



Newfoundland & Labrador Association of
Social Workers

Navigating Ethical Issues in Social Work Practice

December 5, 2017
National Webinar

Navigating Ethical Issues in Social Work Practice



- 1) Trends in ethical consultations
- 2) Framework/tool to support ethical decision-making
- 3) Ethics and social networking
- 4) E-professionalism
- 4) Practice resources

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- Boundaries
 - dual relationships
 - conflict of interest
 - self-disclosure
 - social media
 - Privacy & Confidentiality
 - Informed Consent



Is it ever appropriate for social workers to maintain relationships with clients after the professional relationship has terminated?

Should social workers ever disclose personal information to clients?

Should social workers ever personally hire former clients?

What do I do if a client contacts me on my personal social media account?

Feeling towards a client the same feeling the social worker has had towards someone else.



A choice between two actions based on conflicting values. Both may be morally correct and professionally grounded. Both may be right or good. This is the dilemma for the practitioner. (Linzer, 1999).



CASW Code of Ethics

Components of Ethical
Decision Making

Risk Tolerance

Critical Reflection and
Professional Judgment



Value 1: Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons

Value 2: Pursuit of social justice

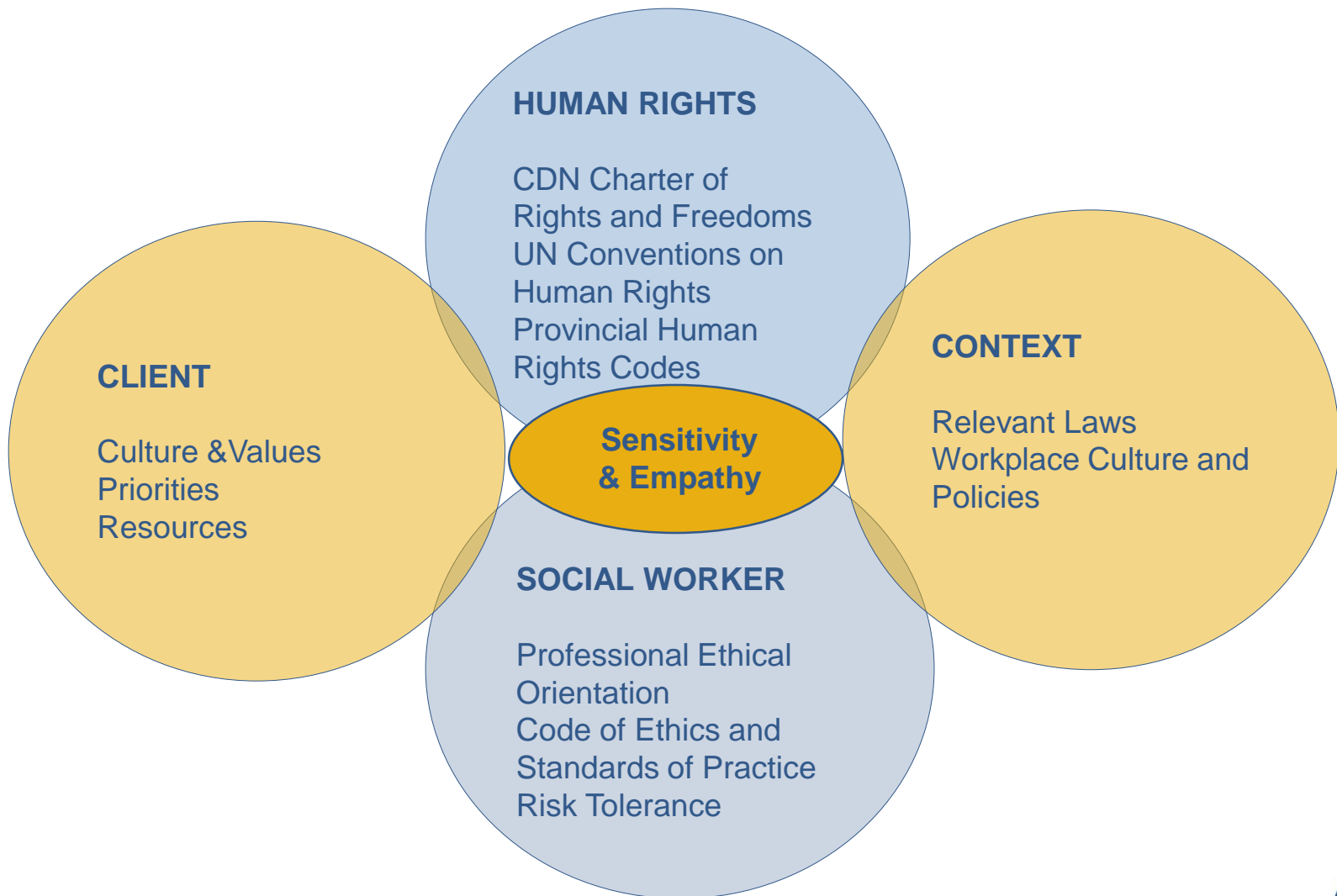
Value 3: Service to humanity

Value 4: Integrity in professional practice

Value 5: Confidentiality in professional practice

Value 6: Competence in professional practice

Components of Ethical Practice



What factors impact your tolerance for risk?

