



# STEPS IN ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Below, you will find a list of actions you can take while trying to clearly think through an ethical decision. Not all steps will be relevant to every decision but, taken together, these provide a helpful list of considerations for responsible practice:

1. **Clearly state question or dilemma** (what is it that makes you feel uncomfortable?).

Here, you can identify the actors involved—is it the behavior of a client you are concerned about? Is it the behavior of a colleague? Is it your own uncertainty about how to address an issue? Be clear!).

2. **Anticipate consequences** (who is affected by the current behavior/decision and who will be affected by potential actions you might take?).

3. **Clearly identify the client** (who is it that you are trying to protect? Remember, ethical practice is always in the service of client—or prospective client—wellbeing).

4. **Assess areas of competence** (Many ethical issues are related to boundaries of competence).

Consider if there is missing knowledge, inadequate skill, a poor personal or professional fit, or some other competency-based issue)

5. **Review codes and standards** (Consult the code of ethics issued by your profession and/or professional body).

For coaches, this often means that of the International Coach Federation. For practicing psychologists, this usually means the code of ethics from the organization representing their highest credential. Learn what these codes have to say about the issue)

6. **Review legal standards** (In some cases, it may be necessary to consult a lawyer to gain clarity about legal issues that may be involved).

Also make certain you understand the jurisdiction in which laws apply, especially in the case where coach and client live in different regions. Note that laws and professional ethical codes can, in some instances, conflict with one another).



7. **Review research and theory** (In some cases, it may be prudent to consult research or theory, especially to the extent that these might inform best practices).
8. **Consider personal feelings and** biases (It can be important to identify social, cultural, religious factors that may be implicated in the issue and be aware of how these might create conflict or tension. In addition, reflect on your own emotions and how these might color your view of the issue).
9. **Consult** (this point cannot be stressed strongly enough. It is vital to be able to solicit a third-party opinion. Make certain you have a network of wise, skilled, and experienced coaches to whom you can turn for support, opinion, and advice).
10. **Actions and documentation** (Identify the specific actions you will take. This may mean making a report, having a difficult conversation, making a change in your own practice, or discontinuing a relationship. Document all actions you take).