



Maintaining Professional Boundaries: When something comes along that is really personal

A PRESENTATION BY THE MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN MICHIGAN IN COLLABORATION WITH THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS

SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

This Presentation is for Educational Purposes Only

- ▶ Thank you for joining us today! This presentation is the result of a collaborative effort between the Michigan Association of Broadcasters and the Mental Health Association in Michigan.
- ▶ The goal is to provide you with educational information about the way stories and events you encounter may cause you internal distress and stress.
- ▶ Another goal is to provide you with the opportunity to share your feelings and experiences via ZOOM in an informal group setting that allows for peer support.
- ▶ Participation in the group support is voluntary and completely anonymous.

Please Remember

- ▶ The intention of this presentation is not to give you mental health treatment. If you experience increased feelings of anxiety or fear if you are triggered because of past experiences, please let me or Sam Klemet know.
- ▶ We want to make sure we are available and you have adequate resources.
- ▶ **My email is mhuff@mha-mi.com | Cell: 313.641.1109**



Who Am I?

► Marianne Huff, LMSW

- Social Worker with a Clinical License in the state of Michigan and I have a small private practice.
- Work primarily with individuals who have anxiety, depression and who have a history of early childhood trauma. I also work with young people who have serious mental illnesses such as a Schizophrenia diagnosis.
- Has been a disability rights advocate for many years
- Currently serving as the President and CEO of the Mental Health Association in Michigan, which is the oldest advocacy organization in Michigan that advocates for individuals with mental health conditions and addictions. Our work is mainly focused on state mental health public policy and influencing legislation that impacts individuals with behavioral health conditions. We advocate for individuals across the lifespan.
- Graduate of Eastern Michigan University's school of social work and I have worked in the public mental health arena for many years.
- I am thrilled to be here today!

WAYS SOCIAL WORKERS & JOURNALISTS/REPORTERS ARE ALIKE



CLEAN-UP CREW • LISTENING EAR • ADVOCATES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE • TRUTH WARRIORS

Social Workers

Journalists/Reporters

1. We talk about truths not usually very pretty

Social Workers are the clean-up crew when people and social systems like the family or the schools fail. Our job is to patch up people and to fetch resources to mitigate the damage when society falls short.

Journalists and reporters are the ones who shine the bright light on system failures, corruption, and the consequences that result; calling attention to what needs to change by sharing stories about things often hidden from most of us. They make us face things as they are.

2. We are up close and personal with the realities of human suffering and the dark side of humanity

Social Workers listen to those who are negatively impacted by what isn't working and seek positive change by supporting the person and by challenging the systems that are failing.

Journalists and reporters talk to those who have been negatively impacted by what isn't working in our society. They can and do talk publicly about a problem from many points of view. They bring stories to the attention of people who may be able to affect positive changes.

3. We bear witness to the truths of those who cannot speak up for themselves

Social Workers speak up for people who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Social Workers advocate for systems reform when necessary.

Journalists and reporters are advocates for social change by focusing their attention on stories that show what needs to be different. And by talking to people who can offer solutions. And sharing knowledge with all who will listen in many ways: through the written word; film; television; and radio. They reach the masses.

4. We are truth warriors

Social Workers, Journalists and Reporters experience the dark side of human behavior and its consequences. As a result, the austere nature of the work we do is often missed by others. We are often like the prophets of old, not welcome in our own land. And we often go to places where angels fear to tread. And misunderstood.

Disclaimer



We will be talking about sensitive topics during our time here, including trauma and secondary trauma, how trauma impacts the human body and brain, and what to do during those times where you may feel overwhelmed or anxious.



There may be times you feel uncomfortable during the presentation. This may or may not happen, but sometimes talking about this subject can be difficult.



One goal is to give an overview of the way traumatic events and stories you cover might trigger you in the field and make it difficult to be objective.



Another goal is to give tools you can use to help when you are overwhelmed by your experiences with your job.

**KNOWING YOURSELF IS
THE BEGINNING OF ALL
WISDOM.**

- Aristotle

The Focus is on YOU Today

The theme for today's session is a bit different then July 26 and August 24, with each session building on the next. Now we will look at how to navigate those times when you find it difficult to remain objective and impartial.

- How do the stories you cover in the world and in your community impact:
- That trigger your emotions and that may be counter to your values?
- Your Ethics or, 'how do I maintain my objectivity when I have been personally impacted by something similar?'
- What do I do if I am covering a story or an event that is too overwhelming because it reminds me too much of someone or myself?
- How do I take care of myself in the situation, especially if I know that I will have a hard time remaining objective? And how do I know when to say, "I don't think I can remain objective."



