

Ethics in Parent Peer Support

Balancing Your Lived Experience
and Professional Roles





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We believe this workbook will be a valuable tool for parent peer support providers to use for discussion with their supervisors and peers on ethical issues they face each day with families, with colleagues, and with partners.

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USING THIS WORKBOOK

Ethics are a core competency for family-run organizations (FROs) and parent peer support (PPS) providers. This workbook is intended to be used as a tool to discuss ethics in training new and seasoned parent peer support providers. Each PPS provider and FRO is different. The workbook, therefore, provides vignettes of common ethical situations PPS providers may encounter and suggested best practices to support families and avoid personal and organizational harm.

Organizations may have specific policies related to some of the scenarios presented here and states may have laws governing the conduct of PPS providers. For this reason, the resolutions or approaches suggested in this workbook could differ from your organization's approach. The value of this workbook is opening the door for dialogue on these issues.

It is recommended that this workbook be used in a group setting that is conducive to discussion. It could be used as part of training for new PPS providers or sections could be used as part of group supervision. The workbook is not intended for an individual PPS provider to review on their own and respond to the questions.

Scenarios are based on actual experiences of PPS providers. In the course of discussion, PPS providers may bring up other situations they have experienced or supervisors may use ethical dilemmas that your organization experienced in the past. These too can be used along with or in place of the scenarios included in this workbook.

Sections 4 through 6 contain basic guidelines and suggestions, as well as opportunities to practice skills in a series of scenarios that place the participant in common situations faced by PPS providers. Each scenario and the associated questions are followed by a description of the dilemma and possible approaches to resolve the situation. A PPS provider's role is to encourage, support, and work alongside families to support them in elevating their own voice. As PPS providers work through each vignette, they will be building their capacity and ability to recognize and resolve situations that test their ethics and professional behavior across a variety of situations and settings.

TYPES OF ETHICAL SITUATIONS

Ethical situations can be grouped into three main categories: Working with Families, Interactions in the Workplace, and Working in the Community and with Partners. Depending upon your time and format, you can focus on just one area or all three. The three main categories are outlined below.

Working ethically with families

- Observe laws, rules, policies and procedures in your work with families.
- Respect the cultural values, choices, decisions, privacy and beliefs of families and refrain from imposing your own values and beliefs.
- Act honestly and respect the rights and responsibilities of parents for their children and work to establish a collaborative relationship with families.
- Set clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries of PPS provider and family regarding expectations, responsibilities, time, access, decision-making, and outcomes.
- Abide by organizational and professional codes of conduct and policies in regard to responsibilities to families and youth.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries and avoid sexual, romantic, or business relationships with any family member receiving services.
- Stay up to date on current resources, research, and tools to assist in your work with families.
- Foster relationships that include skill-building and promoting the family's voice and goals.



Conducting oneself ethically in the workplace

- Act honestly and with integrity to promote the mission of the organization.
- Know and adhere to the organization's policies and procedures.
- Treat co-workers with respect.
- Maintain accurate documentation for services provided and hours worked.
- Maintain confidentiality of information for families served and also internal communications of the organization during or subsequent to employment or contract with the organization.
- Avoid any perceived or real conflicts of interest with other employees, board members, contractors, or funders.
- Take measures to discourage or report unethical conduct of co-workers.

Working ethically in the community and with partners

- Participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of families and youth using family-driven and youth-guided principles and perspective.
- Act professionally when representing the organization and profession outside the office and in work with community members.
- Be clear with partners about your role and support for family voice and empowerment.
- Acknowledge and respect the perspectives of others, promoting authentic family voice and choice.
- Promote collaboration and partnerships that benefit families, and maintain confidentiality of the families with whom you work.
- Treat partners with respect, courtesy, and fairness, being transparent about your goals and support of families.
- Educate yourself on systems relevant to your work with families, including roles, mandates, and trends.

SECTION 1: ETHICS

What Are Ethics?

Ethics refer to a set of principles, rules, or standards for the conduct of a person or the members of a profession. For parent peer support providers, ethics refer to how you conduct yourself when you work with families, other professionals, and community stakeholders.

Ethics serve to protect the family receiving services, the individual PPS provider, the PPS provider's organization, and the profession by setting a standard of behavior. Violating ethics standards can lead to a variety of consequences, from reprimand to loss of certification or legal sanctions depending on severity of the violation.

Why Are Ethics Important?

The purpose of ethics is to guide you in your role, relationships, and responsibilities in both a personal and professional capacity. They will assist you to:

- Maintain physical and emotional safety for both yourself and the family.
- Act as a role model in healthy family communication and collaborative professional relationships.
- Avoid the tendency to fall into a "rescuer" role.
- Stay focused on your responsibilities to the family and the provision of appropriate services, maintaining your capacity as a helper.
- Prevent compassion fatigue (commonly referred to as "burnout").
- Foster a healthy, open, communicative environment when working in a team.

Code of Ethics

Your organization, or state certification, may have a specific Code of Ethics that you must follow. In general, a code of ethics should include the basic areas of integrity, safety, and professional responsibility. The National Parent Support Provider Certification, hosted by the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (FFCMH), developed a Code of Ethics for PPS providers. The full Code of Ethics can be accessed at: <http://www.ffcmh.org/apply-for-certification>

SECTION 2: DEFINING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

What Is an Ethical Dilemma?

An ethical dilemma is a situation where a person must decide between two or more courses of action. Taking either course of action may have consequences or violate rules, beliefs, convictions, or commonly accepted practice. Deciding upon the best and most appropriate outcome is the core of an ethical dilemma. For example, a PPS provider giving their own money to a family in need may help the family short term. However, personally giving money to a family may violate the organization’s rules, cross professional boundaries, and may not help the family in the long run. Weighing these choices is an ethical dilemma.

How you handle ethical dilemmas as a friend can be very different than how you might handle such dilemmas when you are a PPS provider acting in a professional capacity. As a PPS provider you are responsible not only to yourself, but to the families you are serving, your agency, the licensing entity of your agency, and other system partners. The table below outlines how decisions made as a peer/friend can differ from those made as a PPS provider.

