



# **Ethical Decision-Making Toolkit**

## Framework, Information & Worksheet

### 2021

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# INTRODUCTION

PRI staff are privileged to serve our students and their families, and we value the trust our students place in us at a time when they are very vulnerable. We are committed to conducting all practices related to their physical, mental and emotional needs in a manner consistent with the organization's ethical framework. Ethics promotes reflective practice in the delivery of our programs when there is no clear and obvious right course or action.

We believe everyone has a role to play in ensuring the ethical delivery of care and have created an ethical framework called R.I.V.E.R. (Reflect, Identify, Value, Explore, Review) to ensure all staff at PRI can use a shared, standardized approach when faced with ethical decisions.

The toolkit identifies the resources available to guide decision-making and actions around ethical issues that arise, whether clinical or organizational. Using the R.I.V.E.R. framework facilitates effective communication, develops a shared language, and builds common understanding of how to approach ethical issues.

## BACKGROUND

The development of a common approach to ethical decision-making at PRI is the result of PRI's ongoing initiative to instil best practices in all elements of our programming.

Our goal with creating and implementing this Ethical Framework is to:

- Support ethical decision-making within PRI
- Build ethics capacity at PRI
- Develop a common approach to ethical decision making that will enhance behaviour at PRI

Objectives:

- Increase staff awareness and understanding of work-based ethics at PRI
- Enable staff to identify when they are encountering an ethical issue
- Help staff resolve ethical issues they are experiencing in a standardized way
- Document ethical decision making for training and standard-setting

This ethical framework was developed in 2021 with input from staff, Board members, clients and families. It was adopted by the PRI Board of Directors on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

# FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

PRI's values are grounded in Compassion, Integrity, Accountability, Courage and Respect. Being accountable and acting with integrity begins with compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and acting in ways that are not only consistent with PRI's Mission, Vision and Values but also comply with PRI's policies. Our Ethical decision making framework is supported by:

## MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Pine River Institute's Mission, Vision and Values are the foundations that guide our approach to ethical decision-making.

### MISSION

We are committed to helping adolescents struggling with addictive behaviours, frequently combined with other mental health challenges. By fostering maturity in a family-centred program, we help young people get their lives, their relationships and their futures back on track. We are dedicated to treatment excellence, research and evaluation, continuous improvement and the exchange of knowledge.

### VISION

A society with the knowledge, will, and compassion to help struggling adolescents and their families who are in need of effective treatment.

### VALUES

Compassion, Integrity, Accountability, Courage, Respect.

## PRI STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT

The Pine River Institute Staff Code of Conduct outlines the values, principles and standards of conduct that guide our actions and interactions. With these standards we maintain and enhance the public's trust and confidence, and ensure superior service to the students and families we work with.

## THE PRI STUDENT HANDBOOK

The Pine River Student Handbook outlines student rights, rules, expectations and the process for grievances. This handbook acts as a guide for students during their time in residence at PRI. Students are asked to read through it, and sign the forms at the end, and keep the booklet on hand as a guide.

## **POLICIES**

Many ethically difficult situations are not unique in the principles or values that are at play, so PRI has a Policy Manual to deal with similar situations in a similar fashion and to guide staff in their deliberations and actions. This Manual is available in hard copy at head office, campus and the OLE program. For those staff who have access to the central drive on campus, online versions of all policies are also available.

Some policies that support ethical decision making at PRI, include:

- Accessibility
- Anti-Nepotism
- Case Record Access
- Client Rights
- Confidentiality Agreement
- Confidentiality (Client)
- Conflict of Interest
- Dispute Resolution
- Privacy (Client)
- Social Media
- Whistleblower Protection

## **PROFESSIONAL COLLEGES CODE OF ETHICS**

In addition, our health care professionals are governed by their own Colleges' Code of Ethics which are intended to guide practitioner behaviour and support ethical practice:

[Canadian Medical Association- Code of Ethics and Professionalism](#)

[Canadian Nurses Association- Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#)

[Canadian Psychological Association- Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychiatrists](#)

