

Portfolio Assignments I & II

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Portfolio Assignment I

In this case, my client Kristy is a single 28 year old graduate student in social work who is experiencing signs and symptoms of stress. Previously Kristy saw a former colleague of mine for an initial session. During that session my former colleague displayed signs of countertransference when he “trauma dumped” to her despite her voicing feelings of stress, and went as far as asking her to get coffee with him. As Kristy’s counselor, I intend to put her needs first and help her find ways to manage her stress. As a professional counselor, I will also follow the ACA Code of Ethics and address the actions of my former colleague with the intent of preventing further harm to future patients.

Identifying Problems and Potential Issues

I see three main issues in this case example. The first issue is that Kristy is experiencing signs and symptoms of stress. This could be stemming from her time as a graduate student working in social work. The second issue in this case is the way my former colleague addressed Kristy’s concerns. According to the American Counseling Association (ACA), “The primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of clients.” (ACA, 2014, A.1.a). My former colleague failed to support Kristy’s welfare when he put his needs above of hers. This shows a lack of competence which is an ethical issue. Similarities in therapy have the potential to impact the bonds, tasks, and goals of treatment depending on how it is addressed (Morghen, et al., 2019). In this case, Kristy was already feeling stressed so sharing one’s own trauma seems inappropriate. The third issue with this case is that my former colleague asked Kristy to join him for coffee. Regardless of intent, asking clients to meet outside of the professional counseling relationship is not encouraged and I fail to see how my former colleague

would deem it to be in Kristy's best interest after just one intake session. To me, this offer seems to be purely based on my former colleague's needs.

Applying the ACA Code of Ethics

When analyzing my former colleague's behavior I will turn to the ACA Code of Ethics. I acknowledge that as counselors, me and my former colleague have a responsibility to read, understand, and follow the ACA Code of Ethics and adhere to applicable laws and regulations. (ACA, 2014, C.1.). My former colleague went against the code of ethics when he asked Kristy out on a date. While his intentions may not have been romantic, it is still by definition a romantic gesture that falls under a prohibited counselor-client interaction (ACA, 2014, A.5.a).

Furthermore, the ACA Code of Ethics states that it is a counselors responsibility to "monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired" (ACA, 2014, C.2.g). In this case my colleague had the anniversary of a traumatic event in his life approaching that seems to have impaired his mental health and caused him to lean on his clients for support instead of supporting their needs.

Proceeding With My Former Colleague

The situation with my former colleague is tricky because he no longer works with me. Moving forward with the colleague, I see two courses of action. (1) When counselors have reason to believe that another counselor is violating or has violated an ethical standard and substantial harm has not occurred, they attempt to first resolve the issue informally with the other counselor if feasible" (ACA, 2014, I.2.a). In this case, substantial harm has not occurred, however I would still see an obligation to follow up with the coworker. If they switched clinics, I would attempt to reach out to the former colleague regarding the incident. While doing this, I

would focus on how his own mental health could be affecting his work and potentially encourage a course of reflection and self-care to prevent further harm to clients in the future. (2) “When uncertain about whether a particular situation or course of action may be in violation of the ACA Code of Ethics, counselors consult with other counselors who are knowledgeable about ethics and the ACA Code of Ethics” (ACA, 2014, I.2.c.). In this situation I would consult with my supervisor and go over the situation. This could be beneficial because they may see solutions that had not occurred to me or maybe there were other violations I was not aware of that lead to a more serious issue being addressed.

Proceeding With My Client Kristy

When seeing Kristy I would make sure to communicate my counseling boundaries and establish goals for treatment with Kristy so that she knows what to expect. Assuming that goal is to reduce stress, I would start by asking questions about her life and taking a deeper looking into her relationship with grad school. Depending on her needs, I would work with her on finding balance and prioritizing a self-care routine specific to her with the hope that it would prevent burnout and help her balance her own health with her career.

Conclusion

In this case, my former colleague did not follow the ACA Code of Ethics when working with Kristy. Due to the nature of this violation, I would reach out to my supervisor for guidance and potentially reach out to the former colleague to help him understand the impact of his actions. Moving forward with Kristy, I will be clear on my professional boundaries and work with her to find ways to help reduce her stress symptoms that potentially stem from her graduate program.

