**PS385: Targeted Topics in Applied Behavior Analysis**

**Discussion Board Lecture: Unit 6 Media Lecture**

**Unit 6: Ethical Issues in Applied Behavior Analysis**

**Lecture:**

Welcome, students! Ethics play a role in everyone’s daily experience. People are often faced with situations in which they must decide between the right versus the wrong course of action. Can you remember a time when you were caught in the dilemma of choosing between right and wrong? Did you make the proper choice? It is often easy to do the “right” thing when nothing is “hanging in the balance,” but our decisions can be strongly influenced by variables that exist “in the moment.” At those times, doing what is “right,” is not always easy.

The ethical guidelines to which we adhere in our personal lives may not be sufficient to govern our professional lives. As a behavior analyst, you will be working with “fragile” populations – those who need our protection and those for whom you will advocate. You may routinely find yourself in situations in which you must choose the appropriate course of action. Some of these situations involve choices that appear, on the surface, to be cut and dry; yet, when delving more deeply into the situation, you find that the choice isn’t as easy as you initially thought. In Unit 6, you will consider some ethical dilemmas that are likely to occur in the provision of applied behavior analysis (ABA) services. Some questions that you will consider are: What is the right thing to do? How can I practice with honesty and integrity? What are my ethical responsibilities to my field, my science? The Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB), in the Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts, details the ethical responsibilities of behavior analysts.

Code 1.0, and its subsections, presents our ethical responsibilities to behavior analysis. We are to protect our clients, our profession, and ourselves by practicing with integrity. We are to be honest, reliable and trustworthy at all times. Our ABA interventions are always based upon proven, behavior analytic research and we only accept clients whose needs align with our education, training, and experience. If it is necessary to accept a client whose target behaviors that must be addressed are not in our professional repertoire, we seek guidance and/or training from colleagues who do have the necessary experience.

Behavior analysts are also required to maintain a level of expertise by keeping current in the field. We can do this by reviewing the latest research via journal articles, conferences, and workshops, as well as gaining training that can be counted toward our continuing education requirements. This insures that we will be equipped to provide the best evidence-based services possible to our clients.

In keeping with our focus of providing the best services possible to our clients, we must remember that no bias or prejudice should ever enter into our professional conduct. Bias must be left “at the office door!” We always treat our clients and their loved ones with dignity and respect and we must never let our personal lives impinge upon effective service delivery.

Behavior analysts are often approached by friends and family members requesting advice. Avoid the temptation to “help” at all costs! We are not allowed to provide therapy or make recommendations to those close to us. Personal relationships compromise judgment; so, that also means that you must not engage in an intimate relationship with a client or a member of a client’s family. Accepting favors, gifts, or engaging socially with those with whom we provide services can blur the line between personal and professional life and compromise professional judgment.

Behavior analysts must also be aware of the positions of authority we hold with our clients and supervisees. Because we are experts in the scientific field of ABA, our opinions can be quite influential. Code 1.07 forbids exploitation of others for our personal gain. We must make sure that we do not abuse that “position of authority.” We must always work to promote the well-being of our clients.

You will read a great deal about our responsibility to our clients and supervisees, but what about our responsibility to our profession? Code 6.0 focuses on the importance of upholding the “values, ethics, and principles of the profession of behavior analysis” above all other professional training (Bailey & Burch, 2016, p. 158). This means that we practice ABA and not some of the fad “treatments” being lauded in the “information superhighway” marketplace. We must always insure that we are providing evidence-based services to our clients.

While behavior analysts do not talk about this very much, we do have a responsibility to “get the word out” regarding the effectiveness of ABA. Many people are unfamiliar with what we do. It is up to us to inform the public about the effective, evidence-based services that are available in behavior analysis.

Thank you for viewing your Unit 6 lecture!