

---

Counselling for Caregivers

Unit 2:  
Ethical and Cultural Issues  
in Counselling



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

---



# Unit 2: Ethical and Cultural Issues in Counselling

## Table of Contents

---

Introduction . . . . .	1
Objectives . . . . .	2
Lesson One: The Needs and Rights of Children . . . . .	3
Lesson Two: The Ethics of Counselling with Children . . . . .	9
Lesson Three: The Role of Culture in a Counselling Relationship . . . . .	19
Lesson Four: Gender in Counselling. . . . .	23
Lesson Five: Increasing Your Self-Awareness . . . . .	26
Lesson Six: Resolving Ethical Dilemmas . . . . .	38
Summary . . . . .	44
Self-Assessment Exercise . . . . .	45
Answers to Self-Assessment . . . . .	48
References . . . . .	50
Glossary . . . . .	51
Appendix A: <i>The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child</i> . . . . .	52

---





## Unit 2: Ethical and Cultural Issues in Counselling

### Introduction

Working with a child is a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege because we have the opportunity to make a great difference in someone's life, and a responsibility because we are entrusted with the task of promoting every aspect of the child's development. All children are vulnerable. They have little power over their lives and few skills for protecting and caring for themselves. Caregivers who work with children have a special and important role—one in which they have the power to do great good or, in some unfortunate cases, great harm.

The particular status of children as human beings who need special protection and nurturing is recognised in documents such as the *African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child* and the ethical codes of relevant professional organisations.

Ethical codes and the values which they reflect can guide the work of caregivers and help them when they are making difficult decisions. Considerations such as culture and gender are part of the context within which those decisions are made.

Caregivers working with children and youth have an ethical responsibility to work in ways that put the children's interests first. In order to be able to do this, caregivers must have a high level of self-awareness so they can recognise their own needs, values, and beliefs and see how these could affect the relationship with the child.

This unit contains six lessons. The first discusses the needs and rights of children, including the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*. Lesson Two deals with the ethics of counselling. Lessons Three and Four talk about the roles of culture and gender in counselling. Lessons Five and Six are about increasing your self-awareness and resolving ethical dilemmas.



## Objectives

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

1. Explain why children hold a special position in society and discuss their particular rights and needs.
2. List ethical values associated with counselling children.
3. Discuss the impact of culture and gender in counselling.
4. Explain the role of the caregiver's values and attitudes in counselling.
5. Identify some of your own deeply held beliefs and values and describe how they might influence a counselling situation.

# Lesson One : The Needs and Rights of Children



The experiences children have in their early years determine to a very great extent the persons they will grow up to be. These are the years when they are developing physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually, so it is very important that they have the proper nutrition, stimulation, and emotional support. These are, of course, the years when they are the most vulnerable; they are unable to provide for themselves and need the care of adults and the protection of society. As human beings, we all have a moral obligation to children. As well, the special needs and rights of children are outlined in documents such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, and the laws in your country that address children (Kenya, for example, has a *Children's Act*).



## Activity 1

Find out which laws in your country address the rights and protection of children.

---



---



---



---



For the purposes of this course, we will look more closely at the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*.

## The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

The articles in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* are summarized below and the full document is an appendix to this unit. As you read through this document, think about what each article means for the children and youth in your care.

### Who Is a Child?

The word “child” refers to human beings below the age of 18, both boys and girls.

**Name and Identity**

Every child has a right to have a name, to be registered after birth and to be a citizen of a country.

**No Discrimination**

All children have the same rights. Children should not be discriminated against because of race, religion, colour, sex, disability, language, or ethnic group. They have the same rights whether their families are poor or rich.

**Care and Protection**

Children have a right to be cared for by their parents. Everyone should protect children against danger. Some children do not have parents. They too should be cared for and protected.

**Health**

All children should be healthy. They should be immunised, live in a clean home, eat good food and drink clean water. Governments should provide health services to children. Parents should also take care of the health of their children.

**Drugs**

Children should be protected from drugs and other harmful substances like alcohol and cigarettes. Drugs and alcohol can interfere with growth and education.

**Education**

Children have the right to be educated. The best education takes place in school, at home, and in the community. Children also learn when they play or help adults with work. Governments must ensure children are given a chance to go to school, both boys and girls.

**Freedom of Expression**

Children have the right to think and express themselves.

**Separated Children**

Children should not be separated from their parents and families, if at all possible. Children who have been separated from their parents have rights like other children. They need special help and protection. They should be helped to rejoin their families, or if that is not possible, they should be helped to join another family.

**Child Labour**

Children should not be made to do work that interferes with their growth, health, and education.

**Refugee Children**

Children who have been forced to run away from their countries have rights. They should be protected and helped. They should be helped to join their families as soon as possible.

**Children and War**

Children should not be made to fight in wars. They should be protected from the dangers of war. Children should be assisted to overcome the bad effects of war on them.

**Harmful Social Practices**

Children have a right to be protected against certain social practices which interfere with their growth, development, and education; for example, early marriages.

**Harmful Cultural Practices**

Children should be protected from certain cultural practices that interfere with their growth, physical and mental development, health, and education. Some harmful cultural practices may be borrowed from other cultures while others may be traditional. For example, female genital mutilation is not acceptable as a cultural practice and violates children's rights.

**Sexual Exploitation**

Children should not be forced to engage in sex. It is against the law for children to engage in sex.

**Child Abuse and Torture**

Children have a right not to be abused or tortured.

**Orphans**

Children whose parents have died because of HIV/AIDS or from any other cause have the same rights as all other children. They should be treated with respect and helped to live happily.

