

# Youth Peer Advocate Code of Ethics



## Preamble

The work of Youth Peer Advocates (YPA) is rooted in the values of Youth-Guided practice and Family-Driven Care, as well as the Principles of the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP) (See Appendices). The work of the YPA supports the belief that young people must have a meaningful voice and a primary decision making role in their care. Young people should also have a role in designing and evaluating services and developing the policies and procedures governing the care of all young people in their community, state, tribe, territory and nation. The concepts of empowerment, recovery, and resiliency are central to the work of YPAs. As peers, YPAs use their personal lived experience and training to inspire hope and empower young people to have voice and choice in their care and treatment. YPAs focus on strengths and needs, assist young people in setting priorities and goals, provide information, and help young people navigate multiple complex service systems. YPAs support young people to strengthen their connections to community resources and their natural supports. YPAs work in collaboration with clinicians and other service providers to enhance engagement and partnership in order to improve both the experience and outcomes for young people.

This code of ethics is intended to serve as a guide to the professional conduct of YPAs. It offers principles to guide conduct in situations that have ethical implications.

## Youth Peer Advocate Code of Ethics

The conduct of a YPA will be consistent with the following ethical standards:

- A. Commitment to youth and young adults
  - Primary responsibility is to promote the well-being and independence of the young people with whom the YPA works in keeping with all applicable laws.
  - Promote youth-guided, family-driven, cultural competence, trauma informed practices that focus on the strengths of the young person, view their families as a part of the solution, and support young people to be informed participants in all aspects of their care.
  - Engage in efforts to reduce stigma and blaming of young people, their <sup>†</sup>families and natural supports.
  - Seek to resolve any situations in which meeting the YPA responsibility to the young person comes into conflict with other obligations or requirements of the agency or Code of Ethics.
  - When a team or employer decision raises ethical concerns, attempt to resolve the disagreement through <sup>†</sup>appropriate channels. If the disagreement cannot be resolved, the YPA should pursue other avenues to address their concerns with the goal of promoting the well-being of youth and families.
- B. Empowerment and Self-Determination
  - Promote and support approaches that foster hope, independence, empowerment, and self-determination, the development of self-advocacy skills, resiliency, and recovery.
  - Promote youth-guided practice whereby the young person is able to voice their needs, ideas and participate as an informed member of all processes/teams where decisions are being made about their treatment, services and other aspects of their care.
  - Remain thoughtful and respectful of families' decisions. Support young people to develop skills to communicate, collaborate, resolve and cope with conflicts within families.
  - Support the young person in shaping their service plan and setting their goals.
  - Promote approaches that provide youth and families with the support they need in the *\*least restrictive and least intrusive environment* possible. *\*See: Least restrictive/least intrusive in Appendix B CASSP Principles*
  - Provide current, accurate, transparent information to young people and their supports.

<sup>†</sup>see: Appendix C: definition of terms

C. Respect for Diversity

- Do not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate in any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, military and/or veteran status, socio-economic status, immigration status, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition, or state.
- Seek to understand and identify situations in which one's biases are interfering with the ability to work with a young person and their natural supports and seek guidance from a supervisor.
- Seek to understand and demonstrate insight, knowledge, and awareness of one's own power and privilege.
- Respect the rights, dignity, cultural identity and preferences of those with whom the YPA works.
- Advocate for and promote respect, cultural and linguistic competence at all times and in all relationships.
- Recognize cultural, individual, and role differences and demonstrate competence in providing services that are sensitive to the individual's cultures.
- Seek to understand, accept and appreciate one's own culture as the basis for relating to the cultures of others.
- Seek training and consultation to improve one's ability to work effectively with individuals from diverse groups.

D. Competence as a Youth Peer Advocate

- Provide services with the maximum skill, competence, knowledge, and advocacy.
- Provide services within the boundaries of YPA training and expertise.
- Embrace expertise of one's recovery/resiliency story.
- Have insight and awareness of one's well-being and actively practice these skills to ensure a high standard when working with young people. See: Self Care in definition of terms.
- Practice appropriate sharing of one's story to young people and their families that will contribute to their own hope, wellbeing and recovery/resiliency.
- Keep current with emerging knowledge related to peer services, youth-guided, family-driven care, community resources, empowerment strategies, and evidence-based/best practice treatment and support approaches.
- Seek out opportunities to enhance one's knowledge and skills through training, self-study, professional development and collaboration.
- Seek out opportunities to collaborate with other peer professionals.
- Always seek to incorporate effective practices and seek guidance and feedback from young people, colleagues, and supervisors to improve effectiveness.
- Engage in ongoing discussions with people you support, employers, and colleagues regarding the YPA role to achieve the maximum benefit to young people and their natural supports.