What We Will Talk About Today:

- ▶ What do you do when you are covering a story that is not only triggering, but the situation challenges your values?
- ▶ What steps can you take to regain your objectivity?
- ▶ How do I get clear about my values and my boundaries?
- ▶ How can I use my ethics and my values to guide my inner process and my work?
- ▶ Group discussion based upon participant questions/input.

Some opening questions for you:

Have you ever covered a story or an event or a situation that made you feel uncomfortable because it challenged something of importance to you?



Have you ever covered a story or an event or a situation that made you uncomfortable because the subject matter made it very difficult to maintain your objective and impartial point of view?



Have you ever asked your editor, manager or boss to remove you from a story because it was too difficult to remain objective about what happened?



You don't need to answer publicly, but I want you to sit with these questions for a few moments.

Now that you have taken a few moments to answer the questions:

Hold onto your answers if you wrote them down because we are going to look at them a bit later.

Let's talk about our values.

A value is defined by the American Psychological Association as:

n. **1.** the mathematical magnitude or quantity of a variable.

2. a moral, social, or aesthetic principle accepted by an individual or society as a guide to what is good, desirable, or important.

3. the worth, usefulness, or importance attached to something.

Online:
<https://dictionary.apa.org/value>

What is a value?



- ▶ **"Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny." - Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948), Indian Political and Spiritual Leader**

The background features a faint, semi-transparent graphic of a hand made of wooden blocks, with the index finger pointing upwards. A speech bubble containing a large question mark is also visible behind the text.

Why think about
what we value and
why?

Why values matter:

- ▶ **"Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way."** - Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC), Greek Philosopher
- ▶ **"Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value."** - Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Physicist and Nobel Laureate
- ▶ Our values influence our thoughts and feelings and behaviors.
- ▶ Getting in touch with our values can help us when we are experiencing discomfort about something that we have to do that we are unsure about.



Values Clarification Exercise

The Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Values Bulls Eye as adapted by Dr. Russ Harris, 2008

- ▶ Deep down inside, what is important to you? What do you want your life to stand for? What sort of qualities do you want to cultivate as a person? How do you want to be in your relationships with others? Values are our heart's deepest desires for the way we want to interact with and relate to the world, other people, and ourselves. They are leading principles that can guide us and motivate us as we move through life. Values reflect what you want to do, and how you want to do it. They are about how you want to behave towards your friends, your family, yourself, your environment, your work, etc.
- ▶ Online:
https://thehappinesstrap.com/upimages/Long_Bull%27s_Eye_Worksheet.pdf.

The Bulls Eye Exercise

The importance of inquiring about your values is to provide you with a greater understanding of what is of value to you.

For example, is it of value to have children? If so, why?

If you would rather not have children, why?

These are only examples. There are many values that we hold to be dear.

In the United States, for example, some of the values that this country was founded upon are stated this way in the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The Bull's Eye is included with your packet

- ▶ THE BULL'S EYE The 'Bull's Eye' is a values-clarification exercise designed by a Swedish ACT therapist called Tobias Lundgren. (I have rewritten it.) The dartboard on the next page is divided into four important domains of life: work/education, leisure, relationships and personal growth/health. To begin with, please write down your values in these 4 areas of life. Not everyone has the same values, and this is not a test to see whether you have the "correct" ones. Think in terms of general life directions, rather than in terms of specific goals. There may be values that overlap – e.g. if you value studying psychology, that may come under both Education and Personal Growth. Write down what you would value if there were nothing in your way, nothing stopping you. What's important? What do you care about? And what you would like to work towards? Your value should not be a specific goal but instead reflect a way you would like to live your life over time. For example, to accompany your son to a football game might be a goal; to be an involved and interested parent might be the underlying value. Note! Make sure they are your values, not anyone else's. It is your personal values that are important! From www.thehappinesstrap.com. Dr. Russ Harris, 2008.

How can ethics help me when my emotions are involved?

- ▶ If you have a situation that is emotionally difficult for you and you are having difficulty maintaining emotional distance, it can be helpful to consult your code of ethics.
- ▶ Looking at a situation ethically can help you to make a better choice about what to do or not to do.
- ▶ It can also be helpful to consult with another colleague, or, if you are the member of a professional organization, you might have a resource available to you through that organization.

How do your values help you when you have to make an ethical decision?

- ▶ What are your values as a journalist?
- ▶ Have a list of those values that inform who you are, what you stand for and what is of most importance to you.
- ▶ Keep that list handy so that you can reference it when difficult situations arise.
- ▶ Review what you have written in the four domains: Work/Education; Relationships; Personal Growth and Health and Leisure.
- ▶ In a difficult situation, where is the conflict, if one exists?