**Handicapped Children**

Children who are handicapped have the same rights as all children. They should be treated with respect.

**Children and the Law**

Children accused or found guilty of committing a crime have the right to special treatment. The child should be represented by a lawyer who is specially trained to work with children. They should be treated well and politely. Imprisoned children should not be tortured or treated badly. Children should not be put in the same court or prison with adults.

**Privacy**

Privacy is an important right of children which directly affects the counselling relationship.

**Protection of Privacy**

No child should be subjected to interference with his/her privacy, family, home, or correspondence. Neither should he/she be subjected to attacks upon his/her honour or reputation. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.



## Activity 2

Think about a child in your care. What does each of these items in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* mean for the way you will work with that particular child?

No discrimination:

---

---

Care and Protection:

---

---

Drugs:

---

---

Education:

---

---

Child labour:

---

---

Harmful social practices:

---

---

Harmful cultural practices:

---

---

Sexual exploitation:

---

---

Protection of Privacy:

---

---



As a responsible caregiver, you are obligated to ensure that the child is, among other things, treated equally with other children, protected from harm, allowed to express his or her thoughts and ideas, and given educational opportunities. You must also protect the child’s right to privacy; for example, by not allowing other children or adults to make disparaging remarks about the child and his or her family and by allowing the child to write and send letters without others reading them.

The *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* outlines your legal responsibilities to the children in your care. As a caregiver and counsellor, however, you also have an ethical responsibility to work with children in particular ways. Lesson 2 explores the concept of professional ethics and shows how you can use ethical guidelines in your work.

## Lesson Two



# The Ethics of Counselling with Children

This lesson will consider the meaning of “ethics,” look at key values involved in counselling ethics, and discuss characteristics of ethical practice with children.

## Professional Ethics

Professional ethics are guidelines that help people in a particular profession decide what is right and wrong in their professional practice. These guides are intended to protect clients and the professionals themselves. In the helping professions, clients usually come to counsellors because they are in some kind of distress which makes them especially vulnerable and in need of protection. Persons caring for children are in particular need of ethical guidelines because of the vulnerability and powerlessness of children and the complexity of the caregiver role. Ethical guidelines often are spelled out in what are known as “codes of conduct” or “codes of ethics.”

Ethics are based on values; that is, on principles or qualities that are considered by the professional group to be worthwhile and important. While personal values reflect what individuals consider to be important and what they believe to be wrong or right, professional values describe the beliefs the profession holds about people and how the profession ought to conduct its work.

## Ethical Practice in Counselling

Key values that are associated with ethical counselling include:

- Belief in the dignity and worth of all people.
- Meeting the needs of clients while respecting their individuality and rights.
- Promoting the clients’ right to freedom of choice.
- Commitment to continued learning. (Shebib, 2003)

## Belief in the Dignity and Worth of All People

This value means that counsellors/caregivers will pay attention to the rights of children. They will value children as unique individuals and

respect their confidentiality. They will treat them fairly, regardless of personal feelings about them. They will not label or stereotype them.



### Activity 3

What are some ways that a belief in the dignity and worth of all people is reflected in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*?

---

---

---



### Meeting the Needs of Clients while Respecting Their Individuality and Rights

This key value means that caregivers/counsellors must not use their relationship with the child for the adult’s personal interest or gain. This protects children from sexual and other exploitation by the adult. Meeting the needs of children includes providing for their physical well-being, their education, and for other opportunities.



### Activity 4

What are some ways that children might be exploited by adults? Do you know of situations where children have been exploited by their caregivers? What was the effect on the children?

---

---

---



### Promoting the Client’s Right to Freedom of Choice

Young children may not have the ability to make good choices. However, the caregiver/counsellor can help children learn to make choices in ways that are appropriate to their development. Very young children can choose between two items of clothing or decide whether to walk or be carried. Older children can be helped to talk through problems in order to come to a decision about the best course of action. Making good decisions is an important skill for children to learn and

they need lots of practice and support in doing so.



### Activity 5

What are some ways that you have helped children learn to make their own decisions?

---



---



---



### Commitment to Continued Learning

There is always more to learn about working with human beings. Your commitment to learning is evident in the fact that you are taking this course. Once you have finished the course you can continue your learning by seeking out other opportunities to learn about working with children. You can also learn by observing children carefully and by reflecting on experiences that you have with children; for example, thinking about what happened in a situation and what you might have done differently.



### Activity 6

Think about a difficult situation that you have experienced in your work with children. What happened? What did you learn from that situation?

---



---



---



### Ethical Practice with Children

In addition to the principles that are important in counselling, codes of ethics for persons working with young children reflect the fact that children are still learning and growing and that they do so through their interactions with other persons and their environment. They recognise:

- That early childhood is a unique and valuable stage of life and that every stage of childhood is important in and of itself.

- Children's right to play, since play has an important role in children's development.
- The need to support children's strengths, competence, and sense of self-worth.
- The need to provide safety and security for children and to ensure that they are not harmed, exploited, or intimidated in any way.

Now let's look more closely at some of the ways that you demonstrate ethical values in your work with children.

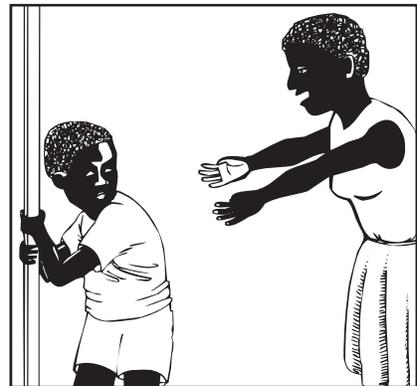
### **Building and Maintaining Relationships**

As a caregiver, you have an ethical responsibility to give the children and youth under your care an opportunity to know themselves and the special talents each may have and to help them develop into responsible adults in their social and career lives.

