

You are a licensed professional counselor (LPC) who also engages in some side supervision and consultation. One day, your telephone rings. You answer and the person on the other end of the line identifies himself as a local pastor. The pastor tells you that he employs three licensed counselors, all of whom are members of the American Counseling Association to work with members of his congregation who are experiencing crisis or hardship. The pastor goes on to tell you that he would like to hire you as a consultant, so that you can ensure that his counselors are practicing ethically, as he hopes that members of his congregation are receiving the best possible quality of care. You agree to the consulting gig, and sign informed consent paperwork with the pastor.

One of the first steps you take in assessing the consultees system is to have the counselors alter their informed consent documents that they provide to clients, so that they can record sessions, which you will observe. All of the clients consent to this.

You are observing the tape of a counseling session in which a client is telling his counselor that he has been suffering from major depression. During the session the client tells counselor:

I just don't know that I believe there is a god anymore. I mean, how can there possibly be a god. Evolution makes so much more sense than the stories of creation, which don't even match up with each other! If there was a god, why would he allow so much suffering? Why do I have to drive by people who are without homes every day on my way to work? Why would God allow slavery? Why would God create a culture where more than one in four women is sexually abused before she is an adult?

The counselor replies:

It is normal for people to question God, and to experience times when they want to stray from their faith. During those times, one of the best things that one can do is to try to bring the Lord closer, to read the scripture, and to look for the love and acceptance that Jesus brings to his flock. Spirituality is a great strength, and it is important for mental health and wellbeing.

You notice that, after the counselor replies the client agrees, and he doesn't bring up any more questions regarding his faith.

Scenario 1

1. What ethical codes are relevant to this situation?
2. To what extent can/should a counselor encourage a client who is questioning their faith to 'stick it out'?
3. Must client's have a spirituality? What is the role of professional counselors in encouraging clients to seek out spirituality or religion?

-----Don't turn the page until you have answered the above questions-----

Scenario 1.b

While talking with the pastor and counselor, you bring up the session. You reflect the counselor's good intentions in ensuring that the client doesn't lose his faith during a stressful time in his life. However, you also tell the counselor that you are concerned that the client isn't able to freely talk about his feelings regarding spirituality, as the counselor clearly communicated the bias that spirituality is important. The pastor tells you that it is his policy that members of the congregation who are questioning their faith be encouraged to come closer to God, as God is the ultimate source of strength, light, and peace. The counselor and pastor both seem to be unwilling to negotiate on their policy that client's who are questioning their faith need to be brought back to God, and the community and support that the congregation offers.

1. What ethical codes are relevant to this situation?
2. What are the potential benefits with regard to clients being encouraged to have a spirituality/religion?
3. How might this encouragement impact the counseling relationship?
4. What are your personal feelings regarding people who identify as atheist or agnostic?