

Ethical Decision-making Framework for Behaviour Analysts

Behaviour Analysts in Ontario are expected to comply with a hierarchy of obligations, the highest being legislation, followed by regulations under the Legislation, the College Standards of Professional Conduct, and then the BACB® Ethics Code, and any other ethical guidelines pertinent to the person's area of practice. Situations sometimes arise in which laws, principles and directives may conflict or not address a particular issue clearly. In these situations, Behaviour Analysts are expected to engage in a well-documented, systematic ethical decision-making approach that is explicit enough to bear public scrutiny.

The following is a suggested approach for Behaviour Analysts to support the navigation of ethical dilemmas. This framework is a synthesis of three such approaches: [BACB® Ethics Code for Behavior Analysts \(2020\)](#), the [Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists](#) (2017), and Evans & Dobson (2021).

Steps in the Decision-Making Framework

1. Define the ethical dilemma or situation. Consider which laws, regulations, standards and/or ethical principles apply to the situation, are unclear, or are in conflict.
2. Determine the individuals and/or organizations involved in the situation. This could include yourself, clients, families, funders, colleagues including other Behaviour Analysts, supervisors, other professionals, employers, the College, and/or the public.
3. Consider your own biases and learning history in relation to the situation. Also consider the moral rights and best interests of the individuals and groups involved, as well as the cultural, social, historical, economic, institutional, legal or political context or other circumstances in which the ethical problem arose.
4. Generate potential options for actions to address the situation.
5. Delineate the risks and potential benefits that may be experienced by each individual (including yourself) under each of the potential options for action that you have identified. A chart with different stakeholders (in columns) and possible actions (in rows) may be helpful (Evens & Dobson, 2021).
6. Consult with your supervisor, mentor, trusted colleagues, or the College Practice Advice Service.
7. Decide on a course of action. Document the process you have engaged in and the reasons for your decision.
8. Implement the selected course of action, in collaboration with relevant individuals affected by the issue and document specific actions taken, agreed-upon next steps.
9. Evaluate the impact of your action, taking responsibility for the consequences, including correction of any negative consequences. Re-engage in the decision-making process if the ethical issue is not resolved.

10. Take any appropriate action, as warranted and feasible, to prevent future occurrences of the dilemma (e.g., communication and problem solving with colleagues; changes in procedures and practices).

Resources

Behavior Analyst Certification Board. (2020). *Ethics code for behavior analysts*.

<https://www.bacb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Ethics-Code-for-Behavior-Analysts-230119-a.pdf>

Canadian Psychological Association Code of Ethics for Psychologists (2017).

https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Ethics/CPA_Code_2017_4thEd.pdf

Evans, D.R., & Dobson, K.S. (2021). *Law, standards, and ethics in the practice of psychology* (4th ed.). Thomson Reuters.

CPO Website FAQs <https://cpo.on.ca/members/professional-practice/professional-practice-faqs/>

Registrants may consult with the College's Practice Advice Service practiceadvice@cpo.on.ca or phone 416-961-8817.