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## HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH ETHICS IN STUDENT SUPERVISION?

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### ABSTRACT

#### How should we deal with ethics in student supervision?

Social workers agree that supervision is an essential aspect of the social work profession. Supervision therefore occupies an important place within social work education. In supervision, students learn to analyse their first experiences of work and their own impressions and feelings, and explore their views on the field of work under the guidance of a supervisor. Students also learn to translate the theories they have acquired into practice. For the majority of students, this is not an easy task. They have many moral and ethical questions about their actions. Since the values and norms within the social field are neither static nor unambiguous, identifying what the “right” action might be can be very confusing. Even within a supervision group, there can be several opinions about this. This article therefore explains the “ethical circles in social work” method. The method acts as a form of guidance for students and supervisors who are dealing with ethical questions.

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1 **Keywords**

2  
3 (Student) supervision, ethics, ethical circles, care ethics, values and standards

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5 **SAMENVATTING**

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7 **Ethiek in studentensupervisie: Hoe begin je eraan?**

8 Dat supervisie essentieel is binnen het beroep van sociaal werk, daar zijn sociaal werkers het al  
9 langer over eens. Supervisie krijgt binnen de opleiding sociaal werk dan ook een belangrijke plaats.  
10 In supervisie leren studenten (eerste) werkervaringen te analyseren, eigen indrukken en gevoelens  
11 te onderzoeken en hun visie op het werkveld te verruimen en dit onder begeleiding van een  
12 supervisor. Studenten leren tevens de reeds verworven theorie om te zetten in de praktijk. Voor het  
13 merendeel van de studenten is dit geen eenvoudige klus. Zij hebben dan vele morele en ethische  
14 vragen over hun handelen. Aangezien de waarden en normen binnen het sociaal werkveld niet  
15 statisch en eenduidig zijn, is het soms ook erg verwarrend wat nu juist "juist" handelen is. Binnen  
16 een supervisiegroep kunnen hier bij de verschillende studenten en supervisor meerdere meningen  
17 over bestaan. Daarom wordt de methodiek "Ethische cirkels in sociaal werk" toegelicht in dit  
18 artikel. Deze methode kan een houvast bieden voor studenten en supervisor om aan de slag te  
19 gaan met ethische vragen.

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21 **Trefwoorden**

22  
23 (Studenten-)supervisie, ethiek, ethische cirkels, zorgethiek, waarden en normen

24  
25 **INTRODUCTION**

26  
27 Supervision and ethics are inextricably linked. Supervision can take place in many different  
28 contexts, but ethics will always be present. This article focuses specifically on ethics in the  
29 supervision of students in educational settings. In the field of social work, ethical issues and  
30 dilemmas arise continually. Social workers often have to make immediate decisions about particular  
31 situations, without any help from others. In order to assess their actions as social workers, it is  
32 obviously useful for social workers to engage in reflective dialogue on their actions. Ideally, the  
33 social worker will sit with a few colleagues and, guided by a supervisor, reflect on their own actions  
34 in supervision. In the field of work, supervision is necessary for keeping your skills sharp and for  
35 receiving recognition and support, and thereby for offering the client the best chance of receiving

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respectful and ethical guidance. The same is true for the student of social work. It is important that he or she learns the methods of supervision, and more importantly, that he or she learns how supportive, helpful and open-minded supervision can be.

Smeets (2007) discusses ethics in supervision and the ethics of supervision. This article focuses on ethics in student supervision, and especially on themes and students' questions that have ethical implications. When I refer to supervision in this article, I always mean supervision in social work education, student supervision, unless explicitly stated otherwise. The article also describes a method called "ethical circles in social work". This method can be used to work on ethical issues with students. First, however, I wish to briefly address the role of supervision within social work education.

### **THE ROLE OF SUPERVISION WITHIN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION**

Supervision is an in-school course that relates to the gaining of out-of-school work experience (Jagt, Rombout & Leufkens, 2006). Student supervision is focused on the student's specific work situation, viewed from a certain distance. The goal is not to develop optimal working performances, but to encourage the optimal development of the supervisee as a professional. Student supervision stimulates learning processes in a way that helps to form the personal skills needed for the social work profession and that can influence a social worker's choice of actions, either immediately or in the long term. At the end of supervision, these processes do not need to be complete, but they do need to be visible and the student needs to be on the right track. It is important that the student has "learned to learn" from his or her work experience.

