



# Using an Interdisciplinary Strengths Based Model to Address Ethics, Human Rights, and HIV/AIDS

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## ABSTRACT

The right to health is increasingly understood to more broadly include the diverse rights that relate to access to prevention, care, treatment, and support for persons living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. Scarce resources, confidentiality protections, end of life issues, mandatory reporting requirements, dual relationships, coupled with the stigma and discrimination toward marginalized and at-risk groups (for example, sex workers, homeless, persons with substance abuse histories, and racial/ethnic and/or sexual minorities) often find providers confronted with difficult ethical questions or dilemmas at both the micro (individual) and macro (systemic) levels of practice.

Using a Decision Making Model (DMM) may help providers across disciplines – law, medical, and social services - to identify and address ethical dilemmas. A DMM, accompanied by case vignettes and experiential exercises, provides a venue to explore the range of psychosocial, individual, and institutional issues that may affect the provision of strengths based and culturally competent services.

## WHY USE A DECISION MAKING MODEL

Useful in sorting out personal values and beliefs, confidentiality issues, laws and agency policies, and professional values and ethics.

- DMM is deliberate – and provides guidance when professional Codes of Ethics are less clear
- Facilitates a more ethically and legally defensible decision

## DECISION MAKING MODEL (DMM)

### Step 1 — Identify your personal response to the case.

How might your personal feelings affect your clinical judgment or your perception of the client's behaviors? How do your cultural values (e.g., both professional and personal) impact your response?

### Step 2 — Review case facts

What are the facts of the case? Are any of these facts really assumptions or interpretations?

### Step 3 — Conceptualize an initial plan based on clinical issues

Develop an initial plan which considers how various options might affect your treatment goals/plan and therapeutic relationship with the client/systems.

### Step 4 — Consult Agency Policies and Professional Ethics Codes

What are agency policies? How do the core values of social work apply to the case? (See Chart A)

### Step 5 — Analyze / review your plan in terms of the five guiding principles.

Reconciling the five principles means doing the least amount of avoidable harm while maximizing the most guiding principles. (See Chart B)

### Step 6 — Identify the Legal Issues from a Human Rights Perspective

What does the law say, and how might it affect my client? Is legal consultation needed? Does law conflict with client's human right?

### Step 7 — Refine Your Plan(s)

Review and reassess the plan(s). Is it congruent with client needs / beliefs / culture?

### Step 8 — Choose a Course of Action and Share It with Your Client

Select one course of action. Inform, clarify, and discuss the plan with the client(s).

### Step 9 — Implement the Course of Action

Implement the action. Discuss with the client on an ongoing basis. Evaluate client response(s) and impact on the relationship. Document. Seek supervision.

## FINDINGS

Integrating a DMM for ethical decision making helps providers to better serve clients by taking into consideration the range of complex practice, personal, and systemic issues. Practicing the DMM enables providers to incorporate professional codes of ethics; understand the role of confidentiality; promote and utilize interdisciplinary collaboration; review legal and policy implications; and identify resources (including use of professional peer review) necessary in practice.

CHART A

### THE CORE VALUES OF SOCIAL WORK ARE:

- Service
- Dignity and worth of the person
- Integrity
- Social Justice
- Importance of human relationships
- Competence

CHART B

### THE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ARE:

- **Autonomy:** the right to self rule
- **Nonmaleficence:** do no harm
- **Beneficence:** benefiting others/society
- **Fidelity:** be faithful
- **Justice:** be fair

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