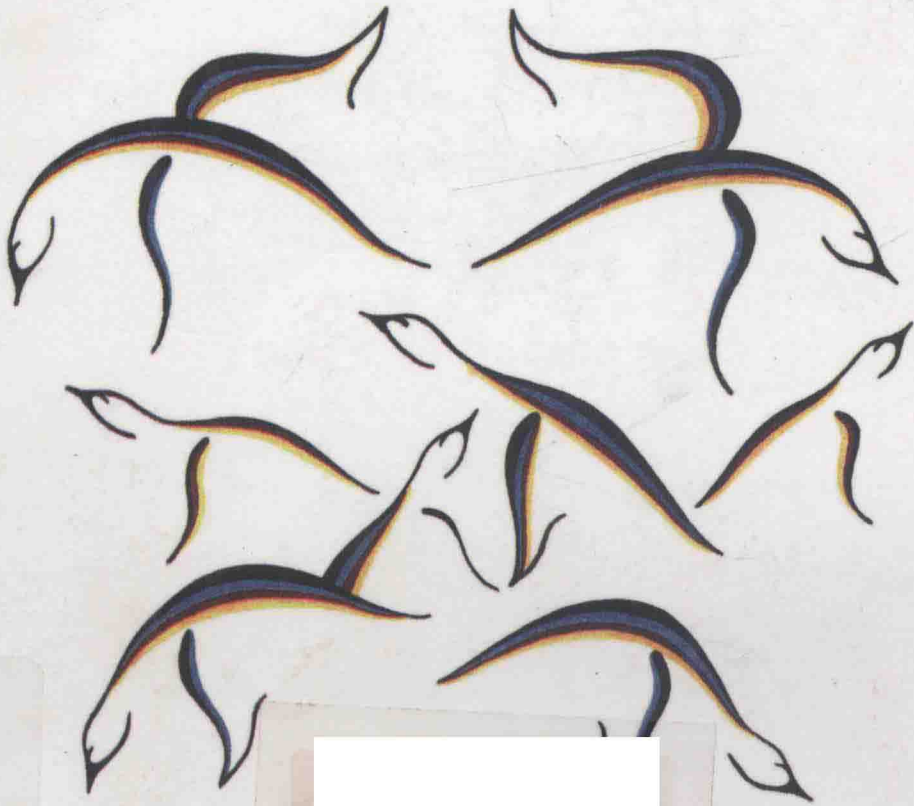# Ethics and Values in Social Work

An Integrated Approach

for a Comprehensive Curriculum

Allan Edward Barsky

ETHICS AND VALUES IN SOCIAL WORK

An Integrated Approach for a Comprehensive Curriculum

ALLAN EDWARD BARSKY

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Framework for Managing Ethical Issues

1. Identify Ethical Issues

- Learn relevant laws, agency policies, ethical standards, and professional values
- Recognize ethical questions or problems as early as possible
- Articulate the specific issues that require attention

2. Determine Appropriate Help

- Identify which types of help may be most useful (ethical or legal advice, clinical expertise, moral or financial support, conflict resolution, risk management, implementation)
- Determine which sources of support are appropriate (supervisor, attorney, ethics expert, professional association, insurer, colleague, client, friend, or others)

3. Think Critically

- Reflect on one's own values, virtues, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, emotions, capacities, challenges, and social context
- Consider multiple perspectives
- Define goals for the ethical management process
- Identify and weigh obligations
- Brainstorm options and assess consequences

4. Manage Conflict

- Analyze the nature of the conflict (rights, interests, power, miscommunication)
- Define goals for conflict resolution
- Determine appropriate strategies for engaging relevant parties in a constructive process (negotiation, mediation, advocacy, arbitration)

5. Plan and Implement Decisions

- Determine who is responsible for performing which tasks, and when
- Develop strategies to avert problems and to raise the likelihood of success
- Monitor implementation to enable early response to problems that may arise

6. Evaluate and Follow Up

- Evaluate the extent to which the goals were achieved and determine what types of follow-up (if any) are needed
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the ethical management process and determine recommendations for change

Loop back to earlier stages as needed.

Ethics and Values in Social Work

To Jocelyn Adelle:
May you be inspired by good values
and virtues throughout your life.

