I. INTRODUCTION

A. Ethics refers to the moral principles or values that guide us when deciding what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad

B. Your ethics will have a great impact on your personal and professional relationships

C. You will rely on your ethics to help you make difficult choices and decisions

II. CODE OF ETHICS

A. Health care teams form professional helping relationships with clients and have developed ethical standards to guide interactions

B. Regulated professions have codes of ethics provided by their governing college

C. Support workers do not have a formal code of ethics, but many employers have informal codes of ethics that describe the values and personal qualities to guide your work

D. See Box 10-1, p. 129 in the textbook, for a sample code of ethics for support workers

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF HEALTH CARE ETHICS

A. Health care ethics is the philosophical study of what is morally right and wrong when providing health care services
   1. Four basic principles of health care ethics are:
      a. Autonomy
      b. Justice
      c. Beneficence
      d. Nonmaleficence

B. Autonomy (also called self-determination)
   1. Means having free choice involving decisions that affect one’s life
   2. As long as a person is mentally competent, they have their right to make decisions concerning lifestyle, medical care, and services affecting them; this right is protected by laws (see Chapter 11)
3. You must always respect your client’s choices and preferences even with routine tasks; it is unethical to ignore choices and preferences
4. It becomes very complicated when your client’s decision could cause them to be at risk; always consult your supervisor if you have concerns about a client’s safety
5. Respecting your client’s autonomy also means that you do not judge their choices or lifestyle by your own values or standards
6. Never express your disapproval of their choices or preferences, politics, religion, or lifestyle

C. Justice
1. Means that all people should be treated in a fair and equal manner
2. In Canada it means that all Canadians, regardless of ability to pay, receive access to the same medical services
3. Some people are easier to work with than others, so you may want to spend less time with demanding people or people whose lifestyle you don’t agree with, but this is unjust and unethical
4. Treating people justly also means that you do not betray their trust
5. Clients trust you to handle their possessions with care, respect their privacy, perform your services competently and skillfully, and keep all conversations and health information confidential (see Chapter 11)

D. Beneficence
1. Means doing or promoting good; these principles are central to your work
2. Support work is about promoting wellness, helping people in their daily lives, and supporting them during difficult times
3. The client’s needs come before those of his or her family
4. If you feel a family member’s request goes against the needs of the client, contact your supervisor for guidance
5. You must always stay within your boundaries of a professional helping relationship (see Chapter 6)
6. Do not ask clients to do something that is in your interests rather than theirs
7. You must always remain professional and not become involved in family disagreements, or take advantage of a strained family relationship
8. To do the most good for your clients:
   a. Always give your best effort
   b. Finish your tasks on time
   c. Be careful, alert, and exact when following instructions
   d. Be compassionate and empathetic
   e. Avoid using work time for your own interests (e.g. watching TV, drinking coffee)

E. Nonmaleficence
1. Means seeking to do no harm
2. Harm can be intentional (abuse) or unintentional (accidental injury or negligence)
3. Perform only those tasks that you have been trained to do, and recognize the limits of your role and knowledge
4. Family and clients may innocently ask you to perform tasks that are not in your scope of practice, and could cause harm to the client if you are not trained to do the task
5. Refer all questions about treatment plans, diagnosis, and all medical information to your supervisor; discussing or giving medical information is outside your scope of practice
6. Keep your skills and knowledge current, support work is constantly changing; the more knowledge and practice you have, the safer your skills will be
7. You can protect your clients by applying the guidelines in all situations.

IV. DEALING WITH ETHICAL DILEMMAS

A. Codes of ethics provide guidelines for ethical behaviour, but cannot give answers or rules for every situation

B. When making an ethical decision, consider all the possible options to the dilemma, and carefully consider the following:
   1. Does the option respect the client’s wishes and preferences?
   2. Does the option provide the client with a short-term or long-term benefit?
   3. Could the option cause harm or increase the client’s risk of harm?
   4. Does the option treat the client justly and fairly?

C. Answers to these questions often contradict each other; for example, the client’s preference may increase the risk of harm
   1. You must involve your supervisor in the solution

D. See the Support Workers Solving Problems box, p. 132 in the textbook

E. Remember to consider the four principles of health care ethics when making your decisions