

Ethical Decision-Making Paper

School Counselor Ethical Decision

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Ethical dilemma #2

Jason is a student that is in 7th grade and is having thoughts of suicide. Jason goes to talk to his school counselor because a teacher heard him express some suicidal thoughts. The teacher sent him to the counselor, so he would have someone to talk to about the problems he is having. One of the main things that is making him think about taking his taking his own life is the way that he is treated at home by his family. However, Jason is under the age of 18 so he is considered a minor. Nevertheless, the counselor tells Jason's parents about the thoughts that Jason is having and gives them a resource list to help them find Jason some help for his suicidal thoughts. The school counselors' decision to call Jason's parents about his suicidal thoughts is unethical because his family is the reason for his suicidal thoughts, and it does not provide immediate help for Jason.

Identify the problem

The problem in this ethical dilemma is that a seventh grader is having thoughts of suicide because of problems that he is having at home with his family and personal life. He has expressed these thoughts in school because his teacher overheard him saying suicidal things and referred him to the school counselor. From here the problem is that the counselor calls Jason's parents to let them know that Jason is having these suicidal thoughts. The counselor does this because Jason is a minor. This issue here is that Jason's parents are the reason that he is having all these suicidal thoughts. If the counselor tells Jason's parents, they might not do anything to help Jason and they might even make the situation worse than it has to be. The counselor also did not tell the Jason that his parents would be told that he was having these suicidal thoughts. It also

seems like the only thing that she did for Jason was print him out a page of resources for him to give to his parents. This probably wasn't the best method of getting Jason the resources that he needs to get through this difficult time in his life.

ACA Code of Ethics

In the case of an ethical dilemma, it is important that the ACA Code of Ethics is applied to all situations. This is an interesting case because the counselor thought that she was doing the correct and ethical thing by contacting Jason's parents because he is under the age of 18 and is considered a minor. In section A.9. in the school counselor code of ethics, it talks about how the counselor has a duty to contact the authorities and parents if the student presents a serious and foreseeable harm to self and others. However, there is a section of that paragraph that states if the parents are the party that is causing a student to feel this way the counselor should talk to other qualified professionals before making a final decision to tell the parents. (American Counseling Association, 2014, Section A.9) According to this code in the code of ethics the counselor should have contacted the authorities to get Jason immediate help. Also, before she made any decision she should have talked to the other counselors in the school and asked their professional opinions on what to do in this situation. However, she did not do either of these things and just immediately called Jason's parents and this action could possibly make Jason's situation a lot worse. If she would have talked to other professionals before making the decision that she made, they might have given her a different opinion not to call Jason's parents because the action of telling Jason's parents could make the situation a lot worse for him.

Determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma

In determining the nature and dimensions of the dilemma is important to apply certain foundational principals. These foundational principals are autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and fidelity. (Foster-Miller, n.d.) In this case the foundational principal of non-maleficence was broken. This principal means that a professional will not let harm happen to a person through harm or neglect. (Foster-Miller, n.d.) In the situation involving Jason and his thoughts of suicide it is neglect that the only actions that the counselor took are that she called his parents and sent Jason home with a list of resources in the area that can help with suicide. If Jason's parents do not take action to help Jason get through the difficulties, he is facing then it was the wrong decision for the counselor to tell them in the first place. Most likely they will not help Jason because they are one of the main reasons that Jason is feeling the way he is. This is also a violation of the foundational principal of fidelity. Fidelity means giving continued support to a person. In this circumstance it was not demonstrated that this counselor was giving the maximum amount of support to Jason in this circumstance. In the dilemma it is not said what ended up happening with Jason. It would be good if the counselor would do a follow up with Jason very regularly to make sure he is not having thoughts of suicide anymore.

Potential Courses of Action

A potential course of action that the Counselor could have taken is to immediately contact appropriate authorities that could give Jason immediate help. This would have been more beneficial to Jason than calling and just printing him out a list of resources in the area. Also, the counselor could have sat in the room with Jason and called the national suicide prevention lifeline. This is a number that people can call and talk to someone about thoughts of suicide. One of their big focuses is on least intervention. This means they help the client without getting

superior involved, but they are there for the person to talk to if the person needs them. (National Suicide prevention lifeline) Another potential course of action that the counselor could have taken is to call on other councilors and professionals to help her make the right decision to best help Jason in this difficult situation. That is also a rule in the code of ethics that all counselors are supposed to follow anyway. (American Counseling Association, 2014, Section A.9)

Consider the potential consequences of all options and determine a course of action.

The counselor in this scenario should have come up with all of these potential courses of action before making a final decision. If this would have been done it could have created a much better result than the action she decided to take. The consequences of the course of action that was taken could possibly have negative consequences with Jason and his parents. It sounds like the counselor didn't consider the repercussions of telling Jason's parents that he is having thoughts of suicide even though she knew that Jason's parents were one of the main causes that was making him feel this way. The other options could have more positive outcomes with helping Jason get over his suicidal thoughts. These other options would also be more in line with the ACA code of ethics, as opposed to the option that the counselor ended up deciding on.

Evaluate the selected course of action

The course of action that would be best in this situation would be to consult with other councilors and professional like it states in the ACA code of ethics. In the ethical decision-making model it is important to apply test to the final course of action to make sure it doesn't have its own ethical problems. The first test is justice, and I feel that this course of action follows with the guidelines of justice because it is putting Jason's needs first. The second test is publicity. When this course of action is put through the publicity test it passes. If this course of

action was put in the news for how a councilor handled a situation it would not be looked at as bad. It would be looked at as everyone has Jason's well-being in mind. The third test is universality. This course of action passes this test also. It passes because I would recommend this course of action to another counselor that is in a similar situation. This course of action is good because it gets multiple opinions from different points of views and perspectives.

Implement the Course of Action

Implementing this course of action would mean getting in contact with the other counselors or professionals in the school as soon as possible. This would also mean that while the counselor is meeting and or talking to the other professionals that Jason is somewhere safe and being supervised to make sure he is not doing anything to harm himself or others. After meeting and coming to a conclusion on what to do in this situation it will be important to implement everything as fast as possible. Also, it is very important that the final decision has Jason's best interest and well-being in mind. After, the initial implementation of the plan it will be important to follow up with Jason to make sure he is safe and doing ok. This would also mean calling child line to report a potential child abuse situation because one of the main reasons Jason is having thoughts of suicide is because of things that are happening in his personal life and things that are happening at home with his family and his parents. Child line will report the call to the local CYS and they can do an investigation with the family to make sure there is not any abuse or neglect going on at Jason's home. Counselors that work with children are all mandated reporters so it is very important that in a situation where there is suspected child abuse going on at home that the councilor reports that information as soon as possible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is the counselor's responsibility to keep the child safe that is coming to them for help. The counselor violated the code of ethics and did not have the child's safety in mind. The school counselor's decision to call Jason's parents about his suicidal thoughts is unethical because his family is the reason for his suicidal thought, and it does not provide immediate help for Jason. It is very important for counselors to know how to deal with a child that is suicidal because suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among youth in the United States. (Cash, 2010)

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