



## **Group Counseling**

### **Lecture 12**

## **Ethical Issues in Group Therapy**

**Lecturer: Susan Gitau (PhD)**

# Introduction

Harmful practices in human service can be safeguarded by adherence to professional ethical codes and guidelines.

In counseling practice, client harm reduction is made possible by counselors respecting human rights, client rights and always safeguarding the professional practice.

In this lecture, we shall review ethics in counseling practice, identify ethical issues in counseling practice and how they interface with counseling standards and ethics in counseling practice setting like group work.

# Expected Lecture Outcomes

Be

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

Explain

Explain the term ethics in group counseling

Examine

Examine ethical issues in group counseling process.

Discuss

Discuss ethical interventions in group counseling

# Defining Ethics

Ethics is generally defined as a philosophical discipline that is concerned with human conduct and moral decision making. Ethics is also the study of morals or human conduct.

It involves making decisions based on moral nature about people and their interactions in society.

Ethics are normative in nature and focus on principles and standards that govern relationships between individuals

It could mean beliefs held about what constitutes the right conduct (AIPC, 2008)



# Ethics in Group Counseling

Ethics in group counseling refer to beliefs that a group leader (counselor) should hold about what constitutes the right conduct or basically moral principles adopted by an individual group member or group. Ethics provide rules for right conduct during the group process.

Group norms should embrace counseling ethics values and principles like respect for human dignity.



# Rationale Behind Ethics in Group Counseling

As ethical issues are a significant focus of the right to care for clients in a social care setting, maintaining fluid enforcement of the caregiver's ethical standards is faced with challenges when dealing with.

One of the initial concerns of ethical group therapy involves the competency of the counselor to provide adequate care within the boundaries of a group.

Parsons & Dickinson (2017) state, “a core ethical responsibility of every human service provider is to do good on the client's behalf .

Without sufficient training for a group leader to facilitate a group therapy session, regardless of the size, the core element of doing good and cause no harm, will stand in jeopardy and at risk of harm.

# Ethical issues in Group Counseling

These are related terms in ethics study and ethics practice and how they impact counseling work and in particular group counseling



In this lecture, we shall review related terms applied in ethics, ethical issues in group counseling and give related examples encountered in group counseling.

# Morality

Refers to perspectives of right and proper conduct that involves an evaluation of actions based on some broader cultural context/religious standard.

Covers good, bad, wrong, ought and should issues. In group counseling, this should be well explained with sensitivity. Group counseling should be guarded and guided by moral behavior.

# Values

These are beliefs and attitudes that provide direction for everyday living.

What values do you wish the group members to embrace while respecting diversity and inclusivity?

Ensure that no member including yourself imposes values on the other members.

# **Ethical conduct**

Refers to a combination of knowledge and a clear conception of the principles that underlie an ethics code.

As a group leader and group members, ethical conduct must be encouraged always to avoid harm.

A group leader should take responsibility over own behavior and aim at being role model for the rest.

# Community Standards

---

They are societal principles that define what is considered reasonable behavior by individuals in a particular area or community.

A group can be considered as a community because members share common goals and purpose.

For the community to work in harmony, members must observe community standards or norms set. Alcoholic anonymous (AA) groups have twelve steps and traditions that act like community standards because members are expected to live them out in their own lives.

# Law and Legal Issues

A formally established rule regulating the conduct of people within a particular jurisdiction that must be obeyed to avoid legal sanctions.

In counseling, laws regulate the practice, ensuring that counselors adhere to standards that protect clients' rights and well-being.





# Law...

---

For example, confidentiality laws require counselors to protect clients' private information unless there is a risk of harm.

This helps in interpretation of a problem from a legal perspective.

Issues that are common in counseling include state licensure, child abuse, gender-based violence, suicide among others



# Ethical Practice

---

Adhering to a set of moral principles and professional standards that guide behavior in professional settings.

Ethical practice in counseling ensures that group counselors like other counselors act in the best interests of their clients, maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Counselors must avoid dual relationships that could impair their professional judgment.

Observe application of moral judgement, upholding human rights and practice diversity and inclusivity always



# Professional Practice

---

Conduct and work carried out by someone in a professional capacity, adhering to the standards and guidelines of their profession.

Maintaining competence through continuing education, seeking supervision, and adhering to ethical codes,

Avoid dual relationships, review ethics and law to make informed decisions and act from the best interest of the group.

# Ethical Dilemma

A situation in which a person must choose between two conflicting ethical principles or values.

Dilemmas often involve balancing the duty to maintain client confidentiality with the duty to protect the client or others from harm.

Problem situations can introduce ethical dilemmas in counseling practice and the group leaders should be able to identify them and resolve them ethically and in time.





# Minority Group

---

A category of people differentiated from the social majority, often by characteristics such as ethnicity, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

Understanding the specific stressors and barriers faced by LGBTQ+ clients, survivors of sexual violence, people living with disability, low social status clients among other is crucial for effective group counseling.



# Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

---

## **Creating Safety**

This includes the physical and psychological safety.

Counselor should possess to make a client feel safe, competencies and skills relevant to group therapy.

In group counseling the venue should be a safe and secure place for members and the process.

