

Self-Care Ethics Discussions Case Study

Monica, a master's level social worker (no license yet, but she's studying for the LMSW exam), works for We Can Do It, a nonprofit which employs about 30 people under the mission of establishing world peace. As director of programs, Monica is part of their small leadership team: executive director, deputy director, and the two directors of development & marketing. The organizational chart also shows a few departmental managers, and several program coordinators, most of whom are social workers. Monica supervises two program managers (LMSWs) who each supervise five program coordinators (5 total MSWs).

The leadership team meets with each other once a week, on the same day as their all staff meeting. The flow & availability of open communication beyond that is scant and varied. They have a monthly, one-hour, all-staff training on a topic relevant to their work: conflict resolution, non-violent communication, cultural humility & competency, etc.). Training topics are decided by those in the leadership team.

There are no set expectations of workflow and work/life balance. Everyone, including Monica, is accustomed to working around the clock, seeing clients, sending emails, and responding to texts well into the evening and weekend. The executive director (E.D.) in particular is notorious for being at the office on the weekends. The current E.D. has been in her position for about two years (three years shy of the average tenure for E.D.s). Direct service staff (program coordinators and managers) don't seem to stay too long at We Can Do It; the annual turnover rate for those positions is well over 50%. As a remedy, organizational leadership (leadership team and board of directors) are focused on increasing fundraising to increase staff salaries. Monica is used to the long hours and high energy required to keep things running. She misses out on some social gatherings with friends and family. However, she loves her job and recognizes the sacrifices as requirements of a job well done. She's in regular communication with her supervisor (deputy director), and they have a good relationship.

Shortly after the school year starts, Monica begins to receive reports of program coordinators who are using more of their PTO recently, disrupting more programming than usual. Her two program managers (both LMSWs) tell her that some of the coordinators have expressed fatigue and difficulty sleeping so they're taking time off to rest. One of the managers expressed similar concerns, including information about how her marriage is Luckily, there's a generous PTO policy so no one is in danger of running out of PTO days. Monica doesn't inquire further, and she takes up the topic at the following week's meeting of the leadership team. The deputy director (non-social worker) echoes Monica's concern and wants to brainstorm ways to investigate the matter further. The executive director (LAPSW) worries that such an exercise will take time, attention, and resources away from the lofty mission at hand – establishing world peace. After all, the agency has a generous PTO policy and an EAP for just this reason. The team moves on from the topic to discuss next week's fundraising event. Monica follows up with the deputy director; they agree to individually address additional concerns if they are expressed again.

Discuss these questions through the lens of your assigned ethical principle:

Group number	Code of Ethics	Discussion Questions (after a brief introduction)
1-10	4.05 - Self-impairment	- What tools or strategies might we use to increase our ability to find/build/promote Awareness toward this standard? - What tools or strategies might we use to increase our ability to find/build/promote Balance toward this standard? - What tools or strategies might we use to increase our ability to find/build/promote Connection toward this standard? - What other ethical challenges are present here?
11-20	2.08 - Impairment of colleague	
21-30	3.07 - Administration	
31-40	3.08 - Continuing Education & Staff Development	

4.05 Impairment

(a) Social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility.

(b) Social workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.

2.08 Impairment of Colleagues

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's impairment that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties and that interferes with practice effectiveness should consult with that colleague when feasible and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague's impairment interferes with practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the impairment should take action through appropriate channels established by employers, agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

3.07 Administration

(c) Social workers who are administrators should take reasonable steps to ensure that adequate agency or organizational resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision.

(d) Social work administrators should take reasonable steps to ensure that the working environment for which they are responsible is consistent with and encourages compliance with the NASW Code of Ethics. Social work administrators should take reasonable steps to eliminate any conditions in their organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with the Code.

3.08 Continuing Education and Staff Development

Social work administrators and supervisors should take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for continuing education and staff development for all staff for whom they are responsible. Continuing education and staff development should address current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics.