

Clinical Conundrum

Addressing questions related to ethical and clinical practice issues in speech-language pathology and audiology

Question: I am an SLP and active ACSLPA member. I have a question about the issue of consent for providing inclusion services in the classroom. My plan is to go into the classroom and teach the whole class a series of lessons. Although the lessons are designed to target my clients specifically, it is felt that all the students in the classroom would benefit. While I have written consent from the students that are on my caseload, not all students in the class are on my caseload. Do I need written consent from all the students in the class in order to provide this type of service? What are my legal responsibilities to obtain informed consent in a situation such as this?

Answer: This is a relevant question as more regulated members become involved in a variety of contractual relationships, including relationships with other private practitioners, and with agencies such as school divisions and other not-for-profit agencies.

ACSLPA's *Code of Ethics* states the following with respect to informed consent:

Autonomy - We respect and promote clients' rights and abilities to make informed decisions.

Members:

- Recognize the strengths and vulnerabilities of the client.
- **Ensure that clients are informed and understand the services and options for service available to them.**
- **Ensure that the client has the right to refuse consent or withdraw consent once given.**
- Will obtain consent for services from a substitute decision-maker when a client lacks the capacity to make decisions, subject to applicable laws and workplace policies.

To begin with, I would check with your employer and/or with the school division (if that is not your employer) to be sure that you are in compliance with any of their policies or requirements regarding consent.

From ACSLPA's perspective, there is no expectation that you obtain formal written consent from each family who has a child registered in this classroom. It would, however, be appropriate to **inform** all families in writing of the upcoming lessons, outlining:

- the dates you will be in the classroom,
- what the purpose of your involvement will be,
- who to call if there are any questions, and
- what to do if they do NOT want their child to participate.

A brief explanation of the intended outcomes of the lessons would also be appropriate.

We typically suggest this type of an approach whenever an ACSLPA member is providing a service involving individuals who have not been identified as clients (e.g., social skills or language lessons in a classroom, etc.). This ensures there are no surprises for family members, and they can ask questions and/or opt out if they wish.

We welcome your thoughts on this or any other clinical conundrum! Readers are encouraged to submit both their comments and their ethical clinical issues in question format to slp@acslpa.ca for SLP related issues audiology@acslpa.ca for audiology related issues.