

# ETHICS

# TRAINER GUIDE

Professional  
Development for  
Child Abuse Hotline Operators





## INTRODUCTION

Hotline training is a contract deliverable for MidSOUTH. This two-hour session on ethics is delivered in partial fulfillment of that deliverable. While it is designed for new operators, be aware that there may also be experienced personnel and/or supervisors in the group. Shift as needed to take advantage of their knowledge and skills.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

As a result of this training, operators will:

- Identify personal values that shape their professional ethics.
- Agree to and use a common definition of ethics.
- Identify situations that present ethical dilemmas in the workplace.
- Identify and utilize a series of steps to solve ethical dilemmas.

### SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

#### A. Housekeeping

As needed. Some suggestions for thorough attention to this area include:

- Sign-in Sheets. Sign-in sheets must be completed. Direct participants to print names and information legibly to ensure proper information is available to enter into the database.
- Training Center Facilities. Direct participants to the location of bathrooms and other important facility sites.
- Cell Phones/Office Work. Turn cell phones to vibrate or off during training. Do not bring office work to training.
- Evaluations. We ask that every student evaluate both the training and the trainer.

## MATERIALS LIST

Participant Manuals

Flipchart Set-up for Small groups –  
easel, pad, markers, tape

PowerPoint Presentation

Handout 1 - Agenda

**B. Introductions**

As needed. Suggestions for this area include:

- Welcome the participants to the training.
- Introduce yourself and provide information about your education, experience, and background.
- Allow group members to introduce themselves if unknown to each other.
- Review the Agenda (Handout 1)

**C. Large Group Listing – Why are you here today?****Purpose**

The purpose of this exercise is to have group members identify reasons it is important to attend training in ethics, as well as issues they would like addressed during the training.

**Methodology**

Write the following questions on a whiteboard (or have some other visual media prepared). They are also on **page 1** of the PM.

- ❖ **What kinds of “ethical dilemmas” have you faced in your professional life (that you are willing to share?)**
- ❖ **Have you been in a situation at work where you were “uncomfortable”?**
- ❖ **Have you ever witnessed unfair or unethical behavior of a colleague toward the public you serve?**

Record the group’s answers on flip-chart paper or other visual media.

**Discussion**

Direct the group to **page 1 of the Participant Manual** and ask that they note the following points in the spaces provided.

**TEACHING NOTES**

The study of ethics is important for several reasons:

- To improve our ability to make ethical decisions and, thus, improve the quality of services provided,
- To protect ourselves and our agencies from liability, and
- To protect our clients.

#### D. Case Scenario – Large Group Discussion

##### Purpose

To get group members thinking about how our own values are realized in the work setting.

##### Methodology

Ask the entire group to read the scenario titled “Susan” **on page 2 of the Participant Manual**. Allow several minutes for the participants to read and consider the scenario. Ask for volunteers to answer the question, “What should Susan do?”

##### Processing

There will be a variety of responses about what Susan should do. There are several points that can be discussed:

- It will likely create conflict, stress, and tension in the workplace if Susan reports the activity of the coworkers to the supervisor.
- Susan can communicate her approach to her work to her coworkers and try to change their behavior over time.
- The supervisor has a responsibility to know what is going on in the office and, hopefully, attempts to ensure that contacts are routinely made.
- There is a chain of command that Susan can follow within the organization if she attempts to change the behaviors of her coworkers.
- Ultimately, Susan must adhere to what she believes is right.

## TEACHING NOTES

Conflicts of values are at the heart of ethical problems. Generally, if the situation does not “feel” right, it causes us to stop and think. The consideration of ethics is subjective in nature. One of the problems in resolving ethical dilemmas is that we cannot foresee all of the risks or the full extent of the risks of each decision. In ethical decision-making, there is not always a right or wrong. Resolving ethical problems requires us to consider a menu of options and choose the most agreeable or least unfavorable among the choices.

## SECTION 2: DEFINING ETHICS

### A. What are your personal values? – Individual Exercise

#### Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to establish a common definition for ethics.

#### Methodology

- Have the participants answer the questions on **page 3 of their Participant Manuals – Your Thoughts on Ethics**. Responses will not be collected.
- Go over the group members’ responses to the questions.
- The trainer may choose to share his or her answers to model self-disclosure. Jot down the participants’ responses and begin to note common responses.

#### Processing

Summarize the exercise with the following points:

- Ethics have to do with what we value, our ideals, those things/ideas/etc. that we hold dear.
- Although your values are unique, there are likely some values that most of us here share.
- Generally, a common thread appears within the values identified by a group of professionals. The values of individuals of a “like mind” are going to be drawn together.

