

# BEYOND THE CODE: ETHICAL COUNSELING IN A MULTICULTURAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

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Dr. Marisa White  
us3we3@gmail.com

1

## OBJECTIVES

Identify	Identify three ways cultural values influence ethical decision-making in counseling practice.
Apply	Apply a social justice framework to resolve common ethical dilemmas in multicultural counseling.
Develop	Develop strategies to advocate for systemic change while maintaining ethical professional boundaries.

2

## REFLECTION

How does culture impact ethical codes?

How does cultural impact interpretation of ethical codes?

How does culture impact your decision-making?

How do you incorporate advocacy into your practice.



3

## ACA CODE OF ETHICS (2014)



CODES RELATED TO  
CULTURE



CODES RELATED TO  
SOCIAL JUSTICE

4

## WHERE IS IT MENTIONED IN THE ACA CODE

### Multicultural & Diversity

Mission: Promote respect for human dignity and **diversity**.

Preamble: Counseling is a professional relationship that **empowers diverse** individuals, families, and groups ...

Preamble 2. honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts

Ethical Principal: Justice, or treating individuals **equitably** and fostering fairness and equality;

Codes: A2c, A4b, B1a, C2a, C5, E5b, E5c, E8, F2b, F11a F11b, F11c, H5d

### Advocacy & Social Justice

Preamble: Core professional values includes **"promoting social justice"**

Ethical principal: **justice**, or treating individuals equitably and fostering fairness and equality

Codes: A7a, A7b

5

## MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

Counselors' cultural and diversity awareness and knowledge about self and others, and how this awareness and knowledge are applied effectively in practice with clients and client groups.

**Awareness** of one's own cultural values, biases, and assumptions.

**Knowledge** of different cultural practices, worldviews, and experiences.

**Skills** to adapt interventions and communication styles to meet the cultural needs of clients.

6

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice advocacy is the proactive effort to identify and address systemic barriers and inequities that affect clients and communities.

Promoting equity in access to resources and opportunities.

Empowering marginalized groups.

Working at individual, institutional, community, and policy levels to bring about change.



7

## EVOLUTION OF THE CODE

Codes of ethics evolve in response to:

**Increased cultural awareness** and recognition of client diversity.

**Societal shifts:** movements for racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and disability inclusion.

**Emerging ethical challenges:** systemic racism, language barriers, immigration issues, and historical trauma.

8

## EXAMPLES OF CHANGES: 2005-2014

Updates reflect a growing emphasis on culturally responsive care, advocacy, and the counselor's role in dismantling oppressive systems.

- conversion therapy
- referral based on strongly held beliefs
- HIV positive
- technology

9

## THE IMPACT OF CULTURE: INTERPRETATION

Culture impacts how people perceive, interpret, and respond to the world

Culture impacts communication, expression of distress and illness, and help-seeking behaviors

Decisions and behaviors are guided by cultural norms

10

## WAYS THAT CULTURE INFLUENCES ETHICAL DECISION- MAKING

Perceptions of autonomy vs. collectivism:  
Consent

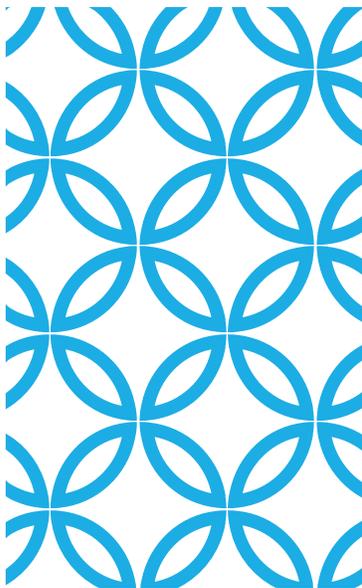
Interpretation of boundaries

Understanding of confidentiality

Accepting gifts

Bargaining

11



## FRAMEWORK AND MODELS TO USE IN ETHICAL SITUATIONS

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12

## WHY USE A SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK



Equips counselors to resolve dilemmas in a way that prioritize equity, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness.



