Participant Handouts

Ethics and Boundaries 2019-21:

The Ethical Use of Power

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Training Provided by the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System
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1. **Power defined**

Power is the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events.

2. **Worker power**

3. **Client power**

4. **Micro and macro power**

5. **Workshop objectives**

Upon completion of this workshop, participants will have a basic understanding of:

1. The micro and macro power that workers bring to the change process that includes:
   a. Positional power
      1) legitimate
      2) reward
      3) coercive
      4) informational
   b. Personal power
      1) expert
      2) referent
   c. Cultural power
      1) explicit
      2) implicit

2. The power that clients bring to the change process.
3. How clients react to worker power.
4. The ethical context within which power is used in the change process.
5. How to use power more effectively.
6. Exercise: How much power do you have?

On the following scale, indicate with a check mark how much power you think you have as you work with clients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Powerless</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Powerful</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the following scale, indicate with a check mark how much power you think you have to make changes in your agency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Powerless</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Powerful</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Exercise: How much power do you have? (Continued)

Using how you marked the scales above, go to the appropriate flip chart scale on the wall and place a check mark in the same place you did above. One scale is for your power to change clients, the other for your power to change your agency.
8. Exercise: What power do I have?

Make a list of all the kinds of power you can use as you do your work with clients.

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Report out

9. Kinds of power

10. Positional Powers

Positional power comes from your position in your agency. It comes from federal statutes as well as state laws and policies. It also comes from county policies including hiring policies and assignments. Positional powers include:

**Legitimate power** is that associated directly with your particular job. You can do certain things with certain people because of your job. This both empowers and limits what you do.

**Reward power** is about your capacity to provide resources to clients. This can be one of the strongest sources of your power.

**Coercive powers** include threats and punishments.

**Informational power** refers to your access to information and being able to share, withhold, or even manipulate or conceal it. Our Code of Ethics as well as state laws defines what we should be doing with this informational power. It can empower or embarrass.
11. Exercise: Positional Power

With those at your table, look back at the list of our powers on the wall. Identify which are positional powers. Be prepared to add any missed on the list.

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When instructed by your trainer, one person from each table should go up and identify these powers using “PoP” as indicator of positional powers.

12. Personal power

Personal power is based on strength, confidence, and competence that individuals gradually acquire in the course of their development. It’s what you bring to the table because of who you are. There are 2 kinds of personal power.

When you have knowledge and skills that enable you to understand a situation, suggest solutions, use solid judgement, you have expert power.

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Referent power comes from one person liking and respecting another. This can be one of the most powerful tools a social worker brings to the table.
13. Exercise: Personal power

Do the same thing with personal power that you did with positional power. Identify which on the list are personal powers.

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When directed to do so, one person from each table, go up and identify these powers using “Per” as indicator of personal powers.

14. Cultural power

Cultural power in the context of this workshop means the power that comes from the cultural contexts of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, etc.

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15. Exercise. Cultural power

Look back at the list of our powers on the wall. Are any of them cultural powers? Add any missed.

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16. Explicit and Implicit Bias

17. Explicit Bias

Explicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in a conscious manner.

18. Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

19. Exercise: Changing implicit bias

Together, at your tables, make a list of things you could do to impact your implicit biases.
20. NASW Code and bias

Value: Dignity and Worth of the Person

**Ethical Principle:** Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity.

4.02 Discrimination

Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability.


21. Exercise: Tying bases of power to bullying

With your group, identify how each basis of power can be used by a bully.

1. Legitimate power.

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2. Reward power.

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3. Coercive power.

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4. Informational power.

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5. Expert power.

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6. Referent power.

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7. Cultural power.

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22. Exercise: Tying bases of power to stopping bullying (Continued)

On your own, identify 3 particularly helpful powers you have that you could use to stop a bully when you witness a person bullying someone else.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________

Share these 3 powers at your tables. Identify one that occurs the most often at your table.

1. __________________________________________

Report out.

23. Clients’ reactions to your power

“Parents feel an overwhelming sense of fear during their interactions with public child welfare systems and this fear is most pronounced at the time of the first visit from the CPS workers” (Schreiber, 2013).

