**Cases**

**Case 1**

In the six months since he’d started working as a behavioral case manager, Benjy had come to really enjoy seeing his clients. At the youthful age of thirty, he seemed like a kid to many of them, and several had commented on how they appreciated his caring, nonjudgmental approach. He was surprised then when Ariel, a client he’d been working with for several weeks, told him that they were considering requesting a new case manager.

Benjy encouraged Ariel to share more of what they were feeling. What kind of support did Ariel need to feel like they were making progress on their goals? Ariel hesitated, and then expressed what was on their mind. One of the issues Ariel struggled with was substance use, and Ariel thought they would be more comfortable working with someone who understood what addiction actually felt like. “You’re really nice and always treat me with respect, they told Benjy. “I just feel like it would help to talk with someone who knows what this is like.”

Benjy paused, thought about his previous training, and made a snap decision. “Well,” he began, “I don’t usually share this, but I do understand.”

From there, Benjy went on to briefly tell Ariel about his coming out in college, dealing with rejection from his family, and falling into a heavy party scene for a while, which had included several months of hard drug use including heroin and crystal methamphetamine. It hadn’t been a part of his life for very long, he told them, but he knew what it felt like to use, and how difficult it could be to stop.

Benjy’s voice was trembling when he finished speaking, as all he could think to himself was, “That’s it. I’m finished here.” Ariel sat silently for a moment, considering what they’d just heard. Finally, they simply told Benjy, “That’s actually really helpful. Thanks.”

After the session, Benjy immediately went to his supervisor’s office and asked if they could talk.

**Case 2**

It wasn’t at all how Olivia expected her European vacation to go. At her last therapy appointment, she and Wade, her therapist of over a year, had talked about the trip as a reward for herself, marking two years since the end of a nasty divorce with her ex-partner, Cedric. But after returning home, Olivia to therapy clearly in a state of distress.

The trip had gone well, she told Wade, until she and her friend Jade found themselves cashless and unable to pay in a restaurant that didn’t accept credit cards. Jade immediately ran off to find an ATM, Olivia told him, leaving her alone as the restaurant was closing for the night. Just as the manager made a suggestive remark – that perhaps Olivia could think of other ways to pay her bill – Jade came running in with the money and they hurriedly left. For the rest of the vacation, however, she felt numb to the outside world, limiting her trips outdoors and only eating meals in the safety of her hostel. Relating the story to Wade, she expressed that for the first time in her life, she’d felt in danger of being assaulted.

“Well,” Wade suddenly blurted out, “What if you had?”

The question caught Olivia completely off-guard. Wade’s approach was completely different from their past sessions. Instead of quietly listening and exploring his client’s feelings, he asked her question after question in rapid succession, all of it focused around a hypothetical outcome. Was he asking her to imagine being attacked?

Olivia didn’t feel the closest bond with Wade, but over the past year he’d helped her work through a lot of grief and anxiety around her divorce. She trusted that he knew what he was doing and didn’t feel comfortable questioning him mid-session. When their time was up, Wade awkwardly told her, “Well, I wanted to try something different this time and see how it worked. Now we know that even if you were assaulted, you’d be able to find help for yourself.”

Olivia left the appointment on the verge of tears: she felt like she was escaping that restaurant all over again. In the days ahead, she just couldn’t shake the questions in her mind. What led Wade to encourage her to re-imagine the entire ordeal? Why didn’t he ask her permission before doing something so different with their therapy?

The more Olivia thought about it, the less comfortable she felt continuing to work with Wade. Before her next session, she called and canceled her appointment. When Wade emailed her, asking for a final meeting so they could have closure, she deleted the message without replying.

**Case 3**

As a case worker for the state-administered child welfare system, Carissa conducts monthly check-ins with approximately 100 youth in group and foster homes, to ensure that their needs are being met. Her caseload includes youth in faith-based agencies, nonprofits, and for-profit entities, which provide day-to-day care for youth currently in custody of the state.

During one of her check-in meetings at Cumberland Villages, a group home run by a faith-based nonprofit, Carissa met with Samantha, a 15-year-old client who confided that she was thinking about having sex with her boyfriend, who was another resident of the facility. Samantha stated that she would like education about safer sex practices, as well as access to birth control. Even though Carissa does not work for Cumberland Villages, she explained to Samantha that it is against the group home’s policy for residents to engage in premarital sex and to use birth control. Instead, she advised Samantha to abstain from all sexual activity.

The following month, Samantha confided in Carissa that she’d started having sex with her boyfriend. She repeated to her case worker that she still wanted access and education about birth control and safer sex practices. Carissa explained that even though the state agency for which she is employed and the state, which currently had legal custody of Samantha, has no explicit policies regarding premarital sex, sexual activity for minors in state’s custody, or access to birth control, because Samantha was placed in a group home that does have explicit policies, she was unable to help Samantha access information about safer sex practices and birth control. Carissa then advised Samantha to refrain from sexual activity, warning that she might let administrators at the group home know that she was having sex with another resident. Such a report would possibly trigger disciplinary action against Samantha and/or her boyfriend, resulting in their being split up and placed in different facilities.

Two months later, a few days before their monthly check-in, Carissa received a phone call from Cumberland Villages: Samantha had now gone missing from the program. When Carissa visited the facility and spoke with some of the staff and other residents, another youth informed her that Samantha and her boyfriend had run away. Additionally, Carissa learned, Samantha told some of the other young women at the group home that she suspected she was pregnant two days before she left.

**Guiding Questions:** Using these questions to structure your reflection, write a brief, first-person essay describing your reaction to the scenario you selected, examining the attitudes, assumptions, biases, and beliefs that the story provoked in you. **Be sure to follow APA style guidelines, and do not simply copy the questions and answer them in the style of a worksheet.** **Suggested length: 5 – 7 pages.**

1. Describe your emotional response to this scenario. What made you choose this case, and not one of the others?
2. Describe what you consider to be ethically questionable or uncomfortable about the situation, referring to the Social Work Code of Ethics and your own personal perspective. Where do you see conflicts between your personal and professional values?
3. Identify the potential biases and/or assumptions you made in your reaction to the persons in this scenario. What will you do to address these potential blind spots?
4. If you were confronted with this situation in your professional work, what specific goals and actions would you take to ensure that your personal values do not compromise your ethical practice with clients?
5. Describe the resources would you need to help you formulate an ethically-appropriate response to the scenario you selected. How would you go about finding and engaging with these resources?