WRITING ABOUT RELATIONAL ETHICS IN THERAPY FOR DIFFERENT THERAPIST AUDIENCES

CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE

Degree of Receptivity

- Already with you philosophically and want skills
  - You don't need a lot of background and justification
  - Get to cases and skills
- Open minded but haven't thought much about this area
  - Start with examples of clients bringing up ethical dilemmas
  - Pivot to a definition of the ethical domain for client work
- Concerned/skeptical about "imposing values" on clients
  - Start with the definition and emphasize examples related to harm to children

Type of Clients They See

- Mostly gear the writing to individual cases, since that's where most R.E. consultation occurs
- If couple therapist audience, give couple examples too; same for family therapists

STRATEGIES FOR YOUR WRITTEN MESSAGES

Opening

- Be personal about how you got interested in this topic
- Strongly emphasize the difference between client ethics and therapist ethics (otherwise therapists will collapse it back to their professional ethics.)
- Define the ethical domain as client behavior that has consequences for the welfare of others. Keep stressing that this is about harm to third parties.

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- Give several examples of common ethical dilemmas presenting in therapy. Bill's favorites: whether to divorce, cut off a difficult family member, keep or reveal a family secret, end or continue an affair.

Initially Focus on Client-Broached Dilemmas: What They Bring to Us as Ethical Concerns (As Opposed to What We Might See and They Don't)

- Describe how therapists often deal with these dilemmas: reducing it to more familiar psychological terms (avoiding the ethical), focusing only on what the client needs for self, or becoming prescriptive.

Write About LEAP-C

- Emphasize that most ethical consultation involves Listen, Explore, Affirm. Most clients resolve dilemmas for themselves with this help.
- Sometimes therapist Perspective is useful.
- Occasionally, Challenge. (That's the hardest one, takes practice.) Use examples about harm to a child or vulnerable adult.
- For a brief article, feel free to stop after Perspective and share a case example (disguising the details.)
- For a longer piece, get into times when Challenge is required and emphasize that it's done after the other skills.

HOW TO END AN ARTICLE

- Return to personal: how you have changed, offer a modest testimonial
- Send readers to relationalethicsintherapy.org for free material
- Refer to Bill's book *The Ethical Lives of Clients*
- Your website if you want to be a resource
- End with an inspirational message (e.g., we can do better therapy by walking with clients who are facing ethical challenges)

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