

MFT Ethical Considerations When Serving Military and Law Enforcement Families

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Mentimeter

Let's get to know each other

Our Selves of Therapist

Chad Jordan

Family

- Grandfather - WWII veteran (Army)
- Father - Navy Officer
- Uncle - USMC
- Cousin - Beaufort County Sheriff
- Father In Law - Air Force
- Mother - Feminist

Self

- Youth rebellion - Many negative Interactions with LEO
- Past 18 years serving those who serve
- Independent political stance

Lisa Tyndall

- Grandfather - NYFD Battalion Chief
- Uncle - NYFD/NYPD
- Husband - Chief of Police
- First responders feel like family.
- Some past negative interactions with police but no resulting consequences
- Husband's cousin in the military
- Father & Stepfather some military service
- Moderate liberal political stance

For your consideration

Personal Bias and Self of Therapist

- Held Beliefs
- Family Beliefs
- Political Beliefs

Contributing Factors/Therapeutic Relationship

For Your Consideration (Laszloffy & Platt, 2024)

Differentiation

* "...differentiation is characterized by having the ability to allow others to have reactions to our truth without a reactive need to control their process. It also entails the ability to remain present enough to accurately hear the view of others."

Self-of-The-Therapist

* Reflection on what makes you - you; and how that influences what you see and what you do not see

For Your Consideration (Laszloffy & Platt, 2024)

Meta-conversation

*How do our conversations go today? Both in small groups and as a large group?

*What role do you find yourself stepping into and what do you notice about your responses?

Both/And Thinking

*Notice if you can find an opportunity to hold the possibility that two seemingly conflicting realities that are shared today can co-exist

Vignette Instructions

*Please make sure you have access to a copy of the current AAMFT Code of Ethics

Vignette Ground Rules

In exploring personal examples - keep information de-identified

Assume good intent from your group partners

Stay grounded in AAMFT Code of Ethics

Task at Hand

Explore potential ethical considerations

Apply relevant principles from AAMFT Code of Ethics

Justify your actions

Questions to Consider

What are the competing duties?

Who are the stakeholders?

Which standards/principles apply?

Are there competing principles?

What laws/regulations need to be considered?

What is/are the risk(s)?

Vignette Instructions

In person participants:

Break into groups of 3-4 (identify a person to write down thoughts, reporter and a timekeeper)

Report out: Standards and principles, potential plan of action with justification, area of uncertainty they would seek consultation on.

Online participants:

Will act as one large group.

Questions will be populated in the chat by the facilitator - please respond to the questions as they come and the facilitator will summarize and report out to the larger group

Vignette One: personal bias and self of therapist...

You are a MFT working with a family addressing the relational dynamics in the system and the behavior issues of the 14 year old son. You are aware that the father works in law enforcement but just learned that he is with immigration and customs enforcement. During this family therapy session, the 14 year old made derogatory comments about “illegals” and praised Trump for taking back our country. The parents appeared to be align with and support their sons comments and asked if you are liberal or conservative.

Your spouse obtained birthright citizenship but much of her family in the united states have not formally become citizens. Your spouse is a strong advocate against the actions being taken by the current administration and the department of homeland security and is actively participating in protests. Your political stance is liberal.

Ethical Considerations - Vignette One

Standard I: Responsibility to Clients

Marriage and family therapists advance the well-being of families, partners, and individuals and make reasonable efforts to find the appropriate balance between conflicting goals within family systems.

Standard III: Professional Competence and Integrity

Marriage and family therapists maintain high standards of professional competence and integrity.

Vignette Two

You are a private practice therapist in your solo practice. Your client is a veteran law enforcement officer of 15 years. She was recently involved in a use of force shooting that left a person critically injured. She has missed several sessions for a variety of reasons, but comes in and her appearance is clearly somewhat different than usual and not in a good way. She shares that sleep has been nonexistent because when she closes her eyes the scene replays itself over and over again. She is doubting herself, second guessing and worried that she responded out of fear. She shares that she is going back on duty next week and is struggling with trusting herself even though she's been cleared.

