

STEPS: SOLUTIONS TO ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN SCHOOLS (Stone, 2001)

STEPS: Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools (2001) adapts and extends the seven steps of The Practitioner's Guide to Ethical Decision Making developed by The American Counseling Association (ACA) model and extends the conceptual and contextual applications so they align with the uniqueness of counseling in schools.

STEPS is a nine step model which considers the emotional influences of a problem, the chronological and developmental appropriateness of the solution, the setting and parent's right.

1. Define the problem emotionally and intellectually
2. Apply the ASCA and ACA Code of Ethics and the law
3. Consider the chronological and developmental levels
4. Consider the setting, parental rights, and minors rights
5. Apply the moral principals
6. Determine the potential courses of action and their consequences
7. Evaluate the selected course of action
8. Consult
9. Implement the course of action

1. Define the Problem Emotionally and Intellectually

How do your emotions define this problem (your initial reaction)? What does your heart tell you should happen in this case? File this initial reaction away for later reference.

How does your intellect define the problem; unemotionally, objectively? What are the facts? Separate out the hearsay but remember that rumors often inform. Separate out the facts, innuendos, rumors, hearsay, and hypotheses. However, in school settings we cannot rule out the hearsay or rumors as they are often how school counselors discover the truth about situations that involve their students.

2. Apply the ASCA and ACA Ethical Codes and the Law

Ask yourself whether your code of ethics or the law offers a possible solution to the problem. Ethical dilemmas are often complex and we will not usually find a hard and fast simple solution in the codes or laws.

3. Consider the chronological and developmental levels

How does the student's developmental level impact the dilemma and how you will approach it? It matters how old a child is and how they demonstrate their ability to make informed decisions. Also, school counselors have to continually remind themselves that the younger and more immature the child, the greater our responsibility is to their parents/guardians.

4. Consider the setting, parental/guardian rights and minors' rights

You must consider the rights of parents/guardians to be the guiding voice in their children's lives, especially in value-laden decisions. Clear or imminent danger can take many forms and is not necessarily an uplifted knife when you are talking about a minor in a setting called schools. Parents' rights to be informed and involved when their children are in harm's way must be honored.

5. Apply the Moral Principals (Kitchener, 1984)

Consider the basic moral principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, and loyalty (Kitchener 1984) and apply them to the situation. It may help to prioritize these principles and think through ways in which they can support a resolution to the dilemma.

6. Determine Your Potential Courses of Action and Their Consequences

Consider possible and probable courses of action. In this process of thinking about many different possibilities for action, it is helpful to write down the options and also to discuss options with another person. Examine the good and bad consequences of various decisions. Ponder the implications of each course of action for the student, for others who are

related to the student, and for you. List the good and bad consequences of each decision.

7. Evaluate the Selected Action

Evaluate each option considering the information you have gathered. and assess the potential consequences for all the parties involved. Ponder the implications of each course of action for the student, for others who will be affected, and for yourself as a counselor. Eliminate the options that clearly do not give the desired results or cause even more problematic consequences. Review the remaining options to determine which option or combination of options best fits the situation and addresses the priorities you have identified.

8. Consult

Discuss your case with a fellow professional, preferably a supervisor, to help you illuminate the issues. In the throes of an ethical dilemma it is sometimes difficult to see all the issues clearly. School counselors often have to do their ethical problem solving on the run. It is not always possible or feasible for school counselors to close their office doors and sit with paper and pencil to walk through the ethical decision making model. There consultation is the one step that should never be skipped (Stone, 2001).

9. Implement the Course of Action

Go forward with your decision after you have considered the previous steps. Regardless of your decision, risk follows but you made the best decision based on the advice and information you had at the time. School counselors cannot practice risk free but we can reduce our risk and raise our support for students by using ethical reasoning.

STEPS is reprinted from Stone, C.(2005; 2010). Ethics and Law for School Counselors. ASCA: Alexandria, VA