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Quick Professional Learning for School Counselors On-the-Go

Title	<u><i>Student Risk-Taking Behaviors: When Do School Counselors Break Confidentiality?</i></u>
Author/Presenter	Michael Moyer and Jeremy Sullivan (Professors at University of Texas at San Antonio)
Summary	This study aimed to better understand the circumstances under which school counselors would break confidentiality in response to student risk-taking behaviors.
Topic / Platform	Ethics / Article

Key Takeaways	Implications for Practice	Level Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidentiality has been described as the most difficult ethical issue facing school counselors. The best way to defend your decision making is “act as a reasonable counselor would in a similar situation.” When presented with vignettes, counselors were asked to indicate the ethicality of breaching confidentiality. This study found that the intensity, frequency, and duration of potentially harmful behaviors were significant factors in counselors’ beliefs about breaking confidentiality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing professional development is vital as we aim to check our own biases and values and how these inform how we would categorize “dangerous behaviors.” It is also important to “check” yourself when defining “dangerous behavior”: would you feel the same if the student was of a different sex or gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, etc.? If so, why? Ethical dilemmas frequently involve some interplay between law, policy, and/or ethical standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This survey did not include elementary school counselors, since it was deemed unlikely that elementary-aged students would engage in the behaviors included in the survey. Developmentally, we know that adolescents value privacy and would prefer as much as possible. Confidentiality is often a significant concern for these students. The study found that smoking, sexual behavior, and alcohol are more likely to be reported for younger students, indicating that older students are frequently viewed as more autonomous.

Fun Fact... Did You Know?

The ASCA Ethical Standards recognize that students’ developmental age and stage may be one aspect you consider when navigating an ethical dilemma. Check out standard A.2.g for



Note: PDs-on-the-Go are intended to convey general information only, and not to provide legal/ethical advice or opinions. When facing an ethical dilemma, it is always best practice to consult with a colleague or supervisor and to document your ethical decision-making process.

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