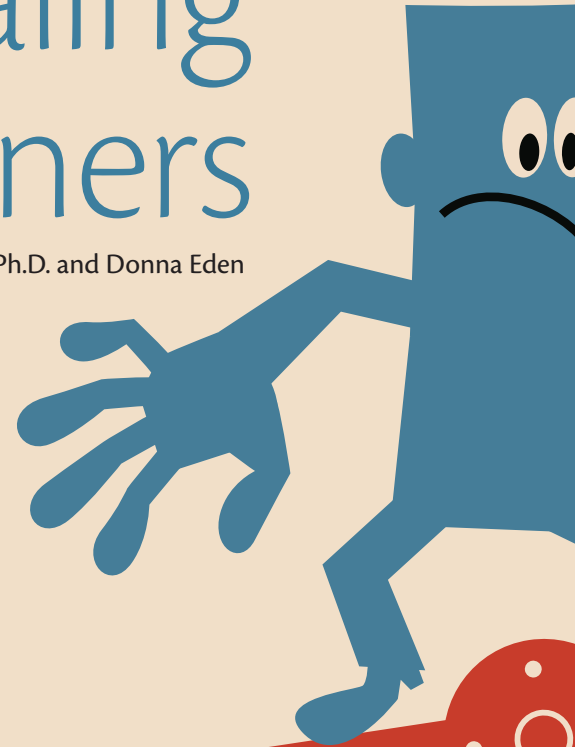


Ethics Guidelines for Energy Healing Practitioners

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When we launched our practitioner certification program in Eden Energy Medicine in 2005, we knew of no models for teaching ethics to energy healing practitioners. We wanted our students to understand that ethics are far more than a list of rules that will restrict them – or a bunch of arcane requirements that should put fear in their hearts. How could we persuasively convey that ethics are the principles adopted by practitioners within a field to translate the *desire to serve* into the profession's evolving wisdom about *how best to serve*? Ethics, in fact, guide members of a healing discipline on the lessons gleaned from the experiences of those who came before them about:

1. How to create and maintain a vital interpersonal context for providing healing services.
2. How best to navigate through the various types of challenges that may arise when providing those services.

Embracing sound ethical practices is no less than the *third pillar* for being able to provide outstanding health care services, right along with developing strong professional competence and taking robust care of one's own health and well-being,

In addition to needing to provide a firm foundation in the ethical principles that apply to all healing professionals, we knew that many ethical challenges are unique to energy healing. For instance, you feel a heavy, painful sensation in your hand as you are working on your client's stomach. The other two times



How to find balance in ethical situations unique to energy practitioners.

you have felt a similar sensation, the person had a malignant tumor in the area you were working. What do you do with this information? Or, coming from the other direction, a woman in her first session informs you that a mammogram detected a small lump in her right breast. She wants you to feel it energetically and determine if she needs to have a biopsy. Are you allowed to explore and tell her what you find? Or you are having success in helping a woman with fibromyalgia and her family accuses you of practicing Satanism and tells her to stop seeing you. She is torn. How do you respond to the situation?

To further complicate our task, our students ranged from physicians and other seasoned health care professionals to those who had never had a course in ethics. We developed a case study approach to teaching ethics which proved highly engaging for students of all levels of experience. The human dilemmas in ethical issues cut across all bounds, and our role-plays, debates, mock ethics hearings, and penetrating discussions of the core issues were illuminating for us as instructors, as well as, for the students. As the cases

we explored accumulated, a case book of ethical challenges emerged in 2011, resulting in the award-winning (*U.S. Book News*) ***Ethics Handbook for Energy Healing Practitioners***.

In one of the 50 vignettes from the *Ethics Handbook*, the following dilemma is presented: You are seeing a woman who has been having anxiety attacks during the past six months, and you are also seeing her husband for digestive problems. During a breakthrough session with the husband, you learn that he has been having a secret affair. It is immediately obvious to you that his wife's anxiety is based on her sensing at some level, though you have also been working with some success on ways her anxiety seems tied to her childhood history, as well as, problems with triple warmer and bladder meridians. Can you continue to see her as a client? Him? Could you have taken any steps to prevent this crisis in confidentiality?

