

**Navigating Ethical Challenges  
in Behavior Analysis:  
Translating Code into Conduct**

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**What today is about.....**

- Understanding guidelines that exist to assist in behaving ethically
  - *Guidelines for Responsible Conduct (BACB)*
- Discussion of some (not all) guidelines
- Reviewing dilemmas that commonly occur and discussing how to apply the guidelines

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**ETHICAL CHALLENGES**

- Navigating ethical challenges is a complex process
- One component skill is understanding the guidelines that are developed for our profession
- Another component skill is application of these guidelines
- Moving from code to conduct is a skill set

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### What is the skill set comprised of?

Identifying ethical challenges (SIGNAL  
DETECTION)  
Understanding the involved/relevant guidelines  
Integrating contextually relevant information  
Using a decision tree  
Utilizing problem solving approaches  
Consult resources  
Consult experts

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### How do we teach that skill set?

- Contextual relevance
- Application in context
- Sharing of experiences
- Specific Problem Solving Strategies

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### Best way to learn code to conduct: Review of Real world ethical dilemmas

- The key to ethical practice is nuanced application
  - Weighing the issues
  - Understanding courses of action and potential ramifications
  - Referencing the code and using it to guide us

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### Before we begin.....

- What is it that makes ethical behavior a challenge?
- Themes
  - Changes in circumstances or relationships
  - Differing opinions
  - Emotions

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### International Association for Behavior Analysis Ethical Standards

- The Association for Behavior Analysis International® expects its members to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional behavior in the conduct of their work and the advancement of behavior analysis.

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### International Association for Behavior Analysis Ethical Standards

- ABAI embraces the diversity of professions within its membership; thus each ABAI member should adhere to the ethical standards that have been defined for his or her profession.

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**International Association for  
Behavior Analysis Ethical  
Standards**

- The American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
- The Association for Clinical Researchers' Code of Ethics
- The Association for Institutional Research's Code of Ethics

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**International Association for  
Behavior Analysis Ethical  
Standards**

- Behavior Analyst Certification Board's Guidelines for Responsible Conduct for Behavior Analysts
- The National Association of School Psychologists Professional Conduct Manual

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**International Association for  
Behavior Analysis Ethical  
Standards**

- The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics
- The National Education Association's Code of Ethics of the Education Profession

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## Guidelines for Responsible Conduct

### Responsible Conduct of a Behavior Analyst (Section 1)

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### 1.01 Reliance on scientific knowledge

- Behavior analysts rely on scientifically and professionally derived knowledge when making scientific or professional judgments in human service provision, or when engaging in scholarly or professional endeavors.

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### What is the basis of intervention chosen?

- Is it empirically validated and verified to be effective?
- If theoretically embedded and compelling, will it be studied for effectiveness in this case?
- What do we value in the selection of treatments within this science?
  - Our behavior should be consistent with this

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Evaluate the extent to which our behavior is consistent with these guidelines.
- Address inconsistencies
  - Alter recommendations
  - Collect data to guide decisions for individuals
  - Share results to build data base

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### 1.02 Competence

- (a) Behavior analysts provides services, teach, and conduct research only within the boundaries of their competence based on their education, training, supervised experience, or appropriate professional experience.

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### 1.02 Competence

- (b) Behavior analysts provide services, teach, or conduct research in new areas or involving new techniques only after first undertaking appropriate study, training, supervision, and/or consultation from persons who are competent in those areas and techniques.

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Is certification sufficient?
  - Minimal
- What behaviors are necessary?
  - Is conference attendance adequate?
  - Why is familiarity with the literature essential?

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### What does this mean?

- **KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS**
  - More important than knowing your areas of expertise
- What are the challenges to this in the real world?
  - Expectation from others
  - Not valued in larger community
  - Continuing education commitment must be extensive

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Be clear in your areas of expertise
  - Support this by evidence of ongoing training
- For each potential case, compare clinical goal to areas of expertise;
- Document # cases you refer to others;

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### 1.03 Professional Development

- Behavior analysts who engage in assessment, therapy, teaching, research, organizational consulting, or other professional activities maintain a reasonable level of awareness of current scientific and professional information in their fields of activity, and undertake ongoing efforts to maintain competence in the skills they use, by reading the appropriate literature, attending conferences and conventions, participating in workshops, and/or obtaining BACB certification.

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### What does this mean?