Ethical Dilemmas as Peer (Friend) vs. Parent Peer Support Provider (PPSP) Comparison

PEER OR FRIEND	PARENT PEER SUPPORT PROVIDER (PPSP)
Personal decision affects your relationship with your friend. <i>E.g. Personally giving money to a friend could affect your friendship.</i>	PPSP decision may affect agency, collaborative partners, and others. <i>E.g. Personally giving money may violate a contract your organization has with funders or an organizational policy for staff.</i>
Personal decision could result in breakup of friendship. <i>E.g. The gift or loan of money could come between you and your friend.</i>	PPSP decision may result in a financial loss to your agency in lost business or fines. <i>E.g. A contract violation could result in the contract being terminated for your organization or disciplinary action for you for violating policy.</i>
Decision does not violate rules or laws. <i>E.g. Giving money to a friend does not involve a legal contract but is a personal decision.</i>	PPSP decision may result in criminal and/or civil liability to you and your agency. <i>E.g. PPSP decision may impact your organization’s reputation and expose them to potential lawsuits.</i>



PPS providers are often in positions where decisions must be made quickly without the benefit of time for a more informed choice. The best rule of thumb to avoid negative consequences is “*When in doubt, ask before acting.*” Your supervisor can offer guidance and assist you in walking through possible outcomes based on options available in the situation.

Summary

An ethical dilemma is making a decision between choices that may seem to benefit a family but may otherwise violate agency rules and professional boundaries. Even though the situations could be very similar, the process to make a decision as a PPSP is very different than when you are making a personal decision about a friend or family member. Always ask for guidance from a supervisor when you are in doubt.

SECTION 3: PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

Definition

Professional boundaries are guidelines established by legal, ethical, and professional standards. They exist to enable the PPS providers to work effectively with a family without becoming personally entangled in the family dynamics or problems.

Professional boundaries enable a PPSP to:

- Maintain the focus on the family, their values, and culture
- Share components of the PPS provider’s personal story only when it serves to support and benefit the family
- Assist the family to identify and prioritize their needs
- Mutually agree upon a plan to prioritize and address needs
- Establish parameters of their relationship, such as how and when to communicate
- Utilize skills to empower and model appropriate behavior for the family
- Respect the family’s confidentiality and laws governing information
- Recognize when the family’s needs are beyond the capacity of the PPSP and connect them to other resources
- Mutually agree when to end services

Professional boundaries help a PPSP to avoid:

- Making decisions based on their own personal values and culture
- Continuing to relate their personal story instead of focusing on the family’s needs
- “Rescuing” the family instead of empowering them
- Playing the hero by trying to do everything for the family rather than working as part of a team
- Discussing the family’s situation outside of work with family and friends
- Disclosing information about the family to schools, agencies, or professionals without a signed consent form from the family
- Establishing inappropriate relationships with any member of the family, such as physical, sexual, or romantic relationships, or even business relationships

Why Explore Boundaries?

Most people become PPS providers based on a desire to help other families overcome the challenges that they have encountered in trying to find resources and support for their own family. Because we identify so closely with what other families are experiencing, it is natural to want to step in and help. While this lived experience is what makes the peer support relationship unique and effective, it also can make it challenging to maintain a professional role. The relationship you develop with families is the foundation for the work you do together, and boundaries are a major factor in the quality and functionality



of this relationship. Boundaries allow you to define your role as well as the expectations that you have of the family and that they have of you as the PPS provider. When boundaries are not established and upheld, the perception is that the relationship is meeting the personal needs of the PPS provider rather than the needs of the family. When healthy boundaries are in place, the family's needs are prioritized and both the PPS provider and the family are clear on their responsibilities and expectations.

Limit Setting

Boundaries are established by setting limits within the working relationship, clarifying what is permissible and what would be considered beyond the scope of this professional relationship. Clearly explain to a family what your role will be. It is best to set limits and structure early in the relationship so that you and the family can focus on productive work together. In general, limit-setting includes identifying what you can or cannot do. For example, you can set boundaries around times of day you can be reached or how many times a week you can meet with the family. Likewise, it is important to set parameters around what the family can expect from you and the program. Limit-setting ensures safety, consistency, comfort, privacy, and reliability. Roles and limits may need to be discussed or revisited throughout the course of your work together for the family to clearly understand both your role and theirs as you work together. Your own organization may have guidelines around limit-setting that you should refer to.

SECTION 4: WORKING WITH FAMILIES

Basic Guidelines

Working with families as a PPS provider, you will encounter unique and complex situations. Every family will be different, although many needs will be the same. It is important to remember that your role is to work alongside families and support them in making the choices that are best for their child, their family, and themselves. Let's review the basic guidelines for working with families in an ethical manner.

Your role as a PPS provider is a professional one. As such, if you disagree with a family's decision, it is important to respect their choice and never impose your belief system or morals on the family. Your role is to work within their belief system, not convert them to yours.

With every interaction it may be appropriate to share pieces of your personal story to build a trusting relationship. However, it is important to share your story only as it applies to supporting the family; the goal is to address their needs, not yours. For example, if your child experienced many hospitalizations and the family you are working with has a child in the hospital, you might share that you understand how much parents worry when their child is in the hospital because you have had that experience. Going into detail about how many hospitalizations your child had, where they were hospitalized, and for how long takes the focus off of the family whose child is presently in the hospital.

It is important to be clear that your role as PPS provider is different from a friendship or social relationship. Major issues that commonly arise include:

- **Relationships Outside of Work:** Maintain professionalism by avoiding emotional or physical relationships, including social media, with members of families who are enrolled in your program. This includes social relationships, and it would not be appropriate to meet them for drinks after work or to use other substances with them.
- **Accepting Gifts:** Many families will want to express their gratitude through gifts, as they would with a family member or friend. To avoid offending the family, seek guidance from your supervisor on what is your organization's policy on



accepting gifts. Some organizations permit accepting homemade food, handmade gifts, or flowers but do not permit expensive gifts.

- **Money:** Avoid business, financial transactions, or bartering agreements with families. It is not acceptable to borrow from or lend money to families with whom you are working. A parent or family member is in a vulnerable position when you are working with them, and to enter into any type of financial relationship could be construed as your taking advantage of them.
- **Giving Gifts:** Check your organization’s policy on donating food, money, clothing, or household items to a family with whom you are working. Some organizations have policies that any donations to a family are done through the organization and not through the PPS to avoid shifting the role of the PPS from providing support to personally donating to the family.

Some of the situations in which you may find yourself can be difficult to navigate. When personal and professional conflicts arise, seek supervision or professional guidance. Sometimes talking through a situation can clarify what action you should take.

Test Your Knowledge

The following scenarios are ones that you may encounter when working with families in your community. For each one, review the situation and identify the ethical concern presented to the PPS provider. Then, explain how you would address the situation. Following each scenario, the ethical dilemma is explained as well as potential resolutions or approaches. Check yourself to see if you accurately identify the issue and if your approach aligns with the guidance provided.

Your organization may have policies or procedures that specifically address these ethical situations and could differ from some of the resolutions or approaches identified in this workbook. It is always important to read and understand your organization’s policies and act accordingly.

Section 4: Scenario 1 – Carmen

You have been providing support to Carmen, an adoptive mother of a youth with depression and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. As a result of your work together, Carmen was able to access waiver services for her daughter, and she has invited you to go out to dinner with her to celebrate as well as offered you a small gold bracelet as a token of her appreciation.

