

## VRN Ethical Decision Making

*The concepts and materials covered in this workshop are adapted with the permission of William L. White to George S. Braucht, LPC. Selected references include:*

1. Corey, G., Corey, M. S., Corey, C., & Callanan, (2015, 9th Edition). *Issues and ethics in the helping professions*. Belmont CA: Brooks Cole.
2. White, W. L. & Popovits, R. M. (2001, 2nd Edition). *Critical incidents: Ethical issues in the prevention and treatment of addiction*. Bloomington IL: Lighthouse Institute. Available at [www.chestnut.org/LI/bookstore/index.html](http://www.chestnut.org/LI/bookstore/index.html)
3. White, W. L. & the PRO-ACT Ethics Workgroup. (2007). *Ethical guidelines for the delivery of peer-based recovery support services*. Available at <http://www.bhrm.org/recoverysupport/EthicsPaperFinal6-8-07.pdf>

One dictionary definition of Ethics states that it is the “branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions.”

**Recovery Coaches have the following vulnerabilities that make it essential for them to be grounded by a “Code of Ethics” as well as an effective ethical decision making process:**

1. **Peer recovery support relationships last far longer than counseling relationships.**
  - Services can span three periods: pre-recovery engagement, recovery initiation, and recovery stabilization, and recovery maintenance
  - More likely delivered in the peer’s natural environment and not in a clinic
  - Involve a larger cluster of family and community relationships
2. **In contrast to client-counselor relationships, peer recovery coach relationships involve: less of a power differential, different core functions, and increased accountability to the person seeking recovery and the local communities of recovery.**
  - Addiction counselor ethical guidelines are often not applicable to the recovery coach
3. **Peer recovery support services vary in type and at different stages of addiction/recovery.**
  - Requires careful attention to support service needs, delivering services within one’s knowledge and experience boundaries, and knowing how and when to involve other service providers
4. **Peer recovery support services can be an adjunct to addiction treatment for those with high problem severity and low recovery capital, or an alternative to treatment for those with low-moderate problem severity and moderate-high recovery capital.**
  - Requires vigilance in determining service needs, skill in making timely referrals, and a keen awareness of the boundaries of one’s competencies

**VRN Ethical Decision Making derives from our core values: Hope, Wellness, Diversity, Recovery, Integrity and Commitment**, and is further defined as “**exercising integrity with sustained vigilance in preventing harm and injury to those to whom we have pledged our loyalty/service.**” Coaches act

with integrity which is the “quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness; the state of being whole and undivided.”

First and foremost it is important to *Protect the Check*. Coaches always abide by the Standards and Ethics codes of the organizations for which they work. Our behavior and actions may put the whole organization at risk and endanger the good work happening through the organization. We may see only an incident – while those in leadership have a responsibility to protect the entire organization.

## **VRN Ethical Behavior Code**

The principles guiding all Coaches/guides interactions are embodied in the VRN Ethical Behavior Code that are acknowledged and endorsed. The below principles guide me in my role as a Coach/Guide, as well as in my relationships and levels of responsibility in which I function:

1. **My primary obligation and responsibility is my recovery.** I will immediately contact my supervisor if alcohol, drug use, or anything else gets in the way of my recovery.
2. Recovery is guided by self-determination. I assist others in achieving their needs and goals. This includes advocating for the decisions of the peers regarding professional and other services.
3. I will support the Faces and Voices of Recovery Bill of Rights for each person that I serve.
4. I advocate for the integration of peers into self-selected recovery communities and will promote the individual’s inherent value to those communities.
5. I act in accordance with the law.
6. I affirm the dignity of each person that I serve.
7. I provide recovery services regardless of someone’s age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, political belief, language, socioeconomic status, or mental or physical condition. If differences that impact the motivation for recovery occur, I seek consultation and, if necessary, make a referral to another recovery support.
8. I never use physical force, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, intimidate, threaten, harass, or make unwarranted promises of benefits.
9. I share my lived experiences to help others identify resources and supports that promote recovery.
10. I respect the privacy of those I serve and I will abide by confidentiality guidelines as required by law.
11. I never engage in sexual or intimate relations with peers that I serve.
12. I do not accept gifts of significant value from people that I serve.
13. I do not lend to, or borrow from, the peers that I serve.
14. I improve my recovery service knowledge and skills through ongoing education, training and supervision as determined by the VRN program.