Ethical Decision Making:

- ▶ Ethical decision-making is not just about choices in medicine (such as when to end care) or complex moral conundrums faced by society (such as assisted suicide). You cannot separate [ethics from personal values](#) and our everyday behaviour. As well as the moral code of the society we live in, we all have our own inner sense of morality that informs our actions. The ability to make these choices, according to our values is inextricably tied to our understanding of freedom.
- ▶ Blog by Simon Ash/November 15, 2021
- ▶ Online: <https://betterhumans.pub/unlock-your-values-to-make-better-decisions-c1a53de1c8f4>

What are ethics?

- ▶ Ethics provides a set of standards for behavior that helps us decide how we ought to act in a range of situations. In a sense, we can say that ethics is all about making choices, and about providing reasons why we should make these choices.
- ▶ Online:
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>



Journalism and Code of Ethics

- ▶ PREAMBLE
- ▶ Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy.
- ▶ Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough.
- ▶ An ethical journalist acts with integrity. The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

Online: [SPJ Code of Ethics - Society of Professional Journalists](#)



Read the preamble to the Code of Ethics from the SPJ

- ▶ What comes to mind as you read the preamble?
- ▶ What stands out for you?
- ▶ As you read the preamble, can you identify the values that are true and/or important to you and for you?
- ▶ Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts.



How to apply your values and ethical decision making to your life

WHAT FRAMEWORK DO YOU USE TO MAKE AN
ETHICAL DECISION THAT IS BASED UPON YOUR
VALUES?

Tools you can use when you have a dilemma

- ▶ Taken from Dr. Russ Harris.
https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/How_to_deal_with_values_conflicts_-_Russ_Harris.pdf
- ▶ Step 1: Identify the life domain where values conflict.
- ▶ Step 2: Identify the two main values that conflict.
- ▶ Step 3: Think of values as being like the continents on a globe of the world. (No matter how fast you spin the globe, you can't see all the continents at once. Some are always at the front, and others are always at the back. It's the same with values; they continually change position, throughout the day. Some come to the front, some go to the back.)
- ▶ Step 4: Think of all the different ways you can live two different values simultaneously.
- ▶ Step 5: Is there a dilemma you need to address? (A dilemma is a difficult situation where you have two options but they conflict with each other.)

More Tools

- ▶ Dr. Russ Harris suggests the following when you are struggling with an issue on the inside:
- ▶ Acceptance of the reality of the situation. Ask yourself: What can I control in this situation? For example, if you are having a hard time with a story, then ask yourself: What can I control?
- ▶ Conduct a cost to benefit analysis: What will happen if I choose to write or report about the story anyway? What will happen if I choose to tell my Newsroom manager that I cannot maintain my objectivity? Is that a choice?
- ▶ Accept that there may not be a perfect solution.
- ▶ There may not be a way to avoid making a decision.
- ▶ Acknowledge today's choice—"I can do..... For 24 hours today."

A story for you from my career:

- ▶ A few stories from my career, one of which is an amalgamation of individuals that I have worked with over the past thirty years as a social worker and as a disability rights advocate. Below is a true story that happened many years ago.
- ▶ Part One (all true): When I was working as a disability rights advocate at Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service, one of the ethical issues that we were told, in advance, that we might have to navigate, is the conflict between the fact that I am a mandated reporter of child abuse and/or elder or vulnerable adult abuse and the fact that the attorneys work under the professional rules of conduct and are NOT mandated reporters. From what I understand, an attorney could be disbarred for reporting the abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult. However, for social workers, failure to report abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult or child could result in the loss of licensure. Fortunately, I did not have to confront this issue.

Another true story that happened to me..but I did not know any better. I have no regrets.

- ▶ Years ago, I had a client who was being evicted from her rental unit. The woman had a major mental health condition and did not have access to an attorney. It was a holiday and although the organization for whom I worked had the funds to assist this woman, the holidays were interfering. She owed past due rent for about two months. I wasn't able to get legal assistance for this woman from Legal Aid or from any other non-profit legal organization.
- ▶ I learned about the eviction and had no choice but to attend the court proceeding with her.
- ▶ The client asked that I be allowed to come before the Judge with her. The Judge allowed it.
- ▶ I spoke with her and for her, and, advised the Judge that my organization would pay for the past due rent.
- ▶ Three times the attorney for the apartment complex asked that the Judge not allow me to speak.
- ▶ We won and two months later, I received a letter from the Michigan State Bar alleging that I engaged in the unauthorized practice of law.
- ▶ It was my values that drove me to help this woman.

Separating our emotions from the work

- ▶ Since I am not a journalist, I cannot speak directly to what it must be like for journalists to navigate their emotions when asked to cover a story that challenges one's values or core beliefs.
- ▶ I have, however, worked with individuals, both as a therapist and as an advocate, in which my ethics and my values have been challenged.
- ▶ What do you do when you feel strongly about something and you have to write a story about that issue that is in conflict with what you believe?