24. Exercise: Clients’ perceptions of your power

You have a report that a 3 year old has almost daily been out on a busy street for long periods of time. Reporter says mom is on porch obviously drunk or high and totally ignores where the child is. You knock on mom’s door. She lets you in.

You are a white female working in Racine County. You are working with clients primarily from a very impoverished neighborhood of primarily African American families.

25. Exercise: Client’s perceptions of your powers (continued)

Work at your tables to make a list of powers this client is likely to think you have (whether you do or don’t have that power). Remember, make use of our list on the wall of your powers.

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26. Clients’ perceptions of your power

Don’t underestimate how intimidating the positional powers you bring with you are as you meet with clients, particularly at those first visits. You bring with you the power of the law. Clients may know little about what those laws limit or what powers they assign you, but they are often afraid.

27. Exercise. Ethical use of power in direct work with clients

Your trainer will assign a couple of the sections below to your group. Read that section.

Together, you will prepare a sentence or two rephrasing your section in the context of the power differential between yourselves and your clients. Put it into language you would use to explain it to a student intern. It may be easier to write your own statement first and then share. You could choose one from all of them or write a composite.

Remember to use the list of powers on the wall.

Here’s an example using 1.02. Self-Determination

In order for a client to make a shared decision about what they are going to do to keep their children safe, they can’t feel powerless as they work with their helping professional. They must feel empowered. That is, they have the power to present their own ideas, share in decision-making even if within the constraints of child safety per CPS.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

Code of Ethics

Ethical Standards: Selected Responsibilities

1. SOCIAL WORKERS’ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS

1.02 Self-Determination

Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients’ right to self-determination when, in the social workers’ professional judgment, clients’ actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others.
1.03 Informed Consent

(a) Social workers should provide services to clients only in the context of a professional relationship based, when appropriate, on valid informed consent. Social workers should use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the services, risks related to the services, limits to services because of the requirements of a third-party payer, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives, clients’ right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent. Social workers should provide clients with an opportunity to ask questions.

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(a) Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Social workers should inform clients when real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients’ interests primary and protects clients’ interests to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting clients’ interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

(b) Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

(c) Social workers should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. (Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers relate to clients in more than one relationship, whether professional, social, or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively).

1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality

(a) Social workers should respect clients’ right to privacy. Social workers should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.

1.08 Access to Records

(a) Social workers should provide clients with reasonable access to records concerning the clients. Social workers who are concerned that clients’ access to their records could cause serious misunderstanding or harm to the client should provide assistance in interpreting the records and consultation with the client regarding the records. Social workers should limit clients’ access to their records, or portions of their records, only in exceptional circumstances when there is compelling evidence that such access would cause serious harm to the client. Both clients’ requests and the rationale for withholding some or all of the record should be documented in clients' files.

(c) When providing clients with access to their records, social workers should take steps to protect the confidentiality of other individuals identified or discussed in such records.
1.09 Sexual Relationships

(a) Social workers should under no circumstances engage in sexual activities, inappropriate sexual communications through the use of technology or in person, or sexual contact with current clients, whether such contact is consensual or forced.

(b) Social workers should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with clients’ relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Sexual activity or sexual contact with clients’ relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a personal relationship has the potential to be harmful to the client and may make it difficult for the social worker and client to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. Social workers—not their clients, their clients’ relatives, or other individuals with whom the client maintains a personal relationship—assume the full burden for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

(c) Social workers should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with former clients because of the potential for harm to the client. If social workers engage in conduct contrary to this prohibition or claim that an exception to this prohibition is warranted because of extraordinary circumstances, it is social workers—not their clients—who assume the full burden of demonstrating that the former client has not been exploited, coerced, or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.

1.10 Physical Contact

Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing clients.) Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact.

1.11 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal written, electronic, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.


28. Power differentials with clients

In a truly ethical helping relationship that includes a fully involved, empowered client, the power differential is less extreme. Child welfare workers have a responsibility to keep children and/or their community safe. Because of that, they must have legal power that must always be on the table. But, that power is most effective when used as is necessary, rather than as a primary tool.
29. Power differentials with clients

A frightened, threatened client is not likely to do more than comply when necessary. They are not likely to change their behavior in a way that is not only beneficial to their child’s safety and well-being, but also long lasting.