How would you respond to Carmen’s invitation? In what ways would you consider Carmen’s culture when you respond to her? Would you respond to the gift differently than the invitation to dinner?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 1

Ethical dilemma: In this situation, Carmen wants to express her appreciation for your help. Check your organization’s policy on going out with families you may be supporting and consider the context. In some cases, stopping for lunch after a particularly stressful IEP meeting may be acceptable and very supportive to the family. In other situations, an invitation to an



expensive restaurant may not be appropriate. Your relationship is a professional one, not a friendship. You need to gently explain your role and your boundaries as a PPS provider, but still offer some way to celebrate her success and acknowledge Carmen’s hard work on behalf of her family.

In general, as a PPS provider, it is not ethical for you to accept expensive gifts for your work. There could be gender or cultural norms that would dictate a different type of response for accepting small gifts (homemade food or gifts, flowers, etc.). Your organization will have specific policies or processes around these types of situations, and it is important to seek guidance from your supervisor when you are faced with such a situation.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Thank Carmen for her thoughtfulness and explain that your organization does not allow you to accept expensive gifts. Emphasize to her that you’re very proud of her hard work on behalf of her child and acknowledge her expression of appreciation.
- Propose another way to celebrate, such as an announcement at the next parent group. Reflect back that it was Carmen who did the work and should be proud of herself and her child.
- After thanking Carmen, encourage her to write a letter about her positive experience with services to submit to funders with your company’s quarterly reports, describing to her how this will give back to the community as a whole by increasing awareness of the need for advocacy and resource connection services.

Check Yourself: Scenario 1

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?

Section 4: Scenario 2 – Heather

Heather is a young mother with three preschool children, two of whom have special needs. Heather has been out of work for months after losing her job due to child care issues. You have just helped her apply for food stamps, but there is a four-week waiting list to process her application. It is Friday afternoon and you are meeting her today at the local McDonald’s Playland, and all the children are asking for hamburgers. Heather also tells you that she has very little food at her house, perhaps not enough to make it through the weekend.

What would you do? Would you take your own money and purchase food for Heather’s children?



Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 2

Ethical dilemma: As a PPS provider, your goal is to support and empower caregivers. That is, “do with” the family, not “do for” them. This can be really difficult when you see a family in need and you want to help them. It is especially important at these points to be compassionate while maintaining your boundaries. You must focus on problem-solving with the family around ways to meet their needs more consistently through use of community resources, formal supports, and natural supports. In such situations, you need to consider best locations for meetings and the potential impact of location on families and their needs.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Excuse yourself from the meeting and make a private phone call to your supervisor to request reimbursement for the purchase of meals for the children. Once you receive approval, talk privately with the mother about being able to provide dinner for the children and discuss options for her to access food through the weekend, such as a trip to the food bank or calling upon her natural support network.
- Your organization provides gift cards that you keep in your wallet for this type of situation. Quietly give Heather the gift cards so she can purchase food for her family without making Heather feel badly as a mother who is not able to provide for her children. Later explain to her that you can only use the cards for an emergency and try to brainstorm with Heather options to get food for the weekend.
- Anticipate that meeting at a restaurant could be an uncomfortable setting and find a better location for the family to meet and the children to play while exploring options for a sustainable, long-term solution to this critical need.

Check Yourself: Scenario 2

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?

Section 4: Scenario 3 – Connie

On a family visit with Connie, you notice that the children’s father appears to be inebriated, slurring words and sipping from a bottle of liquor. You continue your visit for several minutes until you notice him encouraging the toddler to take a sip and acting as if it would be funny to see the toddler take a drink. Connie notices you looking at what is happening and seems embarrassed and concerned with what you might think or do.



Would you say anything to the father? Would you say anything to Connie? What steps would you take to protect the toddler's safety?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 3

Ethical dilemma: In this situation, you need to address safety and assess Connie's ability to keep her child safe from someone who is inebriated. This type of behavior should not be ignored and you should seek the guidance of your supervisor. If you are a mandated reporter in your state, you need to discuss with your supervisor whether to file a report with child welfare.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Step outside or into another room and contact your supervisor immediately to explain the situation and your concerns about the child's safety.
- Privately speak with Connie to discuss your concerns about the child's safety and ask if she feels safe. Remind her of the limits of confidentiality you discussed at the beginning of your work together and explain that to protect the child you may have to report the father's behavior.
- Call the toddler over to you, distracting her with the chance to sit next to you to draw a picture for you. Once the toddler is distracted, talk with Connie about how the father's behavior concerned you and that such behavior endangers her child and may have to be reported.
- Do not leave until you have developed steps to ensure the child and mother's safety.

Check Yourself: Scenario 3

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?

Section 4: Scenario 4 – Darrin

A father you are working with, Darrin, has allowed his girlfriend, who is the mother of his three children, to move in with him in an apartment that is funded by the state. The girlfriend has three additional children from other relationships that also will be living in the apartment, bringing the total to eight people living in the two-bedroom apartment. As the PPS provider for the father, you are the only one who knows about this situation and he has asked you not to say anything because he and the



children could all be evicted from the apartment with nowhere to go. Darrin told you that he feels personally responsible for the children he has helped raise, and he will not turn his back on them. You are sure that another provider will find out about it and he will lose his funding, putting everyone at risk of being homeless.

Would you report Darrin to the housing authority? What is your role as Darrin's PPS provider in this situation?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 4

Ethical dilemma: You understand Darrin's situation and are compassionate about his need to maintain housing for his children. At the same time, you recognize that his violation of the rules of his apartment complex and lease is putting his entire family's housing at risk. While it is not your role to report such violations, it is your role to ensure that Darrin has the information needed to make informed choices and to be aware of the possible consequences of those choices. In this situation, he is in violation and could be evicted, which will impact all of the children.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Explain to Darrin that you are sensitive to the situation that he finds himself in. Ensure that he is aware that he faces potential eviction once others notice that he is in violation of his lease.
- Help Darrin identify and explore his options (1. continue in violation and hope it won't be reported; 2. explore other housing options for either the mother or the entire family within the housing complex or in another location) and the pros/cons of each, encouraging him to make a decision that will best protect the children in his custody.
- Identify housing resources and tenant advocacy organizations that could help Darrin inquire about options for a larger unit or adding the mother to the lease.
- Offer to assist him in applying for a new apartment or home.

Check Yourself: Scenario 4

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?



Section 4: Scenario 5 – Zalika

You are a male PPS provider working with Zalika, a single mother of three children with behavioral health challenges. During the last few visits to her home, her behavior has seemed flirtatious, but you have tried to ignore it and think that she is being friendly.

