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# Exploratory Study of Common and Challenging Ethical Dilemmas Experienced by Professional School Counselors

*Results of a survey asking public school counselors in Virginia to indicate their most common and most challenging ethical dilemmas are presented. Ninety-two school counselors reported that the most common and challenging ethical dilemmas included those involving student confidentiality, dual relationship with faculty, parental rights, and acting on information of student danger to themselves or others. Results are reported for differences in academic level. Implications for professional school counselors and counselor educators are discussed.*

All professional counselors are required to abide by the ethical standards of their particular professional organization. In the case of school counselors, this adherence is to the American School Counselor Association ethical standards (ASCA, 2004). Ethical standards are established as a guideline to use and refer to in situations that create dilemmas, defined as “problems for which no choice seems completely satisfactory, since there are good, but contradictory reasons to take conflicting and incompatible courses of action” (Kitchener, 2000, p. 2). According to the Solutions to Ethical Problems in Schools model proposed by Stone (2005), referring to the ethical code is one of the first steps, which then is followed by, if necessary, considering the students’ chronological and developmental levels; considering the setting, parental rights, and minors’ rights; applying moral principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, and loyalty; determining potential courses of action and their consequences; evaluating the selected actions; consulting; and implementing the chosen course of action (pp. 16–19). Currently, little empirical evidence is available on the ethical dilemmas faced by school counselors. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

The ASCA magazine publication *School Counselor* includes a regular column on legal and ethical issues. Since its inception in 1997, *Professional School Counseling* (PSC) has published 11 articles specific to ethical issues. Legal issues and ethical implications

were included in other articles, but the focus on ethical issues was limited. Of these 11 articles, 7 were published in a special issue on legal and ethical issues in school counseling (Remley, 2002).

Confidentiality was the most frequent focus in these articles. Isaacs and Stone (1999) presented a study in which they surveyed 627 school counselors regarding the likelihood of breaking confidentiality in a wide variety of situations. Their study indicated that in many situations described, elementary school counselors were more likely to break confidentiality than middle school counselors, who were more likely to break confidentiality than high school counselors. This finding reflected the age and maturity levels of the students, legal precedents that establish increasing children’s rights with age, as well as the different roles that school counselors have at different academic levels. Previous studies also have indicated that elementary school counselors have more contact and consultation with both families and teachers than middle and high school counselors (Isaacs & Stone), and they perceive school-family-community partnerships to be more important than do high school counselors (Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004).

Isaacs and Stone (1999), as well as the authors of two other PSC articles, reported the difficulties involved with balancing student confidentiality and parental rights. State laws vary regarding the extent of parental rights, but, generally, minors (under 18) cannot legally provide informed consent for counseling, and some scholars interpret this to mean that parental rights supercede confidentiality. Legally, confidentiality for minors is an ill-defined legal area. Ethically, confidentiality is needed within the counseling relationship, but so are the support, good will, and cooperation of student support networks, which frequently include families (ASCA, 2004). Confidentiality for minors remains a debated issue which understandably causes many school counselors concern regarding how to resolve situations when parents want more information than the counselor believes should be shared (Glossoff & Pate, 2002; Isaacs &

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Stone; Mitchell, Disque, & Robertson, 2002).

Confidentiality was also the focus of additional articles on the ethical challenges of working with students exhibiting specific behaviors. Froeschle and Moyer (2004) outlined the challenges of working with students who self-mutilate, including the challenge of disclosing information to parents and determining the level of potential harm to students when weighing the decision to breach confidentiality. Stone (2000) pointed out that sexual harassment presents a legal responsibility to inform school authorities who are in a position to take corrective action to stop the harassment. School counselors who are aware of harassment through a victim's disclosure can be in a conflict between the legal requirements of notification to school administrators and the ethical duty of confidentiality. Initially, the information can likely be shared without disclosing the victim's identity, but for purposes of due process, the perpetrators may eventually need to be able to face their accusers (Stone). Capuzzi (2002) reminded school counselors that suicidal ideation is a form of self-harm, thereby mandating the counselor to break confidentiality and inform parents.

