

Ethical Dilemma

During my time at Mending Arrow Ranch, I had the pleasure of meeting and working with a young lady who was in foster care, who I will call Jane to keep her identity confidential. Jane was 15 years old and had lived with her grandmother with her much younger brother and sister for many years until her grandmother passed away. She and her siblings were transferred to the care of a distant relative in one of the kinship programs in an effort to keep them in the family. By this time, Jane's biological mother had tried to get in contact with Jane, although she could not have custody of her. Her biological mother gave her some fantasy books that her foster mother thought were "evil" books. When Jane started coming to sessions at Mending Arrow Ranch, her foster mother made sure to let us know that Jane was told to get rid of the books and was seen to be a horrible influence on her sister and brother. She told us that Jane was mean to her siblings and just overall a bad child.

In my interactions with Jane, she was a very sweet young lady and was quite gentle with the horses. When chatting with Jane in an effort to build rapport, she kept bringing up topics from the books she had been reading. The ethical dilemma I faced was whether to discuss the books with her against her foster mother's wishes, or to change the conversation to something else every time the topic of the books came up in discussion.

I turned to the National Social Workers Association (NASW) Code of Ethics for answers to my situation. I specifically remembered the values of "dignity and worth of the person" and "importance of human relationships". I realized that Jane was old enough to make some of her own decisions, and that she had a right to self-determination. I personally did not believe the books were "evil" but whether I believed they were "evil" or not did not matter; what mattered

was my respect of what Jane likes and wants in her life. I also realized that if I ignored her discussions on the books, then it may strain our therapeutic relationship. Based on these ethical values, I decided to go ahead and discuss the books with her if the topic came up, but to use that moment to discuss why the books were important to her. Through our discussions, I learned that these books were the main connection she had with her biological mother. By continuing to discuss the books that were important to her, I showed her that I thought her choices had merit and that I did not believe she was a “bad” child. I respected her personal beliefs, and this allowed her to open up about deeper issues.