Would you say anything to Zalika about her behavior? What steps might you take to address the situation?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 5

Ethical dilemma: Sometimes when you are in a helping role, a person you are working with may develop affections for you or be attracted to you. This can occur with caregivers and older youth and is something you should address immediately if you suspect someone is developing a romantic or sexual attraction to you. Social and intimate relationships are prohibited between PPS providers and any member of the family with whom you are working. It is important that you not reciprocate the flirtatious behavior and to clearly communicate the professional boundaries of your relationship. If it continues, seek guidance from your supervisor on addressing the situation, up to and including being transferred from that family's case.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Consider if you could be misreading the behaviors. Discuss this with your supervisor before you act.
- Develop an approach with your supervisor that addresses this situation, such as bringing it up to Zalika or scheduling meetings in public places or bringing another team member along with you.

Check Yourself: Scenario 5

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?

Section 4: Scenario 6 – Granny

You are working with Miss Smith, or Granny, as she is called by the three grandchildren she is raising, to prevent them from being placed in state custody. She has legal custody of the youngest child, but she has cared for the other two children since they were toddlers. Granny needs financial assistance to provide food, clothing, and other necessities for the children.



Granny's daughter, who is the children's mother, receives a monthly check from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) for the children although they do not live with her. You know that this is fraud. While Granny needs the help, she does not want to upset her daughter and risk the children going to live in an unhealthy situation with the daughter so she can continue to receive monthly checks.

Would you assist Granny in getting legal custody of all of the children? What would you do if Granny refuses to file for legal custody and you know that the daughter will continue to receive payments while Granny needs the funds to care for the children? Would you report Granny's daughter for fraud?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 6

As a PPS, you should not refer to the grandmother as Granny, even if that is what everyone in her family calls her. Using someone's first name or nickname can be perceived as being disrespectful or too informal for someone you are just meeting. Address her by Miss Smith unless she specifically gives you permission to call her Granny.

In this situation, you are aware that fraud is occurring and also are aware of the impact of this fraud on Miss Smith and the children. While it is not your duty to report fraud, it is your role to assist Miss Smith in thinking through potential ways to address what her daughter is doing and how to meet the children's needs. It is important to walk through possible approaches and the pros/cons of each. You must respect her decision on how to proceed, even if you disagree with it.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Perhaps Miss Smith could file for formal custody of the other two children and then monetary assistance will be addressed through the court. As a PPS provider, you can assist Miss Smith in filing a petition for custody and support her through the court process to ensure that the AFDC checks are assigned to Miss Smith for the care of the children.
- Find out what steps would be taken if the fraud were discovered by the state and share this information with Miss Smith. Assist her in thinking through the pros and cons of reporting the fraud, both in the short term (angry daughter, might have to fight for custody) and the long term (having consistent resources to meet the children's needs, having legal custody of the children to be able to properly care for them).

Check Yourself: Scenario 6

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?



Section 4: Scenario 7 – Angela

You are working with Angela, a single mother, and her 10-year-old son. The mother is very stressed trying to make ends meet, addressing her son's behavioral disorder, and fighting with her ex-husband over custody. She has been consistent in working with you, and there are improvements in the family's situation. When you arrive for your visit with her, she is home alone and is drinking, something she has not done in several years since completing rehab. She reports that she had an awful call with the ex-husband, is just very stressed, and knows that she needs to find another way to cope rather than using alcohol, but she had a weak moment. Her son will be home in one hour.

What would you say to Angela? Would you take any actions? What would you do about the son coming home from school in one hour?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 7

Ethical dilemma: While you may not agree with her coping strategy in this case, you are faced with how to support her in remaining sober and how to ensure the ongoing safety of her son if she should relapse again. Your approach in this instance will likely affect your rapport with the mother and ability to effectively work with her. Your organization will have specific policies or processes around these types of situations, and it is important to seek guidance from your supervisor.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Angela is an adult in recovery who has had a relapse and admits it. The son is not present and therefore no children are endangered. Rather than reporting it, encourage her to call her sponsor and get back to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, reinforce the progress they have made as a family, and the possible consequences if she begins using again. Support Angela through reconnecting with services to maintain her recovery and find healthy ways to address her stress. Stay with her until you believe she is able to appropriately care for her son.
- Try to find a neighbor or friend that could take care of the son when he comes home from school to ensure his safety until Angela is sober and able to care for him.
- Acknowledge Angela's stress level and the relapse, encouraging her to contact her sponsor immediately. Schedule a time to meet with her the next day while her son is at school to make a plan for addressing her stress level and coping strategies.

Check Yourself: Scenario 7

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?



Section 4: Scenario 8 – Laurie

As a PPS provider you worked with Laurie for over a year through a particularly difficult time for Laurie's son. During the year Laurie's son was hospitalized on several occasions for mental health reasons and you always tried to be present and supportive for Laurie. While you worked together, you maintained strict professional boundaries. After a year, Laurie felt she no longer needed family support services and her file was closed. Several months later, you are in the grocery store and notice Laurie in the checkout line.

What would you do? Would you go over to Laurie and ask about her son? Would you turn away and pretend that you did not see her?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 8

Ethical dilemma: As a PPS provider you are bound to protect the family's confidentiality. This applies not only to the information that you have access to but also the fact that the family is or has received services from your organization. Often the rule of thumb in these instances is to not acknowledge the family. Instead, allow the family to choose whether to acknowledge you or not, and you follow the family's lead. If the family does come up and speak to you, you would certainly respond. When you begin working with a family that lives in the same community, it's possible your children may attend the same school or participate on sports teams together. It's important to explain that if you see them in the community, you will not acknowledge them and do not intend to be rude. Rather you are allowing them to make that decision and protecting their right to confidentiality.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- If Laurie does not come up to you, continue on your way and do not take it personally. Recognize that she may have reasons for not wanting to acknowledge you as it could bring up very difficult memories.
- If Laurie does come up to you, acknowledge that you are glad to see her and hope everything is going well. Be cautious not to ask personal questions about Laurie's son since it is a public setting and because you no longer have a right to personal information since you are no longer working with the family.
- If Laurie volunteers information and is eager to talk, ask if she would like to talk in a more private setting or give you a call during the week. If you are with other members of your family or with friends, do not disclose how you know Laurie or any of the family's history.
- If Laurie comes up to you and are pressed for time, acknowledge that you are happy to see her and hope that all is going well, but you are not able to talk at the moment and need to be elsewhere. Encourage her to call you at the office during the week.

Check Yourself: Scenario 8

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your goals with the family? How might you use this situation to do so?

Preventing Ethical Dilemmas with Families

What other ethical dilemmas have you encountered as a PPS provider? How did you handle them?

Is there anything you could have done to prevent the situation? Is there something you would have done differently?



