

Ethics is the study of morality. It is one of the three major studies of philosophy along with epistemology and metaphysics. Ethics entails the studying of people's behaviors, actions, and values, and how appropriate they are, depending on the setting. The setting you are in, and the norms of that group, determine whether an action you take is acceptable or unacceptable behavior. This is also true in a professional setting, hence, the term professional ethics.

Professional ethics focuses on the actions that are considered to be right or wrong in the workplace and in public matters. As a health educator, ethical conduct is important because we belong to a profession whose mission is to serve the individual and one where we interact with a lot of different people. Our reputation is the most important thing in our field. We want our clients or students to feel like they can trust us and that we will not lie to them or steer them wrong.

Ethical theories provide frameworks by which health education specialists are able to evaluate whether human actions are acceptable or not. Ethical theories have been categorized into two categories. The first is deontology, which is also referred to as formalism or non-consequentialism, and the second is teleology, which is commonly called consequentialism. Deontological theories claim that certain actions are fundamentally right or wrong, or good or bad, without regard for their consequences. According to this theory, lying is wrong, regardless of the benefits it may bring. Deontology theories involve making decisions based on a moral code or rules, the end (consequences) does not justify the means of the act. Teleological theories, on the other hand, evaluate the moral status of an act by the goodness of the consequences. If the act will produce good or happiness from the recipient, then it is considered to be morally okay, if the act does not produce good or happiness, then it is considered immoral. This theory states that the end does justify the means.

Since deontologists and teleologists are not in agreement when it comes to the rationale that should be used in making ethical decisions, and in order to live in a moral society, everyone must be able to work from a common moral ground. To help health educators have a common foundation for making ethical decisions to work from, five basic principles for making ethical decisions have been identified. The first is the value of life principle, which is considered the most basic of principles. This principle states that no life should be ended without strong justification. Due to this principle, topics like abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and capital punishment raise a number of ethical questions. This principle can be applied to a health education ethical decision by making sure that as the health educator you are valuing your client or student. You want to make sure that no matter what the ethical problem you're facing is, you put the value of human life first. For example, if your client wants to try this new "diet", but you learned through research that the diet has been found to be unsafe, you must make the decision to not let them partake in this diet in an attempt to keep them safe.

The second is the principle of goodness and rightness. This principle includes two parallel principles of ethics: (1) the principle of non-maleficence and (2) the principle of beneficence, or benevolence. Non-maleficence refers to the non-infliction of harm to others. It can be broken into three components: not inflicting harm, preventing harm, and removing harm when it is present. Beneficence implies more than just avoiding doing harm. It describes the principles of doing good, demonstrating kindness, and compassion, and helping others. When making a health ethical decision this principle can be applied to how you approach a goal for a client. If you see a client is hurting, whether it be physically or emotionally, you do not want to make any comments or strategies that would potentially cause more harm or make them feel bad about themselves and their current decision-making. Your approach should be one that is kind

and delicate so that you can provide them with strategies and goals on how they can start to remove the harm that is currently present at hand.

The third principle is the principle of justice or fairness. This principle's focus is on people treating other people fairly and justly in distributing goodness (benefits) and badness (burdens). Under this principle, justice is examined in two ways, (1) procedural and (2) distributive. Procedural justice focuses on whether or not fair procedures were in place, and whether those procedures were followed. Distributive justice focuses on the allocation of resources. In making an ethical decision as a health education specialist, this principle can be applied by making sure that you have treated your client or student justly and have given him or her what they are owed. Also, you must make sure that the decisions or recommendations you make for them are decisions that are realistic and fair for their current economic status.

The fourth principle is truth-telling, or honesty. This principle focuses on communication and its importance of it; even more so, the importance of being honest when communicating with someone. This principle understands that people will lie, but the lying has to be justified. When applying this principle to an ethical health decision, you must, no matter what your client or student believes, or wants to believe, always give them the truth in any situation. Especially if it is a situation that will assist them in becoming healthier or remaining safe. An example of this could be, telling your client or student that they are behaving in a dangerous lifestyle even though they think they are not.

The fifth and final principle is the principle of individual freedom (equality principle, or principle of autonomy). This principle states that people, being individuals with individual differences, must have the freedom to choose their own ways and means of being moral within the framework of the other four basic principles. It states that individual freedom is limited by

the other four principles. Essentially the principle of autonomy is all about the idea that we should respect others for who they are. In applying an ethical health decision this principle is applied when a health education specialist, when engaging others to enhance their health behaviors, is making sure that they are respecting the rights of others, to deliberate, choose, and act for themselves.

As a school-based health educator, I must make sure that I follow the responsibilities that are laid upon me as a health education specialist. I must also make sure that I am always following the code of ethics, no matter the situation or population. My population involves students, administration, parents, PE teachers, and food workers. I must make sure that I am in constant communication and partnership with them so that I know how to best serve my population.

I am responsible for the public I work with and I must make sure I support the rights of individuals when making informed decisions. I will encourage actions, and social policies, communicate benefits, act responsibly, and protect the privacy of individuals. I will also provide equitable services to all the people I serve (Article 1). In order to make sure I am serving my community responsibly, I must first make sure that I assess the needs of my community (Responsibility 1). This will give me a foundation to begin my program planning (curriculum). As a school health education specialist, I need to base my curriculum on the needs of my students. I will make sure I am being responsible for my profession and my employer (Article 2 & 3) by maintaining, improving, and expanding my professional knowledge. This will help the students and families I serve when they come to me as a resource person (Responsibility 6). When students or families come to me as a resource person I will make sure that I am confident in my work, but also make sure that I don't put myself in a conflict of interest situation. My

reputation, and the reputation of this field, can always be put at risk. I must make sure I advocate for my profession via my actions and my decisions (Responsibility 7).

I will disclose with my supervisor whenever I encounter an issue where a person's life or others might be at risk. My supervisor will serve as one of the people involved in the planning process for my health education plan (curriculum). I will also work with P.E. teachers, food staff, and parents to assist me in developing specific and measurable objectives (based on found needs) for the students participating in a health education class (Responsibility 2). When delivering health education, I will respect the rights, self-worth, and confidentiality of my students, no matter the population or community. I will make sure that my students feel safe, seen, and heard in my program. I will also be sensitive and aware of the social and cultural diversity in my program (Article 4). However, I will still make sure that my program plan (curriculum) is rigorous in its evaluations. This will assist me in seeing the effectiveness of the methods used in my program plan (Responsibility 3 & 4). After the evaluations, I will manage my program based on the results seen in the evaluations. I will make constant changes and modifications to my program to improve it (Responsibility 5).

At the end of the day, as a health educator, my job is to make the educational environment and culture conducive to the health of all involved. free from any kind of harassment and discrimination (Article 6). Additionally, in order for myself as an educator, and for my program to be successful. I am responsible for constantly studying research and staying up-to-date with new practices, and methods. (Article 5). Having research skills will allow me to identify and gather appropriate resources for my students. By running a program this way, I will be sure that I will be following the code of ethics, and providing my students with an environment where they can feel safe to learn, and not judged. This will allow for students to be

less stressed in my program, and will hopefully allow for open-mindedness with the skills and strategies that I will be providing to them.

The approach that I am going to take with my practice will allow me to meet the demands, expectations, and responsibilities that health education specialists have.

Performing all the responsibilities that a health education specialist is responsible for allows me to run a health-based program that is concrete, ethical, and research-based. This also allows me to achieve the competencies that are part of each responsibility. My professional setting is one that involves a lot of people, and I will make sure to always make population-based decisions for the population that I serve.