## TEACHING NOTES

- One reason to study ethics is to improve the quality of the services we provide.
- There are times when adhering to policy results in ethical dilemmas.
- Acting within the limits set by the law may not always result in the most “ethical” decision. Ethical behavior means much more than adhering to the law or to organizational policy.

## B. Defining Ethics

Have the participants turn to **page 4 in their manuals, What Are Ethics**. Cover the definitions of ethics. Ask participants if there are any other definitions of ethics of which they are aware.

**A code of ethics** is a way of professional self-regulation. It is the **standard** to which professionals of a particular discipline should aspire or must adhere.

Most codes of ethics begin by defining a set of **core values** to which the profession adheres. Examples of core values for child welfare work are:

Safety of children

Permanency for children

Well-being of children

The Division of Children and Family Services of Arkansas has not developed a specific code of ethics for child welfare professionals. There is a Law Enforcement Code of Ethics; however, Hotline Operators are not sworn law enforcement officials. No specific “code” covers the work of Hotline Operators.

In the absence of such a professional code, what can operators turn to for guidance? The business world has written and discussed work ethics for years. These business ethics apply directly to the work of the Hotline Operator.

## TEACHING NOTES

Ask the group:

**“Who's responsible for acting ethically?”**

You are! It isn't the "company." It isn't only managers. It is every person. Ultimately, each of us is responsible for our own actions, including being ethical.

Consider the "3R's" of ethical behavior. Instruct participants to write the information in their **Participant Manuals on page 5** in the spaces provided.

The first "**R**" of business ethics is **RESPECT**. It is an attitude that must be applied to people, organizational resources, and your environment. Respect includes behavior such as:

- ❖ Treating everyone (customers, co-workers, vendors, etc.) with dignity and courtesy.
- ❖ Using company supplies, equipment, time, and money appropriately, efficiently, and for business use only.
- ❖ Protecting and improving your work environment, and abiding by laws, rules, and regulations that exist to protect our world and our way of life.

The second "**R**" of business ethics is **RESPONSIBILITY**. Employees have a responsibility to customers, co-workers, the organization, and themselves. Responsibility includes such behaviors as:

- ❖ Providing timely, high-quality goods and services.
- ❖ Working collaboratively and carrying your share of the load.
- ❖ Meeting all performance expectations and adding value.

The third "**R**" of business ethics is **RESULTS**. Essential in attaining results is an understanding that the way results are attained – the "means" –

## TEACHING NOTES



are every bit as important as (if not more important than) the ultimate goals – the "ends."

- ❖ The phrase, "The ends justify the means," is an excuse that is too often used to explain an emotional response or action that was not well planned or carefully considered.
- ❖ Obviously, you are expected to get results for your organization and for your customers. However, you are also expected to get those results legally and morally, by being ethical. If you lose sight of the distinction, you jeopardize your job, your business, and your career.

By considering Respect, Responsibility, and Results before taking action, you will avoid the following common rationalizations for not doing what's right:

- ❖ Everyone else does it.
- ❖ They'll never miss it.
- ❖ Nobody will care.
- ❖ The boss does it.
- ❖ No one will know.
- ❖ I don't have time to do it right.
- ❖ That's close enough.
- ❖ Some rules were meant to be broken.
- ❖ It's not my job.

<http://ethics.georgesmay.com/>

## TEACHING NOTES

**SECTION 3: GUIDELINES FOR RESOLVING ETHICAL DILEMMAS****A. Defining Ethical Dilemmas**

Begin this section by defining ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma occurs when a professional has to choose between apparently opposing duties and/or values.

**B. Steps for Ethical Problem Solving**

Have participants turn to **page 6 of the Participant Manual – Guidelines for Making Ethical Decisions.**

Go over each of the steps and explain the information presented.

Adapted from: Congress, E.P. (1996). Social Work Values and Ethics, Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

**E** Examine personal, professional, client, agency, societal values

**Examine values**

**T** Think about the applicable ethical standards, laws, and legal precedents that apply

**Think about standards**

**H** Hypothesize different decisions, their outcomes, and the impact on relevant systems

**Hypothesize**

**I** Identify who will benefit and who will be harmed by these specific decisions, keeping in mind the professional values and mission

**Identify**

**C Consult**

Explain that next they will be asked to apply these steps to various case scenarios presented.

**TEACHING NOTES**

**SECTION 4: EXAMINING ETHICS****A. Small Group Exercise - Case Scenarios****Purpose**

The purpose of this exercise is to provide practice in applying the steps of ethical problem solving to case situations and to illustrate to participants the advantages of consulting with others around ethical issues with which they are faced.