Group counselors should be safe objects for the members and for the entire group throughout the process

# Confidentiality

This entails keeping confidential and privileged reports and information private and safe.

This is best demonstrated by signing a contract at the beginning of group counseling.

Declaration should be made of the legal clauses that outline the boundaries and limitations of confidentiality and from time to time, reviewed and shared to the group members.



# Commitment and Responsibility

This is the duty to remain faithful to the terms of contract and terms of working.

The duty to warn and protect the members and the group interest is encouraged too.

The group leader should model and encourage members to be committed to the process and take responsibility over own mistakes during the process.

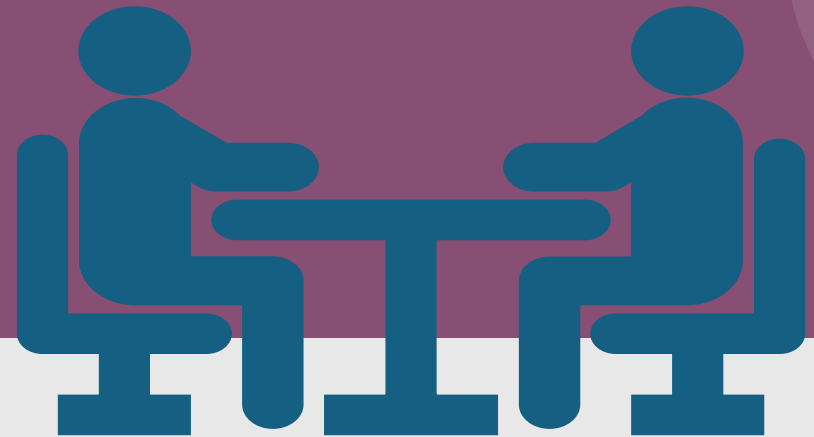


# Avoid Dualism

Relationships that can compromise the quality of the group process and the group counselor should be avoided at all costs.

Such relationships include flirting with group members, engaging in business activities, going out for social events together and other compromising relationships.

If possible, avoid being a therapist to your members too.





This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)



# Conflict Resolution

Certain conflicts if allowed to escalate can introduce issues of ethical considerations.

Such issues were discussed in week 11 as problem situations in group therapy.

If the group leader can resolve them in time, this would be healthy for the whole group.

# Best Interest of the Group



This entails making credible reflections before, during and after the group process.



All that a group leader does should be for the best interest of the group.

# Consultation and Supervision

A group leader should be open to consult on matters of values, skills and competencies in running the group.

Clinical supervision provides both legal and professional guidance that is helpful to maintain the group cohesion and performance.

Regular clinical supervision will not only be helpful for professionalism but also be part of self-care for the leader.

# Self-care Practice



The group counselor like individual counselor needs regular self-care and therapy if need be.



All helpers are prone to burn out and stress with compassion fatigue.



A well laid down self-care plan is recommended for group counselors.



This may include taking breaks from the group work, retreat, meditation and any other positive outlet.



---

# Self-care

## What works for you?

---



# Steps to Resolving Ethical Dilemmas



Identify the problem in the group (problem situation)



Identify the underlying ethical issues in that problem



Relate the problem to existing ethical codes and standards of the profession



Brainstorm on possible solutions



Pick out the best course of action

# Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

---



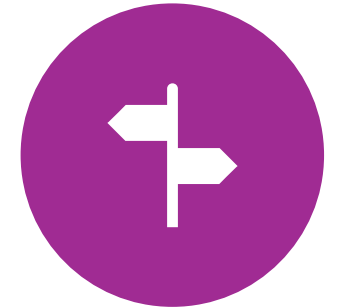
REVIEW THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION  
IN TERMS OF COST BENEFIT  
ANALYSIS, REDUCTION OF HARM TO  
THE CLIENT AND THE GROUP LEADER



CHOOSE HOW TO IMPLEMENT AND  
WHO TO IMPLEMENT THE COURSE OF  
ACTION TAKEN



REVIEW THE IMPACT OF THE ACTION  
TAKEN



MAKE NEW RESOLUTIONS OR POLICY  
CHANGE GOING FORWARD.

# Conclusion

In this lecture, we have covered ethics and practice of ethics in group counseling.

We have reviewed related ethical practice terms in group counseling context and suggested resolution to ethical dilemmas that may arise by outlining ethical decision-making process.

Informed changes to standards and ethical practice of counseling in group work may be made once a dilemma is resolved amicably.

# References

---

1. AIPC. (2008). *AIPC's counseling dilemmas eBook*. Locked Bag: Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors.
2. Kabir, S. S. (2017). *Essentials of Counseling*. Banglabazar, Dakar - 1100: Abosar Prokashana Sangstha.
3. Colman, M. (2015). *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (4th ed). Oxford University Press
4. Parsons, R. D., & Dickinson, K. L. (2017). *Ethical Practices in the Human Services: From Knowing to Being* (First ed.). (N. Davidson, H. Dreiling, A. Rickard, G. Piccinni, B. Allen, & K. Rathert, Eds.) Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
5. Younggren, J. N., & Harris, A. E. (2008). Can You Keep A Secret? Confidentiality in Psychotherapy. *Journal of clinical Psychology* . doi:doi:10.1002/jclp

