THE CRAFT OF ETHICAL CONSULTATION

From Chapter Two of
The Ethical Lives of Clients - Transcending Self-Interest in Psychotherapy
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There are five core skills in ethical consultation under the acronym L.E.A.P.-C skills: **Listen, Explore, Affirm, Perspective, and Challenge.**

They are often (although not always) used sequentially in a particular clinical conversation, or across sessions.

LISTEN

Listen for the ethical part of the client's decision-making. As with all forms of listening in ethical consultation, it's important to give a full hearing to both sides of the dilemma and to how the client is expressing moral intuitions in light of their life experience and their culture. Don't immediately translate the client's ethical language (like "should") into clinical language (like "need").

EXPLORE

This is where the nuances will emerge as we help the client articulate multiple sides of their dilemma. Often a decision will emerge from this exploration, one that the client can live with in terms of resolving the tension between personal needs and responsibility to others. It can be challenging for therapists to stay with ethical exploration without quickly turning it to strictly clinical exploration.

Example: The client says, *"It would be wrong for me to do this."* An ethical domain question follow up would be *"What do you see as wrong about it?"* as opposed to immediately going to a clinical domain question such as *"What is making you anxious about it?"*

AFFIRM

Affirming involves acknowledging and supporting the client's ethical commitments. and willingness to explore them openly in therapy .

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PERSPECTIVE

It's often not necessary to share one's perspective on an ethical dilemma because often the client sorts out how to proceed with the help of the listening, exploring, and affirming skills. However, clients can sometimes benefit from perspective statements such as: normalizing the dilemma, sharing concerns for the client and others involved, bringing research or clinical wisdom to bear on the situation, or cautioning the client to slow down to make a decision that sticks.

CHALLENGE

Ethical challenge is used only sparingly when there is risk of imminent harm to a third party, or when the client has a blind spot about even considering the needs of others in an ethical dilemma. The firmer the challenge the more caring and concerned the therapist must be in relating to the client.

Example: *"I'm worried for you right now that you may end up hurting yourself and some people you love."* Challenge interventions are best paired with "autonomy-granting" interventions such as *"This is your choice to make. I appreciate your letting me weigh in with my concerns."*

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