice
- Ghosting clients
- Claiming expertise, one does not possess
- Imposing one's values on a client
- Creating dependency in a client
- Sexual activity with a client
- Dual relationships

# Application

The moral principles involve a process of striving that is never fully complete. Applying ethical principles and the related ethical standards is not as simple as it may seem, especially when dealing with culturally diverse populations. The ethical principles form the foundation of functioning at the highest ethical level as a professional.



# Breaching Confidentiality

There are situations that allow for breaching of confidentiality. They include but not limited to: Interest of providing competent services to clients, When clerical assistants handle confidential information as in managed care, When the counselor consults with experts or peers, when the counselor is working under supervision and when other mental – health professional ask for information and the client has given consent to share, when a client poses danger to self or to others, when a client discloses an intention to commit a crime, when the counselor suspects abuse or neglect of a child, an elderly person a resident of an institution or a disabled adult, when a court orders a counselor to make records available, contractual terms of the counselor 's employment. For example, a counselor may be employed on explicit conditions that require disclosure of criminal acts by clients to the counselor's employer, parliamentary powers requiring a disclosure of confidential information for instance prevention of terrorism (Corey, 2009).

# Conclusion

Counseling ethics are universal, and all practicing therapists are required to adhere to the same. During practicum and internship, a student can keep updating their practice by consulting their supervisor and program director. They need to keep referring to the ethical principles and guidelines to avoid being caught in ethical dilemmas and confusion. They can also request if the internship site has their own ethical guidelines and codes, so they always operate within the same.

# References

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