



YouthWorkAndYou.org

Victoria University, Australia

in collaboration with

Ulster University, Northern Ireland

Unit 2

Human Rights and Ethics in Professional Youth Work

Ethical Decision Making

YouthWorkAndYou.org is brought to you by the Youth Work eLearning Partnership [YWeLP], an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership 2017-2019.

Introduction

Ethical Decision Making

This unit provides you with a short introductory video, information about the topic, the opportunity to reflect on your own practice as a youth worker and finally a call to action.

This unit will encourage you to consider the vital role of ethics in youth work practice and how you might use a code of ethics to assist you to make ethical decisions when working with young people.

Please watch the Unit 2 video before proceeding further.

A photograph of a modern university building with a large sign that reads "VICTORIA UNIVERSITY" in bold, blue, sans-serif capital letters. The building is made of light-colored bricks and has a blue sky in the background.

Setting the Scene

A person's values, beliefs and attitudes all influence their decision making process and subsequent actions. Values can be defined as what is most important to an individual, whereas our beliefs are what is thought to be the truth. A person's attitudes are revealed by words and thoughts and can be influenced by our beliefs and values.

Therefore, it can be stated that ethics is a study of these values, beliefs and attitudes in addition to related concepts and principles. Ethics also consider social rules and mores in relation to human behaviour.



When a youth worker undertakes ethical research the following principles must be considered:

- *Respect for persons*
- *Beneficence – maximum benefits, minimum harm*
- *Justice – who receives the benefits and who bears the burdens.” (NHMRC et.al 2018)*

A youth worker will need to approach ethical problems and ethical dilemmas differently as there is a different focus. There is a clear, although somewhat difficult decision to be made with an ethical problem.

On the other hand, “*an ethical dilemma occurs when a person is confronted with a choice between two (or several) alternative courses of action, of which may entail breaching some ethical principle or causing some potential harm*” (Banks, 2010 p.12).

The “trolley problem” is a famous ethical dilemma which demonstrates the choice between two options that both have negative consequences. Eleanor Nelson has created a TED-Ed video that you can view here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yg16u_bzjPE

References:

Banks, S (ed.) 2010, *Ethical Issues in Youth Work*, Routledge, London UK.

National Health and Medical Research Council 2018, *National Statement on Ethical conduct human research (2007)- updated 2018*, NHMRC, viewed 13 April 2019, <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/aboutus/publications/national-statement-ethical-conducthuman-research-2007-updated-2018>

What you will learn

Unit 2 Ethical Decision Making covers:

- An understanding of ethical problems and ethical dilemmas.
- An ability to implement a Human Rights framework into youth work practice.
- Knowledge of how a Code of Ethics can assist a youth worker to make ethical decisions when working with young people.
- The ability to reflect on one's practice and seek out further information.

Unit 2 Contents



1. An understanding of Ethical problems and Ethical dilemmas.

This unit will explore youth work values and ethics and how ethical dilemmas occur in everyday youth work settings. To support youth workers to identify processes for decision making, we will examine a case study.

2. An ability to implement a Human Rights framework into youth work practice.

Using the decision-making cycle in this unit, you will understand how youth work practice is grounded in human rights and the empowerment of all young people.

3. Knowledge of how a Code of Ethics can assist a youth worker to make ethical decisions when working with young people.

There is an opportunity in this module to consider the Code of Ethics that is the foundation of your practice as a youth worker, and how this document can assist you in decision making. If your country does not currently have a Code of Ethics, consider the benefits of co-designing a code with the young people that you work with.

4. The ability to reflect on one's practice and seek out further information

This unit encourages the practice of self-reflection in all learning activities. Time for reflection is important to apply the new

Summary of Video Content



Engaging with the Interactive Video Content

Youth work as a profession is based on a set of core values and principles (Sapin 2013). These values involve building voluntary relationships with young people based on trust and clear boundaries. Youth Workers assist young people to navigate and negotiate with other relevant organisations, and the broader community (Unger 2015).

Reflect: Consider 5 of the most important personal values and how these values impact your role as a Youth Worker.

The role of a Youth Worker is to empower a young person in terms of their 'independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights' (The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2013). However, there may be times when a youth worker's values conflict with other service providers or community members. In these situations, a youth worker will work alongside the young person within their social context and ensure the interests of the young person are prioritised.



Stuart, Maynard and Rouncefield (2015, p.19) state that these are the 'Core Values of Youth Work':

- Supporting personal and social development of a young person
- Supporting identity formation
- Raising critical consciousness
- Supporting empowerment
- Anti-oppressive practice
- Valuing personal experience
- Participatory practice
- Responsive to needs, interests and preferences'

Reflect: Which additional three values could you add to this list?

