

## CHAPTER 2

# The ethical counsellor and supervision

Hazel Reid

**CORE KNOWLEDGE**

This chapter will provide the opportunity to:

- relate the central importance of ethical behaviour in counselling to supervisory practice;
- examine ethical principles in the context of supervision;
- connect the concepts of multiculturalism and anti-oppressive practice to supervision;
- consider the links between reflexivity and ethical practice;
- explore personal values and their impact on supervisory practice.

**INTRODUCTION**

Ethical principles, enshrined in standards and codes of practice, underpin counselling, and it is important for the counsellor to reconsider these before entering into a supervisory relationship. Acting ethically is often complex, and professional standards cannot encompass all the ambiguities that are involved in ethical decision making. In counselling, and in supervision, we can be guided by Hippocrates' command that above all else we should 'do no harm', but further guidance is needed. This chapter begins by reviewing ethical principles and relating these to supervisory practice. The chapter moves on to discuss the ethical importance of respecting cultural difference and avoiding oppressive practice. Reflexivity was defined in Chapter 1, and its central role in the development of effective and ethical supervision is examined here. Finally, this chapter helps you to explore, reflexively, your personal values and their potential impact on a supervisory relationship. To begin, the chapter reviews what is meant by 'ethical principles'.

## REVIEWING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

McCulloch (2007, p54) states: *Ethical practice is action that leads to human well-being from a perspective that values the disposition to act truly and justly.* Discussions around ethical principles derive from debates in moral philosophy that took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (and, of course, in the ancient world). Leading discourses, or ways of thinking about ethics, define three main perspectives: virtue, consequentialism and deontology. These are reframed by Cribb and Ball (2005) as dispositions, goals and obligations, respectively. There are interesting debates around how the discourses about ethics are shaped, but space limits further discussion here – we will keep the focus on ethics in counselling and supervision. Ethical codes and/or guidelines are developed from a consensual view within counselling, demonstrating that the organisation and its services are accountable. In so doing, they set boundaries around practice. These boundaries aim to protect clients from malpractice, but they can also serve the profession by determining its place within wider ‘helping’ professions. In other words, such codes also enhance and protect the boundaries around a particular area of expertise (McLeod, 1998), indicating that counsellors must be aware of the limits of their own competence and know when to discuss a referral. When existing codes of practice are found wanting, or professional experience and intuition do not provide a solution, reference can be made to more general ethical principles. The principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice and fidelity are well known, but are now summarised briefly for this review.

*Autonomy* refers to the right to freedom of choice and freedom of action, provided that these freedoms do not harm others. In many countries such rights are upheld by legislation. *Non-maleficence* translates as ‘above all do no harm’. Even where a client has sought help and given informed consent, the counsellor cannot assume that the responsibility for the consequences of any interaction is that person’s alone. *Beneficence* refers to the principle of ‘doing good’ and promoting human well-being. To fulfil this principle, counsellors ensure they are working within their competence and maintaining and updating their knowledge and skills. *Justice* focuses on the equitable distribution of and access to goods (i.e. resources) and services. Access to those services may, however, be constrained by funding and by policy controls. Finally, *fidelity* relates to the qualities of loyalty, reliability and acting in good faith. Codes relating to confidentiality are informed by the moral and ethical principle of fidelity (and even where there are limits to confidentiality, these limits need to be explicit and explained).

While all of these principles are relevant to counselling, it is possible that they may conflict with each other in some circumstances. Within an increasingly litigious society, adherence to such principles can be difficult and can appear somewhat abstract as they are based upon rational decision

*THE ETHICAL COUNSELLOR AND SUPERVISION*

making (Banks, 2009). Further, ethical issues cannot be separated from their social and historical context: McLeod states (1998, p274): *Moral concepts such as 'rights' or 'autonomy' only have meaning in relation to the cultural tradition in which they operate.* However, the principles listed above can offer a framework that is useful when considering the ethical dilemmas that arise in the supervision process. Decisions taken in supervision can be related to these ethical principles. Documenting the discussion that leads to a particular decision is helpful to justify the approach taken and, consequently, can also protect those involved, should evidence to support the decision be required in any subsequent complaint (Scaife, 2001). But while there is common ground from which a consensus results, there will be times when the supervisor or the supervisee face ethical problems and ethical dilemmas – we will return to this shortly.