**Methodology**

1. Have participants turn to **page 7 – 8 in their Participant Manuals – Case Scenarios**. Ask the participants to work in small groups. Assign each group one or two scenarios to discuss.
2. Ask the participants to
  - read the scenario
  - discuss the situation as a group
  - use the information presented on page 7 of the Participant Manual to develop a recommendation for a plan of action
3. Each group will elect a spokesperson from one of the groups to present the key points from their discussion.

**Processing**

Professionals must recognize the value of consulting with colleagues on ethical questions they encounter in practice. In the absence of a formalized “ethics board” or “committee” within an organization, professionals must rely on one another to assist in resolving the ethical dilemmas with which they are faced. It is recommended that professionals use the steps provided to assist in defining the ethical values at stake within a certain situation and the most desirable course of action to resolve the situation.

**TEACHING NOTES**

1. Patty is one of the best employees at the Hotline. She is reliable, conscientious, and strives to do her best. She has been employed at the hotline for a number of years. Because of her skill, Patty has become known as the one who can handle “difficult people.”

Last week, Patty took a call where she was cursed and put down. She didn’t respond well and became rude and offensive with the caller. She immediately came to you to report this incident. She was very upset and asked to be allowed to go home. Nothing like this has ever happened with Patty.

After this incident happened, the supervisor talked to Patty’s co-workers. Her co-workers begin to relate that there have been a number of changes in Patty’s behavior over the last several weeks. Her co-workers express concerns that she is “not right,” “acting strange,” and “heading for a meltdown.”

What should the co-workers do? Is there anything that the co-workers could have done sooner?

What should the supervisor do? What role does the supervisor have in keeping “in touch” with what is going on with employees?

Discussion:

Are we our brothers’ keepers? Do co-workers have responsibility to each other? Do co-workers have responsibility to the public if they are concerned about impairment?

## TEACHING NOTES

2. You are having dinner with a number of friends. One of your friends is talking about her new babysitter. You immediately know the name; you have knowledge of the babysitter. The babysitter in question is a woman with a number of reports of alleged abuse. You want to warn your friend. Do you?

Discussion:

Legally, can the operator warn the friend? What things could the operator do to express concern about the choice?

3. While dining at a local restaurant over the weekend, you notice a co-worker having dinner with someone of the opposite sex. The co-worker and dinner guest are laughing and lean in to talk with their heads close over the table. You aren't sure, but you think you saw them hold hands. The situation bothers you because you know the co-worker has been having problems in her marriage; however, you are not sure what you saw. You don't think the co-worker saw you at the restaurant. What would you do?

Discussion:

What business is it of yours? The nature of an ethical dilemma is that there is not always a "right" answer. We cannot foresee all of the consequences of choosing to act or choosing not to act.

4. On your off day, you and a co-worker whom you like, respect, and have been fairly good friends with go out for lunch and shopping. At the end of the day, she shows you an item that you don't recall her purchasing. It isn't an expensive item – you estimate it was under \$5. Something bothers you about it, because you distinctly remember her saying that she was going to put it back. You do not remember her going to the cashier. You aren't 100% sure, but you are almost certain she didn't buy the item. What do you do?

## TEACHING NOTES

## Discussion:

You despise thievery. It is a personal deal-breaker for you. You aren't sure if she shoplifted or not, but you have no desire to be friends with, or more importantly, work with someone who steals. If you decide to say nothing, what will likely result? If you decide to say something, what will happen?

5. A co-worker, Claire, is having a really tough time in her personal life. It is common knowledge that her husband left her and has filed for divorce. It is a messy, ugly split. There are two children (who are still with your co-worker), but the estranged husband is doing everything he can to get full custody of the children. Another co-worker (who has never liked Claire) tells you that he heard that the husband found out that Claire was having a homosexual affair with a woman whom the couple was friends with. You have no idea whether this is true or not. What do you do?

## Discussion:

If you ask anyone else at the Hotline about this rumor, then you are potentially spreading malicious gossip. If you don't ask, you may never know the truth. You are strongly opposed to homosexual relationships on the basis of your beliefs. What do you do?

6. One of the operators on your shift is constantly broke. She regularly asks people to loan her a couple of dollars or cover her lunch. She does not reliably pay these loans back. It has been a running "joke," but it is getting tiresome and people are beginning to grumble. She is a pretty good co-worker other than this. You think it is time to stop the withdrawals. Times are tough. How do you handle this?