Your spouse works with a company who contracts with the police department and you recently engaged in a company sponsored dinner with several of the command staff of the department and really enjoyed getting to know each of them as individuals and their better halves.

Ethical Considerations - Vignette Two

Standard I: Responsibility to Clients

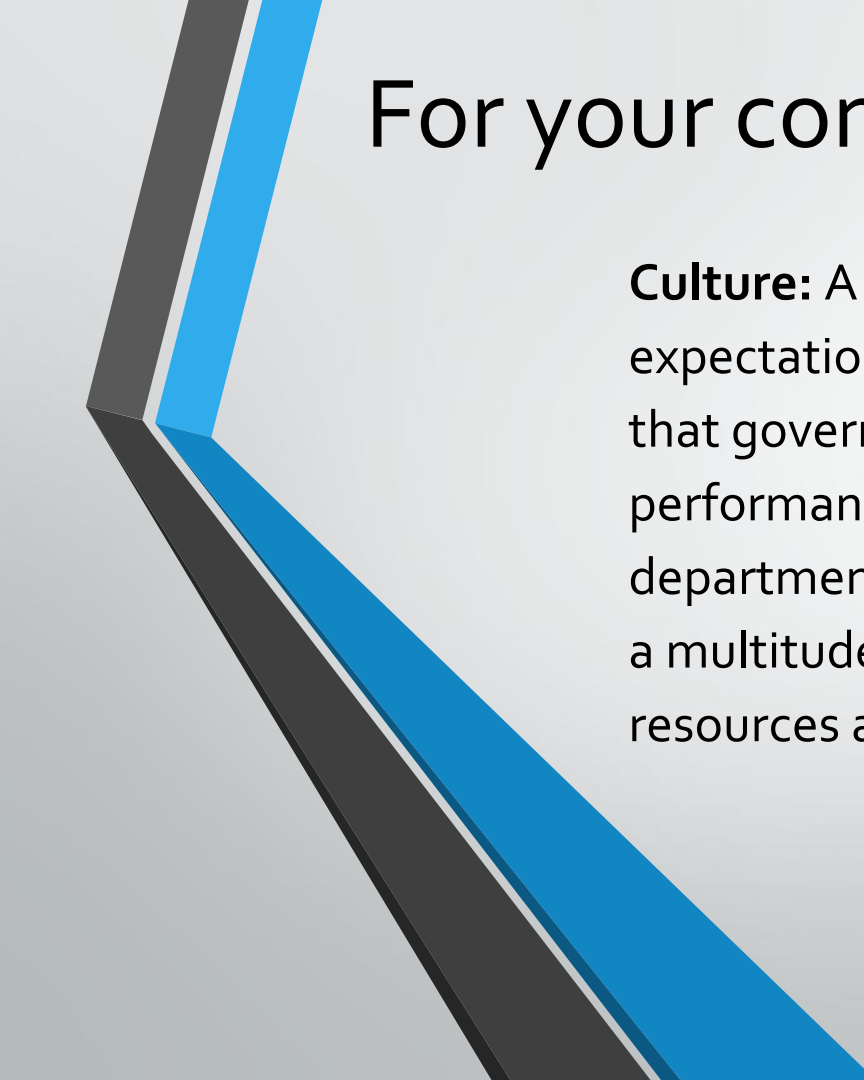
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For your consideration

Culture: A set of assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and philosophy (and informal rules) that governs the professionals interactions, performance, and role. Subcultures exist as well - departments and agencies - which can depend on a multitude of factors (leadership values, resources available).

LEO and Military Systems: Are you a culturally informed?



