

# Introduction to Psychological Counselling

Values and Ethics in Counselling

Session Week 9

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# Aim

- to develop a further understanding of the Values and Ethics in Counselling
- to further develop the skills of counselling and their application with ethical principles.

# Values and Ethics in Counselling

- All counsellors develop personal system of ethics for how they work with their clients.
- The word 'Ethics' is sometimes defined as the science of morals in human conduct.
- Morals are concerned with the distinction between right and wrong and with accepted rules and standards of behaviour.
- Thus ethical codes for counselling attempts to present acceptable standards for practice.

## Why does Counselling need Ethical Codes?

- Ethical issues permeates counslling practice. To use legal language, counsellors always have a duty of care to their clients.
- To some extent counslling relationships are complicated
  - Client's issues/problems are complicated
  - The nature of the relationship itself is complicated
  - Therapy may be characterized by abrupt changes, which may have severe implications for the client's well-being.
- Counsellors are human, and humans are fallible. Ethical codes provide guidance and accountability.

# Implications of the Stages of Ethical Development

- We are on a continuum of development
- A counselor's basis for ethical judgment is characterized by the dominant stage of development
- Stages are continuous & overlapping
- Internal ethical conflicts can occur between ethical reasoning, actions, and situations

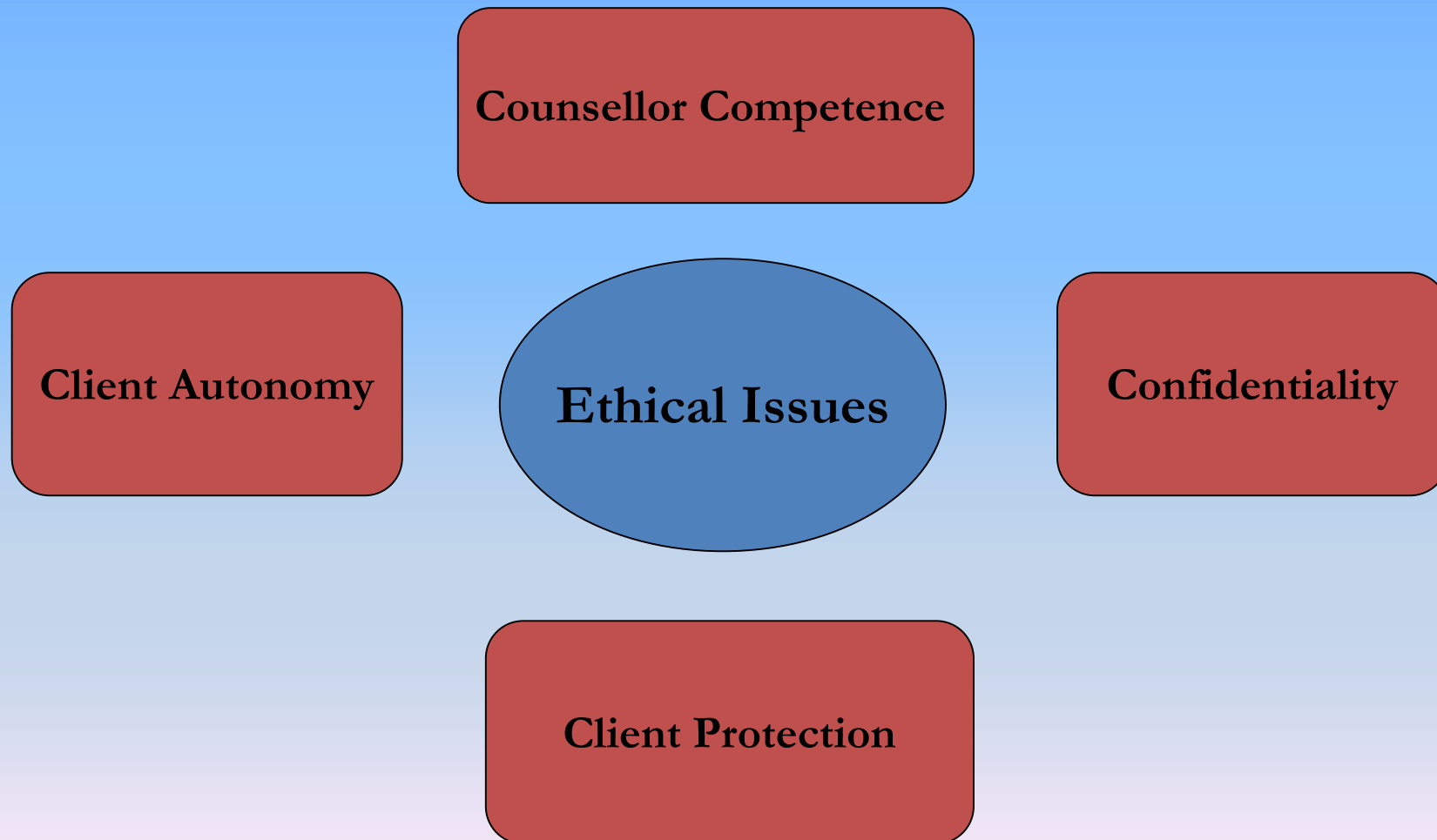
# Values and the Counselling Relationship