## TEACHING NOTES

Discussion:

How do you address problems with co-workers' behaviors that impact you? There are "right" ways and "wrong" ways. What are some of those ways?

7. Why is it that Sally seems to be able to do exactly as she pleases and not get into trouble for it? She can come in late, take a long lunch, leave early, and it doesn't seem to be an issue with the supervisor. There aren't any repercussions for any of her behaviors. You and another co-worker believe that Sally gets special treatment. Is there something "going on" between her and one of the supervisors? Even if there is, it isn't fair that the rules don't seem to apply to her.

Discussion:

Do you know what has been arranged between Sally and the supervisor? Has Sally called in or made arrangements to leave early? How often does this happen? How often is too often for "special consideration"? Is it frequent enough that co-workers are justified in concerns? How would operators address this with the supervisor? Has the supervisor objectively examined his treatment of this operator? Is there "special treatment"? If this has been brought up or spoken about, what is the supervisor's reaction?

## **B. Optional Large Group Discussion – Time Permitting**

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to provide the participants an opportunity to discuss ethical dilemmas they may have concerns about

## TEACHING NOTES

at this time, to provide practice in applying the steps in ethical problem solving, and to allow the participants an opportunity to make a plan for resolving future ethical dilemmas.

### Methodology

Provide the group with clean sheets of paper. Ask the group to identify ethical dilemmas they may have encountered or may be facing at this time. The participants may choose to write the situation down on the paper and hand it in anonymously, or if someone feels comfortable, he or she may discuss the situation with the entire group.

The small groups should apply the steps for ethical problem solving and come up with an action plan with recommendation.

### Processing

As the small groups present recommendations for the various situations, ask the groups to identify the key values or principles which are relevant to the situation, prioritize the values according to professional judgment, and generate a list of alternatives with a plan for implementing one of those alternatives.

## SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

### A. Concluding Discussion

Spend a few minutes and ask the following question again,

“What barriers exist for me in my efforts to maintain ethical behavior or practice?”

Allow time for the participants to write down their barriers in the Participant Manual in the space provided on **page 10**.

## TEACHING NOTES



Conclude the training with an invitation to the participants to be aware of the obstacles routinely encountered and encourage the trainees to formulate a plan for confronting the problem.

**B. Evaluations****TEACHING NOTES**

# ETHICS

## PARTICIPANT MANUAL

Professional  
Development for  
Child Abuse Hotline Operators





## WHY STUDY ETHICS?



What kinds of “ethical dilemmas” have you faced in your professional life (that you are willing to share?)



Have you been in a situation at work where you were “uncomfortable”?



Have you ever witnessed unfair or unethical behavior of a colleague toward the public you serve?



## **SUSAN**

Susan has been working at the Hotline for 3 months. She loves the job and makes extra efforts to ensure that she is doing all she can to help her peers. Her supervisor recognizes that she is a hardworking, competent operator.

Several of the “experienced” workers on her shift do just what is needed in order to get paid; they don’t seem to be concerned about how their behavior impacts the other operators on duty or, more importantly, how their behavior may impact children in the state who are at risk for abuse and neglect.

Susan has found out that at least 2 of her coworkers are using the “not ready” feature on the phone system to avoid taking calls. One operator has encouraged Susan to “slow down” and “not take it so seriously” so that she doesn’t burn out too soon. She is beginning to question herself and is becoming unhappy with her job. What should she do?

## YOUR THOUGHTS ON ETHICS

1. What does the term “ethics” mean to you? Where do ethics come from?

---

---

---

---

2. Do you think it is acceptable to break a rule or regulation you find unfair, unwise, unnecessary, or wrong?

---

---

---

3. What barriers exist for you in your efforts to maintain ethical behavior or practice? Do you have a plan or system in place for addressing ethical dilemmas?

---

---

---

## **WHAT ARE ETHICS?**

Ethics are:

- The discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.\*
- A set of moral principles or values.\*
- The principles of conduct governing an individual or group.\*

\* Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1996

### 3 R'S IN ETHICAL GUIDELINES

The first "R" is RESPECT. Respect involves:



The second "R" is RESPONSIBILITY. Responsibility includes:



The third "R" is RESULTS.

- ❖ Do "The ends justify the means" ?

Consider **Respect, Responsibility, and Results** before taking action and avoid the following common rationalizations for not doing what's right:

- ❖ Everyone else does it.
- ❖ They'll never miss it.
- ❖ Nobody will care.
- ❖ The boss does it.
- ❖ No one will know.
- ❖ I don't have time to do it right.
- ❖ That's close enough.
- ❖ It's not my job.