- Continuing education
- Continual clinical skill use

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Meet continuing education requirements;
- Attend ongoing training opportunities annually;

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### 1.04 Integrity

- Behavior analysts are truthful and honest. The behavior analyst follows through on obligations and professional commitments with high quality work and refrains from making professional commitments that he or she cannot keep.
- The behavior analyst's behavior conforms to the legal and moral codes of the social and professional community of which the behavior analyst is a member.

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### 1.04 Integrity

- The activity of a behavior analyst falls under these guidelines only if the activity is part of his or her work-related functions or the activity is behavior analytic in nature.
- If the behavior analyst's ethical responsibilities conflict with the law, behavior analysts make known their commitment to these guidelines and take steps to resolve the conflict in a responsible manner in accordance with law.

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### Integrity

- When errors or made or conflicts exist, action is swift and consistent with the guidelines

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Know the ethical codes;
- Know the laws;
- ACT when you need to act
- Document any reconciliation you conduct;

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### 1.05 Professional and Scientific Relationships

- Behavior analysts provide behavioral diagnostic, therapeutic, teaching, research, supervisory, consultative, or other behavior analytic services only in the context of a defined, remunerated professional or scientific relationship or role.

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### 1.05 Professional and Scientific Relationships

- When behavior analysts provide assessment, evaluation, treatment, counseling, supervision, teaching, consultation, research, or other behavior analytic services to an individual, a group, or an organization, they use language that is fully understandable to the recipient of those services. They provide appropriate information prior to service delivery about the nature of such services and appropriate information about later results and conclusions.

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### 1.05 Professional and Scientific Relationships

- Where differences of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status significantly affect behavior analysts' work concerning particular individuals or groups, behavior analysts obtain the training, experience, consultation, or supervision necessary to ensure the competence of their services, or they make appropriate referrals

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### 1.05 Professional and Scientific Relationships

- In their work-related activities, behavior analysts do not engage in discrimination against individuals or groups based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis prescribed by law.

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### 1.05 Professional and Scientific Relationships

- Behavior analysts do not knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning to persons with whom they interact in their work based on factors such as those persons' age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status in accordance with law.

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### 1.05 Professional and scientific relationships

- Behavior analysts recognize that their personal problems and conflicts may interfere with their effectiveness. Behavior analysts refrain from providing services when their personal circumstances may compromise delivering services to the best of their ability.

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### DUAL/MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS: What are challenges to this?

- DRIFT
- Poorly defined relationships
  - Asked about other students in the classroom
  - Asked about other children in the family

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Clearly delineate your role(s) with each client;

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### How do we follow this guideline?

- Use user-friendly language
- Informed consent
- Share information about results
  - Forget to do this in research
    - Staff too
  - Can we help consumers become better at understanding effective intervention?
    - Empower them through education

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### What does this imply?

- Effective self-evaluation
- Willingness to refer to someone who would be more effective and efficient

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### How do we follow these guidelines?

- Do no harm
- Know thyself
- Keep interests of client paramount and above own

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### **1.06 Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest**

- (a) In many communities and situations, it may not be feasible for behavior analysts to avoid social or other nonprofessional contacts with persons such as clients, students, supervisees, or research participants. Behavior analysts must always be sensitive to the potential harmful effects of other contacts on their work and on those persons with whom they deal.

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### **1.06 Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest**

- (b) A behavior analyst refrains from entering into or promising a personal, scientific, professional, financial or other relationship with any such person if it appears likely that such a relationship reasonably might impair their objectivity or otherwise interfere with their ability to effectively perform his or her functions as a behavior analyst or might harm or exploit the other party.

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### **1.06 Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest**

- (c) If a behavior analyst finds that, due to unforeseen factors, a potentially harmful multiple relationship has arisen (i.e., one in which the reasonable possibility of conflict or undue influence is present), the behavior analyst attempts to resolve it with due regard for the best interests of the affected person and maximal compliance with these guidelines.

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**What are commonly encountered dual relationship risks?**

- Individuals known in other contexts who could become clients or may request services
  - Neighbors
  - Students or supervisees

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**Dual Relationship Risk**

- A child is seen in a home-based program and the request is made to now work with the school system
  - What are the challenges?
  - Why are we inclined to agree?
  - **Who is the client?**

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**How do we follow this guideline?**

- Clearly delineate your roles(s) with clients;
- Have singular relationships;
- If more than one relationship, eliminate one if at all possible;

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### 1.07 Exploitative Relationships

- Behavior analysts do not exploit persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or other authority, such as students, supervisees, employees, research participants and clients.