Preface

A MESSAGE FOR STUDENTS

Each year during student orientations at Florida Atlantic University, the director of our social work program asks professors to introduce the courses they teach and explain why students may be interested in this subject matter. I describe how I teach professional values and ethics, the study of "what is good" and "what is right" in how we practice social work. I suggest that students should be very interested in this subject matter because it can save them the emotional, social, and financial pain of being involved in malpractice lawsuits and professional disciplinary hearings. In truth, learning social work values and ethics can help social workers avoid legal and ethical problems with clients. More important, when social work practice is guided by the high ideals of social work values and ethics, we enhance the quality of services that we provide for our clients and communities. We also derive personal satisfaction from knowing that we are performing our service in a manner that promotes social justice, human growth, and respect for the dignity and worth of all individuals.

This textbook is designed to help you integrate social work values and ethics into all aspects of your social work curriculum and ultimately your practice in the field. Rote memorization of rules and laws is neither sufficient nor interesting. Instead, this textbook invites you to engage personally in a range of learning experiences: reflecting on your own values, analyzing case situations, role-playing social work-client interviews, and pondering over challenging ethical dilemmas. As you work through the exercises in this textbook, remember that learning can be amusing and imaginative. Push yourself to think through situations from other people's perspectives. Do not be afraid to play the devil's advocate, stating positions or asking questions that others might find politically incorrect. Be creative when you

think of different ways to resolve ethical issues. Take risks during role-plays. Classroom exercises give you an opportunity to test different ideas, skills, and strategies without posing risks to real clients. The first time I counseled a suicidal client, I had no prior experience with the ethical and clinical issues that arose—not even in a role-play. I knew suicide intervention from a theoretical perspective, but I had little understanding of suicide intervention from an experiential one. Use the case scenarios in this textbook and raise your own questions to help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

If you are looking to this textbook for simple, definitive answers for how to handle difficult ethical issues, you may be disappointed, at least initially. Although social workers have a range of laws, agency policies, and ethical codes to guide them toward ethical practice, in many situations, the correct response to an ethical problem is not clear. In some cases, there may be conflicting ethical or legal obligations. In other cases, there may be no way to accurately predict which course of action will lead to the greater good—or avoid the greater harm. Being able to manage uncertainty, and the stress caused by uncertainty, is crucial. This textbook does not necessarily provide you with specific answers to your ethical problems, but it does provide you with a range of tools and strategies that can guide you toward solution.

Different programs may use this textbook in different manners, assigning different chapters or modules to different courses. By having a single ethics textbook, you will be able to refer back to earlier materials to review the basics, or refer forward to other materials to explore ethical issues at higher or more in-depth levels. Use the index to see how different ethical issues are applied in different contexts of practice (e.g., how confidentiality may be applied to work with individuals versus families, groups, or communities). Use the glossary to help you understand key concepts. Finally, use the websites and bibliography at the end of this textbook to locate further readings to assist with class assignments and issues that may arise in practice. There is a myriad of resources online and in scholarly journals, with practical information and thought-provoking debates of ethical issues. Your journey

of professional development will continue long after you have completed your degree, so it is important to know where to find ethics and values resources to support you on this journey.

The image on the cover of this textbook, by Canadian artist Doris Cyrette, is entitled "Playmates." The notion of playmates suggests a group of people who have fun, fooling around, and building relationships as they engage in various games and activities. Although there are many serious aspects to social work values and ethics, we should not take ourselves too seriously. In order to manage ethical issues, we need to be able to play nicely. Even if we do not share the same values and beliefs, we share this world, and we need to learn how to proceed in a fair, just, and cooperative manner. Note how some playmates on the cover are bigger than others—yet none dominate the others. In fact, the more powerful birds may be looking out for the interests of the more vulnerable birds. Note also how the playmates are headed in different directions—yet out of apparent chaos, they are sharing space without colliding or blocking each other's course. They have found general rules of engagement and principles to guide their relationships. Enjoy the role-plays, readings, and exercises throughout this textbook, and have fun learning about values and ethics throughout your professional careers.