In the course of their education, students acquire new knowledge, skills and competences, but they have little chance to embed these. Nevertheless, the student is expected to translate these newly acquired competences into professional actions in real situations; situations that are often very different from those they encounter in training sessions at university. Sometimes, this can lead to confusion and can throw a student off balance. Supervision can help students to orient or reorient themselves, to disentangle their thoughts and to distinguish different aspects of the problem. Supervision can help a student to draw more effective links between feelings, thoughts, desires and actions, and to relate these to the responsibilities of the profession in concrete work situations. In doing so, they ignore the tensions and inconsistencies between the different dimensions, instead developing the courage to acknowledge them and to regard them as a means to grow as a future

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1 professional. The student learns to reflect independently on his or her professional actions.  
2 Often there is a tension between a social worker's personal identity and their professional identity.  
3 Supervisees learn to practise their profession more independently and they become more aware of  
4 their own possibilities and boundaries.  
5

## 6 **ETHICS IN SUPERVISION**

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8 As stated in the introduction, Smeets refers to the ethics of supervision and of the ethics in  
9 supervision. The literature focuses primarily on the ethics of supervision. The form of the  
10 supervision and the context and conditions in which it takes place are very important. The ethics  
11 of supervision are addressed in questions such as: how is supervision embedded in the educational  
12 programme? How many students take part in a supervision group? Who is the supervisor? What is  
13 the supervisor's background/education/experience with supervision? How safe is supervision and  
14 the supervisor for students? Does the supervisor review the students' progress in supervision? If so,  
15 does he or she give grades to the student? Can students choose their supervisor and their fellow  
16 students in the supervision group? It is extremely important that an educational programme that  
17 wishes to organize supervision in a conscious and responsible way considers these questions. A  
18 lack of means and financial resources is often an obstacle to accomplishing this. However, ethics *in*  
19 supervision, rather than these issues, forms the main focus of this article.  
20

21 When students come to supervision with the questions, concerns and difficulties that they have  
22 experienced during their traineeships, they often have high expectations of the supervisor. They  
23 hope to get a straight answer from the supervisor and guidelines on how they should act in certain  
24 situations. They want guidance on how to improve in future and on how to feel that they are  
25 acting properly; that they have helped the person in the "correct" way, or, at least, that they will  
26 be able to learn this for the future. The notion of helping people in the "wrong" way is very hard  
27 to accept. As future social workers, they have chosen to help people, not to "not help" them. They  
28 want to see their interventions having good results and to see people making progress, and to feel  
29 good when people are grateful for their help.  
30

31 But the profession of social work is not simply "black or white"; it is grey. When you work  
32 with people, there are so many factors that have to be taken into account. The question of the  
33 individual, their background, your own background, their specific context, your own specific  
34 context, the absent third person, the organization, society, other people's emotions and your  
35 own, the values and standards of the profession, the law, procedures and principles. With all this

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in mind, the social worker must make decisions, often alone. Social work is not a positive science. 1  
 Working with people is not an activity whereby the taking of specific actions leads to a specific 2  
 answer. The number of factors involved means that you never have full control over a certain 3  
 situation. Often, when you work with people, you have to follow your instinct, try your best, and 4  
 hope that as many issues as possible have been taken into account and that you have behaved in 5  
 a professional way. That is why it is so important that you question yourself continuously and that 6  
 you consult colleagues in order to exchange ideas. This way, you are able to stay alert. 7

8  
 This shows why supervision during education is so important. Students look to each other 9  
 for support. How would somebody else react in such a situation, and how would they view a 10  
 particular process of care? 11

12  
 But how does anyone know whether one action is good and another is not (Vierwind, 2011)? This 13  
 happens, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of the whole set of values and standards that 14  
 we have at our disposal. We have inherited these values from our ancestors and from the culture in 15  
 which we live. This process of moral judgment is not static; due to change over time and changing 16  
 situations, tensions can develop within the morality of a particular group or culture. 17

