



Why an ethical decision-making framework?

Nurses are required to make ethical decisions in their everyday practice, some are more complex than others. During a pandemic, the factors to consider for ethical decision making become very complex and numerous. You can utilize this ethical decision-making framework, along with the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* to collaborate with clients, families and other members of the healthcare team when faced with ethical decisions to determine the best course of action. This framework consists of five steps, each with considerations and guiding questions to help guide you through the ethical decision-making process.



Figure 1: Steps of the ethical decision-making framework

Review of the ethical decision making framework

Step 1: Assessment

Use this step to clarify and focus the ethical decision

Assessment considerations

1. Identify what you know and what you need to know to make an ethical decision.
2. Gather as much information as possible including all relevant factors.
3. Identify all those who should be involved (healthcare team, client, family).
4. Determine the decision that needs to be made and by whom.

Guiding questions

- What are the goals of care in this situation?
- Who is significant in this care situation and how could they be involved?
- What are my beliefs and values? How do they influence your approach to ethical problems?
- What values in the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* are inherent in this situation?
- What values are important for others in the situation? This may include the client, family, or other members of the healthcare team.
- Do the individuals involved in the situation have different values? Do these differences create conflict?

Step 2: Review and Reflect

Use this step to identify and examine all possible options for the ethical decision.

Reflect and review considerations

1. Identify all the alternatives available.
2. Examine the various options that could be implemented.

Guiding questions

- What action(s) do I think will do the most good? What do other healthcare team members think?
- What values does society view as important in this situation? What are the societal expectations of care?
- What action(s) will cause the least amount of value conflict and/or moral distress? What are the potential consequences of the actions? How will key persons be affected?
- What constraints are you experiencing in taking action consistent with your ethical duties and obligations?
- What are the risks of harm if you do not take a course of action? What are the risks of harm if you do?
- What legislation, standards, policy applies to this situation in terms of your obligations? What are the legal implications for these actions?

Step 3: Maximize Good

This step will assist in understanding professional obligations while choosing an ethical action.

Maximizing the good considerations

1. Examine relevant legislation and professional standards.
2. Consider you and your colleagues experience and judgment.
3. Identify and utilize other available resources to support your decision making.
4. Think about the effects of your choice on others choices: are you making it easier for others to act ethically?

Guiding questions

- What do I believe is the best action? What does the healthcare team believe is the best action?
- Are there constraints preventing me from taking ethical action?
- Do I have the virtues required to take ethical action? Do I have the necessary knowledge and skill?

Step 4: Ethical Action

Use this step to assist in taking action.

Ethical action considerations

1. Select the best alternative- all things considered.
2. Formulate a choice as a general maxim for all similar situations- is there a time when this may not apply?
3. Develop a clear implementation plan-with the appropriate rationale. Clearly communicate this to all those who may be affected.

Guiding questions

- Am I acting according to the *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses*?
- Am I practising the way a reasonably prudent nurse would practise in this situation?
- Am I acting with care and compassion in my relationships with others in this situation?
- Am I meeting my professional and institutional expectations in this action?

Step 5: Evaluation

Use this step to reflect, debrief and obtain feedback on the ethical decision and action that was taken.

Evaluation considerations

1. Consider organizing a follow-up debriefing and continuing education session(s) and/or planning changes to related policies and procedures.
2. Seek feedback on the process from all those involved.

Guiding questions

- Were the outcomes of this action acceptable?
- Was the process of decision making and action acceptable? Did all involved feel respected and valued?
- Were harms minimized and was good maximized?
- What did I do well?
- What might have been done differently?