A NOTE FOR INSTRUCTORS

As we all learned in our introduction to social work courses, social work developed as a unique profession in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Social work pioneers such as Mary Richmond, Jane Addams, Helen Harris Perlman, Florence Kelly, Charles Levy, and Whitney Young each emphasized the importance of ethics and values in guiding all forms of practice. From its historical mandate of ameliorating social problems among the most vulnerable populations in society to its ongoing dedication toward facilitating social well-being and social justice, the profession of social work has been defined by its commitment to particular ethical ideals (NASW, 1999). Not surprisingly, ethics and values comprise a core component of

social work education (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). Although modern schools of social work have access to a number of solid textbooks on social work values and ethics (Congress, 1999; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007; Dolgoff, Loewenberg, & Harrington, 2009; Linzer, 1999; Reamer, 2006b), this textbook is the first that provides a comprehensive plan for teaching and learning ethics and values across the social work curriculum.

Given that values and ethics are already interspersed throughout social work courses and existing textbooks, one might ask why a comprehensive textbook on ethics and values is needed. Having taught at four different schools of social work, I have found that most programs provide students with a solid, general understanding of values and ethics from their theory and practice courses. Unfortunately, there are many gaps in traditional social work curricula. Course content on values and ethics is often repetitive. Students might be offered content on confidentiality in three different courses, for instance, but each time the content covers the same basics, never moving to the next levels of understanding, application, and analysis. Often, students do not have a chance to learn ethical analysis at an advanced level unless they take a stand-alone course on advanced ethics (Kaplan, 2006b). This textbook is designed to remedy these problems by providing a comprehensive set of educational materials that will take students from basic to advanced levels, using an explicit theory for teaching and learning ethics and values. Schools of social work that adopt this textbook will be able to fully integrate ethics and values into their existing courses in a comprehensive manner.

Part I of this textbook focuses on content for students in BSW and MSW foundation courses, consistent with the Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education. To tailor course expectations to the different needs of BSW and MSW programs, professors should consult the Instructor's Manual, which offers specific suggestions for courses at both levels. Part II of this textbook focuses on content for students taking advanced or concentration courses in their MSW programs.

Social work educators often instruct their students to "start with the client." Likewise, I would suggest that social work educators "start with the student," ensuring that their educational activities fit with the students' current stage of knowledge and receptiveness to learning (Swindell & Watson, 2007). This textbook adopts a "developmental approach," meaning that students will experience certain types of learning in earlier courses and other types of learning in later courses, helping them work toward higher levels of understanding, application, analysis, and integration of ethics and values content. These stages of learning are informed by theories of moral, cognitive, affective, and behavioral development. Theories of moral development, for instance, suggest that infants are not born with a concept of right and wrong (Gibbs, 2003; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983). Eventually, they first learn about right and wrong by following particular authorities (parents, teachers, religious and cultural teachings, etc.). By analogy, when novice social workers begin their social work education, they are not familiar with the specific ethical standards governing social workers and the social work profession. They need to understand the authorities on social work ethics, including what types of consequences will ensue if they do not follow certain ethical guidelines. Initially, novice social workers may follow a social work code of ethics or agency policy simply because that is the ethical standard, agency rule, or law to be followed. As novices develop into more autonomous professionals, they will need to make more nuanced decisions about ethical behavior, based not only on following particular rules or standards but on their ability to analyze complex problems (Kaplan, 2006a). Developing social workers need to learn the rationale behind ethical standards and policies so they can make reasoned choices. Accordingly, this textbook initially provides novice social workers with relatively "black and white" ethical principles and standards that they should ordinarily follow. Once they have a basic understanding of these, this textbook will introduce them to more challenging issues that cannot be resolved by simply following one particular rule or standard. Thus, they will learn to assume full responsibility for decisions they make.

Theories of cognitive development suggest that knowledge acquisition occurs through