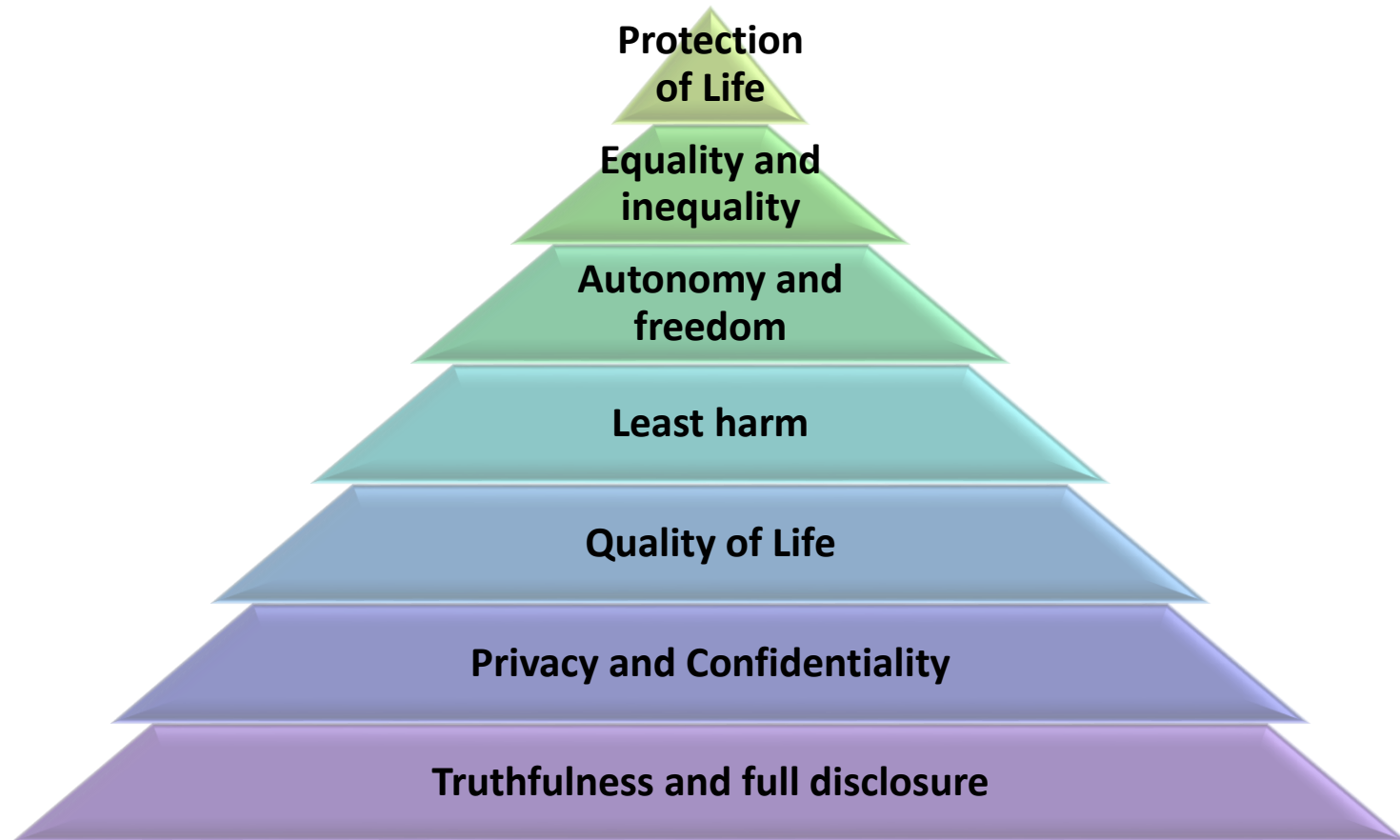
How comfortable are you with uncertainty and ambiguity?

What principles are you guided by? Deontological or Utilitarian?

What theories inform your practice?