The book presents a model ethics code for energy healing practitioners and begins its discussion of each vignette by identifying the ethical principles that are applicable to that case. The principles are divided into the following sections: General Principles, Personal Healing and Development, Competence and Scope of



Practice, Informed Consent, the Healing Relationship, Confidentiality, Personal and Interpersonal Boundaries, Record Keeping, Public Statements and Advertising, and Teaching and Presentations. For the case presented above, these are presented with the simple introduction: You are caught by surprise and are in a terribly awkward position. Guidelines to consider include:

1. Your client's health and welfare are the highest priority in your professional activities. (*General Principles-1*)
2. Your client is the only person who has the right to determine who has access to information about his or her energy healing services. (*Confidentiality-1*)

Discussion then proceeds to thinking through how to approach the case. The *Handbook* continues:

Even if a clear understanding about the bounds of confidentiality had been achieved, this could be a very difficult situation. To avoid situations like this, some health practitioners, if treating more than one adult member of the same family, make it clear and explicit with each person involved that any information voluntarily revealed by one family member can be shared with the others. Then each client has a choice and knows in advance that anything they choose to disclose may be shared. Other health practitioners take just the opposite approach, maintaining a seal of confidentiality with each client, even if in an intimate relationship or in the same family. Some health practitioners, particularly some psychotherapists, will not treat more than one

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3. If conflicts occur regarding your ethical obligations, you must attempt to resolve these conflicts in a responsible fashion that avoids or minimizes harm. (*The Healing Relationship-15*)
4. You do not enter into a dual relationship that could reasonably be expected to impair your effectiveness in the delivery of healing services. (*Personal and Interpersonal Boundaries-13*)
5. If you are working with more than one member of the same family, you must establish from the outset the kinds of information that may be shared, and with whom, and the kinds of information that may not be shared. (*Confidentiality-2*)
6. You seek to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness in your communications and in the practice, teaching, science, and art of energy healing. (*General Principles-4*)

person in the same family, in order to prevent situations such as this one.

The wording of this case suggests that confidentiality for each party was either established or implied, leaving you in a straightjacket as you review your options. Like many ethical dilemmas, there is no "right answer" or "ideal approach" for this situation. Whatever step you take next will provide some benefits while containing some risks. However, those steps can be informed by an understanding of the applicable ethical principles regarding confidentiality, dual relationships, client welfare, and how to proceed when ethical principles collide.

A place where you can start without confusion - about what you can say without breaking confidentiality - is with the husband. You can explain your ethical dilemma to him. Presuming that his wife's symptoms of anxiety have been shared knowledge among the three of you, you could present your



belief that his wife is at some level aware of his affair, that this is contributing to her symptoms, and that the situation puts you into an ethical dilemma as long as you are continuing to work with her on that anxiety. Possible outcomes include that he might choose to tell her about the affair, might end the affair, might separate from her with the intention of getting counseling or of ending the marriage, or he might insist that it is your ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality.

If he opts to insist on confidentiality, or if you have decided not to discuss the situation with him, your choices include:

- You could continue to work with both of them and compartmentalize the information. However, should the wife learn that you were told about the affair, she may perceive you as being complicit with the husband in concealing it. This would likely violate her sense of trust and could undermine future work with her.
- You could tell him that while you will not break confidentiality, you can tell his wife that for reasons you cannot disclose, you are not able to continue to work with both of them and you must refer her to another practitioner. If he still refuses to disclose the affair, you would follow through on this. Your rationale could vaguely include that it is not turning out to be workable to have both of them as clients.
- Or, you could tell him that the next step is to tell her that you believe the couple dynamics are contributing to her anxiety and that you would like to refer them for couples therapy as a required adjunct to your continued work with her, or as an alternative to your continued work with her.

You would do well to discuss each of these or other options (such as breaking the confidentiality—an option that is hard to imagine choosing) with a colleague and to consider very carefully the possible outcomes of each course of action open to you, based

on everything you know about each partner.

As you can see, these kinds of dilemmas do not have easy answers, but anticipating particularly challenging situations in advance prepares you to meet the conundrums that may come your way. With sound ethical principles being so vital to the success of our field, we are also initiating a free Ethics Forum so energy healing practitioners can run ethical dilemmas they are facing by their peers. The Ethics Forum will also include other features such as a database of useful articles, risk-management guidelines, and blog-like discussion of cases such as the one described above. You can ask to be contacted when the Ethics Forum is up and running by writing ethicsforum@innersource.net. 