For your consideration

- Awareness of LE/Mil culture
- Culturally Humble - Non-expert
- Norms, traditions, rituals, lingo
- Lived experience/peer support
- Mission Focused
- Closed System
- Slow to Trust
- Self Discipline
- Power/Control
- Protector
- Cultures within Culture
 - Drone Operators
 - ICAC

Know Before You Go

- Informed Consent/Confidentiality
- Reporting Requirements
- Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)
- Command Directed Evaluations
- Clinical Documentation
- Gov Agencies:
 - NC Public Records Rule (Chapter 132)
 - Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
- Contracts with agencies/EAP
- Embedded Providers
- Peer Support

*NC: Mental Health Confidentiality Law (122C-52)
*DoD Instruction 6490.08
*HIPAA and Privacy Act

Know Before You Go - Common Clinical Factors

- Numbing – Accomplish Mission/Job
- Stress Reactions/Injuries
- Moral Injury
- PTS
- Resiliency and PTG
- Stigma
- Burnout and Dehumanization
- Addiction
- Domestic Violence

"Are there some cases at work that touch me? Absolutely. But I can't show that because I have a job to do. So, that's stress in itself." (Campbell et. al, 2021)

Safety Concerns

- Suicide
- Access to Firearms
- Fitness for Duty
- Separation from Service

*LEOs are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty.
(Ruderman Foundation)

*Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (Thomas Joiner)

Vignette Three

You are supervising an LMFT-A that works on a military installation. Your supervisee has relatives with a history of military service and is excited to contribute to the family legacy as a specialist serving military members and their families. Your supervisee is working with an active duty military couple. Both acknowledged understanding limits of confidentiality and reporting requirements related to domestic violence during intake. At session 5, the spouse discloses an incident where things got heated, they were screaming and yelling at each other and she punched her spouse leaving a minor bruise.

What ethical considerations are presenting for the supervisor?
What ethical considerations are presenting for the LMFT-A?

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STANDARD IV: RESPONSIBILITY TO STUDENTS AND SUPERVISEES

Marriage and family therapists recognize and attend to power differentials with students and supervisees, and promote the professional development of students and supervisees.

STANDARD IX: ADVERTISING

Marriage and family therapists only engage in appropriate networking, advertising, and marketing activities.

Law Enforcement Couples

- Loyalty is felt by both officer and spouse (Johnson et al., 2005; Roberts & Levenson, 2001)
- Work-family conflict is major stressor typically (Brodie & Eppler, 2012)
- Higher days of stress for LEO = officer more attuned to the spouse affection but less attuned to hostility (Roberts & Levenson, 2001)
- Spouse is more attuned to hostility and less attuned to affection (Roberts & Levenson, 2001)
- Trauma events like physical altercations/being shot at, witnessing a suicide, death of a colleague, - impacted areas like communication, parenting, quality time and commitment.

Law Enforcement Couples

Coping Strategies (Campbell et al., 2021):

- Intentional processing of stress
- Connecting to other LEO couples
- Therapy
- Couple time - intentionality
- Patterns of withholding

Menicke & Ropes, 2016

"And part of it was not having a lot of time together. ... I don't want to waste that on petty grievances. And the other part of it was, he's going to work tonight, and he gets shot, do I want our last conversation to be me yelling at him over leaving a wet towel on the floor?"

Law Enforcement Officer Spouses (Friese, 2020)

Adaptation to Life

Shift work, single
parenting

Resilience

Public image

Lack of sleep

Protective traits

Stressors:

Sleep deficiency

Physical health

Emotional/relational stress

Hypervigilance

Caregiving = emotional strain/exhaustion

"I always wanted to have my husband's lunch made. So, he'd have something before he goes to work and the kid's lunches were made, a hot breakfast, a hot dinner. So that would be a little stressful at times to get that done and now I don't really care so much."

Law Enforcement Officer Spouses (Friese, 2020)

Secondary Trauma

- Mutual shared experiences of hearing secondhand @ critical incidents
- Fear experienced when critical incidents happen
- Impact of national crises

Coping Mechanisms

- Peer support
- Spirituality
- Coping
- Family time
- Self-care
- Isolation
- Loyalty/pride

"Cops are really good at compartmentalizing, but I don't think that people understand that their wives do it more because we have to kind of put it away for a later time".