Ethical Decision-Making Model

- Clearly articulate the dilemma
- Consider your immediate reaction
- Consult the Code of Ethics
- Consult applicable agency policies and standards
- Determine if there are legal aspects to the dilemma
- Access for cultural considerations
- Re-examine what was covered if informed consent
- Explore options (risks and benefits)
- Consult
- Document
- Monitor & Evaluate



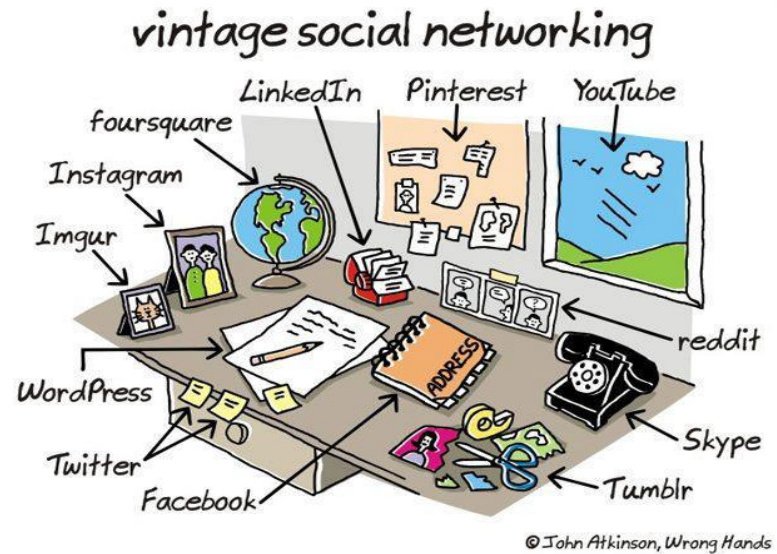
Critical Reflection & Professional Judgement

“Ethical behaviour comes from a social worker’s individual commitment to engage in ethical practice. Both the spirit and the letter of this Code of Ethics will guide social workers as they act in good faith and with a genuine desire to make sound judgements”.

(CASW Code of Ethics, 2005)

Pause for Thought

- Am I placing the client first? Or am I motivated by my own needs?
- Are professional boundaries being challenged? Have I set clear boundaries?
- Is this situation/dilemma creating a blend between my personal and professional life?
- Would I consider it to be reasonable for another social worker to make a similar decision given the context and facts?
- Can I explain the rationale for my decision and link it to my professional code of ethics?
- Are there other influences that may be guiding my decision-making?



Key Areas for Ethical Consideration

- Self-Disclosure and Boundaries
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Conflicts of Interest and Dual Relationships
- Informed Consent

“Karen, RSW is concerned about a current client who has missed his last three scheduled appointments. Karen has not been able to reach the client by phone. Knowing that this client has a Facebook profile, Karen questions whether she should search the client’s Facebook page to check in on the client”.

- ✓ Know and understand the importance of boundaries
- ✓ Understand the importance of informed consent
- ✓ Know your Code of Ethics and Ethical Guidelines
- ✓ Use consultation and supervision
- ✓ Use models of ethical decision making
- ✓ Engage in continuing professional education
- ✓ Remember that you have tremendous power and the responsibility to use it wisely.
- ✓ Documentation is essential
- ✓ Engage in on-going critical reflection

- “The development of an on-line persona that is congruent with the values and ethics of the professional and portrays use of self in a way that is respectful and demonstrates professional integrity”.

McAuliffe (2014).



"If you're so super,
why don't you have a Facebook fan page?"



Risk Management Strategies

- ✓ Become familiar with the operational policies of social media sites and ensure that your privacy settings are set to the highest levels.
- ✓ Keep personal and professional internet accounts separate and recognize when boundaries are being challenged.
- ✓ Remember that the internet is permanent and everything you post or write may have a lasting effect.

Risk Management Strategies

- ✓ Periodically check to see what is available about you on-line.
- ✓ Think about how your on-line comments will be perceived and interpreted – pause before you post or send.
- ✓ Consider how your on-line comments may impact on your professional reputation and your profession.

Risk Management Strategies

- ✓ Do not post anything on-line that you would not repeat in a crowded room or would want to read on the front page of the Telegram.
- ✓ Develop your own professional social media policy and contribute to the development of agency policies and guidelines.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with best practice standards and guidelines and engage in continued learning.

- CASW Code of Ethics & Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005)
- Ethical Decision Making in Social Work Practice 2015 (NLASW)
- Practice Matters (NLASW)
- Social Media Use and Social Work Practice – 2014 (CASW)
- Standards of Practice (NLASW)
- Self-Assessment Tools for Informed Consent and Documentation
- Model Regulatory Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice – 2015 (ASWB)
- Connecting Voices – NLASW Social Work Newsletter
- Professional Issues Committee – Ethical Consultations for NLASW Members!!

Thank-you



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