## RELATING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES TO SUPERVISION

We have now reviewed general ethical principles – but how do they relate to the practice of supervision? At this point, extensive reference could be made to relevant ethical codes (e.g. BACP, 2010) and, of course, you will want to be familiar with your own professional organisation's latest code of practice and ethics for supervision. However, before moving on it may be more interesting to start with a 'blank page' and think about the ethical principles that you would like to be evident in a supervisory relationship.

### REFLECTION POINT

What would be most important for you? What would you wish to be evident in supervisory work, enacted by both the supervisor and the supervisee?

Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p54–55) propose six basic principles for supervision.

1. Balancing appropriate responsibility for the work of the supervisee with respect for their autonomy.
2. Due concern for the well-being and protection of the client with respect for their autonomy.
3. Acting within the limits of one's own competence and knowing when to seek further help.
4. Fidelity – being faithful to explicit and implicit promises made.
5. Anti-oppressive practice.
6. Openness to challenge and feedback combined with an active commitment to ongoing learning.

## WHEN ETHICAL PRINCIPLES CONFLICT

Life is complicated, and it is not possible to approach ethical decision making purely from an objective stance. For example, I might decide on what is the best action for my client, based on the principle of beneficence, but my decision may conflict with my client's wishes. If I proceeded without taking into consideration my client's views, I would be disregarding the principle of autonomy – of the client. My approach would need to consider the client's right to choose, alongside taking account of who has the right to judge what is 'for the good'.

The counsellor and the supervisor will often face ethical problems and ethical dilemmas that occur when principles are in conflict. Solutions can often be found for problems, but – by definition – ethical dilemmas are more difficult to solve, and turning to ethical codes and general principles may not provide an answer. What follows are a number of case studies that demonstrate how principles can conflict within supervision. For each, you might add an activity by asking yourself: *Hmm, what would I do in these circumstances?*

### Case study 2.1 Jane and Jo

Jane is worried about her supervisee Jo, who appears to be very anxious. Jo starts the session by talking about what is going on in her personal life. The more she talks the more agitated she becomes, and Jane is concerned that neither of them will be able to contain the anxiety within the supervision session. Jo then reveals that when life became unbearable in the past she attempted suicide. Jane is concerned about what will happen when Jo leaves. Will she be safe?

### ACTIVITY 2.1

What ethical principles apply here? How do they influence the next step and what action should be taken? What would *you* do in these circumstances?

You would want to act in good faith (*fidelity*) as it is likely that Jo has made her revelation expecting it to be confidential. But you would also want to 'do the right thing' (*beneficence*), and that need is likely to conflict with respecting Jo's *autonomy*. If you were working with a young or vulnerable client, your agreed contract is likely to have covered the issue of confidentiality and what is to happen if this needs to be overruled to prevent self-harm or harm to others. In a supervisory relationship, intervening

## THE ETHICAL COUNSELLOR AND SUPERVISION

because you are worried about Jo's mental health and safety might conflict with your supervisory contract. But you would also be thinking about the principle of *non-maleficence* if your supervisee is currently working with clients. You would want to protect your supervisory contract with Jo, but the issue may be one for counselling for Jo, rather than supervision. Containing Jo's anxiety would be important within the session, and listening to what she has to say is essential, but this is unlikely to be enough. A prompt referral might be the next best step if Jo agrees, but can you insist? The nature of supervision is such that Jane cannot 'un-know' what she has been told. She may feel she now has vicarious responsibility for Jo. It is crucial that the decision taken is shared and documented, framed against the ethical principles discussed.

**Case study 2.2 Janna and Paul**

Janna has worked as a supervisor with Paul, a trainee counsellor, over several sessions. Paul loves his supervision sessions and is very keen to learn. He contacts Janna by email regularly to check out issues he is facing in practice. Janna is beginning to feel a bit worn out by the attention and enthusiasm, but more importantly she is concerned that Paul just does not seem to 'get it', despite the hours of input. Janna likes Paul and wants to support his development, but is concerned about his apparent lack of ability to take responsibility for his own learning and progress.

**ACTIVITY 2.2**

What ethical principles apply here? How do they influence the next step and what action should be taken? What would you do in these circumstances?