[Canadian Association of Social Work- Code of Ethics and Scope of Practice](#)

[College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario](#)

[Ontario College of Teachers Standards of Practice](#)

[Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession](#)

## LAWS

Ethical practice at PRI is also governed by relevant law, including:

[Ontario Health Care Consent Act \(1996\)](#)

[Ontario Mental Health Act \(1990\)](#)

[Ontario Child and Family Services Act \(1990\)](#)

[Ontario Safe Schools Act \(2000\)](#)

[Personal Health Information Privacy Act \(2000\)](#)

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(2005\)](#)

[Occupational Health and Safety Act \(1990\)](#)

[Child, Youth and Family Services Act \(2017\)](#)

[Canada Privacy Act \(1985\)](#)

[Canada Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act \(PIPEDA\) \(2005\)](#)

## NATSAP CODE OF ETHICS

Pine River Institute is a member of the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP). As such, we also follow the Code of Ethics laid out by NATSAP for all members:

[NATSAP Code of Ethics](#)

## ETHICAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

As a healthcare service provider (HSP), PRI has in place fair, transparent and ethical processes to support decisions that are publicly accountable.

BUSINESS ETHICS:

### Human Resources

The **Staff Code of Conduct** outlines the values, principles and standards of conduct for all staff at PRI.

Designated Ethics Champions will undergo comprehensive **Ethics Training** to receive the title of Ethics Champion. All PRI staff will be required to undergo an online Ethics Training Session and refresher on an annual basis, and as part of their onboarding as a new staff member.

### Finance

As a publicly-funded organization, PRI has a responsibility to be a good steward of its resources in providing quality care and services and have extensive controls in place:

- The Risk Management and Audit Committee is a standing committee of the Board constituted to oversee and advise on risk-related matters and audited-related activities on behalf of the Board.
- The PRI Finance and Facilities Committee is a standing committee of the Board constituted to oversee and advise on financial and facilities related activities.
- PRI has a Finance Policy & Procedures Manual that sits with our Finance and Payroll team.
- In addition, PRI uses external auditors to do annual audits for PRI providing independent, objective assurance of our financial operations.

### CLINICAL ETHICS

Good therapeutic relationships at PRI are centered on the need and informed choices of the person/family receiving care. Observance of the principles of clinical ethics (autonomy, beneficence, no maleficence and justice) promote respect and helps resolve conflicts about goals and means of care when they arise.

PRI supports reflective practice by encouraging discussions around clinical ethics encountered. Clinical Ethics are discussed weekly in Monday Clinical meetings at PRI, as well as during weekly Supervision, and in therapist consultation meetings. Discussions are documented via the clinical meeting minutes and, in some cases, Senior Management Team meeting minutes.

In addition, the Clinical Director is available ad hoc to engage in individual or group discussion about clinical ethical concerns as they occur. When needed, the clinical director will reach out to the Ontario College of Psychologists, or other such professional body, to seek guidance.

### RESEARCH ETHICS

PRI's Research Advisory Committee is apprised of research and evaluation activities and contributes ideas to optimize resources, partnerships, project protocol, and study outcomes.

PRI Research & Evaluation partners with university faculty annually to submit our evaluation protocol to the York University Office of Research Ethics: Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) to review and approve all research and evaluation practices. Specific research projects with a university partner may also benefit from ethics approval for that project.

# ETHICAL DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Working in the addictions and mental health treatment fields presents dilemmas relating to personal beliefs, judgments, and values on a regular basis and staff at PRI may experience an ethical dilemma or conflict at any time during the course of their role.

Some ethical decisions may be predominantly clinical in nature, others will be organizationally focused. Clinical ethical decisions are typically those that involve and impact a student or staff member and involve individual values. Organizational ethical decisions are generally those that involve and impact a group of staff members, systems of the organization as a whole and centre on the values of the organization itself.

Any staff member of the organization may identify an issue which, in their opinion, questions the ethics of a situation in any way.

Clients may also raise ethical concerns related to policies, procedures or decisions. These concerns may be brought forward through our Client Complaint process.

