

Steps in Ethical Decision Making

Ethical Decision-Making Model (Chapter 8)*

Pope, Velasquez, Chavez-Duenas & Adames (2021)

1. State the question/dilemma/concern as clearly as possible?
Make sure you don't miss important points in formulating
The problem – have someone read over to check for understanding
2. Anticipate who will be affected by the decision
No one lives in a vacuum – who else may be impacted and how?
3. Figure out who, if anyone, is the client
Minors, 3rd party therapy, insurance: who is the true client?
4. Assess whether we have knowledge, competence, skill, experience or expertise
Is there someone else better suited to help you decide, consult or take over?
5. Review relevant ethical codes: do you know what is ethics and what is law?
Consider consulting an ethical colleague or ethics expert in your field?
6. Review relevant legal standards: do you know what is law and what is ethics?
Consider consulting with an attorney to clarify?
7. Review relevant theory and research
Include emerging theory, research and practice? Seek consultation with a subject
matter expert – our field is too big for us to be able to keep up with new developments
8. Consider whether personal feelings, biases or self-interest might be shading our decision-
making? What feelings are we having about the decision? Are operating out of pride,
fear, greed, or ignorance? Being brutally honest can save you lots of headache here.
9. Consider if social, cultural, religious or other factors may be impacting this decision?
How does our experience/worldview impact what we see and anticipate?
We are all racial, classed and cultural beings embedded in a sociohistorical context.
10. Consider consultation
“Two heads are better than one” is a saying for reason. Seek someone you trust,
someone with experience, someone with expertise to offer you a second opinion.
11. Develop alternative courses of action
Just like in diagnosis, the danger is closing to judgment too soon. Generating two or
Three alternative opinions may broaden your thinking and help you see other options.

12. Think through the alternative courses of action
Do the alternatives reveal benefits we might want to incorporate? What are the risks and benefits? Can you anticipate how your plan might be flawed or go wrong?
13. Try to adopt the perspective of each of the parties who may be affected
Imagine how each of the parties may react? Guard against 'correspondence bias.'
14. Decide what to do, review/reconsider your choice, then implement your choice
Consider "sleeping on it for a night" or consulting with a trusted colleague before implementing your choice?
15. Document the process and assess the results
Document how you decided, which factors/consultants influenced your thinking? Did you accomplish your goals? Were there unintended consequences? Given what You know after implementation/seeing other's reactions, would you have made the same choice?
16. Assume personal responsibility for the consequences of your choice/actions
Can you admit your poor choice/action or inaction and accept the blame?
17. Consider implications for preparation, planning and prevention
What policy/procedure/attitudes might you adjust to avoid a re-occurrence?
What could we add to/subtract/alter in our practice to make it stronger in the future?

* Pope, Keneth S., Velasquez, Melba J. T., Chavez-Duenas, Nayeli Y. and Adames, Hector Y. (2021). Ethics in psychotherapy and counseling: A practical guide. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.