Some of them will be passing through experiences that interfere with their growth. They may have suffered the loss of a loved one. Some may have been involved in substance abuse and other anti-social behaviour.

To be able to help them, you must create a relationship with each child such that he or she trusts you. Do children say the following about you?

- He/she believes what I say
- He/she is listening to me
- He/she is not taking sides
- He/she appreciates me
- He/she will not tell others about my problem
- He/she will help me
- He/she respects me
- He/she believes I am not bad and I can change
- He/she is friendly



## Maintaining Confidentiality

As a caregiver, you should respect the integrity and protect the welfare of all persons with whom you are working. You have an obligation to safeguard information about them that has been obtained in the course of the counselling process.

- All records kept on a child are stored or disposed of in a manner that assures security and confidentiality.
- Treat all communications from clients with professional confidence.
- Do not disclose client confidences to anyone, except as mandated by law, to prevent a clear and immediate danger to someone, or by previously obtained written permission. In cases involving more than one person (as clients), written permission must be obtained from all persons who have been present during the counselling before any disclosure can be made.
- Obtain informed written consent of clients before audio- and/or video-taping or permitting third-party observation of the sessions.
- Do not use these standards of confidentiality to avoid intervention when it is necessary; for example, when there is evidence of abuse of minors, the elderly, the disabled, or the physically or mentally incompetent.

In any form of counselling it is expected that you *do not* discuss with others what has been said in the counselling session. The only exception to this is when you believe that the health or life of the child or youth is in danger, or he/she is a danger to others.

The issue of confidentiality is central to the whole process of building trust. You may be hearing for the first time what someone has done or gone through, so the person expects that you will keep the information to yourself. Breaking trust destroys your relationship with the child and it may also lead to a complete loss of trust in counselling.

Should you feel that you need the help of others in dealing with issues that come up in counselling, discuss this with the child and get permission to disclose to others.

Situations where a caregiver may break confidence:

- The child may want certain information passed on to a third party; for example, a parent, guardian, or teacher.
- Where the caregiver feels the child is a danger to her/himself or others.
- When the good of the child requires it.



### Activity 7

Banda is sixteen years old and for the last year has been coming for assistance at your drop-in centre. Before you tracked down his family and he returned home, he was living on the streets for two years. While on the street he was engaged in glue sniffing, petty theft, begging, and homosexuality. After two sessions with him, and listening to the health problems he is concerned with, you are convinced he could be HIV positive. He strongly rejects your suggestion that he go for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT). He has warned that you should not tell his parents about it.

What would you do as Banda's caregiver, and why?

---

---

---

---



Did you answer that in this case, breaking confidentiality is for Banda's own good? He needs to be tested so that he can receive the appropriate health care.

### Keeping Records

You may need to keep a record of your counselling sessions with children or youth that you see for more than one or two sessions for continuity. These should include:

- Personal details (code name/number preferably).
- The nature of the problem.
- Record of and progress during each session.

You should keep this information under lock and key. When no longer needed these records should be destroyed.

### **Avoiding Dual Relationships**

Dual relationships refer to a situation where you as a counsellor have other relationships with the child that you are counselling. This may be a teacher/pupil, relative/counsellor, pastor/counsellor, or other relationship.

Considering the nature of counselling, where confidentiality and trust between the caregiver and the child form the basis of the helping relationship, this may create a problem. The child may either fear opening up to you fully or may worry about confidentiality.

You as the helper may be influenced by your previous knowledge and attitudes toward the child. You must, however, appreciate that you must not reject the child in situations where there is no alternative source of help.

You should avoid other relationships with a person you are counselling. Avoid counselling children/youth that you are related to. In such cases the child might not be able to open up to you. If they do, you may find issues coming up about which you feel obliged to tell the child's parents or guardian. *Never* engage in a sexual relationship with any person you are counselling. This is totally unethical. You should consider what is culturally acceptable to the child you are counselling.



### Activity 8

Efi comes to you for help at the teenage pregnant girls crisis centre. She is your cousin’s daughter and the first thing she requests of you is not to tell her mother. Efi is four months pregnant and is not sure who the father is. Her father died four years ago and the mother has been struggling to educate Efi and her three brothers. Efi is in class eight and it is expected that she will perform very well and be admitted to the best government schools in the country.

As Efi’s aunt, how would you deal with this case?

---

---

---

---



This is a difficult case for Efi’s aunt. It would appear that either Efi trusts her or that there may be no one else she can approach for help.

The aunt could use the existing trust to help Efi look at the situation from many angles during the period between now and when the baby is born. They could consider how probable it is that Efi will go back to school after the baby is born.

They may also work together to decide on an action plan. This might include visiting the ante-natal clinic, learning about nutrition during pregnancy, and telling Efi’s mother. Through this process, Efi will be encouraged to take responsibility and gain hope for the future.

Depending on how the counselling proceeds, the aunt may feel unable to help Efi and may need to refer her to other professionals.

### Building Your Competence

As a caregiver, you must aim at maintaining high standards of work so that you can offer help to children. Therefore, you should take every opportunity available to learn more, for example:

- Read this manual thoroughly.
- Attend seminars that may be organised in your area.

- Be conversant with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, and the laws in your country that address children and their rights.
- Consult with other caregivers or counsellors on counselling issues, ensuring that you do not break confidentiality.
- Keep yourself informed by reading available materials.
- Be in touch with organisations and individuals such as counselling centres, drug rehabilitation centres, police, hospitals, etc. that you feel you can call upon for help.