Portfolio Assignment II

In this case example, while I am working as a counselor I begin to experience symptoms of stress, including poor sleep and feelings that my stomach is “tied up in knots”. I have also started falling behind on work and taking feelings of frustration out on my friends and family. A coworker said that I have not “seemed myself in a while” and brought up the term “wound healer”. This alarms me and I realize that my mental health needs to be addressed so that I can better serve my patients and prevent myself from taking my stress out on my loved ones. In order to do this I create a wellness plan to help me balance my mental health with my career.

Step One: *Find the Issues*

When I am stressed, I have found that I have a hard time organizing the issues in my head. It is imperative for me to sit down with a notebook and make a mind chart starting with me in the middle and then create branches extending to all of the possible stressors I can think of that are impacting my life. This helps get the jumble of stress outside of myself. From there, I can see the issues and break them down. I will prioritize issues, and set timelines. Creating this visual system I can follow is a useful tool when I am feeling overwhelmed.

Step Two: *What Emotions are at my Door?*

Recognizing what issues I am facing is one thing, managing the emotions that come with them is another. In this case example, my coworker called me a “wound healer” which leads me to believe I am overusing countertransference during my experiences with clients. This is alarming to me because I often times do this with my grief as a personal coping mechanism. It is my responsibility to recognize when I am doing it, and if I was struggling to manage it, I would reach back out to my therapist so that I could have a sound voice to help me work through it. Outside of therapy, I would take time to sit down with the emotions at my door. For example, if I

was finding myself wound up with thoughts of my lost loved one, I would picture the emotion, grief, walking up to my door. When grief arrives, I ask her what she needs. Maybe she needs to look through old photos, or maybe she needs to talk with a friend. The point is to acknowledge her needs and make time for them. For me, it is hard to take time to care for hard emotions. Picturing my emotions as people, helps me empathize, understand, and act on their/my needs.

Step Three: *Flow State*

Addressing the issues at hand and honoring my emotions is important for me. However, sometimes focusing energy on problem solving in those ways can be draining and has the potential to send my head swimming with negative loops and thoughts. When I am overwhelmed in this way it serves me to go and exert myself in a way that is not only physically active, but brings my mind into a flow state. Applicable flow state themes include “time transformation”, “sense of control”, “focus on activity”, and “effortlessness” (Boudreau, et al., 2020). One of the sports I have found that helps me accomplish this is highlining. Growing up, I was raised in a household filled with paranoia and anxiety. As I have gotten older I have spent a tremendous amount of my time learning to work with those engrained traits. “Extreme sports” are the best way I have learned to control my mind. The first time I stepped onto a line my vision was black with fear. As I progressed and practiced, I have been slowly able to learn to manage my fear and be in control of my mind when walking. This practice has been rewarding and instilled confidence and control in areas of my life where I feel anxious. If I was stressed in my life, I would prioritize sports like slacklining to promote physical activity, as well as putting my brain into the flow state so that I can be in a better mental space to handle challenges that come my way.

Step Four: *Last Resort*

Sometimes self-care is stepping away. Being a mental health counselor has the potential to be a heavy job that is taxing on mental health. Taking space from the job can be an important form of self-care. Maybe I need to take my vacation time, or maybe I need to set down the career and do something else. At the end of the day my mental health matters, and if I am going to serve my clients I need to ensure that my mental state is not negatively affecting their care.

As a counselor I am legally bound to the ACA code of ethics which states that it is my job to promote the welfare of the client and to monitor myself for signs of impairment, including mental and emotional problems, in order to prevent harm to my client when I am impaired (ACA, 2014). Ethically, I want to do what is best for my clients and offer them the best care that I can. Personally, I would feel bad if my own hardships were causing harm to or making my clients uncomfortable. It is my duty to take care of myself and be aware of my mental health in order to properly serve my clients.

Conclusion

In this case example I was displaying symptoms of stress and potential burn out. My actions were recognized by a coworker who called my wellness into question. Upon reflection, I realized that I needed to manage my stress by creating and following a personal wellness plan. My wellness plan included (a) Writing out my stressors and breaking them down, (b) Working with my emotions by seeing a counselor or visually viewing my emotions as people I need to care for, (c) Being physically active in a sport that puts my mind into the flow state, and (d) Stepping away from counseling to give myself space. By following this wellness plan I will be able to protect the wellness of myself, my clients, and the people surrounding me when I am going through a rough patch.

References

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