different processes, each depending on the individual's stage of cognitive development (Piaget, 1999/orig.1932). Although theories of cognitive development often focus on stages extending from early childhood to adolescence, developmental theories have been used to enhance adult education curricula. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Forehand, 2005), for instance, suggests that there are six levels of cognitive learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The first level, remembering, suggests that students must first learn how to retrieve, recognize, and recall information about ethics and values from their long-term memories. The second level, understanding, implies that students must be able to construct meaning from this information. Whereas reciting a definition of informed consent would constitute remembering, explaining informed consent in one's own words would demonstrate understanding. The third level, applying, requires the ability to link theory and practice. Thus, a student should be able to describe how to implement an informed consent process with a particular client. The fourth level, analyzing, indicates the ability to break material into constituent parts and assess how these parts relate to each other or to the overall purpose. In terms of informed consent, for instance, a student would need to be able to differentiate components of informed consent (i.e., providing information in user-friendly language, assessing the client's mental capacity and understanding, and ensuring that the client's consent is voluntary). The fifth level, evaluating, requires the ability to critique the theory or knowledge. Evaluating informed consent, for example, might include a critique of this ethical standard from a diversity perspective (e.g., although informed consent refers to obtaining permission from the individual, obtaining permission from a client's family or community might be more appropriate for clients who come from a collectivist culture). The sixth level, creating, refers to using the knowledge in a new or creative manner. A student might build on the diversity critique, for instance, by developing a new ethical standard for informed consent that takes diversity concerns into account. The readings and assignments in this textbook are designed to take students through each of these educational objectives. The materials in Part I focus primarily on recalling, understanding, and applying. Part II includes these three objectives but provides students more opportunities to analyze, evaluate, and create. Some ethics textbooks begin by presenting broad philosophical discussions, for instance, comparing deontological and teleological approaches to ethical analysis. Other textbooks begin by presenting students with a framework for determining tough ethical issues. Before students are able to understand and appreciate the importance of these higher level forms of moral reasoning and ethical analysis, students first need a solid grounding in the "black letter" standards and ethical guidelines. When instructors try to engage students in complex ethical decision making too early, they may hear student remarks such as, "But what is the answer?" even when there is no clear-cut answer. Accordingly, the initial chapters of this textbook have more focus on helping students make use of authorities (e.g., the NASW Code of Ethics, other codes of ethics, agency policies, and relevant laws) as well as how to find these authorities and what happens if a social worker breaches these authorities. Once students have a firmer grasp of these authorities and how to apply them, they will be better prepared for higher level ethical understanding and analysis presented in the later chapters.

Ethical decision making requires more than just formal, logical reasoning; it also requires attention to emotions such as anger, fear, delight, and caring, which exist in all social relationships (Gilligan, 1982). Theories of affective development suggest that a person's emotional capacities (called "emotional intelligence") can be cultivated through specific types of learning experiences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Golman, 2004). Self-awareness requires raising one's consciousness of intuitions and emotional reactions to various situations. Consider a social worker who feels insulted by a client. If the social worker is not aware of feeling hurt, he might lash out at the client. If social workers are to follow the ethical standard about treating clients with respect, they must first have an awareness of their own affective responses. Self-management

suggests that people can learn to manage their emotional reactions and motives in a deliberate manner. Thus, the social worker who feels insulted may turn to supervision or professional consultation for support but must continue to treat the client in a respectful manner. Social awareness refers to the ability to interpret what others are saying and feeling, and why they feel and act as they do. So the social worker who feels insulted must strive to understand why the client said what she said. Perhaps the client was anxious or was experiencing other forms of stress. By understanding the underlying motivations and issues of others, social workers can ensure that their own responses are consistent with ethical, competent practice. Relationship management refers to engaging others in a manner that promotes positive rapport or other desired results. Accordingly, the social worker engages the client by demonstrating empathy and unconditional positive regard, rather than acting defensively, with accusations or insults of his own. To foster emotional intelligence, this book provides a series of reflective and experiential exercises. Given that self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management are ongoing processes, these exercises also provide students with skills and strategies they can use throughout their careers.

Theories of behavioral development suggest that behaviors can be learned, unlearned, and relearned through a variety of processes: associational learning, operant conditioning, modeling, self-awareness, provision of knowledge, and development of critical thinking skills. Hence, this textbook provides an array of learning experiences that will foster commitment to social work values and ethics, awareness of emotional responses that may inhibit behaving in an ethical manner, and skills for putting ethical decisions into practice.

The Transtheoretical Model is a model of behavioral development that focuses on one's readiness or motivation to change (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). This model suggests that behavior change occurs through a sequence of steps—precontemplation, contemplation, decision, preparation, action, and maintenance. Initially, in the precontemplation stage, people are not aware that there is a problem in their behavior, so they are not motivated to change. Upon becoming aware of a problem, the person may experience ambivalence toward change and thus move into the contemplation stage. The person is unlikely to change behaviors until successful resolution of the contemplation stage, understanding that there are more benefits than costs to changing behaviors. Although the Transtheoretical Model was initially developed for people with alcoholism and other addictions, it is relevant to social work students in relation to development of ethical choices and behaviors (Brannen, Boling, & White, 2006). Initially, students may be unaware of potential problems in their usual ethical thinking and behaviors as these apply to social work practice situations. After all, students come into social work wanting to help people, so how could anyone find fault with their ethics and values? As students become more aware of situations where their personal values may conflict with the values of social work, their agencies, or their clients, they can then start to challenge their thinking and alter the ways that they interact with the people they serve. Consider, for instance, a student who values hugs, believing that outward demonstrations of physical affection have a positive impact on human growth and development. When the student first hears that hugging a client may be considered unprofessional, the student may initially resist this notion. Just being told not to hug a client is not sufficient to change the student's behavior. Rather, the process of change must allow the student to process the issues and eventually come to his own understanding of what is professional behavior in relation to hugging. Accordingly, this textbook offers a range of exercises, assisting students at various stages of change with experiential, affective, cognitive, and behavioral exercises.

Theories of acculturation suggest that when people move from one culture into another, a number of factors affect how effectively they adapt. The concept of maintenance refers to the degree to which people hold onto their original language, traditions, values, norms, and morals. Contact and participation refer to the degree to which people adopt the language, traditions, values, norms, and morals of the new culture. Effective acculturation requires a balance

between maintaining original culture and adapting to the ways of the new culture. Although many people think of acculturation in terms of people who move from one part of the world to another and must learn how to adjust to a new culture, the concept of acculturation also applies to non-professionals who move into a new profession, such as social work. Ethical acculturation refers specifically to the manner in which people adapt to the values and ethics of the new profession (Bashe, Anderson, Handelsman, & Klevansky, 2007). Ideally, new social workers learn to integrate their original values and morals with the values and ethics of the social work profession. Integration does not require a complete shedding of personal values and morals but rather an ability to rely on social work values and ethics when acting in a professional manner and an awareness of any potential conflicts between professional and personal values. Three problematic responses to acculturation are separation, assimilation, and marginalization. Separation arises when workers maintain their original values and morals but reject social work values and ethics. By holding onto their original values and morals so strongly, they may feel alienated from the profession. Assimilation arises when social workers identify with social work values and ethics so strongly that they give up too much of their personal identity. The problem with assimilation in social workers is that it may dehumanize them, as workers may act without the individuality that makes each worker unique. Marginalization arises when workers give up their own values and morals but do not yet know or appreciate the values and ethics of social work. Often, marginalization occurs at an early stage of professional development, as students are making the transition from nonprofessional to professional (Bashe et al., 2007). The task for social work educators is to help students make a successful transition from maintenance of their original values and morals to a balanced integration with professional social work values and ethics.

Most social work ethics textbooks provide students with a strategic decision-making framework that guides them through the analysis of ethical issues so they can determine the "best" courses of action. These textbooks help students develop critical thinking skills for working through ethical dilemmas. They do not, however, provide students with guidance on the process of resolving ethical conflicts between social worker and client, client and client, social worker and supervisor, or between other parties that the worker may be helping. This textbook provides students with specific models of conflict resolution to help them work through ethical conflicts with clients, coworkers, and others. The interest-based model, for instance, shows students how to identify common ground and work toward win-win solutions, even when people initially seem to be at complete odds (Cohen, 2006; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1997). The transformative model shows students how to use respectful communication and develop positive ways of interacting with people, even when there is little or no room for consensus (Bush & Folger, 2005). Conflict resolution skills are particularly useful for social workers in the roles of supervisors, mediators, advocates, and facilitators (Barsky, 2007a).