Other articles on ethical issues in PSC included considerations of student and counselor spirituality, especially in small communities. Lonborg and Bowen (2004) raised awareness of the potential for and concerns related to multiple relationships in situations where school counselors' spiritual beliefs are well known. Additional articles pointed out the ethical responsibility both of protecting students from harm and violence (Hermann & Finn, 2002) and of practicing competently through receiving supervision (Herlihy, Gray, & McCollum, 2002).

It would seem from the focus of the literature that the primary ethical dilemma for school counselors is student confidentiality. This would be consistent with the broader scope of the American Counseling Association (ACA). ACA offers its members consultation on ethical issues, and reports the categories of inquiries each year. During the 2002-2003 year, the ACA office received 1,236 inquiries. Almost half of the inquiries (609) regarded issues of confidentiality, and another quarter (305) regarded issues of the counseling relationship, which includes dual relationships (Hubert & Freeman, 2004). Confidentiality is the area in practice that seems to cause most ethical concerns among all counselors, which may be true for school counselors as well. We do not know, however, what additional areas are causing ethical dilemmas for school counselors.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

No studies to date have examined which areas of the ASCA ethical standards present the most common

or the most challenging dilemmas, and whether these dilemmas vary across academic level. Counselor educators and supervisors would benefit from this background information by being better able to prepare novice counselors to meet these challenges on the job. School counselors would also benefit by normalizing their experience of common dilemmas. In order to explore the most common and most challenging dilemmas experienced by professional school counselors, and to explore whether any differences exist between the levels in which school counselors work, a survey was developed and distributed to practicing school counselors in Virginia.

## METHOD

### Participants

Names of public schools in Virginia were accessed through the Virginia Department of Education. A stratified random sample of 300 schools was selected, with 100 schools selected from each level (elementary, middle, and high school). Envelopes were addressed to "School Counselor" at each school address. The letter of informed consent included a request to pass the survey to another counselor in the same building (if applicable) if the original recipient was not going to complete the survey. Mailings for the elementary and middle schools were sent in April 2004 with a follow-up in May. Mailings for the high schools were sent in August 2004 with a follow-up in October. The difference in the timing of the mailings was based on the heavy testing responsibilities for most Virginia high school counselors in the spring.

From the 300 surveys sent, 92 school counselors responded for a response rate of 30.7%. Among the respondents who provided demographic information, females made up 89% ( $n = 82$ ) of the respondents; males made up 10% ( $n = 8$ ). Caucasian was the indicated ethnicity for 85% ( $n = 78$ ) of the respondents, 9% ( $n = 8$ ) indicated African-American, 1.1% ( $n = 1$ ) indicated Asian American, and 1.1% ( $n = 1$ ) indicated multicultural. The age range represented was 25 years to 62 years. The median age was 52 years, and the mean age was 46.6 years. Participants had worked as school counselors for a range of 1–29 years. The mean, median, and mode of experience as a professional school counselor were all 10 years. This population represents a slightly larger percentage of females than many other national studies of school counselors. The ethnicity, age, and experience of the population in this study are very similar to many other national studies of school counselors (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

A variety of school settings was represented: 34% ( $n = 31$ ) of the participants worked in rural schools,

38% ( $n = 35$ ) in suburban schools, 17% ( $n = 16$ ) in urban schools, 10% ( $n = 9$ ) in a combination or other setting, and 1% ( $n = 1$ ) did not respond to this question. The participants included 28% ( $n = 26$ ) elementary school counselors, 32% ( $n = 29$ ) middle school counselors, and 40% ( $n = 37$ ) high school or secondary schools configured as grades 7, 8, or 9 through grade 12.

