

Ethical Considerations Checklist for Client Autonomy & Systems-Based Care

A structured tool to ensure ethical decision-making when working within larger systems (e.g., courts, healthcare, social services).

Instructions: Check all that apply to assess whether client autonomy is being upheld in mandated or system-involved care settings. Use this checklist to identify areas where ethical practices can be strengthened.

Informed Consent & Client Rights

- ☐ Clients are fully informed of their rights and responsibilities in treatment, including consent, confidentiality, and participation.
- ☐ Clients understand the limits of confidentiality, including mandated reporting and legal disclosure requirements.
- ☐ Clients are informed about available treatment options and have a say in selecting interventions that align with their needs.
- ☐ The clinician ensures informed consent is ongoing, revisiting it throughout treatment as circumstances change.
- ☐ Clients have the right to refuse treatment, within the legal and ethical constraints of system-mandated care.

Client-Centered Treatment Planning

- ☐ Treatment plans reflect the client's values, cultural background, and personal goals rather than just external mandates.
- ☐ Clinicians actively seek and incorporate client input when developing care plans, ensuring alignment with their lived experience.
- ☐ Clients are encouraged to set self-determined goals, even in structured or mandated settings.
- ☐ When external mandates conflict with client preferences, clinicians discuss alternative pathways while maintaining legal compliance.
- ☐ Clinicians recognize and address power imbalances in mandated treatment relationships (e.g., court-ordered care, involuntary hospitalization).

Balancing External Mandates with Client Autonomy

- ☐ External mandates (e.g., court orders, probation requirements) are clearly explained to clients, including the potential consequences of non-compliance.
- ☐ Clinicians advocate for alternative, client-centered approaches when system-imposed requirements do not serve the client's best interest.
- ☐ Whenever possible, clients have a role in negotiating system requirements (e.g., modifying probation conditions, adjusting treatment timelines).

- ☐ Ethical considerations are weighed against legal mandates, with clinicians prioritizing harm reduction and autonomy within the law.
- ☐ Clients are not coerced into unnecessary interventions to satisfy system requirements, ensuring treatment remains appropriate and ethical.

Advocacy & Ethical Decision-Making in Systems-Based Care

- ☐ Clients are provided with advocacy support, such as legal aid referrals, patient rights materials, and ombudsman services.
- ☐ Clinicians act as ethical advocates within systems, challenging policies that harm client well-being or autonomy.
- ☐ Clients are educated about how to self-advocate, including appealing decisions, filing grievances, and seeking additional support.
- ☐ When clients experience systemic discrimination (e.g., racial disparities, language barriers, lack of accommodations), clinicians take action to address inequities.
- ☐ Clinicians seek supervision or consultation when facing ethical dilemmas involving mandated care or systems-based interventions.

Trauma-Informed & Culturally Responsive Care

- ☐ Clinicians recognize that mandated care can be retraumatizing and use trauma-informed approaches to minimize harm.
- ☐ Clients are given choices in how they engage with treatment, even within structured systems (e.g., group vs. individual therapy, harm reduction vs. abstinence-based care).
- ☐ Cultural considerations, including language access and traditional healing practices, are integrated into treatment planning.
- ☐ When clients experience stigma or bias within a system, clinicians address it directly and provide support.
- ☐ Clinicians remain aware of their own biases and positionality when working with system-involved clients, actively engaging in self-reflection.

Reflection & Next Steps

How many areas did you check off?

Are there areas where client autonomy could be strengthened?

Do you have a plan for addressing any ethical concerns identified?