Transforming knowledge into behavior is an important aspect of social work education. Learning about social work values and ethics does little good unless the social worker can translate these values and ethics into meaningful behaviors. The fact that social workers know how to determine an ethically correct response to an ethical problem does not ensure that they will behave in an ethically correct manner. Social workers may know, for example, that it is unethical to impose their cultural values on clients. Without sufficient clarification of their own values, however, they may impose values unintentionally. Similarly, social workers may know the right way to respond to an ethical problem but feel afraid to act ethically given the risks of losing their jobs or facing retribution from others who disagree. In order to act ethically, therefore, students must gain confidence to do what is right even when the challenge seems daunting. They must also learn how to manage risks deliberately and effectively. By engaging students at affective, cognitive, moral, and behavioral levels, this textbook is designed to help students not only understand values and ethics but also raise their capacity for integrating values and ethics in all aspects of their professional practice.

The study of values and ethics often involves analysis of complex laws, policies, values, and

ethical standards. As I have written this book, I have tried to be careful with the information I provided and my choice of words to explain various concepts and situations. As you work through this text, you may question certain information or statements. I welcome your questions and feedback. I may be able to clarify information or provide support for what I have written. If I have provided misinformation, I will provide corrections online and in future editions. Feel free to email me at barsky@barsky.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Barsky has a background in social work, law, and mediation. He has taught at a university level since 1989 in four different schools of social work (University of Toronto, Ryerson University, University of Calgary, and Florida Atlantic University, where he is a full professor) as well as being a visiting professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel. He currently serves on the National Ethics Committee of the National Association of Social Workers. Dr. Barsky's prior books include *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions* (Brooks/Cole, 2007) *Counsellors as Witnesses* (Canada Law Book, 1997), *Interdisciplinary Practice with Diverse Populations* (Greenwood, 2000—co-edited), *Clinicians in Court* (Guilford, 2002); *Successful Social Work Education* (Brooks/Cole, 2006); and *Alcohol, Other Drugs, and Addictions* (Brooks/Cole, 2006). Dr. Barsky has taught professional ethics at the University of Calgary and Florida Atlantic University as well as social work and law courses at Ryerson. He is very familiar with accreditation standards in both Canada and the United States, having served on the accreditation committee of the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work and having written the curriculum self-study for Florida Atlantic University School of Social Work (complying with the Council on Social Work Education's standards for re-accreditation of the School). Dr. Barsky's combined social work and law background provides him with important knowledge and insights into the development of professional knowledge and awareness of social work values and ethics in practice.

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To paraphrase a popular cliché, no author is an island. From the moment I started developing ideas for this book through the processes of writing, reviewing, rewriting, reviewing, rewriting...through to publication, I have been surrounded with eight incredible waves of support. First, I thank all the bright and energetic students from my ethics classes for being my teachers, as they have helped me learn as much as I have taught. Second, I thank Dr. Michele Hawkins and the Florida Atlantic University School of Social Work for providing me with excellent teaching opportunities where I could develop and hone many of the educational materials that I have incorporated in this book. Third, I thank Maura Roessner, Mallory Jensen, Patterson Lamb, Lynda Crawford, and the other staff at Oxford University Press for their wonderful encouragement, ideas, feedback, editing, and support throughout the publication process. Fourth, I thank Deanne Bonnar (Boston University), Laura Kaplan (University of Northern Iowa), Pam Graham (Florida State University), José Torres (University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Katherine Van Wormer (University of Northern Iowa) who provided constructive criticism and insightful suggestions for improvement on earlier drafts. Fifth, I thank a former student, Holly Stewart, for helping me with the wording that social workers may use to explain confidentiality and informed consent to clients in a clear and comprehensive manner. Six, I thank various members of the Association of Social Work Boards and the National Ethics Committee of the National Association of Social Workers for their input concerning which ethical issues seem to be most challenging for social workers. Seventh, I thank my parents, Edith and Sam Barsky, for the values, virtues, and ethics that they instilled so lovingly throughout my upbringing. And finally, I thank my husband Greg and daughter Adelle for all their moral support and sacrifices, allowing me to spend far too much time in my office when I should have been out playing with them.

The cover image, *Playmates*, is courtesy of Canadian Ojibway artist Doris Cyrette. In it, the artist ponders the relationship of two- and three-year-olds who play separately together, enjoying the closeness of each other.