## **What We Don’t Do**

The majority of our principles define what we do. There are also things we don’t do including:

- We don’t threaten, harass, abuse or intimidate others;
- We don’t make unwarranted promises;
- We never engage in sexual or intimate relations with the peers we serve;
- We don’t accept gifts of significant value;
- We do not lend to or borrow from the peers we serve.

All Coaches will face ethical incidents and challenges. When faced with these situations it is imperative that you engage and seek the guidance of your supervisors. Again remember to protect the check.

## **Four Step Decision Making Process\***

VRN provides a four step Ethical Decision Making worksheet (found on the next two pages) that helps to: identify vulnerable parties, applicable recovery values and actions; any laws, standards or historical practices that might guide your conduct; and steps to address and document any incident.

\*Adapted with the permission of William L. White from White, W. L., et al. (2007). Ethical guidelines for the delivery of peer- based recovery support services. Available at [www.williamwhitepapers.com](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com)

**Step One: Who is vulnerable to harm** in this situation, and what is the potential degree of such harm?

Vulnerable Party	Potential	Risk of	Harm
	Minimal	Moderate	Significant
Individual/Family Being Served			
Recovery Coach			
Service Provider Organization/Agency			
Recovery Support Services Field			
Recovery Community			
Community at Large/Public Safety			

✓ Where appropriate

**Step Two: What core recovery values apply** to this situation, and what action would they suggest?

Core Values	ü
Advocacy (Challenge injustice; Be a voice for the voiceless)	
Autonomy/Choice (Recovery is voluntary; it must be chosen)	
Obedience (Laws and ethical decisions)	
Recovery (All service hinges on your personal recovery)	
Protection (Do no harm to and protect self and others; Avoid conflicts of interest)	
Gratitude & Service (Carry hope to individuals, families and communities)	
Capability (Improve yourself; Give your best)	
Authenticity of Voice (Accurately represent your recovery experience and role)	
Stewardship (Use resources wisely)	
Honesty (Tell the truth; Separate fact from opinion; When wrong, admit it)	
Fidelity ( Keep your promises)	
Loyalty (Don't give up; Offer multiple chances)	
Credibility (Walk what you talk)	
Discretion (Respect privacy; Don't gossip)	
Humility (Work within the limitations of your experience and role)	
Hope (Offer living proof; Focus on the positive)	
Dignity and Respect (Express compassion; Accept imperfection; Honor potential)	
Tolerance ("The roads to recovery are many." Wilson, 1944)	
Use of Self (Know thyself; Be the face and voice of recovery)	
Other Culture-Specific Values:	

**Step Three: What laws, standards, or historical practices** might guide your conduct in this situation?

**Step Four: Document:**

➤ What you considered doing:

➤ Who you consulted:

➤ What you decided and did:

➤ The outcome of the decisions you made and actions you took:

## Sample Questions: Ethics

1. According to the VRN Ethical Behavioral Code your primary obligation and responsibility is to:

- A. Not accept gifts of significant value from people that I serve
- B. Not to lend or borrow money from the peers you serve
- C. Provide native recovery support information to peers
- D. Your own Recovery
- E. None of the Above

2. VRN Coaches/guides always abide by the Standards and Ethics codes of the organizations for which they work.

- A. True
- B. False

3. As long as you abide by the VRN Ethical Behavior Code you do not have to inform your supervisor of any ethical challenge or incident.

- A. True
- B. False

4. In contrast to client-counselor relationships, peer recovery coach relationships involve:

- A. Less of a power differential
- B. Different core functions
- C. Increased accountability to the person seeking recovery and the local communities of recovery
- D. None of the above
- E. All of the above