

10 TIPS FOR ETHICAL PRACTICE



- 1. Understand the importance of ethical practice.** Ethics guide our practice. They outline professional roles, boundaries of competence, reporting duties, and appropriate relationships. Ethics provide a philosophical viewpoint of right and wrong.
- 2. Review relevant ethical codes.** Identify codes relevant to your work and understand implications for your practice – see [CCPA](#), [Canadian S&Gs](#), [GCDF](#), [HRMA](#), [NCDCA](#), or [VRA](#) for examples. Some codes are more in-depth than others; invest time in looking at more than one to get a broad sense of ethical practice. Pay close attention to any code you've signed, or are party to, based on membership in a professional association or a professional credential/designation.
- 3. Don't print it, post it, and pray.** According to 10 Things You Can Do to Avoid Being the Next ENRON, ethical codes “need to be actual living documents encouraged and valued at the highest levels.” Simply posting a code on a bulletin board isn't enough; management needs to actively support, encourage, and model ethical practice, setting examples with high standards.
- 4. Make ethics dynamic.** Bring ethics to life by engaging in workplace discussions on ethical practice and issues. Consider developing an ethical resource centre or ethical committee that can regularly discuss challenges currently being faced or anticipated in the future. Ensure discussions can occur without fear of retribution or ridicule; a “safe place” to talk ethics is paramount.
- 5. Be proactive.** As your work evolves, think about the ethical dilemmas that may emerge and plan in advance. Consider a scenario-planning approach (i.e., think of a potential dilemma; then use a decision-making process to identify and evaluate possible solutions).
- 6. Recognize ethical dilemmas.** The first step in any ethical decision-making process is to recognize that an ethical dilemma exists. This may be more challenging than it seems as individuals will have different ideas about what constitutes a dilemma. Be willing to engage in respectful dialogue with someone who has a different opinion than you – don't judge . . . you may learn something new.
- 7. Follow an ethical decision-making model.** An ethical decision-making model provides a structure for working through ethical dilemmas, helping to ensure that every angle is covered, each party is acknowledged, and all the risks and benefits of every action is considered. [CCPA](#) has a great example of a step-by-step process to making ethical decisions.
- 8. Acknowledge shades of grey.** The “black and white” of ethics is easy . . . it's the shades of grey that pose a challenge. In some instances, you have to choose the better of two less-than-ideal options in order to resolve an ethical dilemma. What works one time, doesn't necessarily work the next. Learn from every situation and be willing to do things differently next time.
- 9. Take action.** Although not directly involved, you may witness unethical activities. Be willing to help others explore ethical implications of the situation rather than standing idly by; doing nothing may, in itself, be unethical.
- 10. Engage in professional development.** Ethical practice requires continuous attention. Take a course (such as our [Ethics for Career Practitioners](#)) or participate in webinars, workshops, or seminars. Read relevant articles, including those on emerging ethical topics such as ethics and email or ethics and social media, and/or follow blogs discussing the topics of ethics.



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604.856.2386
info@lifestrategies.ca
www.lifestrategies.ca