

Western Australian Youth Work Code of Ethics

Prologue

Youth workers exist in the space created by young people's exclusion from full membership of the common wealth, in the struggle by young people for survival and recognition on the one hand and the struggle by society for order and control on the other. The core of youth work practice lies in the relationship with the young person as the primary client, expressed through a commitment to advocacy and healing in their work with the young person and the wider society. The following principles are informed by this core position.

1. Primary client

The primary client of the youth worker is the young person with whom they engage. Where conflict exists 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. Ecology

Youth workers recognise the impact of ecological and structural forces on young people. 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.

3. Equity

Youth workers' practice will be non-discriminatory.

4. Empowerment

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. Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.

5. Duty of Care

The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of further harm or injury.

6. Corruption

Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves at the expense of young people.

7. Transparency

The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful. The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from them.

8. Confidentiality

Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them. 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

Youth workers will seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.

10. Knowledge

Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up to date with the information, resources, knowledges and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.

11. Self-awareness

Youth workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with humility.

12. Boundaries

The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits, especially with respect to sexuality. Youth workers will not sexualise their clients.

13. Self-care

Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers.

14. Integrity

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