As the supervisor you would be concerned about Paul's clients if Paul is not learning (*non-maleficence*), but you want to treat Paul fairly and give him every opportunity to learn (*justice*). Alongside this you would need to think about your own well-being, as Paul's demands are becoming excessive. The final decision is likely to be influenced by what is best for Paul's clients. You would want to give Paul enough time to become an independent learner before you wonder if he is perhaps not suited to the occupation and needs career counselling.

### Case study 2.3 Leroy and Jaycee

Leroy enjoys his supervision meetings with Jaycee, but begins to reflect on this. He becomes aware that there is a sexual attraction between himself and his supervisee, and his feeling is that this is mutual. He wonders if it is getting in the way of the functions of supervision and thinks it is his responsibility to do something about this.

### ACTIVITY 2.3

What ethical principles apply here? How do they influence the next step and what action should be taken? What would you do in these circumstances?

It might be thought that counsellors and supervisors in their adherence to the principle 'above all else do no harm', might be 'above' such behaviour – but counsellors and supervisors are human beings, of course, and sexual attraction may be more prevalent than we think. In Case study 2.3 any sexual advance on the part of Leroy might be coercive and would act against upholding Jaycee's *autonomy*, even if the attraction is mutual. It is unlikely in such circumstances that the supervisory contract would be maintained. Leroy should seek advice, which is likely to be that the supervisory relationship must end. He will then be in the difficult position of having to explain to his supervisee why the contract has been terminated. However, when we consider both the supervisee and the potential effects on the supervisee's work, it could be argued that all the ethical principles apply in this case. Using immediacy and being congruent with his supervisee would be important when he explains why the supervision must end.

### Case study 2.4 Maria and Danna

Maria has begun working with a new supervisee, Danna, a qualified counsellor, who states she will report verbally rather than share recordings of her counselling sessions. Maria's expectation was that they would discuss case studies through observation of work – either live or recorded – as that is the norm within the counselling organisation. However, Maria has never liked this approach herself when it comes to her own work, so she agrees to Danna's declaration. Once sessions begin, she has second thoughts and realises she has colluded with Danna to avoid a difficulty that is as much hers as her supervisee's.

### ACTIVITY 2.4

What ethical principles apply here? How do they influence the next step and what action should be taken? What would you do in these circumstances?

On one level we would want to uphold the supervisee's *autonomy* and her right to choose the approach to supervision. This would be an issue with a supervisee who was in training as the work needs to be observed before qualifying, but Danna is at the post-registration stage. What might be important here – if observation is the norm within the organisation – is to explore why Danna does not want her work observed. Maria also needs to consider her own developmental needs and not hide from them, using Danna's difficulty to cover up her own unease at being observed. Unless this is addressed, the work of both supervisor and supervisee may violate the principles of *justice*, *beneficence* and *non-maleficence* as fewer safeguards are in place when compared to other counsellors within their organisation.

### LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Decision making in supervision will also be informed by legal requirements, and these will be bound by the working context, professional codes and the law within a particular country or state. As with work with clients, when in doubt a supervisor should examine codes of conduct, seek advice and document their action. Underpinning the need to be aware of legal requirements is the fear of litigation. When working with children, for example, making a mistake can have very serious consequences. Following the Gillick ruling (*Gillick v Norfolk and Wisbech AHA*, 1985) the law in England and Wales allows practitioners working with children to provide a confidential service. Mrs Gillick requested that her local health authority should not be allowed to give contraceptive advice to her daughters, who were under sixteen years of age. The eventual judgement revolved around whether children under the age of sixteen were competent to make decisions regarding their own medical treatment. The ruling stated that a child is considered to be competent according to chronological age alongside mental and emotional maturity, intelligence and comprehension of the issue: this is known as Gillick competence. The Gillick ruling can be applied outside medical situations, and therefore includes confidentiality in counselling, but it can be overturned in cases where a child may be refusing help in a life and death situation. What might be contentious here is the duty of mandatory reporting, but the Gillick ruling still applies, despite more recent events – for example, following the Laming Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (DoH, 2003). While the Gillick ruling relates to

preserving the confidentiality of the client, the best place to discuss difficult issues will be in supervision. The supervisor can help the supervisee to examine the ethics, balancing protection for vulnerable clients within the framework of the counselling process and the organisation's code of conduct or legal requirements. Action may need to be immediate, but the resulting anxiety can be contained within supervision.

