



Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers

Youth Work Association (Singapore)

Preamble

1. This Code of Ethical Practice is based on the Commonwealth Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers, originally published by the Commonwealth Secretariat and authored by Dr Tim Corney, Ph.D.
2. The Youth Work Association (Singapore), or YWAS, is a member of the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Worker Associations (CAYWA), a global grouping of youth worker associations in the member countries of the Commonwealth.
3. YWAS adopted this Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers at its Annual General Meeting held on 9th May 2017.
4. The Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers is motivated by the importance of ensuring the safety and well being of young people and those that work with them. It promotes safe work practices with young people and documents the values and principles that underpin ethical youth work practice.

Context of Key Terms

1. Ethics

- a. There are numerous ways to address the issue of 'ethics' in a code of practice. These may include adopting or subscribing to specific underpinning ethical theories or philosophies.
- b. However, many would argue that one of the strengths of the youth sector is the diversity of philosophical and religious traditions contained within it.
- c. As such we believe that the basis for making 'ethical' judgments about youth work practice will be assisted and informed by applying the ancient dictum 'primum non nocere' - First, do no harm.

2. Code of Ethical Practice

- a. A Code of Ethical Practice is a document developed by a body of practitioners to provide an agreed framework or set of values for professional practice.
- b. It can also be described as 'a set of norms based on the belief systems or values of a group of people who agree to adhere to commonly held philosophical principles' (Outten 1991:8).
- c. At the basic level a Code of Ethical Practice provides a set of statements about what is considered good practice, while at its best it provides an overarching guide for workers to apply ethical principles in a specific practice context (Youth Action and Policy Association [YAPA] 2005).
- d. A Code of Ethical Practice also provides workers with a frame of reference in which to develop ethical awareness, create discussion of ethical issues and implement good and safe practice for both clients and workers.

3. Youth Sector

- a. The youth sector is a part of the national social and human development framework.
- b. It comprises those agencies – organisations, programs and workers, government and non-government, paid and unpaid – who work with, or to the benefit of, young people as a significant part of their work.
- c. It includes volunteer and paid work in face-to-face youth work, management of service delivery, advocacy, research, training, evaluation and policy formation.

4. Youth Workers

- a. 'If we are to be of service to young people we are going to need to understand ourselves more as servers (servants) than authority

figures; we exist professionally to work with young people to develop their influence and authority, rather than merely to extend our authority over them' (Belton 2012).

- b. Youth workers work in a wide variety of settings in non-government organisations, for local governments, for government departments, for schools, for small community organisations and for large charities (Sercombe, 1997).
- c. Youth workers may undertake a range of service delivery functions as well as ancillary work such as policy, research and management; they are “an agent of change able to continually ask themselves certain questions – whether that is in the field or on a policy level” (CYP 2006).
- d. Often, youth workers are perceived as those whose role it is to keep young people out of the way, provide recreation and fun for them and generally keep young people off the streets. There is little understanding and even less appreciation that Youth work is a distinctive field of practice and a highly demanding professional skill which carries with it considerable responsibilities and pressures” (CYP 2006).

5. Youth Work

Given the diverse range of work, training and expertise in the youth work field, it is difficult to arrive at a simple definition of youth work. However, there are a number of factors that make youth work unique (Sercombe 1997, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria 2004):

- a. Youth workers must have specialist knowledge of the developmental characteristics of young people.
- b. Youth work considers youth in the context of broader issues and is not narrowly problem focused.
- c. Youth work considers the development of the whole person.
- d. Youth workers have a range of knowledge of generic and specialist community services such as law, health, schooling, etc.

6. Youth Work Values

- a. Professions are founded on the basis of values. These values are broader than the codes of practice or rules of association that regulate membership, and are values that transcend the ever-changing context of day-to-day professional practice (Corney 2003; Fook, Ryan & Hawkins 2000).
- b. The Australian National Youth Work Training Project (Broadbent 1997) found that values were considered critical and fundamental to underpinning good youth work practice and are an area of training that youth workers said they needed in order to be able to work effectively.

- c. This includes “understanding what values are, one’s own values, young people’s values, community values, agency values, the values of other organisations and the impact of values on determining the approach to working with young people” (Broadbent 1997:6).
- d. There are values that are quite specific to, and underpin, youth work practice (Sercombe 1997; Corney 2003 & 2004):
 - i. The young person is the “primary consideration” of the youth worker.
 - ii. Young people are seen in their social context.
 - iii. Youth work is holistic – it takes into account the whole person.

7. Relevant Legislation for Youth Work Practice in Singapore

- a. The Children and Young Persons Act is the key legislation that provides for the care, protection and rehabilitation of persons below 16 years old.
- b. The Women's Charter protects women and girls against moral danger and exploitation, and all persons from family violence.
- c. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - Singapore acceded to the UNCRC on 2nd October 1995 - is a comprehensive charter on the rights of children, setting minimum standards that governments should meet in providing healthcare, education, legal and social services in their countries.
- d. The UNCRC affirms four basic principles, namely: a child’s right to survival; a child’s right to development; a child’s right to be protected; and a child’s right to participate actively in his/her community.