18  
 In the process of maturation and the associated reflection on the morality of their actions, people 19  
 develop new insights that may be different from those that they have inherited. Insights can thus 20  
 change, and different moral insights can co-exist within groups of people in a society. Many social 21  
 questions encompass moral issues: how to deal with disadvantage, the environment, healthcare, and 22  
 so on. In a complex society composed of groups with different philosophies of life, discussing such 23  
 questions is not only desirable, but it is also necessary. And even though it is not always possible to 24  
 agree on such things as norms at a community level or in many professions, such as social work, it 25  
 would be very helpful if we could agree on the basic common grounds that underlie them. 26

27  
 Before we discuss the method of “ethical circles in social work”, it is important that we first take a look 28  
 at the values and standards within social work. Moreover, ethical discussions within student supervision 29  
 are inevitably linked with the discussion about values and standards within the field of social work. 30

### **Values and standards within social work**

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 The literature shows that there is an increasing need for ethical reflection within the profession to 34  
 counterbalance the increasing normalization of social work. The Dutch sociologist and philosopher 35

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1 Harry Kunneman encourages reflection on social issues, on our level of professionalism and on  
2 responsible social corporation (Kunneman, 2005). Unlike in the Netherlands, social workers in  
3 Flanders have so far failed to engage in fundamental philosophical and ethical debates about the  
4 aims and positioning of the welfare sector and its associated professionals (Driessens & Geldof,  
5 2008). In Flanders, we do not have a professional social work association that identifies the  
6 profession's values and passes these on to universities. Universities are free to decide which values  
7 they wish to adhere to. Of course, they do not formulate their own, new values; rather, they draw  
8 on existing values, such as international values. While there is a certain amount of common ground  
9 on values between the different universities, nevertheless, there is not always consensus in the field  
10 of work about our professional values, and we lack an official code on which to base our actions.  
11

12 In the Netherlands, there is a tradition of engaging in such debates. Andries Baart's "theory  
13 of presence" offers a sharp critique of professionalization (Baart, 2001). This would lead to an  
14 "absence" of aid to areas "where it is really necessary". Baart reveals a new design language for  
15 the attention, the presence and interpersonal relationships in counselling.  
16

17 Kunneman shares this critical look and critically analyses the place and function of  
18 welfare in the 21st century (Driessens & Geldof, 2008). According to Kunneman, from the middle  
19 of the nineteenth century, a growing "social" belief started to take over in Western societies:  
20 people in social distress were entitled to help and support. Together with the emancipation and  
21 the hope for a fairer society, this belief formed the basis of the expansion of the welfare state. But  
22 in the last decades, a gradual change took place. The emphasis shifts again to care as disciplining  
23 and containment of individual autonomy and to consumption opportunities and production  
24 performance. This changing context has major implications for social work. It is expected from  
25 social work, that it enables the "non-productive individuals" to re-join the economic race.  
26 Social work should re-socialise "uneducated, dangerous, or abnormal people" to "productive  
27 individuals", or otherwise prove that they deserve a label of "pathetic or old".  
28

29 Kunneman wants us to move beyond the "thick-I" (Kunneman, 2005). He uses the term "thick-I"  
30 to refer to individuals who take what they think they need. Not only do they want to consume  
31 more, but they also require recognition of their freedom of action and respect for their highly  
32 individual beliefs and desires. This leads to constant friction with others, meaning that the thick-I  
33 is engaged in ongoing competition and a battle to perform. Increasing prosperity stimulates  
34 hunger for more, rather than leading to greater satisfaction. Is an existence that is dominated by  
35 performance, competition and consumption in an ever-harder society worth the effort? Is this the

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best that we have to offer ourselves and future generations? According to which values could we limit the autonomy and insatiability of the thick-I in daily life without undermining people's autonomy? These are fundamental questions, also for social workers.

Kunneman also presents an alternative vision of a more meaningful and dignified life in post-industrial society (Kunneman, 2005). He defends the importance of normative professionalism. The dominance of the demands of the system and the rise of the thick-I forces professionals' moral values into the background. At the same time, he underlines the importance of these moral values in relationships with clients and in the context of the system. He thereby suggests that in people-oriented professions, norms and values play a role at three levels.

First, system standards define the actions of social workers. At the second level, we find the standards of expertise that encourage social workers to act adequately and effectively, based on professional knowledge, skills and experience. These are translated into the methodological rules and procedures that social workers follow in their professional actions. The third level consists of morally and culturally embedded values and moral qualities, such as the importance of autonomy and personal development, justice and integrity.