SECTION 5: INTERACTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Ethical Guidelines in the Workplace

Working in an organization with other PPS providers has many benefits, such as learning techniques and strategies to employ in specific situations. It also means that your co-workers will have slightly different approaches to doing the work and that there will be occasional conflicts between people. Your organization should have basic guidelines to follow in the workplace, such as an organizational code of conduct that will support ethical and professional behavior. Most organizations have policies, procedures, and expectations around workplace behavior, etiquette, and environment. It is important to ask your supervisor or human resources (HR) representative about your organization's policies and expectations.

In general, a PPS provider should adhere to professional boundaries in the workplace. This means time at work should be focused on PPS provider role/responsibilities and working collaboratively with other staff. It also refers to using appropriate language and dressing professionally. Your agency may have a dress code, and you also want to avoid dressing in ways that might make the families with whom you work uncomfortable, such as a suit and tie or dress and heels for a regular home visit. Sharing information from your personal life can help build rapport with your co-workers, but over-sharing can lead to negative perceptions of you in a setting where you want to be seen as professional.

Be aware of organizational policies regarding emotional or physical relationships among employees. Some agencies allow staff to date co-workers if they are in equal positions within the organization or work in different divisions. However, some agencies have a policy against workplace dating as a means of avoiding conflict in the office. Conflict also can arise if employees enter into business, financial transactions, or bartering agreements with co-workers, or if money is borrowed or lent between co-workers. It is best to avoid financial relationships of any sort within the office and between co-workers.

Equipment and supplies purchased by the organization for your use belong to the organization and should not be used for personal use, such as copying flyers for your child's sports team on your organization's paper and copier. Respect for the workplace extends to your office area, as well. It is important to maintain an organized workspace and to be cautious in posting family pictures or artwork that could be offensive to others. Refrain from posting anything of a political nature. This extends to sharing non-work-related emails, pictures, "memes," and other such items.

Test Your Knowledge

The following situations are ones that you may encounter while working with staff in the workplace. For each one, review the situation and identify the ethical concern presented to the PPS provider. Explain how you would address the situation.

Ethical dilemmas and potential resolutions or approaches follow each situation. Check yourself to see if you accurately identified the issue and if your approach aligned with the guidance provided.

Section 5: Scenario 1 – Mia

While at your job as a PPS provider for a family-run organization, the school calls you, informing you that your daughter, Mia, has been suspended for shoving another child on the playground. You are concerned that Mia's behavior is a result



of her severe anxiety and that the school should have put a behavior plan in place to help Mia when she has an anxiety attack. You are upset and angered by the school's actions and, turning to your co-worker, you ask her to go with you to meet with the school principal in the morning. You know that she has been trained in special education law and has attended IEP meetings with lots of parents served through your organization. Your co-worker says she will gladly go with you to the meeting at school in the morning, although she will need to re-arrange her schedule of home visits and perhaps cancel one in order to attend with you. As you and your co-worker leave at the end of the day, you tell the office manager you will be a little late in the morning.

Should you have asked the co-worker to go to the meeting with you? What procedure would you follow to handle this situation?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 1

Ethical dilemma: It is natural to become upset when you feel that your child is being treated unfairly, and as a PPS provider you know the value of having someone with you for support when attending difficult meetings at school. Because you know your co-worker is experienced in this area you automatically reach out to her for help. It is also natural for your co-worker to want to help you, even if it affects her schedule with other families. However, you are an employee of the family-run organization and not a client. By asking your co-worker to help you, she is put in the situation of potentially neglecting families that are her responsibility as a PPS provider and as an employee. This does not mean that you can't also receive help, but you both must maintain your boundaries as PPS providers and abide by your agency policies and procedures.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- When personal issues are involved, speak with your supervisor and explain the nature of the situation with Mia. Talk with your supervisor about whether it would be acceptable to have your co-worker attend the meeting at school with you for support. It is also important to discuss whether you might need someone to attend more than one meeting over a period of time. To avoid a possible conflict of interest and because of the close relationship you have with your co-worker, your supervisor might suggest another employee go with you. Depending upon your organization's policies, you may have to complete a formal intake.
- You must avoid putting co-workers in awkward situations where they could be jeopardizing their jobs by not informing their supervisor that they are attending a meeting in their role as a PPS provider without the knowledge of the organization. In this instance, your co-worker may have to cancel or reschedule meetings with families for whom she is responsible as an employee to attend a meeting with you. Thank your co-worker for being supportive, and let her know that you will need to speak with your supervisor for direction in this case so that you won't be putting your co-worker in a position to possibly violate your organization's policy.
- Consider whether having your co-worker attend the meeting would in any way affect the ongoing working relationship you have with each other. Negative feelings might arise if the meeting does not turn out well, which could impact your working together. Thank your co-worker for being supportive, stating that it wouldn't be right to ask her to cancel or reschedule home visits. Then talk with your supervisor about the best way to get support at the meeting tomorrow within the guidelines of your agency.

Check Yourself: Scenario 1

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Did this situation provide you with an opportunity to further your professional goals as a PPS provider? How might you use this situation to do so?

Section 5: Scenario 2 – Liz

While at lunch in a local restaurant your co-worker Liz begins to discuss one of the families involved with your organization and the challenges they've been going through, hoping to brainstorm solutions with you. She is referring to the family by their name, and even though she is speaking softly, the restaurant is very busy with the lunchtime crowds.

How would you handle this situation with Liz in a public place?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 2

Ethical dilemma: By using the family's name or any identifying information, such as the family's initials or the child's school, in a public, non-work environment, Liz is breaking confidentiality. Such conversations should be held within the office, during supervision, and only with those who have the need to know information about a family.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Ask Liz to pause for a moment and say, "Hey, we agreed no work talk at lunch today!" and change the topic of conversation. Later in the office, mention to her that you didn't want to slip up and reveal confidential information in public and offer to resume brainstorming with her.
- Make a comment that this is not the appropriate place for such a discussion, saying I don't think we're allowed to have conversations about families in public settings. Let's talk about this later at work, OK?"

Check Yourself: Scenario 2

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Section 5: Scenario 3 – Kayla

Today you are in the office, catching up on documentation. Your 17-year-old daughter, Kayla, has the day off from school and came to work with you. You have a lot of progress notes to enter into the electronic data system. Kayla types much faster than you and could enter your progress notes, allowing you to make several phone calls to families and partners. She offers to help you out.