### **Instrument**

The survey instructions asked participants to respond to questions regarding ethical dilemmas. Examples provided included “being the only school counselor in a building in which a family member is a student, caring parents or staff requesting information to be able to support a student, or seeing students in an illegal or dangerous activity outside of school.”

The survey contained a list of potential dilemma areas, for which respondents were asked to (a) underline the areas in which they had experienced a dilemma within the past academic year; (b) rank the areas of potential dilemmas according to how often the respondents experienced this type of dilemma throughout their career, referred to as *commonness*; and (c) rank the areas of potential dilemmas according to level of challenge. The list of potential dilemma areas, adapted from the divisions of the ASCA ethical code, included student confidentiality (personal disclosures); confidentiality of student records; dual relationships with students; dual relationships with faculty; dual relationships with administrators; dual relationships with parents; making appropriate referrals; acting on information of danger to self or others; using appropriate assessments; interpreting assessments; peer helper programs (including mediation); parental rights; cultural diversity; recommendation writing; practicing only in area of competence; receiving consultation or supervision; providing consultation or supervision; awareness of colleagues’ ethical breach; and other. Respondents also were asked to write two descriptions of dilemmas experienced, one common dilemma and one challenging dilemma.

### **Analysis**

SPSS 13.0 was used for the analysis. Frequencies, cross-tabulations, chi-squares, and Cramer’s  $V$  were conducted to find group differences among counselors working at different school levels. The rankings were recoded into two categories for analysis. If a participant ranked an area of potential dilemma as one of the three most common or most challenging dilemmas, it was recoded as a 1. If a participant ranked an area as less than 3, or did not rank the area at all, it was recoded as a 2. The cross-tabulations and chi-square statistics are thus reflective of cate-

gories ranked as among the top three most common or most challenging dilemmas as compared to those ranked less than 3 or not ranked at all. The rationale for recoding was to establish categories for analysis. Many respondents only ranked three or four categories, while some ranked more. With only 92 respondents overall, analysis would be jeopardized with too many possibilities, so errors were minimized by creating two recoded variables.

Chi-square and Cramer’s  $V$  tests were both run to examine differences between the results and the expected percentages based on the numbers of participants at each level. The chi-square information indicates the statistical significance of the differences, but the robustness of this process is strongly affected by the number of respondents. Because the number of participants is relatively small when broken into levels, analysis using Cramer’s  $V$  also was indicated. A Cramer’s  $V$  between .2 and .5 denotes that the difference is substantively important and merits further analysis with a larger sample size (Cohen, 1988, p. 224–225).

## **RESULTS**

### **Ethics Preparation**

Participants reported on their preparation and education in ethics. Over half (55%) reported having a general course in a master’s program that included some ethics; 58% had a specific course in a master’s program that focused on ethical and legal issues; 46% attended conferences or continuing education sessions on ethical issues within the last two years; 72% had read articles and books dealing with ethical issues; 41% reported having a copy of the ethical code readily accessible; yet only 8% indicated they referred to the ethical code frequently.

### **Most Common Dilemmas**

The results of areas of ethical dilemmas endorsed as most commonly experienced were similar in relative frequency to the indications of whether the participants reported experiencing a dilemma in that area within the last year. The five most common areas in which this group of school counselors reported experiencing ethical dilemmas were student confidentiality of personal disclosures (67%), confidentiality of student records (36%), acting on information of danger to self or others (33%), parental rights (22%), and dual relationship with faculty (20%). Less than 10 percent of the respondents rated the following areas as among the most common dilemmas experienced: providing consultation or supervision (9%); receiving consultation or supervision (8%); dual relationships with administrators (7%); peer helpers (including mediation) (6%); using appropriate assessments (3%); interpreting assessments (3%);

and practicing in area of competence (2%).