<http://ethics.georgesmay.com/>



## ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING MODEL

Adapted from: Congress, E.P. (1996). Social Work Values and Ethics, Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

**E** - Examine personal, professional, client, agency, societal values

### Examine values

**T** - Think about the applicable ethical standards, laws, and legal precedents that apply

### Think about standards

**H** - Hypothesize different decisions, their outcomes, and the impact on relevant systems

### Hypothesize

**I** - Identify who will benefit and who will be harmed by these specific decisions, keeping in mind the professional values and mission

### Identify

**C** - Consult

### Consult

## CASE SCENARIOS

Keep in mind that ethical dilemma discussions are most often about making choices so that we “do no harm.” Some problems have a correct answer, because of standards and policy that outline what to do. But many of our toughest choices do not have a right or wrong answer. These are the choices that are often the hardest to make.

1. Patty is one of the best employees at the Hotline. She is reliable, conscientious, and strives to do her best. She has been employed at the hotline for a number of years. Because of her skill, Patty has become known as the one who can handle “difficult people.”

Last week, Patty took a call where she was cursed and put down. She didn’t respond well and became rude and offensive with the caller. She immediately came to you to report this incident. She was very upset and asked to be allowed to go home. Nothing like this has ever happened with Patty.

After this incident happened, the supervisor talked to Patty’s co-workers. Her co-workers begin to relate that there have been a number of changes in Patty’s behavior over the last several weeks. Her co-workers express concerns that she is “not right,” “acting strange,” and “heading for a meltdown.”

What should the co-workers do? Is there anything that the co-workers could have done sooner?

What should the supervisor do? What role does the supervisor have in keeping “in touch” with what is going on with employees?

2. You are having dinner with a number of friends. One of your friends is talking about her new babysitter. You immediately know the name; you have knowledge of the babysitter. The babysitter in question is a woman with a number of reports of alleged abuse. You want to warn your friend. Do you?

3. While dining at a local restaurant over the weekend, you notice a co-worker having dinner with someone of the opposite sex. The co-worker and dinner guest are laughing and lean in to talk with their heads close over the table. You aren't sure, but you think you saw them hold hands. The situation bothers you because you know the co-worker has been having problems in her marriage; however, you are not sure what you saw. You don't think the co-worker saw you at the restaurant. What would you do?
4. On your off day, you and a co-worker whom you like, respect, and have been fairly good friends with go out for lunch and shopping. At the end of the day, she shows you an item that you don't recall her purchasing. It isn't an expensive item – you estimate it was under \$5. Something bothers you about it, because you distinctly remember her saying that she was going to put it back. You do not remember her going to the cashier. You aren't 100% sure, but you are almost certain she didn't buy the item. What do you do?
5. A co-worker, Claire, is having a really tough time in her personal life. It is common knowledge that her husband left her and has filed for divorce. It is a messy, ugly split. There are two children (who are still with your co-worker), but the estranged husband is doing everything he can to get full custody of the children. Another co-worker (who has never liked Claire) tells you that he heard that the husband found out that Claire was having a homosexual affair with a woman whom the couple was friends with. You have no idea whether this is true or not. What do you do?
6. One of the operators on your shift is constantly broke. She regularly asks people to loan her a couple of dollars or cover her lunch. She does not reliably pay these loans back. It has been a running "joke," but it is getting tiresome, and people are beginning to grumble. She is a pretty good co-worker other than this. You think it is time to stop the withdrawals. Times are tough. How do you handle this?
7. Why is it that Sally seems to be able to do exactly as she pleases and not get into trouble for it? She can come in late, take a long lunch, leave early, and it doesn't seem to be an issue with the supervisor. There aren't any repercussions for any of her behaviors. You and another co-worker believe that Sally gets special treatment. Is there something "going on" between her and one of the supervisors? Even if there is, it isn't fair that the rules don't seem to apply to her.

## **MY PLAN FOR MAINTAINING ETHICAL BEHAVIOR**

**What barriers exist for me in my efforts to maintain ethical behavior?**

---

---

---

---

---

**What will I do to maintain ethical behavior?**

---

---

---

---

**HANDOUT 1****ETHICS****Agenda****I. Introduction**

- A. Housekeeping/Agenda/Competencies
- B. Icebreaker - Why address ethics?

**II. Defining Ethics**

- A. Defining your own values
- B. Defining ethics

**III. Guidelines for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas**

- A. Defining ethical dilemmas
- B. Steps for ethical problem solving

**IV. Exercising Your Ethical Principles**

- A. Small group exercise – Case scenarios
- B. Large group discussion

**V. Conclusion/Evaluation**