Contents

PART I

FOUNDATIONS OF VALUES
AND ETHICS

Case 1: *Sandra is a social worker providing counseling to a client named Colby. Colby discloses that he has been having sex with professional sex trade workers (prostitutes). Although he claims he is using condoms, Sandra is concerned about the safety of Colby's wife. How should Sandra balance her ethical obligation to keep Colby's information confidential with possible ethical, moral, or legal obligations to protect Colby's wife from emotional or physical harm?*

Case 2: *Sofia is a Christian social worker providing community organization services for a neighborhood with a large Muslim population. When community leaders ask her to help them develop programs that instill Muslim morals and beliefs, Sofia feels a conflict with her own religious beliefs and her professional value for diversity. How should Sofia show respect for the community's beliefs and right to self-determination in light of the potential conflicts with own personal and professional belief systems?*

Case 3: *Stacey is a social worker who works for child protective services. During a child neglect investigation, she discovers that the parents leave Chauncey (their 8-year-old child) unattended after school because both need to work in order to pay the bills. They have recently immigrated to the United States, so they have no family or friends to help with child care. They have taken a number of precautions to ensure that the child is safe, but the law says that an 8-year-old cannot be left unattended. Stacey believes Chauncey is better off with the parents' plans rather than being placed in foster care. How should Stacey reconcile her legal, clinical, and ethical obligations toward the child and family?*

Case 4: *Sutcliffe is a social worker who provides counseling to people with learning disabilities. One of his clients, Calvin, starts to exhibit hallucinations and delusions that are more characteristic of schizophrenia than learning disability. Sutcliffe continues to provide counseling, even though he has never received*

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training to help people with schizophrenia. Calvin hears voices that tell him to burn down a house. The owner of the burned house sues Sutcliffe for malpractice. What is the extent of Sutcliffe's legal or moral liability to the owner?

Case 5: *Shelley is a social worker who provides support services to elder clients in a nursing home. Several clients inform Shelley that they have been mistreated by the nursing home staff. Upon hearing about this mistreatment, Shelley feels angry toward the nursing home staff. With the consent of the clients, Shelley refers them to an ombudsman responsible for investigating allegations of elder abuse. Although Shelley has helped her elder clients respond effectively to an abusive situation, what ethical and practical concerns arise in this case?*

These cases[1] portray five very different situations, yet all have one thing in common. They all involve a social worker who needs to make choices based on her[2] assessment of the values and ethics that apply to the particular situation. As you may hear throughout your professional social work education, values and ethics pervade all areas of practice. In many situations faced by social workers, the choices are easy and clear. In other situations, the choices are difficult and not so clear. This text is designed to help you integrate social work values and ethics in all aspects of your practice, whether you are faced with issues that are clear or unclear—easy or difficult.

Learning social work ethics does not mean simply memorizing specific rules and standards of practice for every situation that may arise. Ethical practice requires professional self-awareness, critical thinking, and the ability to manage complex information, values, and principles from a variety of sources. This textbook

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this introduction, you will be able to

- Recall the meanings of the key terms: ethics, values, laws, agency policies, morals, professional ethics, personal ethics, ethical problems, ethical breaches, ethical dilemmas, beliefs, feelings, convictions, rules, and principles.
- Define each key term in your own words.
- Identify the similarities and differences between the key terms.
- Provide an example of each key term.
- Make appropriate citations to sources of laws and ethics.

is designed to provide you with a practical understanding of the principles and standards that guide social work practice, as well as frameworks for raising awareness of your own values and biases, for thinking through difficult ethical issues, and for working with others to decide how to respond to such issues.

To begin your exploration of values and ethics, this introduction provides a definitional framework for the key terms used throughout this textbook. To help provide you with a practical understanding of each term, I will relate each term to the case scenarios at the top of this chapter.

As you work through later chapters in this text, refer back to the definitions in this section whenever you have questions regarding how certain terms are being used.

ETHICS VERSUS VALUES

In common parlance, some people use the terms *ethics* and *values* interchangeably. In professional discourse, these are two distinct but related

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[1] The term *case* refers to a situation involving a social worker and people with whom the social worker is interacting (clients, coworkers, others in the community). I will use cases throughout the book to explore how values and ethics apply to various scenarios that a social worker may experience.

[2] In order to manage the issue of how to use male and female pronouns, I have rotated the use of "he/his" and "she/her" throughout the text. Case examples will include men and women in various roles, including social worker, client, supervisor, and other professionals.