### Most Challenging Dilemmas

The five most challenging areas in which this group of school counselors reported experiencing ethical dilemmas were student confidentiality of personal disclosures (46%), acting on information of danger to self or others (45%), awareness of colleague's ethical breach (34%), parental rights (33%), and dual relationships with faculty (19%). Less than 10 percent of the respondents rated the following areas as among the most challenging dilemmas experienced: receiving consultation or supervision (6%); practicing in area of competence (6%); peer helpers (including mediation) (4%); using appropriate assessments (4%); and interpreting assessments (4%).

### Most Common and Challenging Dilemmas Experienced by School Level

School counselors at different academic levels (elementary, middle and high school) may experience ethical dilemmas with different commonness and challenge. Student ages vary at the different levels, which affect practice; additionally the school structure, parent involvement, and school counselor responsibilities vary at the three levels. Table 1 reports the dilemmas for which there were statistical (according to a chi-square analysis) or substantive (according to a Cramer's V analysis) differences of reported commonness and challenge between counselors at different academic settings. Statistical analysis revealed three areas of significant difference and two areas of substantive difference in reported commonness of dilemmas experienced, and three areas of significant difference and three areas of substantive difference in reported challenge.

### Comparing Commonness and Challenge

Maintaining confidentiality, both of personal disclosures and of student records, were sections from the ethical code that more participants ranked as a most common dilemma than as a most challenging dilemma. In the area of confidentiality of personal disclosures, 67% indicated this as most common, while 46% indicated as most challenging. In the area of confidentiality of student records, 36% indicated as most common, while 18% indicated as most challenging.

Alternatively, those sections of the ethical code that participants ranked more often as most challenging than as most common included information of danger to self or others, parental rights, and awareness of a colleague's ethical breach. Specifically, 45% of the respondents indicated information of danger to self or others was among the most challenging dilemmas experienced, while 33% indicated it was most common. In the area of parental rights, 33% indicated as most challenging, while 22% indi-

cated as most common; and in the area of awareness of colleague's ethical breach, 34% indicated as most challenging while 14% indicated as most common. Seven counselors provided scenarios about situations in which they were aware of a colleague's ethical breach, but only two involved other counselors. Five scenarios involved ethical breaches of administrators or teachers. Ethical breaches included abuse of power, breaking confidentiality, dating and drinking with students, gossiping and spreading rumors. Although teachers and administrators are not bound by the same ethical expectations as counselors, their inappropriate behavior might be interpreted by counselors as breaching ethical standards. The dilemma of having to confront (or, alternatively, ignore) an ethical breach within the school staff is not diminished if it does not involve counselors. School counselors are apparently very aware of the impact on students and school climate when anyone is acting unethically or inappropriately. Parental rights and mandatory reporting issues are discussed further in later sections.

### Dilemma Descriptions

Almost half of the respondents (44/92) included scenario descriptions with their responses. Participants were asked to provide both a challenging and a common dilemma. Some respondents provided both, some provided only one. The scenarios helped to provide a description of the situations involved rather than simply the ethical code area label provided in the survey instrument.

The scenarios showed that ethical dilemmas are frequently related to legal issues, and often do not easily fit into only one category. In an attempt to chart the scenarios into the headings of the ethical code, very few related to only one heading. A common area of concern regarding confidentiality and parental rights involved parents who are either in the process of divorce or who believe erroneously that obtaining custody indicates that the other parent cannot access information. Numerous scenarios presented situations of parents and teachers asking for confidential information—potentially a combination of student confidentiality with parental rights or dual relationships with parent and/or faculty. Two counselors described this overlap of concerns. An elementary school counselor wrote,

I find myself believing that a teacher needs to know information on a child that I have learned via counseling with the student or via consultation with a parent, therapist or other. Generally, the conflict comes when I believe what the student has experienced (the confidential information) impacts behavior and academics at school. I find myself struggling with

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**Table 1. Comparison of Common and Challenging Ethical Dilemmas by Percentage of Counselors at Different Levels of School**