Using a social justice lens to consider the broader systemic and contextual factors influencing a client's life

13

## PRINCIPLE ETHICS VS VIRTUE ETHICS



**Principle Ethics** involves adhering to the code (e.g., autonomy, justice, beneficence, nonmaleficence, fidelity).



**Virtue Ethics** considers the character of the counselor (e.g., compassion, courage, humility, honesty, ).



A **social justice lens** encourages applying these principles to advocate for systemic change and client well-being within unjust systems.

14

## TRANSCULTURAL INTEGRATIVE MODEL

(GARCIA, CARTWRIGHT, WINSTON, & BORZUCHOWSKA, 2003)

1. Recognizes Culture at Every Stage
2. Four Major Dimensions of the Model:

### Awareness

Counselors are encouraged to examine their own cultural identities, biases, and assumptions before making decisions. This promotes self-reflection and accountability.

### Knowledge

Counselors must have knowledge of the client's cultural background, the cultural implications of the issue, and relevant ethical and legal standards.

### Skills

Counselors are guided to use culturally appropriate intervention strategies and communication styles that are respectful and effective for the client's cultural context.

### Action

Ethical decisions must lead to actions that are both ethically sound and culturally responsive.

15

## CONTINUE TRANSCULTURAL INTEGRATIVE MODEL

### 3. Integration of Ethical Standards and Cultural Considerations

- Consider **universal ethical principles** (e.g., autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, fidelity) with **cultural contexts**

### 4. Collaboration and Consultation

### 5. Emphasis on Process Over Prescriptive Steps

Unlike step-by-step models, the Transcultural Integrative Model is **fluid and recursive**, allowing counselors to move back and forth through the process as they gain more insight or information.

