

# **Ethics Paper**

Principles and Philosophies of Health

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## **Introduction**

Health educators and promoters have a responsibility to uphold a standard of ethics throughout their career. Health educators should keep main ethical theories in mind like the deontological approach and utilitarianism when discussing various health topics. While all people in society have a responsibility to act ethically, health educators not only have to uphold these standards but also teach them.

## **Ethics vs Professional Ethics**

Before discussing ethics from a health perspective, it is important to define a few key terms. *Ethics* refers to the study of right or wrong in relation to a society or social system. In a social system, ethics provide rules that all members are expected to follow. Everyone in that social system should be held to the same standards to act ethically. *Professional ethics* are the standards that people are expected to follow in the workplace. These standards are not recommendations or preferences but rather expectations for all workers. Most workplaces will have their own set of ethical standards that workers must accept and follow if they are to work there.

## **Utilitarianism vs Deontology**

Another important distinction to make includes understanding the leading ethical theories of utilitarianism and deontology. Understanding the theories behind ethical decision making can help someone make decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas. When considering *utilitarianism*, people are more concerned with the results of a decision than with the ethical choice itself. If a decision leads to positive results for the most people, then it was the correct decision. *Deontology* is an opposite approach to ethics where the ends do not justify the means. Someone that takes a deontological approach does not concern themselves with the

consequences of a decision. Instead they will consistently follow set rules to make ethical decisions.

### **Importance of Ethical Behavior for Health Educators**

Now that we have discussed some key background terms and definitions on the topic of ethics, we can look at why health educators have a responsibility to act ethically. Health educators are responsible for maintaining a code of professional ethics just like all other professions but an argument can be made that health educators have an increased responsibility to act ethically. When teaching in the health field, ethical dilemmas are sure to come up due to the nature of the content taught. Health educators need a strong ethical foundation to accurately assess these situations and make ethical decisions. The Journal of School Health states, “The Health Education profession is dedicated to excellence in the practice of promoting individual, family, organizational, and community health. Guided by common ideals, Health Educators are responsible for upholding the integrity and ethics of the profession as they face the daily challenges of making decisions.” (Journal of School Health, 2000). For health educators, this describes an increased need for a strong ethical base because of the responsibilities being asked of health educators. Teachers often need to teach a diverse group of students and must promote healthy decision making to their students. This includes discussing ethical dilemmas with students and coming up with ethical answers. Health educators are also expected to follow their own code of ethics which details specific responsibilities they have to attain high ethical conduct and to promote ethical behavior to others.

### **Applying the Principles of Ethical Decision Making**

Health educators also have the responsibility of following the principles of ethical decision making. These ethical principles are autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and

justice. The first principle, *Autonomy*, explains that people should be able to make their own decisions for their lives. As health educators, our job is to promote healthy decision making but we cannot make decisions for our students. The next principle is *Beneficence* which is the idea that a decision should be made based on what is good or the right thing to do. A health topic that could be applied to this concept could be treating others with respect. Choosing to treat others with respect is a good decision that everyone could benefit from. *Nonmaleficence*, the third principle, is used when no decision is ideal so the choice that causes the least harm is best. An example of this is choosing to get your child vaccinated to prevent illnesses even though getting the vaccine will cause pain. The final ethical principle is *justice* which means decisions should be focused on fairness and consistency. As a health educator it is our job to treat our students fairly and be consistent with classroom expectations, policies and discipline.

### **Ethics Reflection For My Career**

Once I begin my career as a health education teacher, I will use these four principles and the theories to make ethical decisions and to act ethically in general. I will also use the Unified Code of Ethics for the Health Education Profession and apply them to the Health Education Specialists Competencies. By strictly following these ethical codes and using them to also meet the health education specialist eight competencies, I will be able to be an effective and ethical health teacher. The first section for the code of ethics covers the responsibility a health educator has to the *public*. As a health education specialist I will have many opportunities to influence the health and decision making of people in my community. I will have to keep in mind the diverse needs of people in my community and ensure that decisions that help the most people are being made while also striving to meet the needs of all people. I will also need to guarantee people's autonomy in the community by allowing people to make their own health decisions as long as

they are not negatively impacting others. For the next section, my responsibility to the *profession*, I will have to act in a way that garners respect for my position. It is important to act ethically so that people in the health field are respected and trusted. By acting ethically, people may be able to see the positive impact of health education specialists which will allow more positive contributions to be made in the health field by myself and other health educators. The third section is a responsibility to act ethically for my *employers*. I will do this by having an open dialogue with my employers about what I am trying to accomplish and by using current, accurate information and theories to carry out my professional responsibilities. The fourth article talks about the importance of how I will *deliver health education*. I will accomplish this by using differentiated teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners. I will also collaborate with others and use research based teaching strategies. Finally I will be sensitive to the different cultural backgrounds of my students. The Fifth article covers how to conduct *research* appropriately. It is very important to maintain privacy and confidentiality when conducting health research as well as not forcing anyone to participate in research. I will be sure to respect those rights by attaining clear consent for people that want to participate in research while maintaining their privacy. The final code of ethics that I will be responsible for keeping is the responsibility in *professional preparation*. If I ever get to the point where I am training other health educators, I will ensure that I am selecting people for programs fairly and be sure to eliminate any forms of discrimination in the program. I will also need to make sure my material is carefully planned with accurate information.

By maintaining this code of ethics I will be able to become an effective and fair health education specialist. I will also apply this code of ethics to the eight areas of competencies defined by the 2020 HESPA II. The first competency is the *assessment of needs and capacity*. By

conducting needs assessments in my population I will be able to address their major health concerns. To do this ethically I will need to keep the fifth ethical code for research in mind and be confidential and only use volunteers in my research. I will also apply the research code to *evaluation and research* competency to conduct effective quantitative and qualitative research. For the next competency, *planning*, I will need to set clear objectives and use effective materials to plan my lessons. I will need to use strategies discussed in the code for delivery of health education. This same code of ethics will need to be considered for the *implementation* phase where I will actually instruct and conduct the health classes in an effective way. The fifth competency, *Administer and Manage Health Education/Promotion*, requires me to gain support for my program by applying the code of ethics to the public. This allows me to demonstrate why my health program is important to the diverse needs of the community. This code also covers the *advocacy* competency, where I will answer questions for community issues and advocate for healthy decision making. Next I will need to apply the first three codes of ethics to be competent in *communication*, to demonstrate why my work is important, deliver the progress I am making and to provide clear information about health issues. The final competency is *ethics and professionalism* which covers the entire code of ethics where I will be responsible for maintaining in all aspects of my career.

## **Summary**

Throughout this paper I learned what it means to act ethically, the theories behind ethics, why health educators have a responsibility to act ethically and the specific steps to take to maintain these ethical standards. By closely following the code of ethics and eight areas of competencies, I will be able to act ethically throughout my career. It is imperative for me to uphold these ethics given the influence health education specialists have on the health of their

communities. Health educators serve as role models for their students and have many other responsibilities that make a deep understanding of ethics and ethical decision making necessary.

## References

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