There are increasing tensions between these different values and norms (Driessens & Geldof, 2008). These growing tensions demand that we engage in more consultation and supervision, but often there is little time or space for this in the modern care system. A "moral deliberation" or existential reflection on the roots of the friction between system pressure, standards of expertise and moral values initially brings complications and delays. But conversely, efficiency is strongly affected by a lack of cooperation and real attention and by ongoing conflicts. Professionals in people-oriented occupations work for "the good life" of their clients. They thus find themselves in a state of constant tension in which they have to make moral choices. They find themselves experiencing tensions between their environment and the system, and between justice, solidarity and private interests. It is not desirable that professionals should repeatedly have to make fundamental choices on an individual basis. Professionals need to feel supported in making these choices, and this is possible in an organization that offers sufficient space in which to do so.

### **Ethics in student supervision**

If there are no solid values and answers in social work, how can social workers and students make the right choices in the field of practice? How can supervisors respond to their students' ethical

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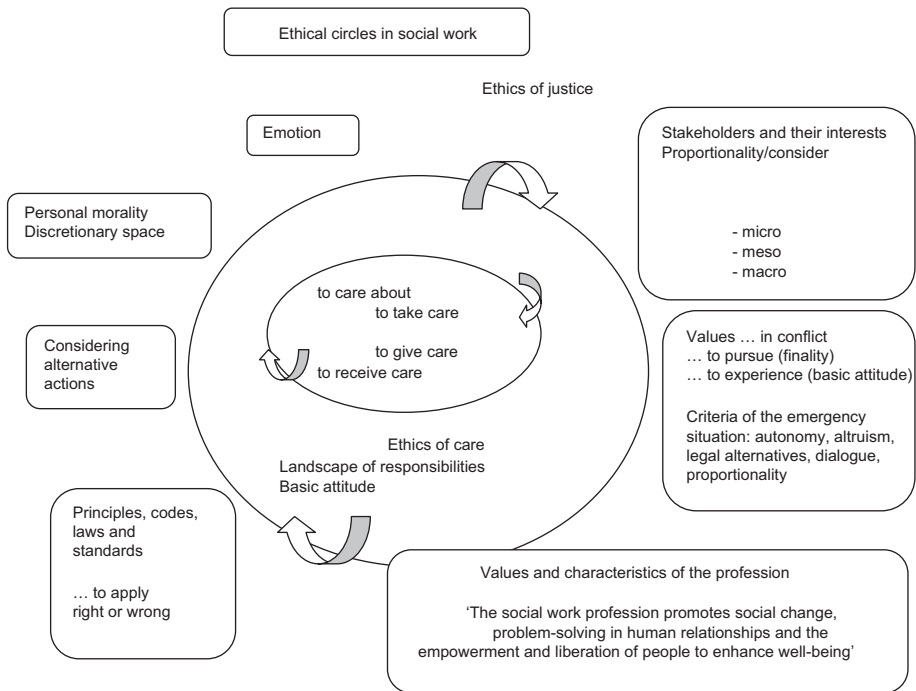


Figure 1: Issues relating to people and what there are thinking about (Janssens, 2008).

questions? Of course, we want our students to learn to be critical of their own actions and to learn to reflect professionally on them. Daniël Janssens, a philosopher, professor and supervisor at KH Kempen University College, has developed a method known as "ethical circles" that can be helpful in dealing with students' ethical questions (Janssens, 2008). This method will now be explained further.

The ethical circles give students guidance on asking the right questions and on identifying different kinds of arguments in situations in which there are ethical conflicts. Due to the fact that ethics is a sub-field of philosophy, there are no unequivocal, absolute, right answers. The point is to ask the right questions and to use the widest possible range of reasoning in having a Socratic conversation about them.

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## The three starting points of the ethical circle

The ethical circles can be approached from different starting points, meaning that you can work with them on the basis of totally different points of view. In this section, I will explain the three different starting points.

The first starting point is a process of moving between idiosyncratic truths, also called the *iterative* starting point. When a social worker's ethical sense is stimulated, he or she tends to quickly form a vision and a reasoned opinion. He or she steps into the circle on a specific spot. To give some examples of this:

A judicial assistant works with a client who is released from prison on the condition that he gives up drinking alcohol. One Saturday evening, he runs into his client in a bar, drinking beer. He thinks: "The value of privacy tells me that I should not do anything about it. It's purely a coincidence that I run into this guy". He steps into the circle on the "values" spot.