Although a collection of values does not provide definitive direction to solve all youth work ethical dilemmas, your values will certainly influence your decision making and your action. Therefore activities such as these could in fact, 'serve to encourage youth workers to think through and discuss and reflect on the implications of their decisions and actions' (Banks 2010, p.11).

Sapin (2009, p.3) demonstrates the link between personal and professional values and youth work practice, by describing how the Youth Worker's values, principles and practice reflect the purpose of empowering young people.

Ethical dilemmas can occur when working with vulnerable young people as there are often situations with competing priorities. Let's consider an ethical dilemma and step through the process of ethical decision making for a youth worker.

Here is the Ethical Dilemma Scenario that was used in the introduction video:

"There is a rule in a youth centre that anyone using racist insults will be banned for a period of time. On this particular day, there is a conflict in the youth centre between two young people, and one uses a racist insult towards the other. However, the youth worker knows that this young person is regularly being bullied by an ethnically identified gang, and has a range of other distressing things going on in their lives at the moment, and has limited supports. The youth worker is inclined not to enforce the rule."

Reflect: How might you approach this scenario? Do you agree with the youth worker in the video? What processes would you use in your decision making?



Roberts (2009, p.11) considers the process of ethical decision making as a cycle and encourages youth workers to work together through the reflective process in order to reach a decision that will result in the best outcomes for the young people involved. The cycle includes:

1. Identify the Ethical dilemma
2. Review and question
3. Clarify the situation
4. Investigate insights from others
5. Question with youth work practice lens
6. New interpretations
7. Question using values and principles
8. Consolidate the argument.

Taken from: Roberts (2009, p.11)

You will find further ethical dilemmas to consider in the resource section of this module.

Call to Action

What will you do now as a result of what you have learnt? The following pages provide more information about ethics and ethical dilemmas in youth work practice. There are also resources to assist you in your work with young people.

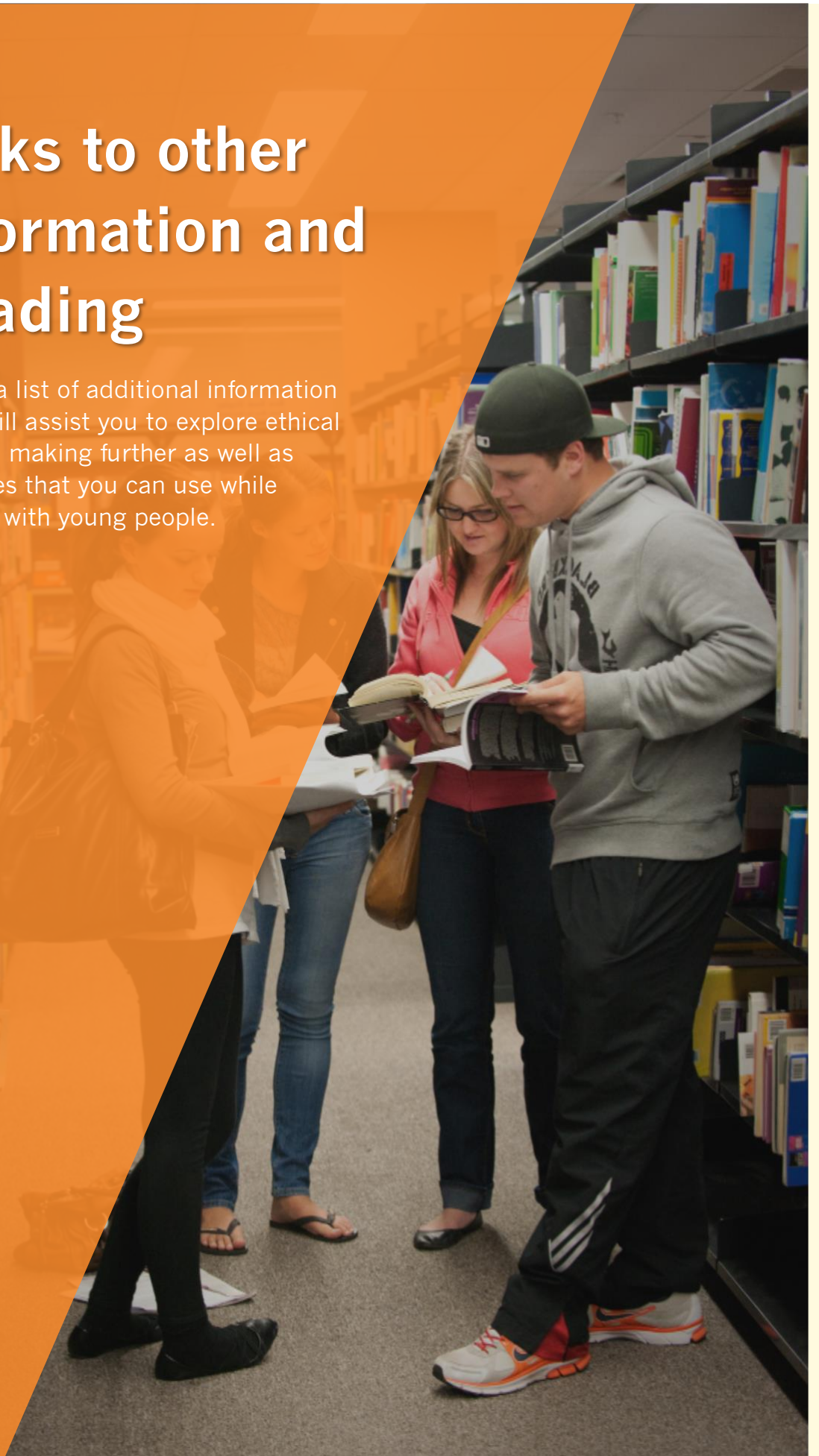
Here are several questions that may assist you to remain reflective in your practice. Does your workplace provide regular supervision where you can debrief with your supervisor, reflect on your practice and undertake continuous professional development opportunities? Is there an opportunity to introduce the concept of ethics to the young people that you support?