How to use ethics and values to make good decisions

- ▶ Taken from Brown University Online: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>
- ▶ **Recognizing an Ethical Issue**
One of the most important things to do at the beginning of ethical deliberation is to locate, to the extent possible, the specifically ethical aspects of the issue at hand.
- ▶ **Consider the Parties Involved**
Another important aspect to reflect upon are the various individuals and groups who may be affected by your decision. Consider who might be harmed or who might benefit.
- ▶ **Gather all of the Relevant Information**
Before taking action, it is a good idea to make sure that you have gathered all of the pertinent information, and that all potential sources of information have been consulted.

Formulate Actions and Consider Alternatives

- ▶ Evaluate your decision-making options by asking the following questions:

- ▶ Which action will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)

Which action respects the rights of all who have a stake in the decision? (The Rights Approach)

- ▶ Which action treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)

- ▶ Which action serves the community as a whole, not just some members?
(The Common Good Approach)

- ▶ Which action leads me to act as the sort of person I should be? (The Virtue Approach)

- ▶ From Brown University



Make a Decision and Consider It



After examining all of the potential actions, which best addresses the situation? How do I feel about my choice?



Act



Many ethical situations are uncomfortable because we can never have all of the information. Even so, we must often take action.



Reflect on the Outcome



What were the results of my decision? What were the intended and unintended consequences? Would I change anything now that I have seen the consequences?

The background is a dark teal color with a pattern of lighter teal question marks of varying sizes. A solid red rectangle is located in the top right corner.

QUESTIONS?

Resources Used for This Presentation

- The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. <https://www.spj.org/> There is a copy of the Code of Ethics included with your packet.
- Clarifying Your Values, Adapted from Tobias Lundgren's Bull's Eye Worksheet by Dr. Russ Harris. Online: www.thehappinesstrap.com.
- Self-Eulogy Values Clarification Exercise by Seth Pennock and based upon Self-Eulogy by Dr. Lucinda Poole and Dr. Hugo Alberts. Online: www.positivepsychology.com.
- ▶ Ash, Simon. November 15, 2021. Blog about Values. Online: Blog by Simon Ash/November 15, 2021
- ▶ Online: <https://betterhumans.pub/unlock-your-values-to-make-better-decisions-c1a53de1c8f4>
- Brown University. A Framework for making ethical decisions. Online: <https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>.
- Harris, Russ. How to deal with values conflicts. PDF. Online and in your packet: [https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/How to deal with values conflicts - Russ Harris.pdf](https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/How_to_deal_with_values_conflicts_-_Russ_Harris.pdf)

More Resources You Can Share

If you are living with serious mental illness or substance use challenges and feel it will help lower your stress if you talk with someone who understands these issues, get help from:

- **Michigan PEER Warmline**
1-888-PEER-753 (888-733-7753) | Available every day from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.

If you are experiencing emotional stress and anxiety, but are more comfortable texting than talking, get help from:

- **Michigan Crisis Text Line**
Text the keyword RESTORE to 741741 | Open 24/7

If you would like to manage feelings of COVID-19 stress and anxiety through meditation, sleep, and movement exercises, get help from:

- headspace.com/mi (Free to all Michigan residents - normally a paid service)

Additional MHAM resources found here:

- www.mha-mi.com

Resources You Can Share

If you are experiencing emotional distress, here are some resources:

- **The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has a page dedicated to mental health resources:**
<https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/resources/mental-health-resources>
- **Suicide & Crisis: 24/7 Crisis Line**
Call or text: 988 | [Our Network: Lifeline](#)
- **Michigan Stay Well Counseling via the COVID-19 Hotline**
Call 1-888-535-6136 | Press "8" to talk to a Michigan Stay Well counselor | Counselors available 24/7 - confidential and free
- **National Disaster Distress Helpline**
Call: 1-800-985-5950 | the keyword TALKWITHUS to 66746 | Available 24/7

If you are thinking of taking your life, get help from:

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
Call: 1-800-273-8255 - Available 24/7 | Text TALK to 741741 | Visit: suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Deaf and Hard of Hearing Hotline**
Access 24/7 video relay service
Call: 1-800-273-8255 (TTY 1-800-799-4889) | Visit: suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing/

Who is the Mental Health Association in Michigan?

- The Mental Health Association in Michigan was founded in November 1936.
- We provide public policy advocacy at the state and level on behalf of individuals with behavioral health disorders (both mental illness and substance use disorders) across the lifespan.
- We publish a monthly electronic newsletter called, “Mental Health Matters,” that is free to members and contains updates about public policy and other issues related to individuals with behavioral health disorders in Michigan.
- Contact: Marianne Huff, LMSW | EMAIL: mhuff@mha-mi.com
Cell phone: 313-641-1109
- Address: 1325 S. Washington Ave. Lansing, MI 48910



THANK YOU!