A youth welfare worker sees Bjorn, aged 11, on the street late at night. Bjorn says that he has to leave the house every morning at 8 am and may not come back before 11 pm. His mother's boyfriend doesn't like kids. Bjorn has no food and must rely on himself. The youth welfare worker decides to report this to the attorney because he judges Bjorn to be in a situation of severe neglect. He bases his actions on an article of the penal code that states that you should act when someone is in distress, and he relies on another article stating that secrecy may be broken when minors are in danger. He steps into the circle on the "deontology" spot.

When the argumentation is built up from one spot on the ethical circle in a way that lacks any nuance, the person's beliefs about the proper course of action threaten to become dogmatic and ideological: the person believes that the truth is to be found on one absolute spot. For this reason, the idea of the ethical circles is to offer an opportunity to broaden, deepen, refine or challenge a person's point of view. Every spot represents an important approach that needs to be taken into account in the ethical discourse.

The second starting point is the *dialectic* one. The ethical circles invite the social worker to engage in dialectic. It means that during the social worker's movement between the different spots on the ethical circles, he may discover tensions within ethical questions. The purpose is to generate as many tensions as possible and to make them the subject of the ethical discourse.

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1 The greatest tension to be found in the circles is the dialectic between the outer circle and the  
2 inner circle.

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4 The outer circle contains different arguments and questions that are part of the ethics of justice.  
5 Here, the social worker is looking for a justified solution with logical reasoning. They put their  
6 emotions aside and place rational arguments in dialectic to each other.

7  
8 All of the arguments and questions in the outer circle belong to the “male ethics”. Persons, the  
9 subjects of the discussion, are treated as abstract individuals who can sometimes be approached as  
10 person X, Y or Z. The outcome is often disruptive (one is the winner, the other is the loser).

11  
12 But could it be done differently? Might there be another kind of ethical logic? Is there another,  
13 complementary way to do the right thing? According to Tronto, Gilligan and Levinas, there is  
14 (Diedrich, Burggraeve & Gastmans, 2003). They reject the far-reaching ethics of justice, in which,  
15 according to Kohlberg, only men can reach the highest post conventional level. To supplement this,  
16 they propose the model of the ethics of care, or the inner circle.

17  
18 The ethics of care starts from private involvement and connectedness, rather than from universal  
19 principles, values, interests or rules. In the ethics of care, it is not possible to take distance from a  
20 case and to use a mathematical formula to come to the right answer. Social workers are indeed  
21 involved with and affected by people’s specific questions and concerns. Emotional connectedness  
22 and care occupy a special place in the ethics of care. For this reason, the ethics of care are called  
23 the “female ethics”.

24  
25 In the ethics of care, a social worker starts from an individual’s story, their concerns and their  
26 loyalties. They are moved by stories of injustice and pain and they try, through dialogue and  
27 responsibility, to find joint solutions. They look for individual answers, but they continue to take  
28 responsibility for society and for the organization. The dangers of far-reaching, unilateral ethics  
29 of care discourse are that little rights are protected, that huge involvement on the part of some  
30 individuals can sometimes leave others in the cold (favouritism), that it can involve arbitrariness,  
31 and there can be little structural change.

32  
33 Besides the central tension between justice and care, there are many other tensions within the  
34 circles themselves. Thinking about the example of the judicial assistant who encounters a client  
35 drinking beer, for instance, we can identify the following tensions:

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- Interests of the client versus the interests of the organization and society 1
- values of privacy versus the safety/responsibility versus being allowed to make mistakes and to develop 2
- deontology versus values of the profession 3
- deontology versus his own conscience 4
- trust (taking care of the relationship) versus care for the client and the system of clients 5

The third starting point is to look at the ethical circles from a *holistic* point of view. The holistic character of the ethical circles is revealed when very different types of argumentation and ethical questions are juxtaposed. An attempt is made to combine as many ethical traditions as possible so that the truth of all these different schools of thought can materialize. To philosophize about what it means to act in the right way presupposes generating as many tensions as possible to ensure that the truth will be uniform, absolute and unilateral.