Do you allow Kayla to type your notes and help you catch up on work?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 3

Ethical dilemma: To allow another person who is not involved with the family to access confidential information, even if it is a co-worker, is violating the confidentiality of families as well as HIPAA. Your intentions may be to ensure that your notes are entered on time, but you would be violating confidentiality. The PPS provider must abide by HIPAA and safeguard the information of the families they serve.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Thank Kayla for offering, but explain that you have a legal obligation to protect your families' private information and you cannot allow someone else to enter your notes.
- Pull out your schedule to identify specific times that you can focus on documentation to avoid getting behind in your notes again.
- Tell Kayla that although it would be faster to let her type in the notes, it wouldn't be the right thing to do. Take this opportunity to explain how important confidentiality is when working with other families.

Check Yourself: Scenario 3

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 5: Scenario 4 – Denise

Your co-worker Denise discloses that she has started dating the father of a family with whom she is currently working as the PPS provider. Denise has an excellent reputation in the organization and has been able to assist many families in reaching their goals over the past several years. You know that Denise has been single for a long time and wants to be in a long-term relationship. Today, Denise tells you that after meeting with the family she is going out on a date with the father.

What should you do? Would you speak directly to Denise? Would you tell your supervisor about Denise's relationship with a family she is working with?



Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 4

Ethical dilemma: It is unethical for a PPS provider to engage in social, romantic, or sexual relationships with a family member receiving services from the organization. Doing so oversteps professional boundaries, decreases the PPS provider’s ability to be objective and effective, and can lead to emotional harm for families who are already in a vulnerable position. The dilemma in this situation is that you now know that a co-worker is acting unethically and in a situation that is harmful for both the family and the program/agency. However, speaking up about it could lead to her termination. Remember, you may be ethically bound to report such issues.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Ask to speak with Denise privately to explain your concerns about her involvement with the father. Help her think through the potential consequences of the relationship on the father, the family, the agency, and her employment. Let her know that, as a PPS provider, you cannot ignore what’s going on and problem solve with her how to address the situation with her supervisor. Offer to go with her to speak to her supervisor.
- Encourage her to go to her supervisor and if she does not agree to act, it is your professional obligation to go to your supervisor for further guidance.

Check Yourself: Scenario 4

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 5: Scenario 5 – Henry

Henry, another PPS provider in your office, sent an email to you on the organization’s server containing confidential information about a mother with whom he’s working. In the email, Henry acknowledged that he may have provided incorrect information to the mother resulting in the mother losing custody of her daughter. You are afraid that the mother who acted on the misinformation provided by the Henry will file a complaint with the agency director and that the investigation will reveal this email and your knowledge of the situation.

What do you do? Would you speak with Henry? Would you say anything to your supervisor about Henry’s mistake and the consequences for the mother and child?



Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 5

Ethical dilemma: This scenario contains several ethical dilemmas. First, emails should never be used to communicate confidential information about families. Even with secure networks, HIPAA prohibits sending confidential information through email unless it is encrypted. The second ethical dilemma is that you now have information about harm that has been done to a family and you are ethically bound to report it to your supervisor. You cannot ignore this fact, even if Henry did not intend to cause harm. In this situation, the well-being of the family must be your priority and not potential consequences for Henry.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Encourage Henry to speak directly to his supervisor about the situation and ask for guidance in addressing the problem and supporting the parent. If he will not go to his supervisor, you have an ethical obligation to speak with your supervisor and report that harm has been done to a family.
- Express your concern about what has happened with the mother as a result of the misinformation and the duty that Henry has to correct the situation. Suggest that you both go to the supervisor immediately to explain what has occurred and follow the guidance of the supervisor to address the situation.

Check Yourself: Scenario 5

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Preventing Ethical Dilemmas in the Workplace

Can you identify other possible ethical situations that could occur in the workplace?

Discuss how you could prevent them from occurring.

SECTION 6: ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE COMMUNITY AND WITH PARTNERS

Ethical Guidelines When Working in the Community

One of the roles a PPS provider may fill is liaison to the community and advocate for family voice and family-driven care with community members. This public role is an important one as others will notice how you behave and will develop opinions



about your organization, other parent professionals, and perhaps family involvement in general. It is your responsibility to promote the value of family involvement as well as the rights of families to have a voice at policymaking tables as partners when it affects their children. Supporting this message and maintaining professional relationships can sometimes lead to uncomfortable situations and ethical concerns. There are basic guidelines to support your work in the communities of the families that you serve.

When you are representing your organization, always promote a positive image of your organization and co-workers. This includes conducting yourself in a professional manner and dressing appropriately for the situation. For example, you would dress differently if you were going to a state level meeting with policymakers than you would if you were going to your office.

At meetings, there could be times when your personal opinion on a policy may differ from your organization's position on the issue. When you are representing your organization at a meeting, you have an obligation to support your organization's position and refrain from expressing a personal opinion on the matter. If you encounter a situation when you disagree with a partner organization, look for opportunities outside of the meeting to share information to resolve the issue or handle them through the appropriate channels in accordance with your organization's policies and procedures. If you know in advance that a topic will be discussed that your organization has a strong position that differs from the committee, it is advantageous to communicate with the committee chair in advance that you will be raising some concerns. Always respond respectfully and never use a public meeting as an opportunity to embarrass or "blindsides" a person or organization.

Building collaborative relationships within the community is beneficial to your work with families. You should develop partnerships with other providers and resources, but also maintain a consistent voice for family-driven care and family voice and choice. Sometimes this will not be popular among other professionals, and you will need to balance your advocacy with respect for other perspectives and roles. Your relationships should be respectful, transparent, and conducted with integrity.

Viewing families as part of the solution rather than the problem sometimes requires a shift in thinking for our system partners who may approach situations in a deficit-based manner. As a result, the PPS provider can be in a difficult position when working in this realm.

Perhaps the most important guideline is to clarify your role when working in systems and with partners. Be consistent in your role and completion of tasks, encouraging family-friendly approaches, scan material for clinical references that are not family friendly, and emphasize the benefits of family involvement and partnering. Encourage cross-systems partnerships whenever possible. Promote authentic family voice and choice in your interactions with partners and systems. Remember you are representing the voice of families and your organization, not your own personal interests.

Additional guidelines include staying current on topics and trends in your field. You need to be well-informed and know where to find information to adequately support the families you work with. When working as a PPS provider, be sure you do not intentionally or unintentionally participate in violations of policies or regulations. Do not ask others to violate organizational/system policies or regulations. If you become aware of violations, seek guidance from your supervisor on how to handle the situation or what your next steps should be.



Test Your Knowledge

The following situations are ones you may encounter as a PPS provider working in communities and with partners. For each one, review the situation and identify the ethical concern presented to the PPS provider. Explain how you would address the situation.

Ethical dilemmas and potential resolutions or approaches follow each situation. Check yourself to see if you accurately identified the issue and if your approach aligned with the guidance provided.

