

Ethical Standards for School Counselors – Discussion Questions & Answers

Note: *These questions and answers refer to the 2004 version of the Ethical Standards for School Counseling. The answers came from groups of students in my EDC 8014 classes at Ottawa University, after much discussion. I'm offering them here as food for thought, **not** as official or legal answers to the questions.*

1. From the preamble: What is the difference between “special care and affirmation” and “preferential treatment?” Where is the line between the two?

“Special care and affirmation” means acknowledging and validating differences, and accommodating them in a way that’s still fair to everyone, and meeting the legitimate needs of all. “Preferential treatment” means stepping over the line into unfairness, favoritism, or discrimination, or enabling/rescuing rather than holding everyone accountable in a balanced way.

2. From A.1.a: How does the bottom line of “Students and student needs always come first” affect or impact school politics? Give an example.

Student needs must come before all other considerations, including district politics or insistent/demanding parents. One example is that even if a high-powered parent tries to intimidate the administration or teachers by bringing an attorney to a parent-teacher meeting, the school is still responsible for making sure the students’ needs (not the parents’ wishes) come first.

Another example is students whose immigration status is undocumented. The law says all students have the right to attend K-12 schools, regardless of the heated political issue of immigration or their documentation/citizenship status.

A third example is if there were a student death on campus, and the administration would rather not address the issue at school. If the student population needs help and support, those needs come before an administrator’s discomfort with dealing with death, grief, and loss on campus.

3. From A.3.b: When could the students’ right to choose post-secondary education options become an ethical issue? Give an example.

A student may want to do something that his/her parents oppose, such as join the military, play in a punk band, or go to cosmetology school rather than a four-year university. School counselors need to provide the student with information about a wide variety of options.

Also, in some cultures, it’s traditional for parents to choose careers for their children, even if the child wants to do something different. Again, school counselors can provide a variety of information and encourage students to be true to themselves in general, but must keep their own personal opinions out of the picture.

4. From A.4.b: What are examples of dual relationships with colleagues that might impact the counselor/student relationship? Give at least three examples.

- *A counselor who's friends with or dating a student's parent outside of school*
- *A counselor who's dating a teacher or coach in the same school*
- *A counselor who's also a student's coach*
- *A counselor who has a private practice outside of the school and whose clients include teachers, administrators, or parents of a student*
- *A counselor who lives in the same neighborhood as a student's family or they go to the same church*

5. From A.6.a: What are some examples of students who would not be appropriate for a school-based support group? Give at least three examples.

- *A student who's highly impulsive and may repeatedly break confidentiality or not be able to stay on task in group*
- *A very withdrawn student who refuses to speak or shuts down in front of others*
- *A student whose issues are so intense that they may be too much for a school based support group (post-traumatic stress following a gang rape, addiction to meth, panic disorder, etc.)*
- *A student who has violent outbursts*
- *A student who's so low-functioning that he/she can't do the activities (verbal or written) that are planned for group*

6. From A.6.d: Under what circumstances would you need to follow up with a school support group member? Give at least two examples.

- *A student who implies or talks directly about suicide during group*
- *A student who cried a lot during a particular group*
- *A student who talks about harming someone (self or others)*
- *A student who talks (directly or indirectly) about being abused*
- *A student who seems particularly quiet or withdrawn*
- *A student who is acting "odd" in any way – and the counselors suspects possible drug use or something else that just doesn't seem right. Follow up directly after group, or as soon as possible.*

7. From A.7.a: What are some examples of "clear and imminent danger" that would lead you to make a phone call home? Give at least four examples.

Suicide threat or attempt, self-injury, eating disorders, addiction or incident with drugs, pregnancy, sexual activity with someone over 18, or runaway plan.

8. From B.1.a: How do you balance the students' right to privacy with the responsibility to collaborate with parents whenever possible? Where is the line between the two?