## IDENTIFYING IF SOMETHING IS AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

What are some signs you are having an ethical dilemma?

- A feeling that something isn't quite right; distress or moral angst. "I just don't feel comfortable about..." or the use of the word "should", "What should I do...?"
- Feeling that you, or someone else, is unsafe but not knowing the "right" thing to do to help
- Encountering a situation where two values seem to conflict (i.e. preserving confidentiality and telling the truth)
- A conflict between team members around a challenging situation, often a result of differing beliefs
- A unique situation with no precedence that makes applying existing standards of practice unclear

Not every decision that individuals are required to make within the context of their role requires the use of this framework. Many decisions can be guided by existing policies, procedures and systems that are actively in place at PRI. For example:

### **SEE STAFF CODE OF CONDUCT FOR:**

- A grateful family just gave me an envelope with \$500. Can I keep it?
- I was the therapist for a student while they were at the program and now the student has graduated. The family wants to hire me off hours to continue to work with them. Can I continue to support them through my private practice?
- I just presented a community workshop and a parent has approached me and asked me to take him on as a client. Can I agree to have him in my private practice?

**SEE ANTI-NEOPOTISM POLICY FOR:**

- My daughter just graduated from university and needs a job. She would make a great RYC. Can I hire her?

**SEE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR:**

- A former student of mine just sent me a friend request on social media. Can I accept it?
- Can I write about my experiences as a staff at Pine River on my personal blog?

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAVE AN ETHICS QUESTION OR ENCOUNTER AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?**

### **RIVER**

In some situations, even with all of the existing policies, procedures, laws and committees in place at PRI, knowing and/or doing the 'right' thing can be unclear or difficult. These types of situations are examples of ethical dilemmas, which the RIVER Worksheet can help address. The worksheet can help an individual, team or the organization work together by using a standardized systematic process, facilitating effective communication, developing a shared language and building a common understanding of how to approach difficult ethical issues.

When using this worksheet, please remember to take into account PRI values and priorities, clinical principles (if applicable) and professionalism.

This worksheet can be found with the Policy Manual in the head office, campus reception area, parent handbook and OLE as well as on the common drive at campus and posted outside the main office. The RIVER Ethics worksheet may be used independently by the Board, staff, and students to work through any ethical dilemma/difficult decision.

For additional support/expertise, the help of an Ethical Champion should be sought. Ethical Champions serve as resources to build a culture of ethics at PRI and to support use of the Ethical Decision Making Framework. Minimum of one Ethical Champion should be selected from each of the following categories:

- Human Resources
- Clinical
- Finance
- Research
- CFI@PRI
- Program
- OLE
- Board of Directors (Corporate Secretary)

With the help of an Ethical Champion, a group should be put together to discuss the issue. Ensure the voice of relevant individuals (those who are potentially affected by the decision) are included. If after discussing the issue with the Ethical Champion and/or larger group, the ethical dilemma is still not resolved, it should be taken by the Ethical Champion to the next level. For governance concerns it is the Governance Committee, for organizational or clinical issues it is the Senior Management Team (S.M.T.). The CEO can be consulted at any point as required and has ultimate authority to approve all decisions, other than those relating to Governance which are dealt with by the Board of Directors.

# **RECORDS**

## **DOCUMENTATION**

The Ethical Decision making process should be documented on the RIVER Ethics Worksheet and submitted to the Executive Director of Operations for record-keeping and potential knowledge sharing. The EDO will ensure that any identifying information of the individual(s) involved is removed for privacy. If the ethical dilemma was clinical in nature, an unedited copy should be kept in the clients file.

## **KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

Ethical dilemmas, once solved, may be brought forward and shared in various forums such as staff meetings, Board meetings, Senior Management Team meetings and clinical meetings in order to educate and inform our team.

Ethical dilemmas encountered will be reported quarterly by the Executive Director of Operations at the PQI meetings, highlighting any trends that emerge for review by the CEO and Leadership Team and Risk Committee of the Board.