Section 6: Scenario 1 – “Those People”

While attending a training provided by your state on an assessment tool to determine a family’s level of needs, other providers begin speaking about families as “those people,” saying that families should quit trying to figure out how to keep their kids at home and just put them in residential treatment centers. As an adoptive parent of children with behavioral health needs, as well as providing support to families who are trying to keep their children at home, you are angered and offended by this statement and defensive on behalf of the families you serve. You catch yourself wanting to lash out.

Would you respond? If so, what would you say to the providers about how they refer to families?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 1

Ethical dilemma: You are a parent and a professional PPS provider for families, so it is natural that such negative words and perceptions would upset you. However, you are in a professional role at this training and lashing out will reflect poorly on you, your profession, and organization. You must represent yourself in a professional manner even when faced with negativity or with issues that strike a nerve for you personally. This is something that you not only model for other parents, but for your co-workers and community partners.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Interject at an appropriate opening and share some evidence-based information on the importance of keeping children in least-restrictive care, citing resources that the participants can refer to after the training.
- Share your perspective that everyone is there to learn how to help families that want to keep their children with special needs at home, and request that the conversation focus on how to support them through using this model rather than being negative about families’ situations and skills.
- Take a deep breath and excuse yourself to the hallway to regain your composure. Return to the training as soon as you’ve contained your emotions and wait for an opportunity to calmly share your perspective on providing support services to families.

Check Yourself: Scenario 1

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Section 6: Scenario 2 – Greta

You live on the same street as Greta, whose family is being served in your program. Although you do not work directly with Greta, you are aware of their situation from group supervision, and the family is also aware that you are a PPS provider in the program. Unfortunately, your son and Greta’s son do not get along and have gotten into a heated argument in the front yard. Greta is yelling at you to control your child and saying that you must not know how to do your job (as a PPS provider). She threatens to call your supervisor to make a complaint. Other neighbors, who know what you do for a living, are witnessing the scene.

How would you handle this situation in your neighborhood and at work? How would your response to this situation be different if you were not a PPS provider?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 2

Ethical dilemma: Although you are not directly serving this family, Greta is aware of your employment and your role as a PPS provider. This is a situation where your professional status in your community intersects with your personal life. You want and need to defend your child just as any parent does, but Greta and the neighbors are viewing you as a PPS provider and not just a neighbor. How you handle such situations in public will reflect not only on you but also on the PPS provider profession. In such situations, it would be important to share what occurred and seek guidance from your supervisor on how to handle the situation with your son and Greta’s son. Your supervisor also may want to bring in Greta’s PPS provider to develop a plan to model appropriate behavior for Greta and also seek resources to help with Greta’s son’s behavior.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- State that everyone is too angry right now to discuss what is going on between the two boys, that you will talk with your son and speak with her once everyone has calmed down. Take your son inside the house to discuss what happened and then decide how to address this with Greta on the following day.
- Discuss the situation with your supervisor so that she is aware of a potential complaint. Also request that Greta’s handling of the situation could be an opportunity for her PPS provider to discuss a more appropriate way to handle such situations.
- Do not engage the other parent, but take your child into your home and ignore Greta’s threats. Talk with your supervisor the following day about what occurred.

Check Yourself: Scenario 2

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Section 6: Scenario 3 – Community Stakeholders

You are with a client at a community stakeholders meeting where several high-level executives around the table are downplaying the suggestions being expressed by family members to improve children’s mental health services. These executives are directly involved with funding some of your agency’s programs.

Would you respond? What would you say to your community partners?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 3

Ethical dilemma: In this situation, you are caught between being a PPS provider and being protective of funding for necessary programs and services for families. It will require effective advocacy skills to ensure that the parents are heard in a way that does not alienate policymakers and funders.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Acknowledge the ideas of both the executives and family members, emphasizing that you are glad to be in a meeting with policymakers that recognize the expertise of parents. Then ask if the ideas from the parents could be reviewed again in light of their experience living with children with mental health issues and receiving services from the system. Maintain a professional tone and demeanor, using strengths-based language.
- Speak up to emphasize that families are the customers of the system and have valuable experience of how programs work on a daily basis with families. You might also refer to the fact that family voice is one of the core values of a system of care for children and offer to bring further information about systems of care to the next meeting.
- Encourage families to express their views in a strengths-based manner that acknowledges the expertise of everyone at the table. If possible, suggest meeting with families before the next meeting to assist them in preparing their thoughts and writing down what they want to say to community stakeholders.

Check Yourself: Scenario 3

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 6: Scenario 4 – Facebook

A post is being generated on Facebook that is highly critical of several child-serving agencies with which you collaborate and share funding. You actually agree with some of what is being said based on your experience and opinions about children’s



mental health services. You are tempted to agree with the comments posted on your page, but it would mean agreeing with negative comments about your agency and collaborative partners.

As a PPS provider how would you handle this social media situation? What is your organization's policy on social media, including email, Facebook, Twitter?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 4

Ethical dilemma: Social media is a tricky issue for the PPS provider and could unintentionally create problems for you and your organization. Although your Facebook page is your personal domain, it is seen by many with whom you work, by your employer, and by families that seek your support. Your agency will likely have an internet and social media policy, but it is not appropriate to engage in negative commentary about your employer or collaborative partners on any social media. As with families, it is best to be strengths-based and reframe negative statements, or to be proactive to avoid being caught in situations such as this by adhering to a no-comment policy on social media where your work is concerned.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- If the comment is on your page, abstain from commenting on the post or the social media platform, removing it from your Facebook page if necessary. Facebook can be beneficial but can also add fuel to an already burning fire. It is important to educate families and the community while still trying to focus on resolution to concerns.
- If you have concerns about some of the policies or actions of your agency, speak with your supervisor and let him/her know that others are commenting on social media, which can reflect poorly on the agency.
- If it is a negative comment posted on someone else's page, ignore it. If asked about your lack of response or removal of a post, state that you separate your work from your personal life, including not commenting on your personal Facebook page about work-related issues.

Check Yourself: Scenario 4

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 6: Scenario 5 – Focus Group

You have been invited to participate on a committee to plan a focus group for families to voice their perspectives on how their community can improve support of families who have behavioral health, developmental disability, and substance use recovery challenges. Another member of the committee happens to be the director of one of your funding sources. In the process of planning the events, she suggests inviting child welfare employees to attend the group so they can hear from concerned parents directly. You believe that parents will not speak honestly if they fear that child welfare will use their statements against them.



