



School Psychologists and Ethical Practice: Information for Parents and Educators

ENSURING WHAT IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD

School psychologists work with parents and educators to help children achieve their best in school, at home, and in life. Our training and practice standards are comprehensive and very specific about decision-making and actions that are in the best interest of the child. School psychologists also are bound by the National Association of School Psychologists' *Principles for Professional Ethics*. These ethical standards guide the behavior of school psychologists.

The basic tenets are that school psychologists:

- will act as advocates for their students/clients
- at the very least will do no harm
- will provide only services for which they have achieved a level of competence
- will engage in professional development to remain current in research, training, and professional practices that benefit children, families, and schools
- will know the Principles for Professional Ethics and thoughtfully apply them to situations within their employment setting or practice (ignorance or misapplication of an ethical principle is not a reasonable defense against a charge of unethical behavior)
- will apply their professional expertise to promote improvement in the quality of life for children, their families, and the school community

Ethics are important and guide practice with the child as the primary focus. School psychologists:

- always place the child as the primary client, recognizing that they serve multiple clients including children, parents, and systems
- take into account the rights of each individual involved and the duties of school personnel, but place the best interest of the child as primary
- communicate to school administration and staff that concerns for protecting the rights and welfare of children are the top priority in determining services

To reach these goals, school psychologists must:

- maintain the highest standard for educational and psychological assessment
- be knowledgeable about validity and reliability of evaluative instruments
- use multiple methods in assessment
- engage in assessment, counseling, consultation, and other services that are responsible and research-based

- address the misuse of assessment techniques or information by unqualified persons
- obtain written prior consent for evaluation

When ethical concerns are raised by school psychologists, they:

- remember that they must act as advocates for the students/clients
- research the concern by reviewing NASP principles, IDEA 2004, state guidelines for special education, and local policies, and note best practices for their field
- evaluate the rights, responsibilities, and welfare of all affected parties
- consult with supervisors and colleagues to review findings
- discuss with administrators the situation, ethical dilemmas, and possible violations of due process rights of students or others to resolve the situation

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION SEE:

Jacob, S., & Hartshorne, T. S. (2007). *Ethics and law for school psychologists* (5th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Jacob, S. (2008). Best practices in developing ethical school psychological practice. In A. Thomas & B. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V*, (pp. 1921–1932). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Williams, B., Armistead, L., & Jacob, S. (2008). *Professional ethics for school psychologists: A problem-solving casebook*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

For the complete NASP Principles for Professional Ethics and other information related to NASP standards, visit <http://www.nasponline.org/standards/ethics.aspx>. Individuals with a question or concern about the ethical behavior of a school psychologist can access information about NASP's Ethics Review Board and how to register a concern at this link.