Remember that you cannot be an expert in all situations that require counselling. Therefore, if you are dealing with an issue where you feel unable to offer help, please refer the child to a person or institution that will be able to help.



### Activity 9

List individuals and organisations in your area where you feel you can receive help for the children under your care.

---



---



---



---



---



### Making Referrals

Do not abandon or neglect the child or youth under your care. If you are unable—or unwilling for whatever reason—to provide professional help or continue a professional relationship, every reasonable effort should be made to arrange for continuation of counselling with another professional. Examples of situations where you need to arrange for counselling by someone else:

- A child needs kinds of services that you aren't able to provide.
- Your relationship with the child stands in the way of being

able to work effectively with him or her.

- You feel like you aren't making any progress with the child.
- When the child asks for a referral.

### **Role Modelling**

Your status as caregiver has already raised you to the status of role model for the children under your care. This role is further strengthened if you are the counsellor in the centre. Be aware of what is acceptable behaviour to the community around you and to the children in particular. Remember that your personal behaviour will influence how these children behave. It is your job to set a good example for them.

## Lesson Three



# The Role of Culture in a Counselling Relationship

As a caregiver and counsellor, you will be working with children and families from various cultures. In order to work effectively with culturally diverse individuals and groups, it is important to know what culture means in people's lives and to recognise differences that might be culturally-based. This lesson will help you begin to explore the fascinating subject of culture.

The idea of culture is interesting and important, but can be very hard to define and understand. Culture is a set of meanings that provides a sort of blueprint for how we should think, feel, and behave in order to be a part of a group. It includes patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, expectations, and symbols; in fact, every aspect of who we are that isn't biological in origin. Often people are part of more than one culture; for example, we may belong to a professional group, a religious group, and social groups each of which has its own way of speaking, dressing, and behaving.

Often we don't recognise aspects of our culture until we encounter cultural ideas or practices that are different from ours. Knowing our own culture is an important aspect of self-awareness, however, because we need to be able to recognise culturally-based differences.

### **Increasing Your Cultural Awareness**

Here are some questions to help you explore your own cultural heritage. Think of the group with which you tend to identify most closely while you are answering the questions or answer them for each of the groups to which you belong:

- What style of speaking is valued in this group?
- Is there a particular type of dress that characterises this group?
- What role (if any) do names play in the group? Are there rules or rituals governing the assignment of names?
- What occupational roles are valued and devalued by the group?

- What is the relationship between age and values in the group?
- How is family defined in the group?
- How does this group view outsiders in general?
- What prejudices or stereotypes does this group have about itself?
- What prejudices or stereotypes do other groups have about this group?
- What prejudices or stereotypes does this group have about other groups?
- What issues divide members within the same group?
- What were/are the group's experiences with oppression?
- How is social class defined in the group?
- What is/are the dominant religion(s) within the group? What role does religion and spirituality play in the everyday lives of members of the group?
- What significance do race, skin colour, and hair have within the group?
- What roles do regionality and geography play in the group?
- How are gender roles defined within the group? How is sexual orientation regarded?
- If more than one group makes up your culture of origin, how are the differences negotiated in your family? What are the intergenerational consequences? How has this impacted you personally and professionally? (Adapted from Diller and Moule, 2005)

These questions show you some aspects of identity that are related to culture. Cultural differences that affect counselling relationships include:

1. Communication styles, for example the way words and phrases are used, the degree of importance given to non-verbal communication, and the appropriate degree of assertiveness in communicating.
2. Different attitudes toward conflict, for example whether conflict is positive or should be avoided, whether conflict should be resolved in face-to-face meetings.

3. Different approaches to completing tasks, for example whether or not it is important to build a relationship with another person in order to work with him or her on completing a task.
4. Different styles of decision-making, for example majority rule or consensus.
5. Different attitudes about open emotion and personal matters.
6. Different approaches to knowing, for example through symbolic imagery and rhythm, library research, visiting people who have had similar challenges. (Adapted from the Community Tool Box, 2005)

Cultural differences can result in very different interpretations of actions, as the example below shows.



### Example 1

Paul is on his way home from school. As he is walking along he sees a tree with enticing ripe yellow mangoes. It is a hot afternoon, he is hungry, and he is still 10 kilometers from home. He walks over to the tree, climbs it, and picks two large juicy mangoes. Just as he steps down from the tree the owner of the garden approaches him angrily. Is Paul a thief?



In some communities it is acceptable for one who is hungry to pick farm produce (mangoes, sweet potatoes, sugar cane, tomatoes, guava etc.) for immediate consumption. This ensures that nobody dies of hunger. In other communities, private ownership is highly regarded and taking anything without the owner's permission is considered to be stealing. The attitudes that people would have toward Paul's actions would depend on their cultural views about whether or not it is acceptable for a person to take farm produce because he or she is hungry.

Cultural norms are very powerful, as we see in the example on the following page.



## Example 2

Among the Kisii of Kenya female circumcision is still practiced as a rite of passage. However, many parents have been enlightened as to the negative health effects of the practice and are abandoning it. Regardless of this, some of their daughters find ways to secretly get circumcised without the knowledge of their parents. They con-  
 nive with relatives, especially grandparents, to organise the operation and rituals that follow it.



This illustrates how the community influences individuals to abide by cultural expectations. Girls who have not been circumcised are normally insulted by peers and are influenced to believe in the value of the practice.

As a counsellor, you will be working with children and families from various cultural backgrounds. One of the most important things to



remember is not to assume that another person has the same values, beliefs, and practices that you do. Use your observation, listening, and questioning skills to learn what is important to the other person and how they see the world. Be open to learning about other ways of seeing and living in the world.