Vignette Four

Your client is a couple, James and Claire. James has been a police officer with the local Sheriff's department for 8 years and Claire is a nurse at the local hospital who now works PRN (as needed). They have been married for 6 years with a 1 year old child and planning on getting pregnant soon. Claire initiated therapy because she feels like she barely sees James with the amount of time he works both on the job and side jobs and she knows that this might only increase if he gets the spot he put in for on SWAT. Especially now that Claire is only PRN because of their growing family and the increased financial stress they are experiencing, she worries that James is bottling it all up. After several joint sessions, in an effort to further assess, you hold individual sessions and discover that depression has set in for James with the weight of the responsibility of his young family and increasing tension in the community while he is on the job. He expresses feeling trapped and not wanting to let his family down or step away from a profession that he loves deeply. He has considered that his family might be better off without him.

Ethical Considerations-Vignette Four

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Vignette Five

Staff Sergeant Daniel Ruiz, a 31 year old active duty marine, recently returned from his 3rd deployment. He is married and has a 6 year old daughter. He and his wife are coming to you, an off-base MFT contracted with Military One Source (EAP), seeking help for increasing emotional distance. Presenting concerns include nightmares for Daniel and elevated intensity of arguments.

At session #4, Daniel shares increasing thoughts about civilian casualties he was engaged in while deployed. During the individual breakout portion of the session, he reveals thoughts of “wanting it all to stop” and occasions where he considered killing himself with a gun. He responded that he does have his own firearm at his home on base. He quickly corrects, recants, minimizes and states that he would never do that to his wife and daughter. He stated he has not shared this with his wife to not be a burden to her and he has not shared with his commanding officer because of the fears of the impact on his career. He asked you to not document his comment about suicide in a record.

Ethical Considerations-Vignette Five

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Steps in Considering Ethical Decision Making

What is the problem(s)?

Keeping culturally humble perspective

Self-reflection and life context/experiences

Previous lessons learned as a therapist

Context of practice location

Review code of ethics, state laws and other statutory regulations

Research best practices/evidence base for possible solutions

Thank you to NCAMFT member Susan Perkins, PhD and Cardinal Points Family Therapy and Education whose "Perkin's Ethical Decision-Making Process" informed these slides.

Steps in Considering Ethical Decision Making

Consult peers and other resources

Outline possible plans of action - consider possible consequences

Steps to mitigate possible negative impacts

Document

What resources you reviewed and who you consulted with

Evaluate and learn

Vignette Six

You are working with a client who is a local law enforcement officer. He was coming to you to process his mother's death where she was involved in a car accident because his anxiety symptoms have been worsening. One session he seems a little different, more reserved than usual and begins the session asking to clarify limits of confidentiality in therapy. Eventually he discloses that he is concerned about a fellow officer's comments about interactions he has had with his wife and that he is worried that this colleague has been physically abusive with his wife. He is experiencing conflict about how or if he should do something. Additionally, your practice website lists "Specializing in First Responders & Law Enforcement" and includes photos of you attending a "Back the Blue" community fundraiser. Daniel tells you this is one reason he felt safe choosing you. And thanks to your website, a local news reporter was doing a story to highlight increasing domestic violence concerns within law enforcement families. This journalist contacts you after seeing your website, asking for a comment "as a therapist who works with police officers."



Ethical Considerations

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Vignette Seven

You are working as an embedded behavioral health provider with a law enforcement agency. You have engaged in a few informal conversations in common areas of the office with a deputy who confided in you that they are starting to struggle following several recent critical incidents and would like guidance on coping skills. Further stating they want to make sure their “head is on straight”. The deputy shared they have been talking with an internal peer support provider about the issues as well.

You are contacted by command staff who stated they noticed you and the deputy were talking in the break room and that they have concerns about the well being of the deputy. The supervisor expressed support for the deputy seeking assistance from the embedded provider and requested follow up to ensure the deputy is doing ok.

Ethical Considerations-Vignette Seven

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Questions & Conversation