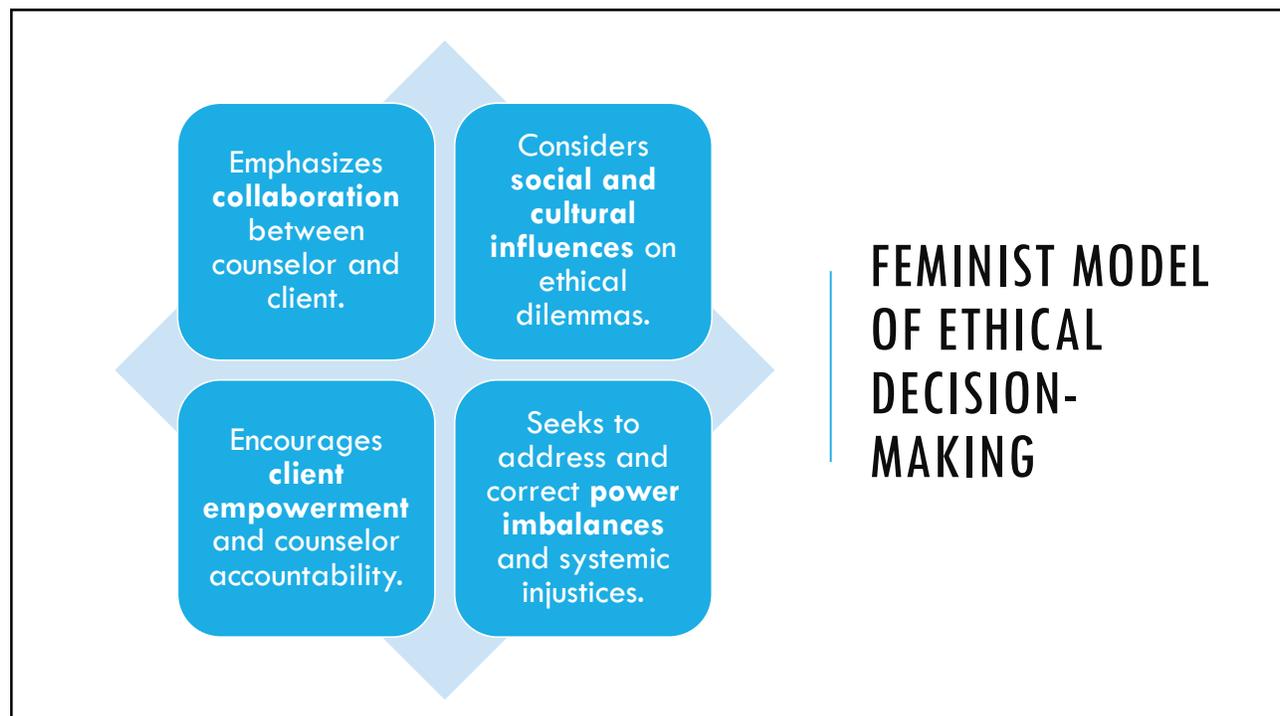
16

## SOCIAL JUSTICE ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

(GOODMAN, LIANG, HELMS, LATTA, SPARKS, & WEINTRAUB, 2004)

1. **Identify the Problem:** Recognize both the immediate ethical issue and the broader sociocultural context (e.g., racism, poverty, oppression).
2. **Consider the Sociopolitical Context:** Ask how privilege, power, and oppression may be influencing the situation.
3. **Examine Counselor Biases:** Reflect on your own cultural values, assumptions, and potential blind spots.
4. **Generate Alternatives:** Consider solutions that not only resolve the dilemma but also promote justice and empowerment.
5. **Consult and Collaborate:** Engage with supervisors, community members, and professionals with diverse perspectives.
6. **Select and Implement a Plan:** Choose a plan that is ethical and just, both at the individual and systemic levels.
7. **Evaluate the Outcome:** Reflect on the consequences and whether justice and equity were advanced.

17



18

## MODEL FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY

(RATTS, TOPOREK, & LEWIS, 2010)

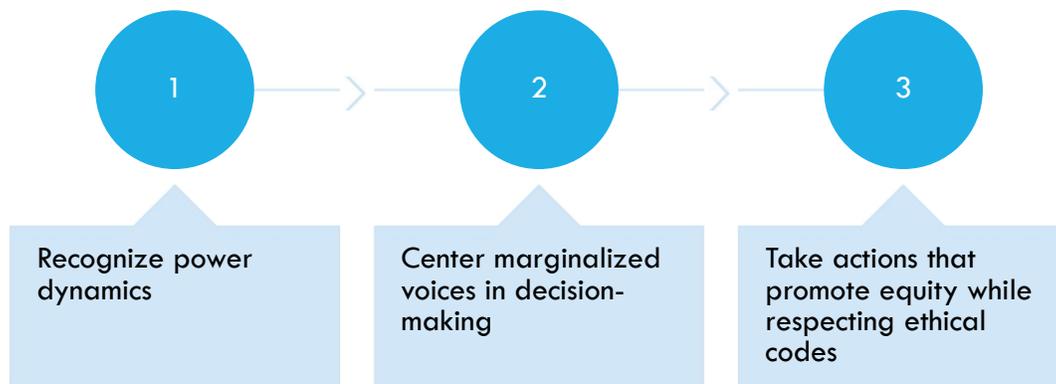
**Client-level advocacy:**  
Making ethical decisions that support empowerment and informed choice.

**Community/system-level change:** Decisions that consider and challenge oppressive systems (e.g., school policies, mental health access).