## Lesson Four



## Gender in Counselling

### Case Study 1: Kamau and Zawadi

Kamau walked into the kitchen while his wife was busy cooking the evening meal and their three daughters were dozing by the fireside. It was an hour past their bedtime.

“What can a man do?” shouted Kamau. “I made you resign from your job, so you can take proper care of my children. They should have slept an hour ago to be properly rested for school tomorrow.”

Zawadi recoiled in fear since lately Kamau has hit or slapped her a few times in anger. Up to last year Zawadi taught at the nursery school in the village. She was able to hire a house-helper and was happy, as she had a bit of her own money and the house was clean and the children cared for until she came home in the late afternoon.

Kamau thought differently. As he put it, “A man is supposed to provide for his family and I do not want my wife to WORK.” Zawadi reflected on her day; she woke up at 5.00 a.m. to heat bathing water for her husband and children. She made breakfast and saw them off by 8.00 a.m. Then she fetched water and firewood and washed clothes before making lunch for the children. Her second child came home with a fever and she took her to the clinic five kilometres away, where they had to queue up until 4.30 p.m. to see the doctor. She was very tired after all this and was looking forward to making supper and going to bed early after feeding the family and cleaning the dishes.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Kamau, “You stay at home the whole day and cannot cook supper in good time. It is time you gave me a son to care for me in old age and inherit my property. You would also have something to keep you busy.”



## Activity 10

Look back at your family and the way you all related to each other as you grew up. As you read about Kamau and Zawadi and the way they treat each other, is any of it familiar to you? If not, what are the different ways in which men and women relate in your family and community?

---



---



---



---



The way men and women relate socially in a given community is referred to as gender. These relationships include:

- The kind of work performed by men and women and its importance, for example women cook and take care of the household while men go to work and earn a living.
- Power relations, for example men make decisions and women implement them.
- Ownership of wealth, for example land and animals are owned by men while household utensils are owned by women.

Gender is learned through interactions with our family, community, and other institutions such as church, mosques, schools, etc. Each community has its own idea of how it wants to prepare its boys and girls to become the men and women of tomorrow. Therefore, gender relations will vary from community to community.

Gender relations will also change over time. For example, in many communities in the past, it has been taboo for a man to cook. However, due to social and economic changes many men have jobs away from home and have to cook for themselves. As a result it is no longer strange to find a man preparing a meal for his family.



### Activity 11

Can you think of changes you have noticed in your lifetime in how men and women relate in your community?

---

---

---

---

When you are counselling children and youth, keep in mind that it is in their best interest to have as many skills and options as possible, regardless of their gender. When boys learn to cook, they know that they can look after themselves. When girls learn a trade or profession, they are better prepared to cope with the uncertainties of life.

# Lesson Five

## Increasing Your Self-Awareness



As we have seen, it is important for caregivers/ counsellors to recognise and accept ways of thinking and being that are different from their own. This allows them to meet the needs of children rather than acting upon their own needs. The following example, which shows the house mother responding in two different ways to Awino’s request for help, demonstrates why this is important.

### Example 1



Awino is a 15-year-old school girl. She is an orphan living in a children’s home. Awino has missed her monthly period for two months and is scared she might be pregnant. She decides



to go and talk to her house mother to seek help and advice.



The house mother strongly disapproves of the tight jeans that Awino is wearing and frowns. She feels only girls with loose morals dress that way. Further, she is scandalised that Awino has had sex outside marriage. Awino can see that the house



mother is shocked by her revelation. Immediately she withdraws her statement and closes the conversation.



## Example 2



Awino is a 15-year-old school girl. She is an orphan living in a children's home. Awino has missed her monthly period for two months and is scared she might be pregnant. She

decides to go and talk to her house mother to seek help and advice.



The house mother strongly disapproves of the tight jeans that Awino is wearing and she would not let her daughter dress like that. However, she smiles warmly at Awino and asks her "Do you have a boyfriend?"

Awino: I have many boyfriends although I like this one boy Banda but he is interested

in other girls and not me. He says I am a baby.

House mother: What makes you think you may be pregnant?

Awino: Well, the other girls told me that when you miss your monthly period it means you are pregnant.

House mother: Have you had sex recently?

Awino: Banda tried to kiss me but I pushed him away—that is when he said I am a baby.

House mother: Have you had sexual intercourse with him?

Awino: NO!

House mother: You don't need to worry then, Awino. If you have not had sexual intercourse you are not pregnant. When you miss your monthly period it doesn't necessarily mean that you're pregnant. There can be other reasons for women to miss their period.





### Activity 12

Think about the differences between scenarios 1 and 2. Write your ideas here:

---



---



---



---



In the first case the housemother was quick to show her feelings and attitudes about Awino. Awino noticed very quickly and closed the conversation, so the house parent lost an opportunity to help a child under her care.

In the second case, despite the fact that the house-mother had her opinion and attitudes she kept them to herself and did not let them become part of the discussion. Hence, Awino opened up to her and the house-mother was able to guide and help her.

As a caregiver, you have a responsibility to respect children as fellow human beings and to act in their best interests. This means that you can not let your personal attitudes, beliefs and needs stand in the way of providing the best possible care for them. The attitudes, values, and behaviours that you must adopt because of your responsibility to the children in your care reflect your professional ethics.

It is easy to say that we will put aside our own attitudes, values, and needs to respond to children’s needs, but it can be hard to do. These characteristics are so much a part of us that we often don’t recognise that they are there. That is why it is so important for caregivers/counsellors to understand themselves well.