When health and/or safety are at risk, contact parents. Let students know in advance when you're going to make a call, and invite them to make the call or be present during the call. You can express general concern to parents without telling them all the details of what the student said to you. You can offer

suggestions to the parent (district approved, keeping your personal biases out of the picture) to help resolve the issue. Or you can ask the parents, “What can I do to support all of you in this situation?”

9. From B.1.d: What are some specific examples of “diversity among families” that you may run into in regard to parents and guardians of students? Give at least four examples.

- Multi-racial or multi-ethnic families, gay/lesbian parents or family members (or students)*
- Students living in group homes or foster homes*
- Students living with grandparents or other relatives*
- Blended (step) families*
- Non-English speaking parents*
- Military families*
- Families where one parent works out of town*
- Diversity in family income (more or less than the norm for your school)*
- Families with non-traditional or very strong religious practices (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses, who don’t stand for the pledge of allegiance or celebrate birthdays or Christmas)*

10. From D.1.b: What are some examples of potential threats that you would need to report to your administration if you heard them. Give at least three examples.

- Harm or threat of harm to others*
- A physical fight on campus or directly before or after school*
- Possession of drugs or weapons at school*
- A student under the influence of drugs or alcohol at school*

11. From D.1.d: What are some diplomatic and pro-active ways you could let your administrators know what is and isn’t working in your program or department? Give at least three examples.

- Do student or staff surveys, and report findings to administration*
- Offer pre- and post-tests to check the effectiveness of programs, and report findings to administration*
- If you have frustrations, make a clear and concise list and schedule a meeting with your administrator to discuss things, and come to the meeting with at least one positive suggestion or request for every frustration you list.*

12. From E.1.c: Give at least five examples of ways you can maintain ongoing personal and professional growth (give at least three of your examples regarding personal growth).

- Keep up with new technologies*
- Collaborate with other counselors*
- Attend conferences/workshops/ trainings*
- Take additional classes*
- Spend time online reading articles and websites in your counseling areas of interest*
- Join a professional counseling organization and scan their journal articles for news and updates*
- Attend or facilitate staff retreats (or personal retreats)*

- Address your own unresolved losses, traumas, and other emotional issues
- Do lots of self-care
- Learn and use stress management techniques
- Travel during your time off

13. From E.2: Give at least five examples of ways that you could become more aware of and sensitive to diversity issues in your school.

- Walk the campus between classes, during lunch, and before and after school, and observe interactions between students, such as how they group themselves, who sits alone, etc. Then stop, sit, and get to know students (unless they're openly hostile!).
- Talk with students and parents about diversity issues. Ask them what they see and what they think is needed at school regarding diversity issues.
- Attend after-school activities such as sports, dances, or club meetings.
- Attend different community activities or functions with diversity themes (such as Greek Fest, Special Olympics events, etc.).
- Sponsor a student club or a diversity night for parents.
- Offer trainings for staff when you've gathered information relevant to your school.
- Create "how to" handouts or lists of websites for staff members to get familiar with that will help them better understand and respond to diversity issues.

14. From G.2: How can you stay diplomatic and be non-confrontational in the event that you needed to directly approach a colleague whose ethical behavior is in question? Give at least three examples.

1. Go directly to the person in question first, rather than to his or her supervisor.
2. Be aware of privacy. Talk about the issue away from other people.
3. Bring a neutral third party along if you think that's needed.
4. Approach the person in a friendly way, from a place of concern, not confrontation. Use "I" statements. "I wanted to run something by you..." Ask for clarification.
5. Then express your concern: "My fear for you is..." rather than, "You shouldn't be..."
6. If possible, and if the other person seems open to it, offer your help, ideas, or support. "Is there anything I can do to help?" is more compassionate and productive than, "I'm telling!"
7. If you do ethically need to share information with someone else (such as the person's supervisor), let the person know what you're planning to do, unless you fear for your safety.
8. If you approach the person's supervisor, make it clear that you're doing so out of concern and let the supervisor know you've already approached the person directly. Seek solutions rather than punishment.
9. Document EVERYTHING!