- Value conflicts:
  - To refer or not to refer
  - Referrals appropriate when:
    - Counsellor's boundaries of competence have been reached
    - Counsellor has extreme discomfort with a client's values
    - Counsellor is unable to maintain objectivity
    - Counsellor has grave concerns about imposing his or her values on the client
- Development of value systems are influenced by:
  - Family
  - Peer group
  - Culture
  - Religion
  - Education etc...

# Ethical Codes in Counselling

- **Ethical codes are guidelines for what Counsellors can and cannot do** that have been developed by each Counselling discipline's body.
- **Ethical codes are not set in stone.** They are principles upon which to guide practice.
- Each counselling situation is unique and sometimes the code requires interpretation
- There are two dimensions to ethical decision making:
  - *Virtue ethics:* Above and beyond the obligatory ethics and are idealistic
  - *Principle ethics:* Overt ethical obligations that must be addressed.

# 4 Groups of Ethical Issues in Counselling





# Ethical Issues in Counselling

- **Counsellor Competence**
  - Relationship (with client) Competence
  - Technical Competence
  - Readiness to practise
  - Fitness to practise
  - Recognizing limitations and making referrals
- **Client Autonomy**
  - Respect for client self-determination
  - Accuracy in counselling information
  - Accuracy in statements about professional competence
  - Honest statements about counselling processes and outcomes
  - Respect for diverse values

# Ethical Issues in Counselling

- **Confidentiality**
  - Any limitations communicated in advance
  - Consent for communication with third parties
  - Issues of permission and parental involvement with minors
  - Permission to record sessions
  - Security of all client records.
- **Client Protection**
  - Maintaining appropriate boundaries to the counselling relationship
  - Avoidance of emotional exploitation
  - Protection of clients' physical safety
  - Addressing the derivational behaviour of other counsellors.

# Malpractice and Competence

- Malpractice
  - Occurs when a counselor fails to provide reasonable care that is generally provided by other professionals and it results in injury to the client.
  - Four conditions must exist:
    - The counselor had a duty to the client
    - The duty of care was not met
    - The client was injured in the process
    - There was a close causal relationship between the counselor's failure to provide reasonable care and the client's injury
- To provide competent treatment, counsellors need to:
  - only provide services for which they are qualified
  - accurately represent their credentials and qualifications
  - keep up on current information of the field, especially in specialty areas
  - seek counseling when they have personal issues

# Confidentiality in Counselling

- Legal protection of the client which prevents a counselor from disclosing what was said within the counseling session(s)
- This right belongs to the client, not the counselor
- When **Confidentiality** doesn't apply:
  - When a client needs hospitalization
  - When the client is suicidal
  - When the client uses a mental disorder as a legal defense
  - When an underage child is being abused
  - When a counselor is performing a court ordered evaluation
  - When the client sues the counselor, etc ...

# Learning Journal

## Exercise

- In what areas do you consider yourself most at risk of acting unethically when you counsel your client?
- What can you do to protect your clients and yourself from your potential to act in the areas you have identified?

## Reflective Journal

- Complete your Learning Journal entry from today's class.

# Next – Week 10 Session

## The Process of Counselling

# References

- Welfel, Elizabeth Reynolds (2010) Ethics in Counselling and Psychotherapy: Standards, Research, and Emerging Issues (Belmont, CA: Brooks/ Cole)