	Percentage by School Level			Significance Chi-Square	Cramer's <i>V</i>	
	Elem. ( <i>n</i> =25)	Middle ( <i>n</i> =28)	High ( <i>n</i> =37)			
<i>Most common:</i>						
Dual relationships with faculty	38.5	21.4	5.4	10.585, <i>p</i> =.004	.341	**§
Recommendation writing	0	10.7	24.3	8.108; <i>p</i> =.016	.298	*§
Cultural diversity	23.1	3.6	5.4	7.163; <i>p</i> =.027	.281	*§
Awareness of colleague's ethical breach	26.9	14.3	5.4		.252	§
Dual relationships with students	3.8	22.2	16.2		.205	§
<i>Most challenging:</i>						
Dual relationships with faculty	30.8	28.6	2.7	10.522; <i>p</i> =.005	.340	**§
Recommendation writing	0	7.1	24.3	9.433; <i>p</i> =.007	.322	**§
Dual relationships with students	0	21.4	10.8	6.331; <i>p</i> =.036	.264	*§
Peer helper programs (including mediation)	11.5	0	2.7		.227	§
Student confidentiality (personal disclosures)	61.5	46.4	35.1		.217	§
Parental rights	42.3	39.3	21.6		.201	§

*Note.* § = Cramer's *V* > .2.

\**p* < .05, two-tailed. \*\**p* < .01, two-tailed.

how much the teacher needs to know in order to be sensitive to the student, family, etc. I try to find the briefest, most helpful information to share. I get parent/student permission to share.

A secondary school counselor wrote,

Parents want to know what counselors discuss with sons/daughters. Parents want *all* information, regardless of confidentiality. If this directly involves the whole family, this is hard to deal with. School counselors cannot act in a professional capacity as a psychologist but it is often frustrating not being able to help a student who you have built a relationship with when you also know the parent and see the dilemma faced by student and parent.

Another dilemma example included areas of awareness of colleague's ethical breach, parental rights, student records, and dual relationships:

As director of guidance, I was made aware that one of my colleagues was allowing a student to contact her birth mother, using the school e-mail and using her e-mail account. The birth mother was not the custodial parent and there were court proceedings against her by her father, who had full custody. ... Custody issues play a bigger role each year in schools as to who has access to information on students as well as who may or may not have physical access to students. We need to be vigilant in upholding parent rights while still protecting the rights of the minor child.

Eight of the 44 respondents who provided scenarios mentioned dilemmas involved in reporting suspected child abuse to local Child Protective Services (CPS) boards. School counselors are mandated reporters, but five counselors wrote about situations in which they believed the report to CPS was either mishandled or not acted upon, and an additional respondent included lack of confidence in Social Services in the "other" category of the dilemma list.

## DISCUSSION

The results from this survey provide helpful information to the school counseling profession. It is important for school counselors, supervisors, and counselor educators to recognize the common and challenging areas of ethical dilemmas. School counselors should be provided with strong preparation and continued education on how to handle the particular dilemmas of student confidentiality of personal disclosures and of student records, acting on information of danger to self or others, dual relationships with faculty and parents, and parental rights.

The most common and challenging ethical dilemmas faced by school counselors appear to be issues of confidentiality, which is consistent with the larger population of counselors represented by ACA, and validates the previous focus in the PSC literature. ASCA's (2004) recently revised ethical code acknowledges more directly than previous versions the tension that exists between confidentiality and parental rights. Section A.2.g. admonishes the school counselor that "primary obligation for confidentiality is to the student but [the professional school counselor] balances that obligation with an understanding of the legal and inherent rights of parents/guardians to be the guiding voice in their children's lives" (p. 2). Furthermore, section B.1.a. indicates that the professional school counselor "respects the rights and responsibilities of parents/guardians for their children and endeavors to establish, as appropriate, a collaborative relationship with parents/guardians to facilitate the student's maximum development" (p. 3). The complexity of navigating a collaborative relationship with parents while respecting their responsibilities and honoring student confidentiality is both a common concern and very challenging.