The circle can be used as a tool to think, either on your own or in a group, about ethical questions and to identify tensions. The circle can also be used to reflect on your own actions: which spot do I use most often? Which spot do I use rarely? What does this say about me, and what do I want to do about it?

### **A thorough approach to the different spots on the ethical circles**

To clarify the different spots on the ethical circles, I will now explain them from the two perspectives mentioned above: the ethics of justice and the ethics of care.

#### *Ethics of justice*

The outer circle, the ethics of justice, contains different spots. In the following paragraphs, every spot will be explained briefly and will be illustrated with the questions that are asked when you want to look at an ethical question or dilemma from that particular spot or point of view.

When a social worker starts thinking from the *deontology* spot, they always refer to a source, mostly a written source, that gives them direct guidelines on and principles for right action. The following questions are asked: what does the law say? May I do that? In principle, what should I do? What are the procedures, the rules? Am I violating professional secrecy?

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1 When a social worker starts thinking from the *interests of the stakeholders* spot, they argue in  
2 terms of the interests that can be promoted or damaged in the short term. In particular, they look  
3 at the consequences, wanting to cause as little damage as possible and to bring happiness to as  
4 many people as possible. The following questions are asked: what are the consequences in the  
5 short term? Am I not doing more wrong than right? Who benefits from this decision? How can I  
6 get out of this easily? How can I make this a win-win situation?  
7

8 When a social worker starts thinking from the *values* spot, they look for long-term answers and  
9 search for goals, dreams and values that are shared by many others. They ask: what is the final  
10 goal and what is the purpose of this law or rule? What is the goal of our organization, of social  
11 work, of my acting as social worker? From the perspective of these values, laws, rules, interests  
12 and emotions become more relative.  
13

14 The social worker tries to take what are sometimes very emotional and complex conflict situations  
15 to a higher level by approaching them as internal conflicts of values. As a result, the stakeholders  
16 gain more recognition and can rise above their own interests and codes. For example, in the tense  
17 ethical conflict surrounding the ban on Muslim girls wearing the headscarf at school, we notice a  
18 few tensions surrounding "values":  
19

- 20 – uniqueness versus safety
- 21 – protection versus self-determination
- 22 – community versus diversity  
23

24 Everyone around the negotiating table would agree that both values in each field of tension are  
25 worth striving for. However, there is much discussion about how those values can, at the same,  
26 transform dialectic into practice. By translating an ethical conflict into a conflict of values, the  
27 stakeholders are no longer opposites experiencing contradictions and conflict, but people who can  
28 search, on the basis of a set of shared values, for a way to realize both values to a maximal degree.  
29 This ethical conflict is all about maturity, a basic attitude that allows the pursuit of values to rise  
30 above private interests. As a social worker, you do not focus on action, but you always strive, in  
31 consultation, to achieve as much solidarity, freedom, empowerment and justice as possible. The  
32 danger is that the social worker fails to take any position and that every action can be justified.  
33 The following questions are asked: ultimately, what is important here? Why are we doing this? On  
34 which goals do we agree? Why does our organization or this particular rule exist?  
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When a social worker starts thinking from the *values of the profession* spot, they realize that they are not value-free; rather, they place some social values higher than others. Owing to a certain drive, a belief in the possibility of a just society and a sense of justice, the social worker will focus on such values as solidarity, emancipation, sustainability, humanity, empowerment and respect, and will realize all of these values as far as possible in all their actions. The following questions are asked: are my actions sufficiently emancipatory? Am I doing everything possible to gain trust and to maintain it? Am I paying enough attention to injustice or I am acting like an opportunist? Dare I question my team when I do not agree with an ethical choice?

The *discretionary space* (your own conscience) is a private decision space that the social worker occupies in an autonomous way. It is the space where you make decisions that are not regulated by regulations and procedures. The social worker is fully responsible for the decisions that he or she makes in this spot. This is where choices are made that sometimes go against agreements, rules and procedures. It is an important space, because the social worker can make an important difference here. In this discretionary space, the social worker constructs arguments on the basis of the values of the profession or his or her own conscience. The following questions are asked: have I done everything that I could have done? What do I really think? What should I do? Do I need to intervene to prevent the situation from getting worse?