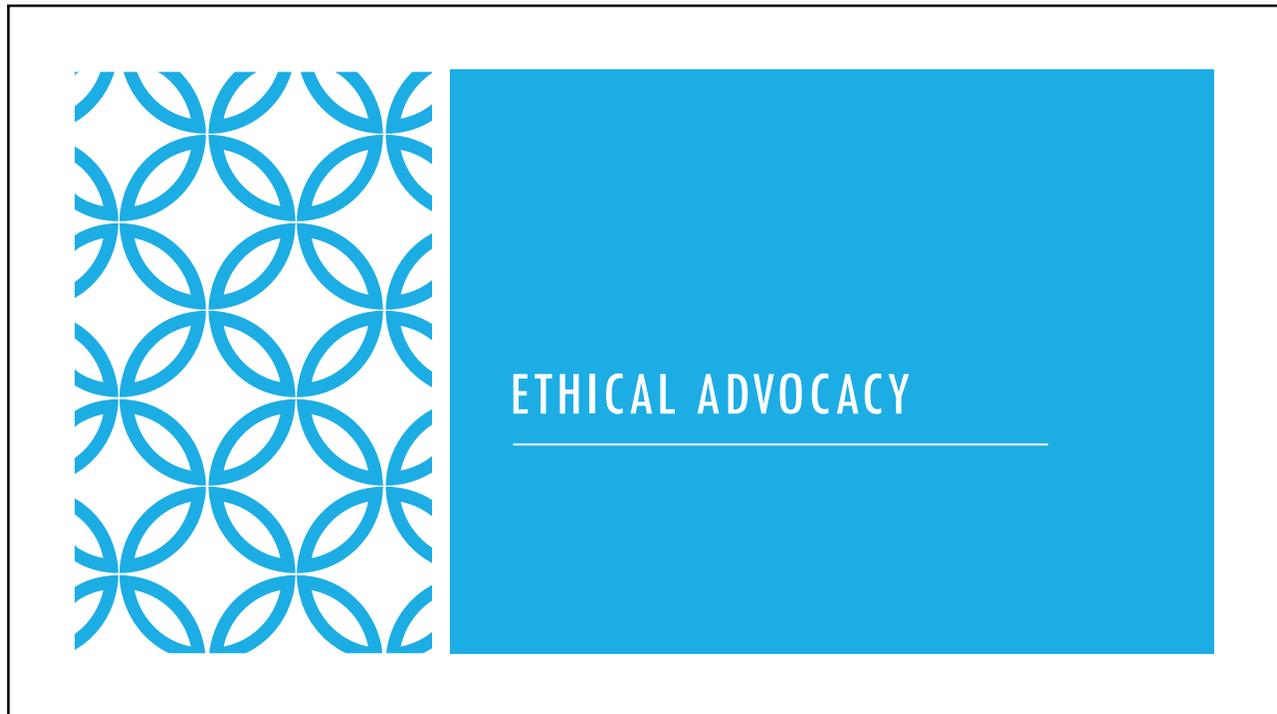
**Reflective self-awareness:**  
Counselors consider their own identities and biases in the ethical process.