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### 1.07 Exploitative Relationships

- Behavior analysts do not engage in sexual relationships with clients, students, or supervisees in training over whom the behavior analyst has evaluative or direct authority, because such relationships easily impair judgment or become exploitative.

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### What is the main issue here?

- Not a relationship between equals/peers
- Power differential
  - Abuse of power

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## 1.07 Exploitative Relationships

- Behavior analysts are cautioned against bartering with clients because it is often clinically contra-indicated and prone to formation of an exploitative relationship

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## Bartering

- While some allowed in APA, it should be undertaken with extreme caution

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## How do we follow this guideline?

- Do not involve oneself sexually or personally – period!
- If one becomes involved this way, refer client to another professional, or terminate entire relationship;

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## Responsible Conduct

- Maintain high standards of the profession
  - Adherence to empirically verified treatments
  - Awareness of competencies and limitations
  - Continued professional development
  - Integrity
  - Clarity in relationships
  - Avoidance of dual relationships
  - Avoidance of exploitation
  - Stop unprofessional conduct if it occurs despite efforts at prevention

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## Section 3: Assessing Behavior

## Section 4: The Behavior Analyst and the Individual Change Program

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## 3.02 Functional Assessment

- (a) The behavior analyst conducts a functional assessment, as defined below, to provide the necessary data to develop an effective behavior change program.
- (b) Functional assessment includes a variety of systematic information-gathering activities regarding factors influencing the occurrence of a behavior (e.g., antecedents, consequences, setting events, or motivating operations) including interview, direct observation, and experimental analysis.

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### Challenges to functional assessment

- Definition of adequate
  - Interview/report?
  - ABC/direct observation
  - Functional analyses
- Changing technology and changing definitions of best practice strategies
- Real world difficulties in manipulating variables – allowing serious maladaptive behavior to occur at high frequency?

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### 4.01 Describing Conditions for Program Success.

- The behavior analyst describes to the client or client-surrogate the environmental conditions that are necessary for the program to be effective.

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### What does this include?

- Environmental conditions
  - Reinforcement
  - Contingencies
  - Supports/resources
  - Consistency
  - Trained individuals
  - Data collection
  - Review of data
  - Access to professionals to assist in problem-solving

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#### 4.04 Approving Interventions

- The behavior analyst must obtain the client's or client-surrogate's approval in writing of the behavior intervention procedures before implementing them.

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#### How should approval be approached?

- Is it understood?
  - Demonstrated?
  - Experienced?
- Are rights understood?
  - Absence of coercion
- Have side effects been discussed?

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#### Sections 8 and 9

- Responsibilities to colleagues and to society

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**Section 8: THE BEHAVIOR ANALYSTS'  
RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLEAGUES**

The behavior analyst have an obligation to bring attention to and resolve ethical resolve ethical violations by colleagues.

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**Section 8.01 Ethical Violations by  
Behavioral and Non-behavioral  
Colleagues**

- When behavior analysts believe that there may have been an ethical violation by another behavior analyst or a nonbehavioral colleague, they attempt to resolve the issue by bringing it to the attention of that individual if an informal resolution appears appropriate and the intervention does not violate any confidentiality rights that may be involved.

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**Section 8.01 Ethical Violations by  
Behavioral and Non-behavioral  
Colleagues**

- If resolution is not obtained, and the behavior analyst believes a client's rights are being violated, the behavior analyst may take additional steps as necessary for the protection of the client.

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**Section 9: The Behavior Analyst's  
Ethical Responsibility to Society**

- The behavior analyst promotes the general welfare of society through the application of the principles of behavior
  - Many interventions are widely employed that lack scientific support
  - A commitment to science-based intervention and objective assessment of outcomes should always be evident

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**The Behavior Analyst's  
Ethical Responsibility to Society:  
9.01 Promotion in Society**

- The behavior analyst should promote the application of behavior principles in society by presenting a behavioral alternative to other procedures or methods.

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**The Behavior Analyst's  
Ethical Responsibility to Society:  
9.02 Scientific Inquiry**

- The behavior analyst should promote the analysis of behavior as a legitimate field of scientific inquiry.
  - DIRECT OBSERVATIONAL MEASURES
  - Educate others about science

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### Ethical Conduct

- Guidelines exist to assist
- Themes
  - Adhere to our science – the experimental analysis of behavior
  - Maintain clinical skills that are conceptually systematic with our science
  - Know your skills and limitations
  - Clarify roles
  - Identify problems and address them
  - Think broadly about primary and secondary obligations in terms of impact and the possibility of effecting change

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### Next.....

- Application to dilemmas

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