When the social worker starts their ethical discourse from the *emotion* spot, they start from a strong emotion of injustice, even disgust, arising from the situations that they witness. They are moved, sometimes they experience heated feelings, and they have a clear sense that something needs to be done. Their ethical sense is heightened. Their arguments are emotionally loaded, absolute and principled. In fact, emotion is necessary in order to do the "right thing". But emotion should not become an obstacle to thinking in a nuanced way and to questioning ethical actions and to being open to the opinions of others. The following questions are asked: what moves me? What do I feel when I see or hear this? What moves me to do something?

In the dialectic of interests, regulations and values, the social worker searches for *creative alternatives*. He or she uses dialogue. All of these alternatives are checked against the arguments of the ethics of justice and the ethics of care.

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### *Ethics of care*

Just like the ethical discourse, the ethics of care starts from values rather than from rights, duties, proportionality, principles and arguments. The social worker who acts from the ethics of care discourse acts from involvement or a connection with people. Rather than being abstract individuals X, Y or Z, these are unique people with their own stories and faces.

We can distinguish four elements of the ethics of care (Janssens, 2008). The first element is “to care about” (recognition). The accent is on giving attention, in terms of a lot of time and space, while having no direct goal or result in mind. Here, the social worker goes to people and does something with them. Their attitude is one of wonder and they have no prejudices and assumptions. The second element is “to take care” (to act). The accent is on “being human, communicating from your own experiences, being aware of your position and mandate, doing something voluntary and recognizing people’s strengths”. The third element is “care-giving” (entering into dialogue): the accent is on taking time to build up a relationship; letting go of the client, even if you do not hear from them for a while; providing space for resistance, anger and confrontation; and offering safety and being reliable. The last element is “care-receiving”. The accent here is on knowing that you are also vulnerable and that you have needs; a space for not-knowing and not-understanding, where you go when you have reached your limits, in order to find a language for difficult subjects and to let go.

While this model was initially developed for students of social work, it can, of course, be used by anyone who deals with ethical questions in supervision. It can be used in work contexts, in degree programmes other than social work, and so forth.

### **The position of the supervisor**

Finally, I would like to reflect briefly on the position of the supervisor. When the supervisor works with students or professionals, it is important that he or she possesses a certain attitude; and this is also the case when he or she works with the ethical circles model.

Supervisors should not forget that they are role models, and should thus be inviting, non-judgmental and consistent in what they say or do themselves (Herman, 2003). Focusing on the position of the supervisor, Smeets points out that the latter should be aware of his or her own

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moral development (Vierwind, 2011). It is important that the supervisor is able to distinguish their own moral development from that of the supervisee. This is related to the distinction between personal and professional ethics. The professional relationship between supervisor and supervisee is all about how the supervisor helps the supervisee to investigate their own values, norms and beliefs in relation to the issue of the discussion. While supervisors do not seem to dispute the assumption that the supervisee's search – within his or her moral world – should be central, often in practice it is not so easy. The supervisor helps the supervisee to reflect on their own morals and to examine how they can act in specific cases, even if the supervisor does not agree with the supervisee's values. This requires having a professional attitude. Therefore, it is important that the supervisor knows their own sensibilities, pitfalls and blind spots, and learns how to handle them. One's own unrecognized irritations can cause one's professionalism to slip. The danger is that the supervisor fails to notice breaks in the supervisee's progress and gives it his or her own direction.

Within the specific context of student supervision, it is difficult to maintain this boundary. As discussed earlier, students often want clear answers, especially in moral discussions. Even when it is quite clear to all concerned that there are no exact answers, students still like to know how a supervisor feels about a particular issue, especially when the supervisor does not recognize him or herself in the student's reasoning; and certainly when the supervisor also judges the student's progress. This, however, is a different discussion.

## CONCLUSION

Student supervision and ethics are two concepts that are inextricably linked. Social work is a wonderful, but difficult, profession. Social workers take many decisions, sometimes with rewarding consequences for other people. The guidance, values and standards related to taking these decisions are not always clear. Therefore, during supervision and beyond, it is a challenge for supervisors and students to work together to find the "right" course of action. So many interpretations and visions are possible.

It is hoped that the proposed conceptual model in this article might be of service in this respect. Ideally, the ethical circles would form the basis of many discussions and would help students and supervisors to broaden their vision on social work.

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