Counsellors need to recognise their own needs, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours so they can see their clients as unique persons who are different from themselves. Without self-awareness, counsellors are likely to respond to their clients in ways that are based on their own needs and attitudes, as the housemother did in the first example with Awino. The table that follows shows some of the differences between counsellors who have self-awareness and those who lack it.

<b>Counsellors with Self-Awareness</b>	<b>Counsellors without Self-Awareness</b>
Recognise and name their personal feelings.	Avoid or are unaware of their feelings.
Can distinguish between their own thoughts and those of clients.	May attribute their own feelings to their clients.
Recognise areas where they are vulnerable or have unresolved feelings.	Respond inappropriately because their own unresolved problems interfere with their ability to be objective.
Understand their personal values and their influence on the counselling relationship.	React emotionally to their clients but don't understand why they are reacting that way.
Realise how their behaviour influences clients.	Are unaware of how their behaviour influences clients.
Change their behaviour based on the reactions of clients.	Behave according to their personal needs and style rather than the needs and reactions of clients.
Understand their own strengths and limitations and can set goals for improvement.	Avoid setting goals for themselves because they are unaware of their own personal and professional needs.

(Adapted from Shebib, 2003, p. 53)

How can you become more self-aware? You can develop your self-awareness through self-examination, something you will be doing in the exercises below. You can also ask trusted colleagues and friends to give you feedback about your behaviours and attitudes. You will need to let them know that you are genuinely trying to improve and won't become defensive or hurt if they tell you something you would rather not hear about yourself!

The following activity helps you learn to "notice" your perceptions, feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviour. This is a useful exercise to try whenever you are in a puzzling or problematic situation because it gives you new insights about your own motivations and behaviours.



### Activity 13

Think about an experience you have had recently and what it was like for you at the time. Then answer these questions:

What were your senses telling you at the time (What did you see, hear, smell, taste, touch)?

---

---

What were your feelings (emotions)?

---

---

What thoughts did you have?

---

---

What did you wish or hope would happen?

---

---

How did you behave (If someone had been watching you, how would they have described your actions)?

---

---



### Becoming Aware of Your Own Values and Attitudes

We all have ideas about what is right and wrong or good and bad. Sometimes we aren't really aware of the ideas we have until a situation comes up that makes us think about what we believe. Often that is a situation where we meet someone who has quite different ideas. This is what happens with Mutinta when she talks with Awino's mother in the following example.



### Example 3

Mutinta, a teacher, is concerned because her student, Awino, has been away from school for almost a month. She knows that Awino has been sponsored to go to school, so she wonders if perhaps someone in the family is ill. She goes to talk with Awino's mother. When Mutinta finds that everyone in the family is fine, she is even more puzzled by Awino's poor attendance. Finally she asks Awino's mother why Awino hasn't been coming to school. "She's a girl," her mother answers. "She'll just be getting married and having babies. Why does she need an education for that?"



This story shows the different values that Mutinta and Awino's mother hold about the education of girls. Mutinta believes that everyone should get all the education they can. Awino's mother believes that education isn't necessary for a woman because of the life she will be leading.

Mutinta is surprised, at first, by Awino's mother's reply. Then she reminds herself that not everyone values education as she does. She considers that Awino's mother has had a different life than she, Mutinta, has had, and it is understandable that she would have different values. This realisation helps her to respond calmly and sympathetically and, in the end, to convince Awino's mother to send her to school.

There are several reasons why it is important for us to be aware of our values. One is that being aware of our values helps us to make choices in our lives that fit with our values. When we do that, we can respect ourselves for the way we live our lives. Another reason is that being aware of our values helps us to understand that not everyone feels the same, and it helps us to respect others even if the values they hold are different from ours.



### Activity 14

This activity will help you to think about your own values. First list five things that are important to you in life:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Now list them according to their importance, with the most important one first:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Does the way you are living your life right now fit with your values?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now ask someone else to answer the first question. What differences do you notice between that person's answer and yours?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Each person will answer these questions a bit differently, although there will probably be similarities as well. For example, you may have



said that you value your family, or that you value kindness, or that you value financial security.

When we talk about values we often talk, as well, about attitudes. What are the differences between the two? As we have seen in the activity above, when we talk about values we are talking about what we believe is important in life. Our attitudes, on the other hand, are our opinions or ways of thinking about things and are often reflected in our behaviour. For example, if I value education then my attitude toward people who are well-educated may be one of admiration and respect.

Our values and attitudes come from many sources including the experiences we have had in our lives, the values that have been passed on from our families, and our culture. Let's look at some examples of ways that each of these factors can influence our values and attitudes.

### **Personal Experiences**

Let's say, for example, that one of your important values is kindness. That value could come from many sources, but one of them might be that you have been treated with kindness yourself through the years. You value the kindness you have experienced and want to pass it on to others.

If one of your values is financial security, it could be because you have struggled against great financial hardship in your life and you don't want your family to experience the same thing.

In each of these examples, the experiences you have had in your life would influence your beliefs about what is important in life; that is, your values.

### **Family Influences**

What you see and hear in the family as you are growing up influences the values and attitudes you have as an adult. Think about some of the messages you got from your parents, guardians, or other family members about how you should live. These may have been things they told you or things you learned from watching how they did things and what they expected of others and themselves. For example, your family may have taught you that women were equal to men and should be

respected, or they may have taught you that men are the bosses of the household and everyone should do what they say.



### Activity 15

Think about the messages you have received from your family about everyday events.

#### Food and Mealtime

Here are some questions to help you start thinking about this topic: What did you learn about food and mealtime? Did everyone eat together? Did everyone talk, or were you expected to be quiet? If there was not enough food, who got to eat first? What opinions did people have about different foods and about how they should be cooked? Were mealtimes a time of pain, pleasure, or both?

