

Standards and Values

*for Public Child Welfare Practice
in California*



Adopted in 2005 by the Board of Directors of the
California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC)
in partnership with the County Welfare Directors Association
and the California Department of Social Services.*

** Partially adopted from publications of the NASW, CWLA, and the Child Welfare Training Project, and California State University, Fresno. The present version is a revision of the Standards and Values adopted in 1996.*

Introduction

Standards of practice are by their nature subject to change. In view of shifting societal standards, as well as advancing knowledge about children, human behavior, and human ills, standards must be subject to continuous reflection and review. Standards can be useful in a variety of ways:

- in clarifying guidelines for professional social work practice;
- in establishing whether a particular course of action is appropriate within a professional role;
- in encouraging social workers to monitor and evaluate their practices and to use outcome data to improve their own performance and child outcomes;
- in determining the focus, substance, appropriateness, and evaluation of training;
- in planning, organizing, and administering effective and culturally sensitive evidence-based practices and services;
- in providing for administrative, accreditation, and certification bodies a clear explication of what is expected of agency personnel;
- in explaining and justifying expenditures and budget requests;

- in establishing patterns of functional discourse regarding currently accepted best policies and practice and in finding effective ways to disseminate this knowledge within the human services community, to elected officials, and to the general public; *and*
- in making it possible to compare what may exist in practice with what is considered desirable for children.

The standards listed below are presented in detail in the sections that follow. In addition, Values for Public Child Welfare Workers, Supervisors, and Administrators are provided.

- Standards for All Public Child Welfare Administrators, Social Workers, and Other Professionals in Public Child Welfare Services
- Standards for Administrators in Public Child Welfare Services
- Standards for Supervisors in Public Child Welfare Services
- Standards for Social Workers in Public Child Welfare Services

Values for Public Child Welfare Workers, Supervisors, and Administrators

1. The goal of public child welfare is to work with families and communities to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to promote their health, safety, and nurturing so that they can grow into adulthood as healthy and positive individuals.
2. A wide range of parenting practices, varying as a result of ethnic, cultural, community, and familial differences, can provide adequate care for children.
3. A caring, protective, and effectively nurturing family with adequate resources is the best and least restrictive environment for raising children.
4. When there is danger to children, the state has the responsibility to intervene in family affairs to protect children. In such a circumstance, the safety of the child takes precedence over the rights of the parents.

5. Child welfare service should work collaboratively with the family to create a plan that emphasizes and builds on the family's and children's strengths and accesses formal and informal resources and supports on behalf of the family.
6. Families and children should participate to the greatest possible extent in planning and implementing their process for change. Children should participate in decisions regarding their care and needs.
7. Service decisions and service provision must be timely, effective, culturally sensitive and accessible, while focused on the achievement of specific outcomes for the child and family.
8. The family has the right to privacy and confidentiality and to be informed of the limits of confidentiality in public child welfare situations.
9. Every reasonable effort should be made to preserve and strengthen a child's existing family before an alternative placement is considered. The state requires an adequate, not an ideal, standard of care for children.
10. Every child has the right to a permanent home for his or her care and upbringing; appropriate legal permanency should be achieved as quickly as possible while insuring child safety.
11. Child welfare practitioners must be able to use the self skillfully, be aware of the potential impact of personal feelings upon professional decision-making, and manage those feelings appropriately.
12. Management practice must be responsive to the ways in which clients and employees are diverse in values, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, affectional preferences, age, and religion.
13. Public child welfare and the community share responsibility for providing needed services to children, and the public child welfare agency and its staff are accountable to the community when providing child welfare services.
14. Social work practice must take into account the impact of social and economic deprivation and personal problems on child abuse and neglect.

Standards for All Public Child Welfare Administrators, Social Workers, and Other Professionals in Public Child Welfare Services

Social workers and other professionals in public child welfare shall take into account and reflect in their practice the diversity of cultures and communities and work towards the elimination of service disparities affecting children and families of color within the child welfare and foster care systems. In addition, they shall:

1. Display knowledge and skill basic to the social work profession and an understanding of the social institutions, organizations, and resources serving children and families.
2. Possess and utilize specialized knowledge and understanding about children and families and about the dynamics of child abuse and neglect with the goal of insuring safety and permanence for children and youth.
3. Demonstrate skills currently deemed fundamental to the profession of social work and related disciplines.
4. Display specialized knowledge and understanding of the diversity of people within the state and region and reflect such understanding in all aspects of practice while working towards the elimination of service disparities affecting children and families of color.
5. Understand how to employ the principles of family-centered practice, including the therapeutic use of authority in child protection (or child welfare) and the worker and agency responsibility to carry out this authority.