There are other ethical and legal issues that may arise in supervision. Examples are: whether there is a 'duty to warn' in the case of the possibility of a serious crime; engaging in fair and due process if a supervisee's competence to practise is a concern; and becoming party to information about a supervisee's colleague who, the supervisor is told, is engaging in misconduct and actions that are discriminatory.

### CULTURAL 'DIFFERENCE' AND ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE

Counsellors should be aware that they operate from cultural assumptions that need to be questioned. Scaife draws on a broad definition of culture, stating:

*Differences between people along the dimensions of ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, age and disability have provided a context for discrimination in favour of the dominant group throughout our cultural history. Ethical practice under the principle of justice requires an equitable approach be made to different groups whether these involve clients and/or supervisees.*

(Scaife, 2001, p134)

Deeply held values and beliefs arising from culture – in its widest terms – can have a negative impact on the practice of supervision. The term anti-oppressive practice helps us to think of this as an approach that is not limited to race or ethnicity – as in the quote from Scaife above. As a first step towards anti-oppressive practice, cultural 'difference' on both sides of the supervisory relationship should be explored from the start of the relationship. This exploration can help to address any 'blind spots' or assumptions that may be influencing the work. Bimrose (2006, p74) suggests that an acknowledgement of difference *is important at various levels. For example (and perhaps most obviously), it is important for the critical review of practice that is at the heart of this activity [supervision].* As Bimrose goes on to explain, this is particularly relevant where there is difference in terms of power and status, both within an organisation and within the dominant culture. A case can be made for matching supervisor and supervisee – for example, a black supervisor with a black supervisee. The intention would be to acknowledge that there may be experiences in common based on membership of a minority group. However, this can be founded on a false



## THE ETHICAL COUNSELLOR AND SUPERVISION

assumption that both parties belong to the same cultural group, and it is itself a kind of tyranny. Scaife supports this point: *Even the act to decide to consult with the supervisee about her or his preference prior to making the allocation singles the person out if this is not the usual procedure* (2001, p139). A case study will illustrate this point.

### Case study 2.5 Margaret

Margaret was born and educated in South East Asia and has recently moved to the UK to join the rest of her family. She has now qualified, having undertaken her counselling qualification at a large university based in a multi-ethnic city. An opportunity arose for a job as a counsellor in a town on the south coast of England, and Margaret was delighted when she was offered the position – which she accepted. She works mainly with adults in a small counselling service. When she met the line manager for the first time, the question of organising appropriate supervision was raised. Seeing that Margaret had her head covered, he said: *I'm not sure what to do about your supervision as we do not have any other counsellors who are Muslim within our small group*. Margaret did not know how to reply as she was not expecting different treatment from any of her new colleagues. She felt, she said, *flattened* by this statement and *as if I was a bit of a nuisance*. On reflection, she thought he was probably trying to be culturally sensitive, but she felt his concern was both insensitive and misplaced.

A better approach from the line manager would have been to avoid making assumptions and ask Margaret about her expectations and preferences regarding supervision, outlining the limitations that existed within a small organisation for any counsellor – regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender or age. The approach taken by the line manager is oppressive rather than anti-oppressive (Thompson, 1993). What was required was the development of multicultural competence – essential in counselling and relevant also for supervision. Multicultural competence is discussed in detail in Reid (2011), and readers are directed there for further information. But, drawing on that publication, principled action that works towards multicultural competence in supervision can be informed by the matrix (as outlined in Reid, 2011) offered by Sue et al. (1995) for counselling. Points can include:

- awareness of own biases and limitations and their outcomes;
- recognition of the range of social variables that lead to cultural difference;
- knowledge about the causes and effects of oppression, racism, discrimination and stereotyping;
- openness about processes of supervision with a view to a collaborative approach that works alongside the supervisee;

- commitment to enriching understanding through continuous professional and reflexive development;
- searching for appropriate and culturally sensitive models of supervision, rather than reliance on established or 'singular' methods;
- awareness and understanding of the impact of negative treatment experienced by marginalised groups;
- respect for people's beliefs, values and views about themselves and the stories they choose to tell the supervisor;
- valuing the language, style and manner of speech, while acknowledging there will be times when the supervisor's linguistic skills will be inadequate;
- questioning of the appropriateness and helpfulness of organisational supervision methods;
- awareness of institutional practices that lead to discrimination;
- congruence when considering how to overcome relevant discrimination;
- understanding of the differences in communication styles and their impact, plus extension of own communication skills and methods;
- open-mindedness to alternative ways of supporting, including using the resources of the supervisee.

