

Nasw and an ethical dilemma: conflicts of interest

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



One ethical dilemma addressed by the NASW is conflicts of interest. A conflict of interest can take many forms; financial, professional, religious, political, etc. (NASW Code of Ethics 1. 06, 1999). One common conflict occurs when a social worker identifies strongly with a belief system, such as the Alcoholics Anonymous credo, and supplants standard treatment modalities with AA doctrine. The allure of sharing such a system with a client experiencing alcohol or substance abuse issues can be strong. Further, it is not difficult to find examples of AA's effectiveness, which can give the illusion of credibility to this choice.

However, review of the details of the program, as laid out in AA's The Big Book and analyzed by organizations such as Rational Recovery should be required before considering AA in social work. It is clear from comparing these texts to social workers' education and training, that the dictates of AA are incompatible. For example, AA requires the unconditional surrender of a patient's will to a higher power, clearly contradictory with the ethos of personal responsibility required for effective change (Trimpey, 2001).

In addition, the spiritual, often religiously interpreted, nature of the program is in clear contradiction with the goal of unbiased treatment, according to the NASW Code of Ethics which states social workers " should be aware of any conflicts between personal... values and deal with them responsibly," (NASW Code of Ethics, Preamble, p. 10) and prohibits the biased application of religious beliefs (NASW Code of Ethics, Section 1. 06, 1999).