---

---

---

---

---

How do you see past mealtime experiences reflected in your feelings and expectations about food and mealtimes now?

---

---

---

#### Dress and Appearance

What messages did you receive about how you should dress when you were growing up?

---

---

---

---

How are these messages reflected in your expectations of yourself and others now?

---



---



---

### **Morality**

What did your family teach you about right and wrong? How did they teach you these things? Were the views you were taught related to a religious background? Did your family have definite attitudes toward people of different religious beliefs?

---



---



---



---



---

How are these teachings reflected in the way you live now?

---



---



---

### **Other**

Can you think of other ways that values you have now were influenced by your family's attitudes as you were growing up?

---



---



---



---



### **Culture**

As we have discussed, we learn the attitudes and values that are expected of us when we live within a particular culture. For example,

we may learn particular attitudes about good and bad behaviour or ideas about different groups of people.



### Activity 16

Earlier you explored some ways that your family experiences have influenced your values and attitudes. Now think about other things that have affected your ideas about what is important in life and how people should live. Write your thoughts here:

---

---

---

Now think about a time when you met or worked with someone whose values and attitudes were quite different from yours. How did you feel and think about that person?

---

---

---

If you were a counsellor working with that person, what difficulties might you have encountered?

---

---

---



Each of us is unique. You have your own ideas about what is important in life and your own attitudes about the situations and people you encounter in your life. These values and attitudes come from the experiences you have had in your life including the influences of your family and your culture. You express your values and attitudes in your behaviour.

The clients with whom you work also have unique perspectives on life which may be different from yours. The first step in being able to work effectively with clients whose values and attitudes are different from



yours is to recognise your own perspectives. This will help you to keep your own ideas separate when you are working with clients and not let them “spill over” into the work you are doing with them.

#### **Example 4**

Lilian has arranged to meet with Karima’s father to discuss Karima’s future schooling. Karima is doing well at school and Lilian would like to see her go on to the next level. She is not sure if Karima’s father will approve.

Lilian believes strongly in monogamy. She and her husband have lived happily together for almost 20 years. Karima’s father has four wives and is unable to care for all of his children.

Lilian knows that it will be best for Karima if she can establish a good working relationship with the father. In order to do this, she will need to put aside her beliefs about monogamy and parental responsibility and attempt to understand how the father sees the situation. Then she will need to work with him to find a solution that is agreeable to everyone concerned.

## Lesson Six



# Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

So far in this unit we have discussed children's rights, the ethical responsibilities of persons working with children, how culture and gender influence work with children, and the importance of self-awareness in working with children. In this final section of the unit we will put many of these pieces together as we look at a process for making difficult ethical decisions.

In your work with children, you may sometimes find that you have to deal with problems that involve competing values; for example, where no matter what decision you make someone will be unhappy or hurt. These situations are called ethical dilemmas.

For example, suppose three girls that you know confide in you that they are making secret plans to be circumcised. If you tell their parents, you will be betraying their trust. If you don't tell anyone and they go ahead with the circumcision, there may be serious health concerns and, if the parents found out that you knew and didn't tell them, they would be very angry with you. You are in a very difficult situation.

The *Ethical Decision-Making Process* below outlines a process to follow in making difficult decisions like this.

### **Ethical Decision-Making Process**

This model is intended as a guide to your reflection on the ethical dilemmas you find in your work with children and families.

#### **1. Identify the Situation Requiring a Decision**

- What is the issue and who is affected by it (child, family, community)?

#### **2. Identify Components of the Situation**

- Practice issues—What would be the most practical, efficient thing to do?
- Ethical issues—What would be the “right” (ethical) thing to do?
- Legal issues—What does the law demand you do?

**3. Reflect on the Person You Are**

- How would you describe the best ethical self that you bring to this work?
- How would you describe the values you have learned in your life?
- What values do you bring because of your cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, gender, and age?
- Do you find that you identify more easily with the child, the family, or the community?
- Do you prefer to have rules to follow, or would you more often say “It all depends”?

**4. Identify Values at Stake**

- What do you understand the child’s values to be?
- How would you describe the community’s values, cultural and spiritual beliefs? What other values are brought to the community by television, music, etc?
- What are the values and standards of others doing the kind of care-giving work you do?
- What are the values of the society you live in?

**5. Identify Ethical Obligations**

- How do you understand your ethical obligations to the child, family, community?

**6. Explore Possible Alternatives**

- What are the implications of each decision you could make on children, families, community?
- What are the costs and advantages of each possible decision?
- What are the implications of not doing anything?

**7. Assess Priorities and Claims**

- What are the priorities of different ethical decisions?
- How could alternative decisions be justified?

- How could each decision be implemented?

#### **8. Resolve the Dilemma**

- What is your final decision? Is it a clear one, or a compromise?
- If your decision must be communicated to the child or to someone else, how will you do so?
- What personal consequences will you have to live with?

#### **9. Prepare for Next Time**

- What have you learned that will help you with your next ethical dilemma?

D. Massing (2002).

Try out this ethical decision-making process in the activity on the following pages.



### Activity 17

Some girls that you know have confided in you that they are planning to be secretly circumcised. You try to persuade them not to, but they won't be convinced. You are worried about their health and about how their parents will feel about this.

Work through this process to help you decide what to do.

What are some of the things you need to consider in deciding what to do?

For example:

- What do you know about these girls and their ability to make good decisions?
- What kind of relationship do you have with these girls? Do they trust you?
- Health issues.
- Spiritual issues/ cultural values and traditions.
- Children's rights.

---



---



---



---



---



---

Is there any further information you need in order to make a decision about what to do?

