

ETHICS AND RISK MANAGEMENT IN PRIVATE PRACTICE: PRINCIPLES AND PITFALLS

This comprehensive webinar explores the ethical and risk management challenges inherent in operating a mental health private practice, whether solo or group-based. Dr. Jeff Zimmerman, drawing on decades of experience and leadership in the field, guides attendees through practical applications of relevant parts of the APA Ethics Code, focusing on principles such as beneficence, fidelity, and respect for client rights. Through realistic scenarios—like those involving informed consent complexities, digital record vulnerabilities, or dual relationships—participants gain insight into how ethical principles intersect with clinical realities.

The presentation emphasizes the importance of proactive planning, and developing routine procedures, detailed documentation, and self-awareness in minimizing risk and protecting both clients and clinicians. Special attention is given to telehealth practices, financial agreements, staff training, and informed consent. Attendees are taught strategies for ethical decision-making, and are encouraged to maintain humility and consult regularly to get input. They are reminded that ethical success in private practice depends on intentional structure, cultural attunement, and ongoing education.

Target Audience

Psychologists Social Workers Counselors
Therapists Psychiatrists Nurses
Course level: Intermediate

Learning Objectives

At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:

1. Identify common ethical vulnerabilities in private practice, including those related to informed consent, record keeping, confidentiality, and dual relationships.
2. Apply principles from the APA Ethics Code to real-world clinical and administrative decisions in private practice settings.
3. Implement risk management strategies related to telehealth, technology use, financial procedures, and staff oversight to prevent ethical violations.
4. Develop comprehensive policies and procedures that support ethical practice operations.
5. Utilize structured ethical decision-making models and appropriate consultation resources to navigate complex or high-risk ethical dilemmas.

Seminar Schedule

Typically begins at 12:00 PM and ends at 3:20 PM Eastern time. There is one 15 minute break. However, check the webinar schedule.

Outline

- Welcome & Orientation (12 - 12:10)
- Welcome and learning objectives
 - Polls #1 and #2 (Time in practice / Size of practice)
 - Disclaimer and expectations
 - Key Concepts
- Segment 1: Core Ethical Principles in Private Practice (12:10 - 12:30)
- APA Principles A, B, and E
 - Client-centered decision-making
 - Cultural competence and self-awareness
- Segment 2: Common Ethical Vulnerabilities & Risk Areas (12:30 - 12:50)
- Types of ethical violations
 - Vulnerabilities in policies and procedures
- Break (12:50-1:00)
- 10-minute break
- Segment 3: Informed Consent, HIPAA, Records, and Communications (1:00-1:50)
- Informed consent as process
 - Releasing records and complications
 - HIPAA and PCI-DSS distinctions
- Break (1:50 - 2:00)
- Segment 4: Scope of Practice & Boundary Considerations (2:00-2:30)
- Dual relationships and boundaries
 - Termination and abandonment
 - Financial policies and procedures
- Segment 5: Telehealth, Marketing & Self-care (2:30 - 2:45)
- Telehealth informed consent and safety planning
 - High-risk clients in virtual care
 - Marketing considerations
- Segment 6: Handling Unexpected Challenges (2:45 - 3:00)
- Use of a risk matrix
 - Termination planning and documentation
- Final Q&A + Wrap-Up (3:00 - 3:20)

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The Presenter

Jeff Zimmerman is a practicing psychologist in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. He has been in practice since 1981. In addition to running and managing a large group practice for 22 years, he is a founder of The Practice Institute (TPI). TPI guides mental health professionals in building ethically responsible thriving practices by helping them learn practice management skills that serve as the foundation for the delivery of clinical services.

Jeff has also focused on conflict resolution for over 40 years helping for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, couples, and divorcing families reduce conflict and achieve resolution when conflict appears to be irreconcilable. He is a frequent presenter and has taught conflict resolution and practice management techniques in both the U.S. and China. He is co-author and co-editor of multiple articles and books (on divorce and professional practice). Jeff is also the editor of the journal Practice Innovations.

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This seminar has been reviewed and approved by Keith Hannan, Ph.D., Phil Rich, LICSW, Daphne Fatter, Ph.D., and Loreen Yearick, MSN, RN. This approval expires on March 1, 2025.

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