

**GUIDANCE FOR FIELD INSTRUCTORS  
HELPING STUDENTS WALK THROUGH ETHICAL ISSUES  
IN THEIR FIELD PLACEMENTS**

(Developed by Field Instructors who attend the Spring 2017 Field Instructor Seminar)

1. Teach students ahead of time/before an ethical issue comes up
  - a. About social work ethics and where the resources are (even though they should know this from class – it would be good to have a mutual experience talking about it.)
  - b. How to know that an ethical issue might be at play here – something doesn't feel right – do you have an uncomfortable feeling (physically, mentally, or emotionally)
  - c. Remind them that this is less about being "right" and more about examining their own values, being familiar with what the people they are working with truly need, and making a hard decision. It could, in fact, be choosing between what is a good decision and a slightly less good decision. The nuancing of this is important.
  - d. Remind them to always seek supervision and to never go through this process alone.
  - e. Remind them that 'not knowing' and humility around that is a professional skill.
2. Ask them to tell the story and the reason for telling it (is something making you feel uncomfortable)
3. Make sure together you understand the context and facts - make sure you have all the information
4. Identify the ethical issue - the rub
5. Agree on how much time you have to make a decision and then work accordingly
6. Ask students if they "had to make a decision right now, what would it be" (this might help you see things in a particular way that could be helpful)
7. Look together at the intersection of the student's personal values and ethics that may be influencing your collective understanding
8. Spend time considering all the printed/formal guidance that is out there – agency policies, rules of law, social work codes of ethics/ethical principles, other profession's ethics, etc.
9. Identify all options (multiple) toward identifying a response/making a decision
10. Ask questions about each of those responses
  - a. Who stands to benefit or lose by each of your decision options?
  - b. What privileges and dominant messages are at play here?
  - c. What are the power dynamics at play here?
  - d. Is race playing a role?
  - e. What consequences might there be?
11. Consider if there might be competing ethical guidance for this particular story and, if so, is there compelling reason to *not* follow it.
12. Last chance to make sure there is anything that we don't know about or any questions that we still have that should be considered before making a decision.
13. Make a decision and then a plan and follow through with it
14. Document your process
15. Follow up after the plan is implemented to see how it went and to evaluate it.