The results of comparing commonness and challenge are also enlightening. More professional school counselors ranked maintaining confidentiality, both of personal disclosures and of student records, as one of the most common dilemmas than as one of the most challenging. Reasons for these two areas of ethical practice to be more common than challenging might be that school counselors have a higher level of self-efficacy in dealing with these dilemmas due to the frequency of experience, and that solutions to these two areas may seem more clear-cut. Professional school counselors rely on FERPA and school policy to maintain the confidentiality of school records, and are committed to maintaining personal confidentiality with their students. Alternatively, acting on situations regarding information of danger to self or others was ranked by more professional school counselors as among the

most challenging dilemma than as the most common. Although the resolution of these situations is usually clear-cut due to legal issues of mandatory reporting, duty to protect, and concerns for school safety, the author hypothesizes that they are ranked as most challenging because these situations are usually highly charged emotionally and can be challenging to deal with for that reason.

The ASCA code (2004) indicates that school counselors are to "avoid dual relationships with school personnel that might infringe on the integrity of the counselor/student relationship" (p. 2). School counselors, however, apparently frequently experience challenging dilemmas involving faculty, especially at the elementary and middle school levels. This too is consistent with previous studies (Isaacs & Stone, 1999), and it reflects the intricacies and practicalities of collaborating with faculty for student development. It is interesting that middle school counselors report dilemmas involving dual relationships with students more common and challenging than do counselors at other levels. This may be a factor of the students' developmental ability to understand different roles that all adults, including school counselors, have with children and adolescents during the many personal and social transitions experienced in middle school (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Consistent with other counseling literature (Moleski & Kiselica, 2005; Pearson & Piazza, 1997), school counselors and educators may be warranted in examining contextual issues of dual relationships and of examining both the benefits and the problems involved in these relationships. Most research and literature on school counselor ethical issues do not differentiate between dual relationships with different constituents. From the results presented here, as well as the results from Isaacs and Stone (1999), and awareness of students' developmental capacity to understand possible dual relationships (Kohlberg, 1981), differentiation in future research seems to be warranted. Further guidelines may be appropriate for practitioners, who report frequent situations of dual relationships with a variety of constituents.

### Limitations

It should be noted that this study was conducted in one state, and it should be replicated in other geographic areas. Although the response rate was adequate, the sample is relatively small. Caution should be used in generalizing from this study based both on the sample size and the limitation of collecting data in only one state. Many research studies surveying school counselors have a low return rate, similar to this one. School counselor time is in high demand, and some school systems indicate that

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completing surveys is not appropriate during employment hours. The timing of this study may have been especially problematic, although there is not a time of year that is identifiably lighter in responsibilities than others. Research on how to improve return rates overall for studies on school counseling would be beneficial to the profession.

Another potential limitation of this study is that although asking respondents to rank the areas of potential dilemmas provided some information, the rankings cannot be assumed to be of equal weight. In other words, a participant who ranked an area as number 1 may consider it to be twice as common or challenging as the area ranked number 2, yet consider the area ranked number 3 to be only barely less common or challenging than the category ranked as number 2. Additionally, the areas of potential dilemmas (i.e., dual relationships, parental rights) were not defined specifically within the survey, nor does the ASCA ethical code define the areas. As a result, respondents may have had different ideas about the meanings of the different areas.

This study was designed to obtain a representational sample of counselors working at different levels of schooling, thus a stratified random sample of schools was used. This may have resulted, however, in a disproportionately larger group of school counselors from rural areas or other schools with only one school counselor. A design targeting a random sample of counselors, rather than of schools, might result in a different professional representation.

### **Implications for Professional School Counselors**

Hopefully, professional school counselors will feel a sense of validation in recognizing that common and challenging ethical dilemmas are indeed reported by others as well. While this admittedly does not help in the process of resolving dilemmas, as counselors we understand the impact of this affirmation.