As should be obvious, the first step in developing this competence is self-awareness, exploring the bias that underpins our assumptions about ourselves and others, and the Western discourses that underpin counselling theory and practice. It is important to stress again that 'difference' is not just related to race or ethnicity, although often it is the most visible difference and the historical circumstances that lead to racial discrimination should never be underplayed. An exploration of personal values is provided in the final activity in this chapter, but the need for self-awareness brings us back to the importance of reflexivity in supervision.

## REFLEXIVITY IN SUPERVISION

In the previous chapter definitions of reflectivity and reflexivity were offered. They are worth repeating here before we continue. A reflective practitioner is someone who is able to reach potential solutions through analysing experience and prior knowledge, in order to inform current and future practice. The internal process of reflection that is active and conscious could be described as reflectivity. Reflexivity is the process by which we are aware of our own responses to what is happening in a particular context (i.e. a counselling interaction or supervision session) and our reactions to people, events and the dialogue taking place. A reflexive understanding will include an awareness of the personal, social and cultural context and its influence on both the speaker and the listener. Reflexive awareness in counselling practice leads to a deeper understanding of how we co-construct

## THE ETHICAL COUNSELLOR AND SUPERVISION

knowledge about the world, and ways of operating within it, that are more meaningful for those involved.

If we view supervision as a learning process, it would be reasonable to suggest that contemporary learning theories promote the concept of reflection as a route to so-called 'deep' learning (Brockbank and McGill, 2007). Deep learning through reflexive processes should lead to cognitive learning: i.e. changes in our understanding of the world, and in ways of behaving in the world. Such learning takes place in a social context with others and is affected by the degree of agency (or personal power and influence) that the learner possesses or can access (Harris and Brockbank, 2011). How supervision is structured, the models and methods employed, the cultural conditions within which it is 'delivered' and the type of organisation within which it is set will all affect the learning process. The space for learning is also created, and often constrained by, the language used – the ways of speaking and thinking in a particular context (referred to earlier as discourses). The prevailing discourse will draw on a particular set of meanings, a shared understanding of the use of metaphors, images that have resonance within a particular setting and cultural stories that are meaningful to the particular group (Burr, 1995). The understanding involved is often assumed and, as a prevailing discourse, is given precedence over other ways of talking and thinking – in other words, of representing the world. In order to belong to a particular group, such discourses have to be understood and joined with. Clearly, some discourses are more powerful than others, and the space for resisting the prevailing discourse may be highly constrained. Such matters affect a person's capacity to learn and are influential in supervision. A case study may help to illustrate the point.

### Case study 2.6 Jenny meets Miranda, her new supervisor

Jenny works in an inner city area with young people who present with a range of issues that are often connected to the disadvantages associated with the area, e.g. unemployment, poor housing, underfunded schooling and what the media describe as 'rival gang culture'. She qualified as a counsellor two years ago and enjoys her work, although it is often very challenging. She is the only counsellor working within a charitable organisation with young people from a particular large housing estate. Although she works 'safely', she often feels isolated and values her supervision sessions. She felt a bit bereft when Pat told her she was retiring and would no longer be her supervisor, but she is relieved to hear that the organisation has arranged for her to have supervision elsewhere. An appointment is made to meet Miranda, her new supervisor.

After the meeting Jenny tells her partner what happened: *It was a nice building, easy to find, but I felt a bit anxious when I arrived, and the first impression of Miranda was, blimey, she just oozes upper class! She was friendly, shook my hand, offered me*

*tea and after the usual introductions invited me to talk about my work, education and training. Well, I didn't say much as I doubted she'd be impressed with my university and I doubt she works with kids like mine! She then told me a little about her own story, where she went after university – Oxbridge, I suspect, although she did not name the place. She was trying really hard, but I just didn't feel comfortable. She was a bit, well, la-di-da! And she clearly had difficulty with my accent. I dunno, it was as difficult for her as it was for me I guess. At one point she was saying something about reflexive practice and making some reference to a character in a book that I don't know about – hadn't got a clue what she meant, but I didn't want to let on that I didn't understand. I then just spent most of the time feeling a bit stupid and miserable, missing Pat. We are not well matched, she lives in a different world to me, but how can I say I want someone else? I work for a charity after all, and she is far more experienced than me! I don't know what to do about this – what do you think?*

In the case study above, Jenny does not feel as if she has much agency in terms of the choice of supervisor, and unless the relationship develops positively, it seems doubtful at this stage that her capacity to learn will be met. Jenny is reflecting on the meeting, but as yet she does not know what, if anything, she can do about the situation.