# APPENDIX 1: RIVER ETHICS WORKSHEET



## PINE RIVER INSTITUTE ETHICS WORKSHEET RIVER

This ethics worksheet has been developed as a tool to use with the PRI Ethical Decision-Making Framework. Each step is identified and key questions to be addressed are outlined.

**This worksheet does not need to be completed in its entirety. You may determine that you can stop based on :**

- Determining this is not an ethical dilemma
- Finding a solution at any point/question of the worksheet
- Determining you are not the person who has the authority to make this decision

Date Opened: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Closed: \_\_\_\_\_

### Reflect

<p>Briefly describe the situation and what about it raises ethical questions. <small>(Please refrain from using names if possible)</small></p>	
<p>Think about how the situation makes you feel. Is there any personal context and/or bias you bring to the situation?</p>	
<p>Who should be part of the group discussing this issue? Ensure the voice of relevant individuals (those who are potentially affected by the decision) is included.</p>	
<p>Can you make a decision about this? If not, who has the authority to make the decision? What is your role in this?</p>	

## Identify

<p>What are the facts of the situation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
<p>Are there organizational policies or guidelines addressing the question? Relevant laws?</p>	
<p>Are there any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest?</p>	
<p>Are there any additional factors that need to be considered?</p>	

## Values

<p>What relevant values and principles need to be addressed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Autonomy (right to make one's own decisions)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Beneficence (do good)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Non-Maleficence (do no harm)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Confidentiality (protect privacy)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Justice (be fair)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflict of Interest</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Transparency</li></ul> <p>(* Full definitions available in Ethics Framework document)</p>	
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How do you weigh these values? In other words, in this circumstance, what do you think is most important, and why?

## Explore

Use this chart to explore options and consider their strengths and weaknesses.

Option	Benefits/Strengths	Harms/Limitations	Aligned with what values/principles/policies
A			
B			
C			

Is doing nothing a viable option?

## Recommend

What is the decision? Choose the option that has the best consequences and that lines up with duties, principles, and values.	
<b>Decision Check:</b> 1) Does the decision align with legislation, organizational policy, college standards, or the law? If not, reconsider. 2) Does the decision accurately reflect the organizational values and commitments of PRI? If not, reconsider. 3) Would you feel comfortable if the decision, and how it was made, was public? Could you explain the rationale for it?	
What is the action plan, and who has to take action?	
Who needs to know about this action?	
Does this situation point to the need for a systems or organizational change? (for example, new policy, additional training)	

### **SHARE!**

Your ethics process is a vital part of quality improvement and education at Pine River. Please consider sharing (anonymously is fine) your worksheet or dilemma to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of work-based ethics at PRI
- Enable easier identification of ethical issues
- Help others resolve ethical issues in a standardized way
- Document ethical decision making for training and standard-setting

**Ethical dilemmas, solved or in progress, may be brought forward in various forums such as staff meetings, Board Meetings, SMT meetings, clinical meetings or shared with an Ethics Champion or the EDO in order to educate and inform our team.**



## **APPENDIX 2: KEY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF CARE**

### ***Autonomy***

The principle of autonomy assumes that individuals have the right to decide how to live their own lives, as long as their actions do not interfere with the welfare of others. Autonomy involves a willingness to provide information so that informed decisions can be made. Valid Consent is an example of how this principle is applied.

### ***Beneficence***

Beneficence assumes a responsibility to improve and enhance the welfare of others, or more simply put, to "do good" for others. This could include preventing harm, removing harm or promoting well-being.

### ***Non-Maleficence***

Act so as to do no harm. Avoid causing harm to individuals or groups, or risking harms of significant probability.

### ***Confidentiality***

Keep private information confidential, unless consent to disclose this information is given by the person to whom it belongs or disclosure is required by law.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

Both real and perceived conflicts between one's self-interest and one's obligation to an individual or group.

### ***Justice***

The principle of justice assumes impartiality and equality. Treat people and groups fairly by treating morally relevant cases alike, and ensuring fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities.

### ***Transparency***

Make ethical decision making transparent. Communicate and make accessible decisions and their rationales to all stakeholders

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