

# Case Study Scenarios

Professional Ethics & Boundaries • Theme 1B • THW Continuing Education

SUPPLEMENTAL HANDOUT

## Case Study Scenarios

Applying the ETHICS Framework

Use the ETHICS framework to analyze each scenario. There are rarely perfect answers — the goal is to practice principled, thoughtful decision-making and build the judgment you'll rely on in real situations.

CASE 1

### The Gift Dilemma

**The Scenario:**

You have been working with Marcus for six months, supporting his recovery from opioid use disorder. Your work together has been highly successful — he's been clean for four months and just got a new job. At your last session, Marcus brings you an expensive watch and says, "You saved my life. I want you to have this — it belonged to my grandfather." He becomes visibly upset when you hesitate.

**Ethical Issues to Consider:**

Gift-giving and receiving · Boundaries in peer relationships · Emotional manipulation vs. genuine gratitude · Cultural considerations around gift-giving

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What ethical principles are at stake here?
2. How might accepting or declining affect your relationship?
3. What would you actually say to Marcus?
4. When is it appropriate to accept gifts from peers?

CASE 2

### Small Town Connections

**The Scenario:**

You are the only peer support specialist in a small rural Oregon community. Your new client, Sarah, turns out to be your daughter's soccer coach. Sarah is seeking support for depression and anxiety after a divorce. She specifically requested you because she heard you were "really good." You also know from community gossip that Sarah's ex-husband had an affair.

**Ethical Issues to Consider:**

Dual relationships · Small community challenges · Pre-existing knowledge about clients · Rural vs. urban practice differences

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Can you ethically work with Sarah?
2. How do you handle what you already know about her situation?
3. What boundaries might you need to establish?
4. How will you handle seeing her at soccer games?

CASE 3

## The Facebook Friend

**The Scenario:**

You've been supporting James for three months. He has made significant progress with his social anxiety and depression. One evening, you receive a Facebook friend request from James, along with a message: "I really value our relationship and would love to stay connected! I posted some photos from my hiking trip that I'd love to share with you."

**Ethical Issues to Consider:**

Social media boundaries · Digital communication ethics · Personal vs. professional online presence · Ending professional relationships

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is your immediate response?
2. Does this violate boundaries, and if so, which ones?
3. How do you decline without damaging the relationship?
4. What policy should you have in place for future situations?

CASE 4

## Money Troubles

**The Scenario:**

Linda, a peer you've been working with for two months, calls you in tears. She explains that her car broke down and she can't get to her medication appointment tomorrow. Without her medication, she's afraid she'll relapse. She asks if you could loan her \$50 for an Uber — she promises to pay you back on Friday when she gets paid.

**Ethical Issues to Consider:**

Financial boundaries · Crisis response · Peer vs. professional help · System navigation

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What do you say to Linda in this moment?
2. Is loaning money ever appropriate in peer support?
3. What alternative solutions might you help Linda find?
4. How do you balance compassion with professional boundaries?

## CASE 5

# Concerning Disclosure

### The Scenario:

During a peer support session, 17-year-old Tyler mentions that his stepfather “gets really angry sometimes” and showed you a bruise on his arm. When you ask more questions, Tyler becomes anxious and says, “Please don’t tell anyone — he didn’t mean it. If you tell someone, they’ll take me away from my mom and it’ll all be my fault.”

### Ethical Issues to Consider:

Mandatory reporting · Working with minors · Trust and confidentiality · Duty to protect

### Discussion Questions:

1. What is your legal obligation in this situation?
2. How do you explain mandatory reporting to Tyler?
3. How do you maintain trust while fulfilling your duty?
4. What are the next steps you would take?

## CASE 6

# When Values Conflict

### The Scenario:

You are a peer supporter in recovery from alcohol use disorder. Your new peer, David, tells you that he doesn’t want to stop drinking entirely — he wants to learn to “drink like a normal person” through a moderation management approach. This conflicts with everything you believe about recovery based on your own experience.

### Ethical Issues to Consider:

Personal values vs. professional role · Harm reduction vs. abstinence · Self-determination · Strategic self-disclosure

### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you support David’s goals when they conflict with your beliefs?
2. What are the limits of person-driven support?
3. How might your own experience be a barrier here?
4. What would genuine respect for David’s autonomy look like?

## ETHICS FRAMEWORK · QUICK REFERENCE

**E — Examine.** What are the facts? What assumptions am I making?

**T — Think.** Who is affected? What are potential impacts?

**H — Hypothesize.** What are my options? Consequences of each?

**I — Identify.** Which option best aligns with ethical principles?

**C — Consult.** What do supervisor, colleagues, or policies say?

**S — Select & Act.** Make decision, implement, and document.

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