Establishing an ethical frame for work with children
Introduction
Cultivate an ethical stance

- Essence of competent treatment
- Integral to the frame of therapy
- Explicit discussion with child/family
- Beyond rules of conduct
Ethical Principles of Child Treatment

• *do no harm*
• serve the best interests of the child
• honor the child's privacy
• respect the treatment without prejudice
• facilitate the child's fullest potential and autonomy
Respecting child's autonomy

Clinical Vignette

- 9-year-old boy with separation anxiety
- Option: teletherapy to preserve continuity
- Patient's desires clashed with family interests
- Child given autonomy and plan reviewed periodically
Respect boundaries in the analytic setting

- Honor the child's right to develop her mind
- Encourage verbalization
- Distinguish therapist role vs. parental role
- Understand enactments
- Reflect upon transference & countertransference
Boundaries of Therapeutic Setting

Clinical Vignette

- 5-year-old boy with anxiety and conflicted feelings of longing and aggression
- Expression of erotic transference
- Aggressive attacks on the frame
- Technique to maintain boundaries and hold the frame
Communication

- Employ standard of "need to know"
- Recognize at risk situations
- Distinguish therapist's impressions vs. revelations
- Seek proper authorization to disclose
- Bounded use of emails given limitations and risks
Judicious Communication

Clinical Vignette

10-year-old boy with gender dysphoria
  • Communication with school attorney

15-year-old adolescent girl
  • Patient's concerns about what therapist would tell parents
Parent Work

- Secure and sustain a strong alliance with parents to preserve treatment
- Foster the growth of parent-child relationship
- Convey themes and areas of vulnerability
- Inform parents of imminent safety concerns
- Honor child's privacy while respecting parents' rights for information
Ethics and Parent Work

Clinical Vignette

- 6-year-old girl with separation anxiety
- Enmeshed relationship with parents
- Child's speech difficulties led to meltdowns when parents misunderstood her words
- Examples of parent work that honored child's privacy
Treatment team context

- Separate and distinguish therapeutic roles
- Communicate with team & family
- Balance privacy with collaboration
- Mitigate risks if concurrent therapy needed
Maintain professional boundaries beyond office

- Decline referrals with conflicts of interest
- Avoid dual relationships, when possible
- Preserve internal setting outside office
- Proactive discussion about unanticipated meetings
- Challenges to privacy and anonymity of therapist
Secrets are destructive ~ Privacy is constructive

- High potential for misunderstanding
- A trusting relationship depends on privacy
- Secrecy is in the way of healing
- Privacy offers freedom of expression
- Safety supersedes privacy if imminent risk
Conclusion