

Haynes and Windell have gifted readers with a clear and thorough discussion of the ethical dilemmas and legal issues associated with the clinical practices of psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Written in everyday language, the book uses the American Psychological Association Ethics Code to guide the practical ethical scenarios under consideration. This book will become a landmark in helping mental health practitioners understand the complexity of navigating and resolving ethical and legal conflicts.

—**John J. Pietrofesa, PhD**, Professor (Retired), Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, and Licensed Psychologist, Affiliated Psychologists of Michigan, Bloomfield Hills

Ethics codes can provide a foundation, but they can't always guide us through the gray areas and real-world dilemmas mental health professionals face in practice. Drs. Haynes and Windell have created a thoughtful, practical, and deeply informed resource of real-world ethical challenges that encourage us to think critically and flexibly when navigating complex ethical dilemmas. This book is a valuable companion for every mental health professional who is committed to ethical integrity and sound judgment.

—**Robin M. Deutsch, PhD, ABPP**, Professor (Retired), William James College, Boston, MA, and former Chair, APA Ethics Committee

This book, which features a robust collection of ethical issues and illustrative vignettes, is like having two leading ethical experts in our field at your fingertips. It is an indispensable reference for mental health practitioners, offering guidance and clarity in maintaining ethical standards when confronted with challenging practice scenarios.

—**Matthew Sullivan, PhD**, Former President of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts

Buy this book if you want the best resource that outlines core ethical principles, discusses ethical challenges through real-world vignettes, and covers diverse populations including children, older adults, and those struggling with gender identity.

—**Steven J. Ceresnie, PhD**, Private Practice, and Former President of the Michigan Psychological Association, Plymouth, MI

This book is a much-needed resource for clinicians and other professionals, offering practical guidance through complex ethical situations within the mental health profession.

—**Kristin A. Meekhof, MSW**, coauthor of *A Widow's Guide to Healing* and *Psychology Today* contributor

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INTRODUCTION

Ethical practices form the foundation of mental health work. Effective mental health practice depends on ethics that frame thinking, choices, and conduct in terms of the well-being and best interests of clients. Ethics also fosters important core practitioner characteristics of predictability, reliability, trust, and alliance.

Because human behavior is complex, mental health professionals can be confronted by ethical concerns and questions, and dilemmas arise every day. Understanding these dilemmas and making effective, action-based decisions about them are essential.

To address mental health ethical issues, the American Psychological Association (APA; 2017a) has constructed a thorough and elaborate ethics code, as have other mental health professional organizations. In addition, state psychological associations field questions from members, and some associations also adjudicate reported infractions. Every mental health professional is responsible to a state licensing board that deals with reported ethical violations. These committees and boards regularly face questions about what is right, what is appropriate, and what should be done in ethical dilemmas.

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Ethical Challenges for Mental Health Professionals: Your Questions Answered, by
J. P. Haynes and J. Windell

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The most frequently reported ethical violations regarding APA members include breaching confidentiality, engaging in dual relationships, crossing professional boundaries, practicing outside one's area of competence, and exploiting clients for personal gain (Pope & Vetter, 1992). In many instances, professionals engage in such behaviors with no clear awareness or realization that they are doing so.

While ethics codes provide structure and guidelines for mental health professionals, they are not like cookbooks, which provide easy-to-follow directions. Situations arise that can be much more complicated than the answers that an ethics code can adequately address. Broad guidelines can address general principles, but they cannot provide specific instructions for how to deal with the myriad situations that are likely to be encountered by a professional in their day-to-day dealings with clients. Additionally, the relationship between professionals and clients often can be complex and prone to nuanced interpretation.

This book, *Ethical Challenges for Mental Health Professionals: Your Questions Answered*, was written to consider questions that mental health professionals often encounter but that are not covered explicitly in their codes of ethics. We also provide specific examples of ethical dilemmas that can arise, and we offer ways of considering these situations with the goal of thinking and acting ethically.

We hope this book will help fill a gap in the literature for mental health professionals, who almost certainly will be confronted with many ethical dilemmas during their careers. Given that there are more than a million mental health professionals in the United States and many thousands more in Canada, this book is intended as an essential and practical resource and stimulus for resolving the ethical questions that may perplex and distress them.

The book is oriented to those in multiple professions that function within the mental health field—psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, and licensed professional counselors.

Simply reading and rereading the code of your mental health profession is good practice, but this alone will not lead to flexible and relevant decision making applicable to all real-life situations. Throughout this book, we not only encourage psychologists and other mental health clinicians to make ethical decisions but also, more broadly, promote flexible thinking as well as the use of appropriate ethical decision-making models (EDMs). By presenting a variety of complex and nuanced dilemmas, this book encourages mental health professionals to engage in critical thinking and apply the rules to their unique situations.

The book is intended as a topic-specific, handy reference. To this end, each chapter is written in a broad question-and-answer structure with vignettes and related sections that each depict and discuss a dilemma related to the

chapter topic. We cite relevant ethical codes and important legal decisions while examining possible courses of action that demonstrate how readers can use similar ways of thinking to deal with their own specific professional questions. Supervisors and peer review groups also can use the book as a springboard for discussions.

Throughout the 21 chapters, our focus is on the framework of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* of the APA (2017a), as it is the most long-standing, elaborate, and extensive mental health ethics-related document. However, we also reference the ethics codes of other mental health professional associations when appropriate. The selection of chapter topics and the organization of chapters are based in part on the most common and frequent ethical problems considered by licensing boards and other ethical bodies, according to research findings. Each of the main chapters includes two or more vignettes, and each vignette is followed by questions and answers in order to delineate ethical dilemmas and subtleties. Case vignettes are composites, identifying variables have been changed, and confidentiality has been maintained.

Chapter 1 provides a broad discussion of the field of ethics and the importance of ethical thinking in mental health practice. Questions as to why ethics are important in mental health work and why mental health professionals should think ethically are addressed in this opening chapter.

Chapters 2 through 8 deal with specific ethical topics, including confidentiality, informed consent, multiple relationships, and sexual intimacy between professionals and clients. Throughout, we excerpt and make reference to ethics codes of various mental health associations.

Chapters 9 through 19 each focuses on a specialty area of mental health work that often poses ethical conundrums and risks. These chapters delve into such areas as working with older adults, performing child custody evaluations, helping clients with problems related to their sexual orientation, working in correctional settings, and testifying as an expert witness in court. Special situations also are dealt with, including plagiarism, barter, fee splitting, and advertising.

Chapter 20 discusses how EDMs can be used by professionals to help make ethical decisions in thorny and complex situations. But as is emphasized throughout the book, mental health professionals should not only refer to these EDMs and to the ethical code of their particular mental health professional group but also be sure to consult with mentors and colleagues when they are uncertain as to the right ethical choice.

Ethical practice protects the client, the practitioner, and the public in general. Keeping professional practice ethically strong is a crucial component of competence and effectiveness.