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On September 26, 2001, I was privileged to be invited to be the opening speaker and a panel member of a workshop for Agency Field Supervisors regarding the issue of Dual Relationships. The following is an edited version of my presentation on that day.

As a place to start our discussions on the issues of Dual Relationships, I thought I would offer a few comments by stating some fundamental questions and attempting to address all but one of them. Perhaps you will find more interest in the question I don't address than in those I do:

Why do social workers have a Code of Ethics?

This is the one question that I'm not going to attempt to address. The history of the development of Codes of Ethics in the field of social work is closely associated with our development as a profession. The controversy continues in this regard: Are we professionals, should we be, are our aspirations for professionalism in conflict with our obligations to our clients? I'll leave these questions for another day and not address them directly here, though I'll encourage you to keep them in the back of your mind throughout the day. Having said that, I will

suggest that it is essential for social workers to have a code of ethics in order to be recognized as a profession:

A profession is based on a specialized body of abstract and theoretical knowledge that is transmitted through a system of elaborate, formal training. Its members, bound together by a set of commonly held norms and a code of ethics, are experts in their special fields of practice and are so recognized by the larger society. A professional person is expected to have a sense of autonomy, a belief in self-regulation, a commitment to service, and a conception of work as a calling rather than simply a means of earning a livelihood.

(Khinduka, 1995, p 681.)

Of course, the short answer to this question of “why a code of ethics” is the simply reply “to protect our clients.”

What are Dual Relationships?

Brownlee & Taylor (1995) provide a basic definition of a dual relationship. They offer that “. . . a dual relationship exists when a social worker participates in a second role category with a client, in addition to the professional role of service provider”. They go further to quote Gottlieb (1993) who adds that a dual relationship exists when “. . . in addition to the professional relationship, there is some other relationship with the individual: friend, family member, student or business partner.”

Why should social workers avoid or strictly manage their dual relationships?

Again, the short answer is simple: The restriction on dual relationships are in place to