19

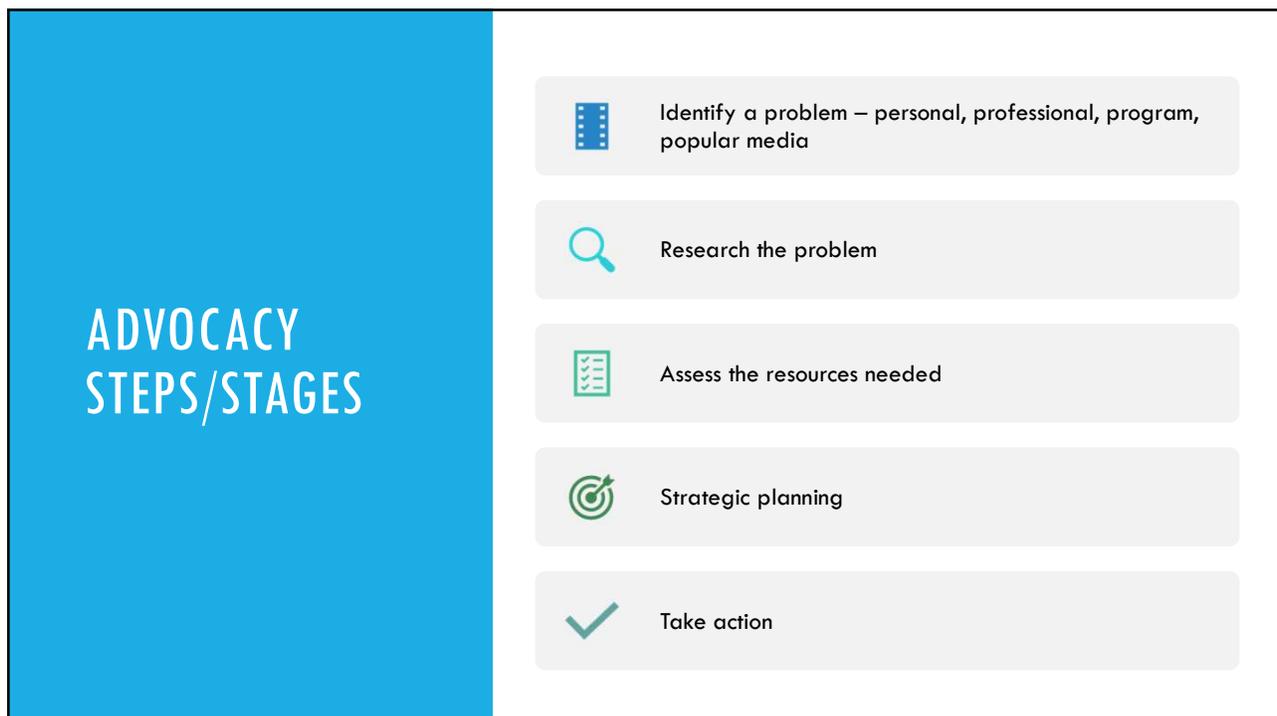
## STEPS FOR APPLYING A SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK



20



21



22

## TIPS FOR ENGAGING IN SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY



Ground advocacy in ethical codes, maintain professional composure, engage in collaborative dialogue



Advocating through professional organizations, or task forces: Provides mentorship, education, and support and reduces risk of acting independently



Document advocacy efforts



Seek supervision and/or legal advice when engaging in controversial actions

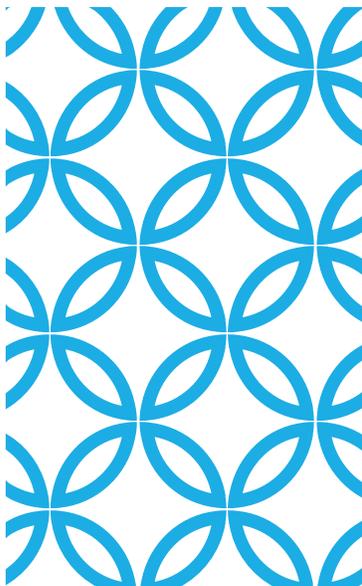


Involve clients or affected communities in the advocacy process



Protecting confidentiality by ensuring not to disclose confidential information or misrepresent organizations affiliations

23



## CASE SCENARIOS

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24

## CASE SCENARIO: MARIA

Maria, a 17-year-old undocumented high school student, seeks counseling for depression and anxiety. During a session, she discloses that she's being emotionally and verbally abused at home. She fears being deported if any authorities become involved and begs you not to report the situation.

### Discussion Questions:

- How do you weigh the ethical principle of “do no harm” in this case?
- What advocacy steps could be taken within your agency or community to support undocumented clients?
- How might implicit bias impact your response to Maria's situation?
- What role does cultural humility play in supporting Maria?

25

## CASE: MARIA



**ETHICAL DILEMMA:**  
BALANCING THE DUTY TO PROTECT A MINOR FROM ABUSE VERSUS THE CLIENT'S FEAR OF LEGAL CONSEQUENCES TIED TO HER IMMIGRATION STATUS.



**SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCERN:**  
UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH OFTEN FEAR ACCESSING SERVICES DUE TO POTENTIAL LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS. CULTURAL STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AND SYSTEMIC BARRIERS ALSO PREVENT TIMELY INTERVENTION.



**ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITY:**  
ADVOCATE FOR POLICIES PROTECTING IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN SCHOOLS AND INCREASING ACCESS TO CULTURALLY COMPETENT CARE.

