



Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning
l'Alliance canadienne pour l'apprentissage par le service communautaire

Ethics in Helping

What are ethics?

Ethics are standards of conduct that guide decisions and actions, based on duties derived from core values.

Ethical Principles*

Principle 1 – Respond within the limits of your training and skill.

When you receive requests for help that require skills beyond your training, expertise, or jurisdiction you must know your personal limits and not exceed the boundaries of your knowledge and skills by making suggestions or implying knowledge that you may be lacking.

Principle 2 – Acknowledge your limits openly by saying that you do not know rather than pretending false expertise.

Even within the limits of your role, you will be asked questions, the answers to which you do not know. Don't play the role of expert! Saying, "I don't know", is much more helpful than faking it. You can still consult with your supervisor and/or make inquiries to find the information you need. In many cases, helping others to problem solve is even more helpful than having the answer every time!

Principle 3 – When in doubt – consult!

When confronted with a situation in which you are uncertain as to what to do, or you think there may be some conflict or dilemma, it is important that you consult with your community supervisor. Your supervisor and your academic instructor can be your greatest resource and they want to help you. Remember that uncertainty is NOT a measure of incompetence!

Principle 4 – Maintain client privacy and confidentiality as long as privacy protects the person being helped.

In an ideal world, your relationship with individual community members seeking your help is private and the nature of your helping interaction implies that you will not divulge personal information about them. This implied 'standard' protects the individual's privacy, and it also promotes a level of trust that makes self-disclosure possible. However, if you receive information that reveals a potential danger to the community member or others, you **MUST** consult with your community supervisor and determine an appropriate method for intervention.

Principle 5 – Show respect for others and for human dignity.

Tolerance and acceptance of both the individual person and their circumstances are important prerequisites for any helping relationship. No person with whom you work should feel that they are being treated in a condescending manner. All contact – and information from that contact – should be conveyed with respect, privacy, and confidentiality. The exceptions to this rule are when an individual agrees that sharing with others is appropriate or if the information gained puts the individual or the community in danger.

Principle 6 – Understand your own personal biases and avoid imposing these biases on others.

You must be careful not to impose your personal biases on other people, or to attempt to influence or prejudice a person's views or beliefs. This might include criticism of others, disenchantment, or strong value judgments that ask an individual to deal with your own personal agenda. Everyone has personal opinions and biases, but they should be stated with personal ownership and without pressuring or convincing another to accept them.

Principle 7 – Continue to behave appropriately when working with persons for whom you feel some aversion.
You may find that you are conversing with an individual for whom you feel some antagonism, dislike, or other strong emotional reaction. In these cases one must consider why the aversion is being experienced and carefully assess whether these feelings will interfere with your role. If so, it is important to consult with your supervisor.

Principle 8 – Act appropriately when working with persons for whom you feel attraction.
During the course of your involvement in a service placement, you may meet individuals for whom you feel interest or even attraction... you may want this person to be your friend, date, or companion. These dual relationships could compromise your helping role and should be avoided.

Principle 9 – Knowing and managing your emotional response while helping another is crucial to your own well-being and to your ability to help.
There may be times when statements that you have made evoke emotionally charged responses from individuals, or the public ranging from anger and irritation to grief and sorrow. Students serving in helping roles must be prepared to know how to handle and even control emotional reactions by learning to set limits, accept but not absorb emotional output, and channel reactions through referral. Occasionally, an individual's reaction may stimulate parallel feelings from your own experience. In these instances, you must follow up and use personal resources of support to debrief... there's no need to 'tough it out' on your own, and it won't make you look more competent if you do so!

Principle 10 – Take responsible action if you learn about illegal behaviour.
If you hear an individual report information that may have elements of behaviour that is illegal or potentially unethical, you may confront the behaviour, pointing out the social norms and consequences in a manner that suggests that you are not the person to judge the behaviour, but that there are clear social norms and laws that one must abide by in a community or society. If the information that has been shared implies a clear and present danger to others in the community, this information should be shared with your supervisor to determine the appropriate course of action.

Principle 11 – Remember that you are a role model!
As a student serving in a helping role in the community you will hold a some degree of expertise and are, therefore, regarded as role models to community members. This means that you are obligated to maintain a congruence between what you say to clients in your role and how you act when you are seen (or heard) by those you are serving.

Principle 12 – Maintain integrity and do not promote hearsay in commenting on professional relationships with others.
As a student serving in a helping role, other students or community members may ask for your opinion. You must refrain from giving negative opinions and limit any potentially critical comment to objective facts about a community member or agency. Everyone experiences other people differently and what might have been a poor experience for you could be quite different for others.

WORKS CITED

Adapted from Ender, S.C. & Newton, F.B., Students Helping Students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

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