Exploring Social Work Ethical Obligations and Dilemmas in Veterinary Social Work

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Road Map for Today

- The Current State of Social Work Values and Ethics
- What are our Ethical Obligations to Animals?
- Exploration of Dilemmas
- Where do we go next?

How do we Make Ethical Decisions?

- Consult the NASW Code of Ethics
- Examine Social Work Values and Ethics
- Use the Ethic Model
- Consult with Appropriate Supervision
- Consult with Colleagues

Social Work Values and Ethics

- The NASW *Code of Ethics* is intended to serve as a guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers.
- The Code contains elements of ethical guidance that include summarization of the profession's mission and core values, overviews of ethical decision making, ethical principles, and some specific ethical standards to guide a social worker's conduct.
  - 1996 & 1999 NASW Delegate Assembly

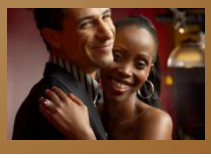
Ethical Obligations

- What are our ethical obligations to animals?



Ethical Obligations

- What are our ethical obligations to humans?

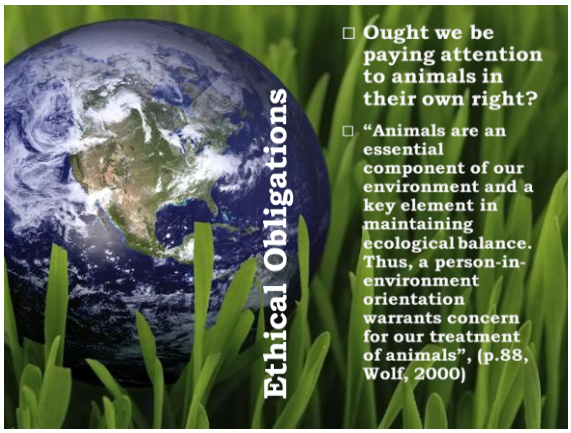


Ethical Obligations



- What are our ethical obligations to animals because of our emphasis on human well-being?
- Meeting the client where he/she is at…
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Evidence-based Practice
  - Medical Benefits of Animals
  - Social Support & Social Lubrication

Ethical Obligations



- **Ought we be paying attention to animals in their own right?**
- **"Animals are an essential component of our environment and a key element in maintaining ecological balance. Thus, a person-in-environment orientation warrants concern for our treatment of animals", (p.88, Wolf, 2000)**

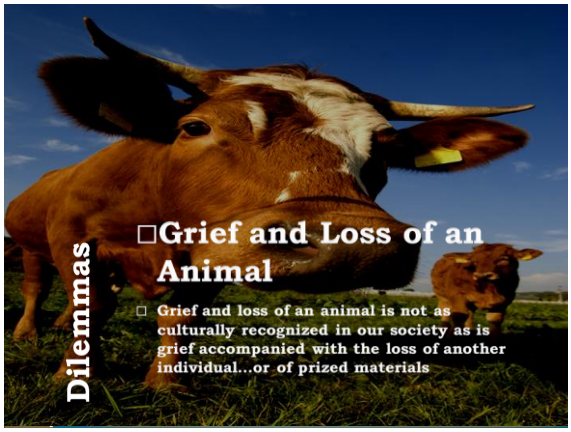
Dilemmas

- The Link Between Human and Animal Violence
  - Does violence towards animals deserve investigation solely because of the harm to the animal?

Resolution

The Link Between Human and Animal Violence

- There is a unique opportunity for social workers to partner with other professionals in a collaborative effort
- NASW Code of Ethics 2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration



Dilemmas

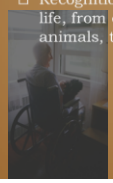
Grief and Loss of an Animal

- **Grief and loss of an animal is not as culturally recognized in our society as is grief accompanied with the loss of another individual…or of prized materials**

Resolution

Grief and Loss of an Animal

- Respecting the dignity and worth of the person
- Recognition of the role of animals in human life, from companion animals, to working animals, to animals for human consumption
  - Wells, 2009 & Beck, 1999



Dilemmas

Human and Animal Homelessness

- "…to deny right to life to living creatures simply because they are not members of the homo sapiens species is, ethically, at least questionable, and social workers ought to study the issue for the integrity of themselves and the profession" (p. 90, Wolf, 2000).

Resolution

Human and Animal Homelessness

- NASW Code of Ethics
  - 6.02 Public Participation
  - 6.04 Social and Political Action

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Social Work Values and Ethics

- **Value:** *Service*
- **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.*
- **Implications for VSW?**

Social Work Values and Ethics



- **Value:** *Social Justice*
- **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers challenge social injustice.*
- **Implications for VSW?**

Social Work Values and Ethics



- **Value:** *Importance of Human Relationships*
- **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.*
- **Implications for VSW?**

Social Work Values and Ethics

- **Value:** *Competence*
- **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.*
- **Implications for VSW?**

Social Work Values and Ethics

- **Other examples?**
- **Value:**
- **Ethical Principle:**
- **Implications for VSW?**

Future Directions

- Adherence to NASW Code of Ethics
- Continued Development of Veterinary Social Work Standards
- Public Education & Outreach
- Individual Efforts of Practitioners