26

## CASE SCENARIO: JORDAN

Jordan, a 26-year-old transgender client, has been denied access to a women's shelter after fleeing an abusive relationship. They are now experiencing suicidal ideation and PTSD but fear discrimination from service providers.

### Discussion Questions:

- How can you uphold ethical standards of beneficence and justice in this scenario?
- In what ways might traditional crisis intervention models fall short for marginalized clients like Jordan?
- How might you advocate for Jordan beyond the therapy room?
- What ethical obligations do you have to challenge institutional policies that discriminate?

27

## CASE: MARIA



**ETHICAL DILEMMA:**  
HOW TO ADDRESS IMMEDIATE RISK AND SAFETY CONCERNS WHILE ALSO NAVIGATING THE CLIENT'S EXPERIENCES OF SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION.

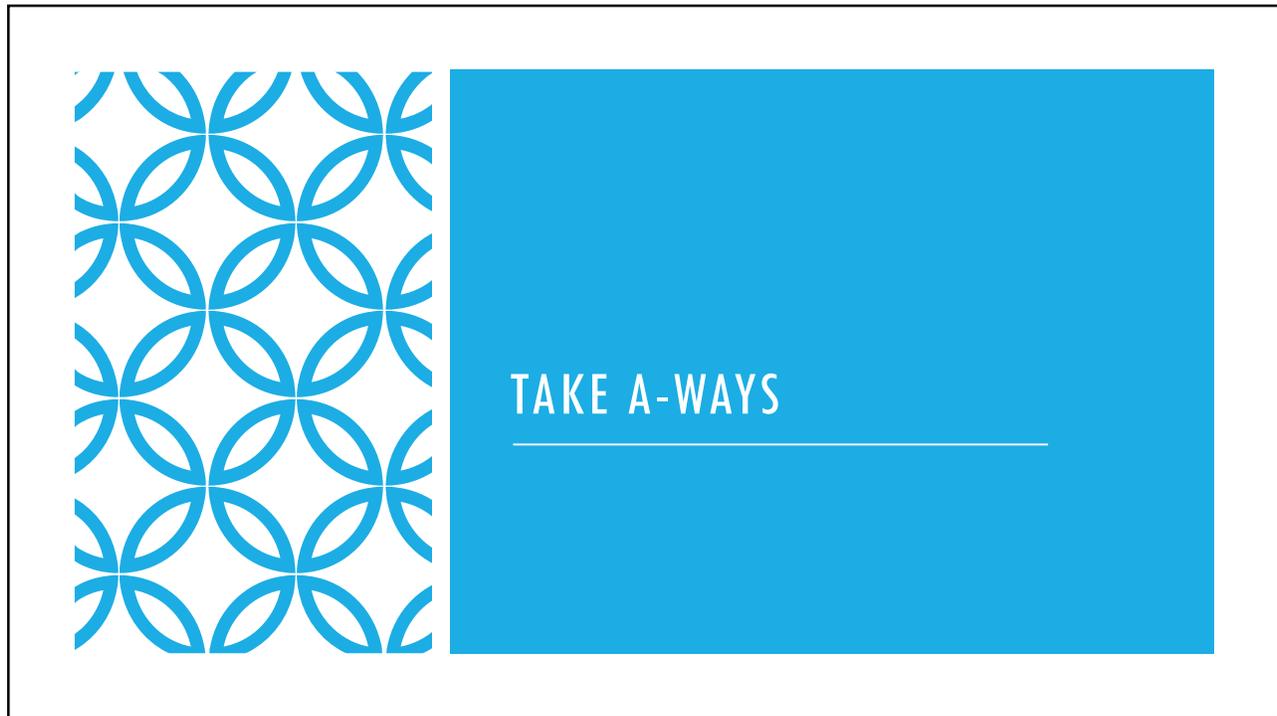


**SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCERN:**  
LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS, PARTICULARLY TRANSGENDER CLIENTS, FACE DISPROPORTIONATELY HIGH RATES OF HOMELESSNESS, DISCRIMINATION, AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.



**ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITY:**  
COLLABORATE WITH LOCAL SHELTERS TO ADOPT INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PROVIDE TRAINING ON GENDER-AFFIRMING CARE.

28



29

<h2>TIPS FOR NAVIGATING ETHICAL</h2>	<b>Use</b>	Use a <b>culturally informed ethical decision-making model</b> that integrates cultural identity, power dynamics, and systemic factors into your decision-making process.
	<b>Engage in</b>	Engage in <b>ongoing cultural humility</b> . Continuously reflect on your own biases and seek to understand your client's worldview without assumptions.
	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Consult</b> with diverse colleagues or cultural brokers <b>Collaboration</b> can provide insight into cultural norms and reduce blind spots in ethical reasoning.
	<b>Prioritize</b>	Prioritize <b>client voice</b> and empowerment - Include clients in decisions, respect their cultural values, and support autonomy and self-determination.
	<b>Advocate</b>	<b>Advocate</b> when needed (e.g., discrimination, lack of access). Take action through advocacy, resource linkage, or systemic intervention.

30

## KEY POINTS

### 1. Embrace Cultural Humility:

- Acknowledge that you are always learning.
- Recognize and challenge your own biases and privileges.

### 2. Context Matters:

- Understand clients' challenges within broader systems of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc.).
- Avoid pathologizing responses to injustice; validate systemic trauma.

### 3. Prioritize Client Voice and Agency

- Involve clients in decision-making around their treatment.
- Respect and affirm cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and healing traditions.

### 4. Ethical Codes Are a Floor, Not a Ceiling

- Use ACA, AMHCA, and NBCC codes as a baseline, but go beyond when advocating for social change.
- Recognize that ethical decision-making must include cultural relevance and systemic awareness.

### 5. Justice Is an Ethical Mandate

- Promote equity, not just equality.

31

## KEY POINTS

### 6. Think Ecologically

- Apply the **social-ecological model** to understand how individual, relational, community, and societal factors shape behavior and well-being.

### 7. Document Cultural and Ethical Reasoning

- When facing dilemmas, clearly document your consultation process, cultural considerations, and advocacy actions.
- Reflect on how your decisions were shaped by ethical standards and social justice values.

### 8. Foster Resilience and Empowerment

- Focus not only on challenges but also on cultural strengths, resilience, and resistance.
- Help clients and supervisees develop skills to navigate and challenge oppressive systems.

### 9. Avoid Ethical Paralysis

- Do not let fear of making a mistake prevent you from acting with integrity and courage.

### 10. Be Transparent and Accountable

- When appropriate, explain your decision-making processes to clients and supervisees.
- Apologize and repair harm when missteps occur.

32



**Ethical counseling demands more than rule-following. It requires:**

- Cultural humility
- Contextual awareness
- Consultation and supervision
- Commitment to social justice



**Goal: balance the ethical tightrope between fidelity to the code and responsiveness to human complexity**



**Dr. Derald Wing Sue reminds us, “A culturally competent counselor is one who questions their assumptions, even when they are grounded in good intentions or established norms.”**

## PARTING WORDS

33

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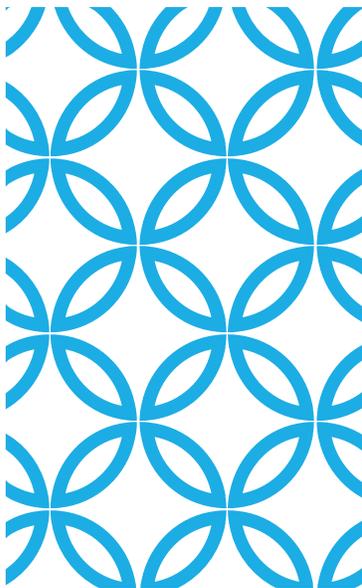
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35



### QUESTIONS?

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Marisa White  
us3we3@gmail.com

36