Professional school counselors who do not feel confident in their local CPS should try to find other alternatives for providing support in addition to mandatory reporting for children in potentially abusive situations. This will, of course, vary by community, but collaborations with local agencies and resources should be cultivated. School counselors should also advocate for increased funding and legislation to support children in abusive situations.

Professional school counselors should remain updated on laws and school policies regarding confidentiality of student records. Confidentiality of student records is a common dilemma faced by professional school counselors. Knowing and following laws and policies allow the school counselor to deal with these dilemmas according to both legal and ethical procedures that protect the school counselor as well as the student. In this study, participants did

not report this dilemma as among the most challenging, presumably because these laws and policies exist to guide our responses.

Professional school counselors need to continue reminding students, parents, teachers, and administrators of responsibilities regarding confidentiality. Part of advocating for the profession is teaching others who and what we are, and confidentiality is an integral aspect of our profession. One of the areas of leadership that the school counselor can provide within the school is to advocate for increased professional behavior among all staff regarding student information, perhaps adopting a school staff ethical code.

It is disturbing that so few school counselors in this study reported referring to the ethical code regularly. If professional school counselors referred to the ethical code more often, and made reference to the code to their colleagues, this would also serve the advocacy and leadership roles of modeling ethical behavior.

Elementary and middle school counselors experience a higher rate of challenge than their high school colleagues in facing some dilemmas, namely dual relationships with faculty, student confidentiality, and parental rights. It is not clear from this study whether the higher rates are because of the students' ages, or because elementary school counselors, and to a lesser extent middle school counselors, tend to be the only counselor in the building. Being the only counselor in the building presents many challenges, one of which is finding consultation, a strategy to use when involved with a challenging dilemma. Professional school counselors are advised to seek out a supervisor or a colleague in a similar situation for consultation in resolving dilemmas.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators and Supervisors**

Counselor educators and supervisors should include case studies and/or role-play opportunities for school counseling students to resolve challenging dilemmas in order to increase self-efficacy. According to self-efficacy theory, those with more direct exposure and practice when learning a skill will develop more confidence in utilizing the skill. In this case, studies and role-plays involving ethical dilemmas could result in a stronger level of self-efficacy when faced with a future challenge. Supervisors should provide ongoing consultation or supervision, and/or implement consultation or supervision groups, particularly for those who are the only counselor in their building. Consultation or supervision groups could provide ongoing case studies for practicing counselors.

Counselor educators and supervisors should include aspects of collaborating with families in the

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education and development of school counselors. The wording in the new ASCA ethical code (2004) encourages school counselors to include families more than the previous code did (Bodenhorn, 2005). The ASCA National Model® (2005) also includes collaboration as a key function of the school counseling program, including collaboration with families. Family systems theories and practices should be included in preparation of supporting and educating parents, recognizing and balancing parental rights, and handling situations of dual relationships.

Counselor educators and supervisors also should include aspects of collaborating with teachers. Confidentiality issues in the school frequently included teacher requests for information as well as parent requests. Elementary and middle level counselors, especially, need to be prepared for situations in which they work very closely with teachers. The balance of collaboration and professional distance is a difficult balance to strike, especially for young professionals.

### Conclusion

Hopefully, current practitioners will recognize some of their own situations in these results, which will normalize their dilemma experiences. There are some ethical absolutes, but the essence of a dilemma is that there are competing reasons to take contradictory actions. Ethical decision making is a daily, ongoing practice for school counselors, and it involves constant vigilance and commitment to serving the best interest of the student. Professional school counselors will undoubtedly continue to be presented with dilemmas involving confidentiality, parental rights, information of danger to self and others, and dual relationships. These dilemmas are inherent in the work that we do as student confidants. Professional school counselors are advised to continue their ethical practices by updating their knowledge and reference rate to the ASCA ethical code, utilizing an ethical decision-making model that incorporates consultation, and maintaining professional relationships with students, parents, and faculty. ■

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