6. Assume responsibility for learning in supervision and demonstrate a willingness to learn and implement new skills and evidence-based practices in a continually changing profession.
7. Meet the expectations of conduct established by the NASW Code of Ethics, other professional ethics codes determined by an individual's professional affiliation, and the county's code of ethics.
8. Adhere to agency policies, procedures, and evaluations, and use constructive channels to bring about positive change in service delivery.
9. Apply results of research and evaluation to practice and collect data in support of the agency's information system.
10. Actively seek to create and enhance knowledge and provision of increasingly effective and culturally appropriate services for children, families, and communities.
11. Demonstrate, throughout all child welfare tasks and activities, acceptance of the professional Values for Public Child Welfare Practice.
12. Uphold the authority to protect the child as vested in Public Law 96-272, the Indian Child Welfare Act, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (PL-105-89), the Multiethnic Placement Act, and other federal and state laws related to public child welfare.
13. Participate in multidisciplinary teams with staff in other programs, with professional colleagues in other disciplines, and with informal and formal institutions in the community.
14. Promote collaborative working relationships among community agencies and the courts toward establishing a comprehensive public system of child welfare and family support that works to alleviate the effects of poverty and promotes social justice.

Standards for Administrators in Public Child Welfare Services

15. Consistent with current practice principles required of public child welfare professionals, provide leadership, ongoing professional training, guidance, and support to staff.
16. In accordance with legal mandates, establish the policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary for effective practice in public child welfare.
17. To the extent possible, involve staff in planning efforts, including agency procedure, policy, and program development.
18. Administer the agency so that it provides required services; establish priorities for provision of such services and insure that they are provided appropriately and without detriment to children and families.
19. Recognize community desires and preferences in improving agency and community services to children and families.
20. Work collaboratively with agency and external stakeholders to continually assess and address the needs of families and children through innovative casework and planning strategies.
21. Advocate for sufficient child welfare funding, highly effective services, professional staff development, and a professional work environment.

- 22. Demonstrate a commitment to a comprehensive system of child protective services.
- 23. Conduct management practice that is responsive to diversity.
- 24. Maintain current knowledge regarding pertinent state and federal legislation and inform staff of legislative developments.

Standards for Supervisors in Public Child Welfare Services

- 25. Provide supervision and guidance to child welfare staff: be available to staff facing crises in the field while holding staff accountable for their work.
- 26. Assume multiple professional roles, including teacher, manager, administrator, and service provider, and take responsibility for the authority that accompanies these roles.
- 27. Provide leadership through developing resources, showing willingness to respond to changing practice demands, acting as a community liaison, advocating for clients, and recruiting, selecting, and training a professional workforce that is reflective of the client service community.
- 28. Develop an understanding of and appreciation for the perceptions and strengths of a culturally diverse professional workforce and provide effective leadership for a multicultural workforce interacting with a diverse client community.
- 29. Acknowledge the validity of other professional training that applies to public child welfare and develop the capacity to supervise, collaborate, and work effectively with a multidisciplinary workforce.

- 30. Promote teamwork through the use of peer supervision, consultation, interdisciplinary training, and group process.
- 31. Use outcome performance data effectively in management and work toward the development of resources to enhance staff practice and agency services.

Standards for Social Workers in Public Child Welfare Services

- 32. Respond to reports of child endangerment, taking into account diverse cultural practices, specific language needs, and the history of the given culture's experience in the dominant culture, including racism, economic oppression, political exclusion/inclusion, immigration, and other environmental factors.
- 33. Assess parents' willingness and ability to provide adequate care, supervision, and protection for the child.
- 34. Using principles of strengths-based practice, provide direct and intensive services to families in ways that are accessible, understandable, and culturally relevant to strengthen their capacity to care for their children.
- 35. Through the entire course of the intervention, engage family in recognizing and using its own strengths and resources.
- 36. Help create a family plan for legal permanency that includes principles of family preservation and community support in ensuring a safe environment for the child.
- 37. Engage in ongoing service planning with the community and support networks as appropriate to establish and maintain an appropriate level of connection within families.

38. Determine the priority of service needs and monitor their provision; understand how social work performance affects child outcomes.
 39. Continually assess the presence and level of risk to all children.
 40. Be prepared to initiate and follow through on court action on behalf of the child; develop skills for preparing court testimony and court reports to ensure the safety of the child.
 41. Ensure a child's participation in planning and direction for his or her life.
 42. Pursue appropriate legal permanency; initiate termination of parents' rights as necessary.
 43. In preparing for reconnection of families or out-of-home permanency, include foster parents and relative caretakers in the planning process.
 44. Use current best social work practices in termination of service.
 45. Manage in a professional manner personal feelings associated with providing child welfare services.
 46. Work toward promoting optimal development of the child and enhancing available resources within the agency and in the community, including resources for independent living/emancipation.
 47. Strive to prevent child endangerment by engaging resources in the community to support and strengthen families.
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