How do you address this partner's suggestion as a PPS provider?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 5

Ethical dilemma: In this situation, the focus for this community event is to obtain the perspective of families and having child welfare officials participate may be intimidating to families. Your role on the planning committee is to ensure that the process and event is family-driven and informed by the family perspective. The director in this situation probably has good intentions and has not considered the potential negative impact of the presence of the child welfare staff to such an event. You should approach situations like this by giving the person the benefit of the doubt and sharing the family perspective regarding their suggestion.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Listen to the director's ideas while asking questions to help the director understand the potentially negative impact that the presence of child welfare staff could have on families speaking freely at the meeting.
- Bring to the attention of the group that many families present may have had negative experiences with the child welfare system and will be hesitant to discuss their ideas about improving the system in the presence of some system representatives. Point out the importance of being transparent with families, and emphasize that families should be informed in advance if child welfare staff will be present at the meeting. Note that attendance may not be what we want if families feel that their voices won't be heard or that their opinions will be held against them.
- Offer to host a focus group with families with a note taker that would record all of the comments made by families without identifying their names. In this way families would feel less threatened about sharing their honest perspectives, and the director will gain more authentic input from families.

Check Yourself: Scenario 5

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 6: Scenario 6 – Funding

While attending a local behavioral health conference, a manager of the state mental health department stopped to talk with you in the hall. She began the conversation by saying how much they appreciate the help your organization provides for the families you both serve. She emphasized that she would love to work with your agency more, but many of their employees are frustrated by some of your agency's advocacy work. As examples, she mentioned that staff are offended by your co-workers encouraging parents to speak their opinions that are sometimes critical of the agency. She suggested that funding for your organization is dependent on decreasing or ceasing this type of advocacy work.

What would you say to the manager of the state mental health department and what actions would you take following the conversation?



Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 6

Ethical dilemma: The agencies and organizations we work with often do not fully understand the family-run organization (or PPS provider) mission and purpose. Being advocates is part of the PPS provider support offered to families whom you serve. It is important to be consistent in the message that parents/families have expertise regarding their children and that their ideas will not always agree with the state’s perspective. As a PPS provider, it is your role to assist the parent in appropriately and effectively communicating their needs, ideas, and opinions about policies, funding, and services that affect their child or family. It is also the role of the family organization to share information, research, and resources about children’s mental health so that families have information to make the best choices for their children and family. This is advocacy, but it is also a critical component of family support services.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Thank her for sharing her thoughts with you, and assure her that you will bring her concerns up with your supervisor. Assure her that your agency values being a good partner, just as it is important to maintain collaborative relationships with the families you both serve. Follow up by sharing the conversation with your supervisor as promised, and take action on any further steps your supervisor recommends.
- Thank her and tell her that this conversation is an important one. Offer to schedule a meeting with your director to discuss, understand, and respect each partner’s mission and values, as well as to ensure family trust isn’t jeopardized through this collaboration of efforts. Remember to inform whoever you referred her to call so they will know to expect this conversation.

Check Yourself: Scenario 6

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 6: Scenario 7 – Helen

You are providing support for the mother of a child with an individualized education plan (IEP) for his behavioral health needs at a local school. Based on conversations with the mother, you suspect that the school is not following her child’s IEP and violating the child’s rights; the mother has signed release forms giving you permission to speak with the school. One of the teachers, Helen, who regularly communicates with the parent, calls you one evening and confirms that the school is out of compliance with the child’s IEP. You now have the information you need to help this child and his parents. However, it may be obvious where you received the information and Helen will be at risk of losing her job if the school knows that she spoke with you. Helen asks that you don’t share information with the family but hopes that you can help in some way.

How do you proceed? What is your obligation to the child and mother? What is your obligation to the teacher, Helen?



Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 7

Ethical dilemma: A PPS provider will always have a release form signed by the parent before speaking with anyone about the child. Once there is permission to speak to teachers or other providers, PPS providers often obtain knowledge that is critical for a family but could be detrimental to the source sharing that knowledge. In this situation, you need to use the information Helen has provided to help this child succeed. However, you also need to be respectful of the manner in which it was shared with you and protective of the source, Helen, who is also trying to help the child in the only way that she can. It is important that the PPS provider consider all potential impacts of sharing this information, explore options for acting on what’s been shared, and seek guidance from a supervisor about any concerns about negative consequences for everyone involved.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Request an IEP meeting and ask targeted questions so that the issues must be discussed but do not have to be brought up by that teacher. You also can ask Helen to bring up some aspect of the problem to get the discussion going but allow her to take a back seat in the discussion and not have her be the one giving all the info.
- Encourage Helen to talk with the principal about the possible consequences of the school not following the IEP, therefore violating the child’s rights, and how it could impact the school (reputation, funding, audits, legal issues, etc.). Suggest to the principal that the school make some changes before someone else recognizes the issue and makes it public. You would need to suggest a timeline for Helen to do this, though, as you will need to act on this in a short time frame in the best interest of the child.
- Contact your supervisor about the situation, exploring the different ways you can support the family/child as well as avoid negative consequences for Helen. Role-play how to use this information with the family and school to act in the best interest of the child.

Check Yourself: Scenario 7

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?

Section 6: Scenario 8 – Lilly

Lilly, a mother you are working with, experiences a very serious situation with her adoptive child with reactive attachment disorder. Lilly is angry and feels that the child protection agency has not provided the services and supports that she needs. She sends an angry email throughout the community and to state agency administrators detailing the child’s out-of-control behavior the night before. You are receiving calls and emails about Lilly’s behavior and a number of professionals on the team express the possibility of removing the child from her custody. Your first obligation is to Lilly but you also need to maintain positive working relationships in the community. How do you handle this situation?



How would you respond to calls from professionals on the team about Lilly's behavior? Would you say anything to Lilly about the calls and, if so, how would you approach the conversation?

Ethical Dilemma, Potential Resolutions or Approaches: Scenario 8

Ethical dilemma: Parents have a right to express their feelings about the treatment their child does or does not receive. The way in which they share their anger, disagreement, or concerns can at times be counterproductive and lead to unintentional negative consequences. One of your goals as a PPS provider is to support families to effectively communicate their needs. In this instance, although you might agree that her child needs the services, you recognize that her method of communication is alienating providers that could help her. You are faced with the need to balance your relationship with the parent, the child's needs, and the partnership of the providers and community members involved.

Potential resolutions or approaches to the situation:

- Emphasize to providers that although acting in anger may not be the best approach, the mother is desperate and is not receiving the services she needs to help her child. Removing the child from the home is not a good solution for the child or parent but providing additional resources is what the mother is asking for.
- Acknowledge the team members' concerns but note that the mother also appears very concerned about her child and is reaching out for help in the only way she knows how. Suggest ways for the team to support the mother in expressing her needs and additional resources to help her child and family.

Check Yourself: Scenario 8

Did your response or approach align with the suggested approaches? What was different in your approach and why?



Preventing Ethical Dilemmas in the Community and with Partners

Can you identify other possible ethical situations that could occur in the community or with partners?

Discuss how you could prevent them from occurring.

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