---



---



---



---



---



---

*(continued on next page)*

**Activity 17 (continued)**

What are all of the possible actions you could take? What would be the outcomes of each of these actions? (Not acting is one of these alternatives)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Which is the best solution? How would you go about acting on this solution? What outcomes of this solution might you need to be prepared for?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What have you learned from this situation that would help you deal with a similar one in the future?

---

---

---

---

*(continued on next page)*

**Activity 17 (continued)**

There is no right answer to an ethical dilemma, only one that does the least harm given all of the circumstances. Do you feel that the solution you chose in the dilemma above is one that is ethically sound? Please explain why.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Summary

This unit has explored the obligations and responsibilities you have as a caregiver/counsellor to children. You have considered rights of children and the ethical responsibilities of caregivers/counsellors. You have considered ways that culture and gender enter into your work with children. This unit has encouraged you to become aware of your own attitudes and values so that they won't interfere with your work with children. Finally, the unit provides you with a process for making the difficult ethical decisions that can arise in working with children.



## Self-Assessment Exercise

Imagine you are the counsellor in each of the situations below. Tell what would you do, and why you would choose that course of action.

### Question 1

You are a caregiver to Tandi who has recently discovered that her mother, who is a single parent, has HIV/AIDS. She understands from the villagers that her mother is going to die soon. Tandi is the first-born. She is 15 years old and three younger siblings follow her. From the first session, Tandi has talked about suicidal feelings: "I want to die before my mother. What will I do once she is gone?" In the latest session, two months into counselling, she appears very depressed. It is 15 minutes to the end of the session and she suddenly shouts out "Yes, it all makes sense now. I'm going to kill myself when I get home".

---



---



---



---



---

### Question 2

Much of the time your client talks about the tremendous problems she is having getting a job. You think that there are practical (as opposed to psychological) reasons why your client is not being successful in her job applications. You could coach her but feel this isn't part of your role as a counsellor. All your normal counselling-style efforts to get the client to help herself are to no avail.

---



---



---



---



---

Question 3

A client is getting worse. She is becoming abusive in sessions and you feel she is mentally disturbed.

---

---

---

---

---

Question 4

You are a caregiver offering counselling to children and young people. A young couple comes to you wanting couple counselling—they say you are the only counsellor they know. You have no experience of couple counselling, but would like to get some. You realise that if you turn them down they will probably not get any counselling at all.

---

---

---

---

---

• Question 5

• Last week, a young person you are counselling admitted he had molested children in the past. He fears he might do it again. He seems to have some insight into his problem and is making some progress. However, he recently mentioned one or two children he would like to molest.

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• Question 6

• You are counselling a young person. You find him/her very attractive and you interpret some of his/her behavior as flirting with you.

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_



## Suggested Answers to Self-Assessment Exercise

### Question 1

Take Tandi's talk of suicide seriously. Listen to her and ask her if she has made a definite plan for committing suicide. The more definite her plan is, the greater the risk that she will actually do it. Contact someone who can help: a medical doctor, a mental health agency, or a crisis line.

Make arrangements for Tandi to be watched closely and supported once she returns home, either by a counsellor in the area or someone in her community that she respects and trusts. Help her make as many contacts as possible. She will need a support network of caring people to help her cope.

### Question 2

Since your efforts to get the client to help herself are not working, you should refer her to an individual or agency that can provide the coaching that she needs to be successful with her job applications.

### Question 3

If possible, refer this client to a mental health professional. If not, try to find a mental health professional to consult for help with short term management of the situation. It is not appropriate or helpful to allow her to continue abusing you.

### Question 4

You are faced with an ethical dilemma—is it better to provide the service knowing that you lack experience or to risk that the couple won't go to a counsellor if you refer them? One solution could be to ask their permission to bring in an experienced couples counsellor to work with you.

### Question 5

Measures need to be taken to protect the children that have been mentioned and any other children with whom the youth comes in contact. You are not obligated to maintain confidentiality in this case because

• the youth could be a danger to others.

• Question 6

• You should not engage in a personal relationship with a client, and  
• never in a sexual relationship. It is probably best to refer the youth to  
• another counselor.



## References

Community Toolbox. (2005). *Community Toolbox website*. Retrieved August 22, 2006 from [www.cib.ik.edu](http://www.cib.ik.edu)

Diller, J.V. & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Early Childhood Australia (n.d.). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved August 24, 2006 from [http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code\\_of\\_ethics/early\\_childhood\\_australias\\_code\\_of\\_ethics.html#link2](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code_of_ethics/early_childhood_australias_code_of_ethics.html#link2)

Klopt, D. & McCroskey, J. (2007). *Intercultural communication encounters*. Toronto: Pearson.

Massing, D. (2002). *Ethical decision-making process* (unpublished).

Shebib, B. (2003). *Choices: Interviewing and counselling skills for Canadians*. Toronto: Pearson, p. 53.



## Glossary

**Code of ethics:** A set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviour by members of a professional group. The code of ethics reflects the values of the group.

**Ethical dilemma:** A situation that requires a choice between competing values.

**Labelling:** Consistently using a particular name or phrase to describe a person.

**Personal values:** What individuals consider to be desirable and what they believe to be wrong or right.

**Professional ethics:** Principles and rules of acceptable conduct that guide the work done by people in a particular profession.

**Professional values:** The beliefs a profession holds about people and how the work of the profession ought to be conducted.

**Stereotyping:** Seeing people in a preconceived, oversimplified way; for example, believing that those belonging to a certain group of people will have particular characteristics.

**Values:** Principles or qualities that are considered to be worthwhile and important.

