

Is it Ethical or Unethical?

Place an “E” in the space provided if you believe the behavior is ethical for criminal justice professionals. Place a “U” in the space provided if you believe the behavior is unethical.

- ___ 1. Accepting a reduced price meal from a local diner.
- ___ 2. Accepting a ride from a member of an offender’s family when your car is in for service.
- ___ 3. Covering with his supervisor for a colleague who is experiencing some personal problems at home.
- ___ 4. Overlooking a close friend’s violation of a petty department rule.
- ___ 5. Periodically taking a mental health day.
- ___ 6. Telling a colleague about an offender’s sexual history.
- ___ 7. Having your car serviced at a garage where an offender works.
- ___ 8. Curtailing field visits when you know there is a budget crunch, especially in reimbursement for gas.
- ___ 9. Asking to use the bathroom at an offender’s home.
- ___ 10. Failing to tell the supervisor when you think you see a colleague having dinner with an offender on your caseload.
- ___ 11. Telling a “little white lie” to protect a peer or colleague.
- ___ 12. Treating offenders differently than the general public.
- ___ 13. You ask a court clerk whom you work with all the time to reschedule a hearing that interferes with personal plans.
- ___ 14. Finding ways around departmental policy and procedures that get in the way of your doing your job.

Every day we make choices about how to behave or how to respond to a situation. The basic process for making ethical decisions can be summarized in the following steps:

	Strategy	Questions to Ask	Ethical or Not?
1	Define the precise dilemma you face. Do not globalize or generalize.	For example, rather than “is the officer acting ethically?”, consider the exact situation, “is it ethical or acceptable when this officer has dinner with the family of an offender on his caseload?”	
2	Gather all of the information about the dilemma.	This includes interviewing the offender, the officer, reviewing case files, finding out how the officer behaves with other offenders, how the officer acts towards this particular offender, etc.	
3	List the pros and cons.	Literally list the pros and cons of the situation on a sheet of paper.	
4	Is it legal?	What are the laws, policies, and procedures about the situation? Does it align with collective bargaining agreements, personnel rules, and other human resource requirements?	
5	Is it aligned with the agency’s mission?	Does the situation support the mission of the agency, and is it necessary to achieve the mission?	
6	What are the consequences of taking the action you are considering?	What are the possible ramifications of this situation- for the officer, the offender, the agency, public perception, etc.	
7	Decide if it is ethical.	Take all of the information and results of each of the above steps, and decide if the situation is ethical according to the definition of ethics.	
8	Act on your decision.	Take whatever steps are necessary to correct the situation. This could include educating the officer and the offender and family; disciplining the officer, changing policy and procedure, etc.	
9	Live your decision.	Now you must model the ethical behavior you are expecting, and demonstrate the agency policy of zero tolerance and its support for ethical behavior.	