References:

- Australian Youth Affairs Council 2013, *National Definition of Youth Work*, AYAC, viewed 13 March 2019, <http://www.youthworkwa.org.au/what-is-youth-work/>
- Roberts, J 2009, *Youth Work Ethics*, Sage Publications Ltd, London UK.
- Sapin, K 2013, *Essential Skills for Youth Work Practice*, Sage Publications Ltd, London UK.
- Stuart, K, Maynard, L and Rouncefield, C 2015, *Evaluation Practice for projects with young people*, Sage Publication, New York
- Unger, M 2015, *Working with Children and Youth with Complex Needs: 20 Skills to build Resilience*, Routledge, New York NY.

Links to other Information and Reading

Here is a list of additional information which will assist you to explore ethical decision making further as well as resources that you can use while working with young people.



Resources

Journal Articles

1. **Banks, S & Imam, U 2012**, 'Principles, Rules and Qualities: An Ethical Framework for Youth Work', *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, vol. 9, no.1, pp.65-82.
2. **Slovenko, K & Thompson, N 2016**, 'Social Pedagogy, informal education and ethical youth work practice', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 19-34.
3. **Pope, P 2016**, 'Handing over our ethics? Youth Work conversations in times of austerity', *Ethics and Social Work*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 369-377.
4. **Kim, S 2015**, 'Disconnected: Youth, New Media and the Ethics Gap', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 44, no. 5, pp. 1168-1170.

Books

1. **Roberts, J 2009** *Youth Work Ethics: Empowering youth and Community Work practice*, Learning Matters, Exeter, UK.
2. **Sapin, K 2013**, *Essential Skills for Youth Work Practice*, Sage Publications Ltd, London UK.
3. **Banks, S (ed.) 2010**, *Ethical Issues in Youth Work*, Routledge, London UK.
4. **Ord, J 2016**, *Youth Work Process, Product and Practice: Creating an authentic curriculum in work with young people*, Routledge, London UK.
5. **Sercombe, H 2010**, *Youth Work Ethics*, Sage Publications Ltd, London UK.
6. **Pozzoboni, K & Kirshner, B (eds.) 2016**, *The changing Landscape of Youth Work: Theory and Practice for the Evolving Field*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC.

Website Links

1. **Professional Open Youth Work in Europe 2016**, *Youth Work as a profession*, POYWE, viewed 20 May 2019, <<https://magazine.poywe.org/magazine/ogbook-issue-3/youth-work-profession/>>
2. **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Code of Ethical Practice n.d**, *Code of Ethical Practice*, YACVic, viewed 23 April 2019, <https://www.yacvic.org.au/resources/code-of-ethical-practice/#TOC-4>
3. **In defence of Youth Work 2011**, *This is Youth Work: Stories from practice*, viewed 12 April 2019, <https://indefenceofyouthwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/20252-youth-stories-report-2011_4th-1.pdf>
4. **Youth Intervention Programs Association 2019**, *Ethical Dilemmas in youth work online training*, viewed 12 May 2019, <<https://yipa.org/training/online/ethicaldilemmas-youth-work/>>

Wrapping Up

Let's consider our own values and ensure that they align with a human rights framework. This will assist us to enable the best outcomes for young people by advocating for and upholding their rights. Ethical dilemmas will occur in youth work practice and a youth worker must be prepared to make difficult decisions, by using reflective practice and a code of ethics as a guide.

Unit 3 will explore different Codes of Ethics from around the world. An Australian case study is used as an example of how a Code is developed and implemented to further professionalise the youth work sector.

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Unit 2

Hickey, Jane (2019). *Human Rights and Ethics in Professional Youth Work Units 1, 2 and 3*. Youth Work eLearning Partnership (YWeLP). Available at <https://www.youthworkandyou.org/ywelp-three/>

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