A Code of Ethical Practice: Guiding Principles

1. Primary Consideration

- a. The 'primary consideration' and constituency of the youth worker is the young people with whom they engage.
- b. Where conflicts exist between obligations to one young person and another, it is resolved in ways that avoid harm and continue to support the person least advantaged by the resolution.

2. Social Environment

- a. Youth workers recognise the impact of social and structural forces on young people.
- b. Their work is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the social context in which the young person lives.
- c. Youth workers will particularly recognise that racism and cultural abuse are factors in the lives of young people and will seek to promote an environment that values their culture.

3. Equity

- a. Youth workers' practice will be non-discriminatory.
- b. Youth workers work to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access to economic, social, and cultural resources.
- c. Youth workers promote just and fair behaviour, and challenge discriminatory actions and attitudes on the part of young people, colleagues and others.
- d. Youth workers draw attention to unjust policies and practices and actively seek to change them.
- e. Youth workers will understand that to deal with young people with equity means that their practice should be culturally appropriate and culturally competent.

4. Empowerment

- a. The youth worker seeks to enhance the power of the young person by making power relations open and clear; by holding power-holders accountable; by facilitating their disengagement from the youth work relationship; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate claims.
- b. Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.
- c. Youth workers will understand that respect for self-determination is critical to their dealings with young people.

5. Duty of Care

- a. The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of harm or injury and strives always to uphold the motto of 'do no harm' in their practice.
- b. Youth workers will take responsibility for assessing risk and managing the

safety of work and activities involving young people while being aware of the need to strike a balance between avoiding unnecessary risk and permitting and encouraging young people to partake in challenging activities.

- c. Youth workers understand that cultural abuse and racism are factors that harm young people.

6. Corruption

- a. Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves or other stakeholders at the expense of young people.
- b. Youth workers are to keep themselves honest in terms of their motivations and rewards, which may be about money but may also involve other things such as power, profile, emotional security, personal identity, etc.

7. Transparency

- a. The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful.
- b. The youth worker will be open and honest with young people, enabling them to access information to make choices and decisions in their lives generally and in relation to participation in youth work activities.
- c. Youth workers will recognise that accountability to different groups may conflict and take responsibility for seeking appropriate advice and making decisions in cases of conflict.

8. Confidentiality

- a. Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them.
- b. Young people should be made aware of the contextual limits to confidentiality, and their permission sought for disclosure. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality must apply.

9. Cooperation/Collaboration

- a. Youth workers will seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.
- b. Youth workers will actively seek opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies, and will encourage young people and others to work together collectively on issues of common concern.
- c. Youth workers will particularly be conscious of the need to work with a range of services in order to secure positive outcomes for young people.

10. Knowledge & Skills

- a. Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up-to-date with the information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.
- b. Youth workers also have a responsibility to undertake appropriate cross-cultural training with young people.

11. Self-Awareness

- a. Youth Workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with respect.
- b. Youth workers will make themselves aware of issues of cultural diversity and seek to be culturally competent in their engagement with young people from different cultural backgrounds.

12. Boundaries

- a. The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person.
- b. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits, recognising the tensions between developing supportive and caring relationships with young people and the need to preserve the boundaries of the professional relationship.
- c. Youth workers will recognise that the relationship between themselves and a young person is a contracted relationship and therefore recognise the need to be non-sexual and limited.
- d. Youth workers will also take care that behaviour outside work does not undermine the confidence, of young people and the public, in youth work.

13. Self Care

- a. Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers.
- b. Youth workers need to prioritise the practice of self-care; of looking after the self as a means to assure longevity of career and continued high quality service provision to young people.

14. Integrity

- a. Youth workers are loyal to the practice of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute.
- b. Youth workers will respect the strengths and diversity of roles other than youth work.

15. Ethical Awareness

- a. Youth workers recognise the importance of continuing reflection and debate and view this statement of ethical principles as a working document that should be constantly under discussion.
- b. Youth workers should also ensure colleagues, employers and young people are aware of the code of ethical practice and be prepared to challenge colleagues or employing agencies whose actions or policies are contrary to the principles in this statement.

16. Anti-Oppressive Practice

- a. Youth workers will work in ways that are non-discriminatory and ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted in all of our agencies, projects and events.
- b. Youth workers will have an understanding of oppression, the ability to recognise oppression and how it operates in the lives of young people.
- c. Youth workers will contribute to enabling and encouraging young people to understand, value, respect and celebrate their own and others' cultural backgrounds and choices.

17. Social Justice

- a. Social justice is a primary motivating value for youth workers.
- b. Youth workers will initiate structural social change and work with the symptoms and causes of social conflict.
- c. Youth workers will take a holistic approach to the social, political and economic wellbeing of young people.

18. Participation

- a. Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship and as members of our society; young people have a right to participate in decision-making.
- b. Youth workers will work towards the active engagement of young people in all areas of society, and will facilitate processes where young people can participate and have a voice.
- c. Youth workers will ensure that the process of engaging young people in agencies, projects and events is not tokenistic.

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