### REFLECTION POINT

If you were Jenny's partner, how would you respond?

The literature on reflective practice for learning within supervision is helpful here. Specifically, Harris and Brockbank (2011) draw on the work of Argyris and Schön (1996) and Hawkins and Shohet (1989), and the discussion of single and double loop learning within supervision. In the case study, Jenny is reflecting on what happened, thinking about the relationship and wanting to find a solution. She is at the start of a process of single loop reflection and learning that is well known and associated with Kolb (1984). If Jenny engages in further *reflection* on what took place, she may decide to *revise* her behaviour at the next meeting by being more assertive, making sure she questions metaphors or language she does not understand. Through *testing* this revised approach she will gain a new *experience*, and she can reflect on the results. If all goes well, she will gain confidence in her ability and will have learnt about herself and how to change this supervisory relationship in the process.

For transformative learning to take place, a deeper change is required. Harris and Brockbank state: *really effective learning is characterised by the transition*

## THE ETHICAL COUNSELLOR AND SUPERVISION

*from single to double loop learning which enables the learner to move beyond their existing way of working with the support and challenge, using reflective dialogue, of their therapist or supervisor (2011, pp55–56).*

To engage in double loop learning Jenny needs to consider if her own beliefs and/or assumptions are influencing her approach to her supervisor and then move to take a new stance by looking at the situation from a different perspective. To do this she needs to shift her ways of thinking about the world and open up a space for the new learning and understanding that arises from this – and the way to achieve this is through reflexive dialogue with her supervisor.

### Case study 2.7 Jenny talks about the next meeting

*Yeah, it was much better, thanks. I thought about what you said and decided I would ask if I did not understand, but actually I went back to some of my notes about reflexive behaviour from the course. At the time it obviously didn't sink in, but rereading these I realised I was making some assumptions about Miranda and not really thinking about my behaviour in that first meeting. I hadn't really thought about this specifically in terms of supervision – and of course Pat, my previous supervisor, well, her background was very similar to mine. Anyway I started to question why I felt so negatively about Miranda, when she was friendly, welcoming, wanted to get to know me and was interested in my work. It's not easy to say this, but my negative view was down to my background, not hers. She was good, though, as she had obviously picked up on this last time, but didn't want to push it early on in our work together. She said that she got the sense that I was feeling uncomfortable that first time and asked me if I could describe my emotions after I left. Well, that got me energised, but I managed to do this in an open way and she thanked me. Turns out she didn't go to Oxbridge, and she's done a lot of work in family therapy in some pretty difficult places here in the UK and abroad.*

*Her approach in the session was very, I don't know, connected – it was me that had been judgemental. She said at one point – about a case we began to discuss – that it was a situation she had not experienced and she wanted me to help her understand it. What really struck me afterwards, thinking about that first visit, is that I'm not like that with clients – like, judgemental. I really try to get to know them on their terms, and that was what Miranda was working towards with me. Anyway we had an interesting 'dialogue', to use Miranda's term, and it felt collaborative. Yeah, I left feeling stimulated and wished we could have had a longer session. Still, there's next time.*

Jenny's final insight in the case study is important. It is often much easier to see and understand the behaviour of others than it is to see and understand our own. To do so and act upon our discoveries requires a high

level of reflexivity, and supervision can provide the space to nurture such reflexive behaviour: leading to transformative learning and change. One other aspect in Jenny's case study that is worth further thought is the place that emotion plays in transformative learning. Jenny's crisis involved her emotions, i.e. she felt stupid and miserable, and was missing Pat. She was not suppressing those emotions, however, and wanted to address the problem. Mezirow (1994, p223) tells us that for a shift in our understanding to occur, so that meaning can be transformed, we need to engage in a process where we critique our assumptions by *examining their origins, nature and consequences*. Strong emotion can also include expressing positive feelings that describe the learning: Jenny now says she left feeling stimulated and wanting more. With Miranda's support she is constructing a collaborative space for learning within supervision.