Previous research with CPS populations has shown that parents feel an overwhelming sense of fear during their interactions with public child welfare systems, and that this fear is most pronounced at the time of the first visit from the CPS worker (Diorio, 1992). The source of parents’ greatest fears involves the removal of their children from their home by a caseworker that they perceive to have limitless and unstoppable power (Ayon et al., 2010; Diorio, 1992; Dumbrill, 2006). Research with CPS workers confirms that parent fears have “major implications for the worker–client engagement process at the beginning and intermediate points in any given CPS case” (Kriz et al., 2012, p. 321), prompting the suggestion that CPS workers need to develop a “fear management toolkit” to minimize fears and facilitate engagement (Schreiber, 2013).

30. Exercise: What specific powers do your clients have?

Make a quick list of the powers your clients have. You may want to use the bases of power we listed to think about what they might be.

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31. Exercise: How clients use their power

Think about circumstances your clients may be in where they need to be able to use their power to help their children be safe and improve their well-being.

Share your ideas with whole group.

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32. Exercise: How do you respond to client power?

Think about a situation where you have felt threatened by a client. That could be a psychological or physical threat. Identify the power they had that was basis of that threat.

Write a sentence about that experience.

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If you’re comfortable with it, share the experience at your table.

If this exercise really strikes a nerve with you, do something about it. Talk to a helpful colleague or your supervisor or seek out counseling. Do what you need to do to manage your response to client power.

33. Children have power

Researchers have found that: In fact, children—with their own understanding of state intervention—often strategize their interactions with the state in attempts to create the outcomes they desire (Reich, 2010).
34. Powerless

You have little or no expectation that your behavior will determine an outcome that you seek.

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35. Client power in ethical standards

*Social workers’ primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients, in general, clients’ interests are primary.*

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36. Power for social change

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37. Exercise: Worker powers for system change

Look through the list of powers on the wall so you can identify which of them you might use to bring about a change of policy or practice in your agency.

Identify which you should be able to use.

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38. Value: Social Justice

Value: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice.

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.

Karen S. Haynes, PhD, MSW, President of California State University, San Marcos says: We are natural leaders. Think about the power we have in knowledge and compassion, our systems perspective. Think about the power that comes with knowing that social work is both an avocation and a vocation. Think about the power that comes from understanding that service on behalf of others is the purpose of life. Think about the power that comes with knowing that we do not offer quick fixes but human dignity, inclusiveness, equality, and social justice.


39. Where to begin with clients

Drumbrill says that workers should lessen their emphasis on starting intervention by understanding the ways parents view the problems that causes the need for intervention, and increase their emphasis on understanding how parents perceive them using power in the process of addressing these problems.

40. Power over, power with

Parents respond to intervention in 3 ways:

1. Fighting

2. Playing the game

3. Working with
41. Power over, power with

1. Fighting

___________________________________________________________________________

2. Playing the game

___________________________________________________________________________

3. Working with

___________________________________________________________________________

What all this means for practice is that those first contacts with parents should begin by addressing the power differential between them and the worker. You need to acknowledge the fear parents probably feel. As you interact with them you can use these descriptions of parental reactions to understand how they are feeling about your power. The quality of information and cooperation you get from clients depends in a good part on their perception of your power over them. Being honest about it, providing information about the reality of what it is and listening to a client’s reaction, is a good start to a helping relationship. (Dumbrill, 2010)

42. Exercise: What clients should know about your powers

What powers do you have that a client should know before the end of that first visit. You can check the flipcharts about types of positional power to get some ideas.

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43. Exercise: Telling a client about your power

Write what you could specifically say to a client about your power at that first visit.

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44. Exercise: How much power do you have?

On the following scale, indicate with an “X” mark how much power you think you have as you work with clients.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power with Clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the following scale, indicate with an “X” mark how much power you think you have to make changes in your agency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power to Change Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerless</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45. Exercise: Check power scales on wall

Go to the power scales on the wall and put an “X” where you think you fall on each scale.

You are Powerful. Use it Well!

Bibliography


