

7.10.2 General Principles of Ethical Decision-Making

The following principles of ethical decision-making were adapted by Page and Wosket from the medical profession, for the benefit of helping professionals (Page & Wosket, cited in Scaife, 2001):

- Autonomy - the principle that individuals have the right to freedom and action
- Beneficence - the principle that actions taken should do good, using knowledge to promote human welfare
- Fidelity - being faithful to promises made
- Justice - ensuring that people are treated fairly
- Non-maleficence - striving to prevent harm

Stadler (1986, cited in Moloney et al., 2007) suggests that people making difficult ethical decisions explore an additional three moral principles:

- Universality - do my actions stand the test of generalisation? Given the context, would most people think my chosen course of action was reasonable?
- Publicity - am I prepared to have my actions publicly scrutinised?
- Justice - would other people find my actions fair and reasonable? Would I apply the same treatment to another person in similar circumstances?

References for this section: Scaife (2001); Stadler (1986, cited in The Bouverie Centre [Moloney, Vivekananda & Weir 2007]).

Most professional Codes of Ethics are about what we *shouldn't* do. Michael Carroll (2010) took on the task of assisting an organisation to capture and develop the positive values which they wanted to live to in their work. This led to his notion of “ethical maturity – having the reflective, rational and emotional capacity to decide what actions are right and/or wrong, having the courage to do it and being publicly accountable for my decision.” (Carroll, 2010)