## PERSONAL VALUES AND SUPERVISION

Within the helping professions, ethical and moral issues cannot be separated from questions relating to values. A value can be defined as a lasting and firm belief that a particular style of conduct is preferable to any other. Values are shaped by historical and cultural settings and, in professional contexts, by the particular social and theoretical developments within the field. Assumptions that such values are shared must be questioned, and the ethical practitioner will, as has been said above, want to explore the background of their own value position in order to achieve anti-oppressive practice (Thompson, 1993).

The helping professions, including counselling, draw significantly on the discipline of psychology and have their roots in values that assume that the individual has it within their power to change for the better – 'better' here meaning what the mainstream society defines as socially acceptable behaviour. This individualistic view, which has dominated the traditional approaches within psychology, ignores how an individual's 'success' is shaped by the social, cultural, historical and political context within which they operate (Parker, 2007).

Ethics, based on values that are underpinned by the discipline of psychology alone, can be problematic if issues related to power and position are not considered. However, while it is important to recognise the influence of such complex issues, problems in practice are rarely addressed if action is always viewed as, ultimately, ineffective.

**ACTIVITY 2.5**

Consider what influences your personal values and how those influences might affect your approach to supervision – as a supervisee or a supervisor.

One way of approaching this is to think about your name, your place of birth, your background and your cultural history. What story would you tell about yourself? Make brief notes on that story.

Think about the discussion in this chapter. How might your biography influence your values within supervision?

Much of what has been covered in this chapter resonates with ethical issues in counselling practice. Attention to these issues forms a sound bedrock for considering ethical issues in supervision. When an ethical dilemma occurs, Corey et al. (1993) suggest the following as a step-by-step process to work towards ethically sound decisions, recommending that each stage should be documented.

- Identify the problem or dilemma.
- Identify the potential issues involved.
- Review relevant ethical guidelines.
- Discuss and consult with a colleague.
- Consider possible and probable courses of action.
- Enumerate the possible consequences of various decisions.
- Decide what appears to be the best course of action.

(cited in Scaife, 2001, p144)

Of course, as in counselling practice, things happen in the moment, and there is often a desire to act immediately. In many cases it will be appropriate to wait and use the phrase *I'll need to think about that some more and get back to you*, but additional advice would be to make sure you do so and in a timely fashion.

So, at a practical level, ethical codes do attempt to address ethical problems and to regulate professional behaviour. They exist to protect the service user (the client) and the practitioner in a society that requires agencies (and their professionals) to be accountable for the services offered. Codes are more than guidelines – guidelines appear optional whereas a 'code' implies a system of laws to be followed, based on a prevailing standard of agreed moral behaviour. Codes serve to unify a group of people around a common purpose and, by so doing, help to define that purpose. Professional codes of conduct within the helping services are usually, but not exclusively (Daniels and Jenkins, 2010), governed by the legislative framework within a particular country.

Responsible and reflexive practice requires a practitioner to interpret (rather than just follow) the codes of practice that govern their work and to develop an attitude of *ethical watchfulness* (Reid, 2004). At the heart of ethical watchfulness, however, lies a respect for persons and an acknowledgement of the defining principles discussed at the start of this chapter: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice and fidelity.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on ethical practice in supervision. It explored:

- general ethical principles found in counselling;
- ethical principles in the context of supervision;
- concepts of multiculturalism and anti-oppressive practice;
- the links between reflexivity, ethical practice and supervision;
- personal values and their impact on supervisory practice.

### SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

**Bimrose, J** (2006) Multicultural issues in support and supervision, in Reid, HL and Westergaard, J (eds) *Providing support and supervision: an introduction for professionals working with young people*. Abingdon: Routledge.

The issues regarding supervision and the broad concept of multiculturalism are discussed in depth in this chapter. Although the book relates to work with young people, the issues explored are not confined to age.

**Bond, T** (2010) *Standards and ethics for counselling in action*, 3rd edition. London: Sage.

**Daniels, D and Jenkins, P** (2010) *Therapy with children: children's rights, confidentiality and the law*, 2nd edition. London: Sage.

For a thorough understanding of the ethical, contractual and legal requirements of counselling, these two books are very useful.

**Scaife, J** (2001) *Supervision in the mental health professions: a practitioner's guide*. Hove: Brunner/Routledge.

This is a comprehensive text on supervision written in an accessible style – the chapter on ethics is particularly helpful.