Joe works in a human service organization serving the physically disabled. When he first joined the organization 12 years ago, he signed a document agreeing that he would never abuse or neglect an individual. He was trained to understand that if he was assigned one-to-one supervision with an individual, it would be considered neglect if he ever left that person alone. Joe understood that if that occurred, he would be summarily fired. Staff members who violated this rule have in the past all been fired.  
  
Joe is bathing a multiply-handicapped individual in that person’s apartment. The person is unable to sit upright for more than a few seconds. Joe was assigned one-to-one supervision of that person. Given that responsibility, Joe is not permitted to be further than arms-length distance from the person, nor ever to lose eye contact while the person is in the bathtub.  
  
While bathing the individual, Joe hears screams from a staff member in the hallway outside of the bathroom. She is calling for help, screaming, “He’s going to kill my baby.” Evidently, she is being attacked by a large and violent individual who lives at the same location. The staff member being attacked is 7 months pregnant. There is no other person at the location at the time the incident is occurring.  
Assume that Joe understands all of these facts correctly at the moment.  
In one essay of between 750 and 1,000 words, respond to the following:  
Based on the information in the case above and using the five steps of the problem-solving approach to ethical decision-making, analyze how you believe Joe should respond to the situation confronting him.

5-Step Problem-Solving Process of Ethical Inquiry

**1. Identify the Problem**

Most circumstances that present themselves as moral dilemmas requiring ethical decision making emerge in the context of an event, or series of events. At some point an HRER professional might sense that the situation, if not handled correctly, might result in a morally wrong alternative. In order to begin a systematic inquiry concerning what would be the best alternative, the person should address the following questions:

1. What are the facts as initially presented?
2. Who are the stakeholders?
3. Are there conflicting accounts and/or perspectives?
4. Whose interests stand to be helped or harmed by the decision that is made?
5. Is more investigation required?

At the point when the facts of the situation have been gathered, the person would want to ask certain questions that would help analyze the facts in the context of the moral demands that the situation represents, in essence to define the need for ethical inquiry.

1. What is at stake?
2. Is action to remedy the situation morally justified?
3. Is inaction an option?

### 2. Identify Possible Solutions

At this point the person addressing this issue must consider alternative choices in conduct. In some cases the list of alternatives will be quite short, particularly when there is little time to react. Regardless, a clear understanding of the possible alternatives is necessary to fairly evaluate what might be the best choice.

**3. Assess Each Alternative Solution**

1. Identify the Relevant Consequences
   1. How will alternative choices (including the choice to do nothing) affect you (utility-based)?
   2. How large is the effect on various stakeholders?
   3. What are the costs/benefits for each group of stakeholders?
2. Identify the Relevant Duties
   1. Do you or other parties to the situation have specific obligations to others (duty-based)?
   2. How will those choices influence other parties to the situation?
   3. Are there conflicting duties?
3. Identify the Relevant Virtues
   1. Are some choices more or less conducive for becoming a good person (character-based)? Will your actions set an example or establish you as a leader or role model for others to emulate?
4. Consider Related Moral Values
   1. Does the situation invoke the concerns for such issues as efficiency, reciprocity, justice, liberty, compassion or excellence?

**4. Choose the Best Possible Solution**

Problem solving of any sort will finally require that the problem solver make a choice. Based on the evidence collected and the analysis of various alternatives against the moral principles considered in Step 4, what would be the “best” course of action?

* Which action or policy would be most likely to resolve the ethical issues?
* Would the solution stem any further difficulties or generate a cascade of resultant problems?

**5. Consult Your Gut. How does it feel?**

Very often, even after comprehensive study, the best choice appears to be the best of two or more bad alternatives. In some cases there will be a nagging doubt that one should move forward without further consideration. On the other hand, even the best of several less than desirable alternatives may in fact be the correct choice.

* Does the proposed solution quiet any pangs of conscience?
* Would someone whom you thought of as a mentor approve?
* Would you will comfortable reading about your decision in the newspaper?
* Could you live with the solution in the long-term? If not, go back to Step 4.

References:

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