E. Ethical Integrity

- Act in accordance with the laws and statutes regarding all issues that affect the YPA's work.
- Assure that one's conduct does not compromise the fulfillment of responsibilities as a YPA.
- Promote and support honesty, integrity, and transparency. Do not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonestly, fraud, or deception.
- Distinguish clearly between statements made and actions taken as a private individual and a representative of the YPA workforce, employer, or credentialing organization.
- Do not exploit professional relationships for personal gain.
- Do not use undue influence or in any way exploit the trust of young people, their families or to whom one is providing services.
- Do not accept gifts of *significant value* from those with whom the YPA works and consult with the YPA's agency policy.
- Recognize situations that involve ethical dilemmas and consult with supervisors and colleagues to seek appropriate resolutions.

<sup>†</sup>see: Appendix C: definition of terms

- F. Informed Consent
  - Provide information about the YPA service to young people and their families in a manner that is thorough and understandable to them (reading level, native language, verbal explanations).
  - Advocate for youth and families to receive current, accurate, transparent information from other providers.
  - Support young people and families to ask questions and obtain more information to help them participate in the planning and service delivery process.
  
- G. Access to Records
  - Assist young people in obtaining access to records regarding their care as needed, advocating for their rights and addressing concerns.
  - Keep notes concerning work with the young person in a manner that is transparent and done in partnership with them.
  
- H. Confidentiality and Privacy
  - Respect the right to privacy and confidentiality of young people and their families in accordance with the law.
  - Disclose <sup>†</sup>*confidential* information only when necessary and only with valid consent (unless disclosure without consent is warranted to prevent serious, foreseeable, imminent harm and/or as required by law.) Explain to young people and their families the circumstances in which one is required to report or act in order to maintain safety to oneself or others.
  - Inform young people and their families with discretion whenever confidential information is disclosed (either with consent or due to a legal requirement).
  - Safeguard all records to assure they are not accessed by unauthorized individuals. This includes the use of electronic methods of storing and sharing information such as email, fax, etc.
  - Refrain from discussion of confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be assured.
  - Never discuss confidential information in public spaces.
  
- I. Conflicts of Interest
  - Be alert to and avoid <sup>†</sup>*conflicts of interest* and inform your supervisor, the young person and their families if the potential for such a conflict exists.
  - Resolve conflicts of interest in a manner that protects the young person and their families' interests.
  - Do not engage in <sup>†</sup>*dual relationships* with young people and their families if there is any risk of harm to the family. If these relationships are unavoidable, take steps to protect the young person and set clear boundaries.
  
- J. Personal Relationships
  - The YPA shall not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with any member of a family currently or formerly receiving services.
  - Do not provide services to young people or their family members with whom the advocate has had a prior sexual relationship.
  - Do not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with relatives or others with whom the young person or family members have close personal relationships when there is risk of potential exploitation or harm to the young person.
  - YPA should follow agency policies in regard to personal relationships.
  
- K. Commitment to Partnership
  - Work to enhance one's understanding of all 'systems' involved in the lives of young people and their families with complex needs including, but not limited to: education, youth welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, probation, family court, health, substance abuse treatment, and youth development.
  - Actively seek out opportunities to partner with clinicians and other professionals.

<sup>†</sup>see: Appendix C: definition of terms

- Keep informed about colleagues' areas of expertise and competencies. Seek assistance and support from those who have demonstrated knowledge, expertise, and competence related to the subject.
- Participate in and lead *interdisciplinary teams* that include young people and their families to promote holistic, cross-system solutions.
- Partner with a wide range of community organizations and resources to support young people to make connections to ongoing natural supports that reflect their culture, interests, preferences, etc.
- Work with young people to develop their constructive self-advocacy skills to support their interactions with a wide range of professionals.

L. Integrity

- Uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the YPA movement by working towards the highest standard of YPA practice.
- Participate in opportunities to advance the YPA movement through learning collaborative activities, mentoring colleagues, research, presentations in the community, publications, training, etc.
- Continue to develop leadership skills when appropriate and demonstrate those skills.
- Seek leadership roles and empower youth leadership and youth-guided practices at all levels whenever possible.
- Promote and facilitate evaluation and research to contribute to the development of knowledge and improved practice of youth peer support and advocacy.
- Act with integrity in relationships with young people, colleagues, families, community members, other providers, organizations, referral sources, and other professionals in a way that promotes respect for the YPA workforce and improved outcomes for young people and their families.

M. Responsibilities when Credentialed

- As an applicant or credentialed individual, I will:
  - Maintain current on any applicable fees
  - Comply with the Code of Ethics and requirements set by the Youth Peer Services Advisory Council
  - Only use the designation of Youth Peer Advocate, or represent myself as having a credential when I am in full compliance with the credentialing requirements
  - Cooperate with any ethics investigation by any credentialing organization or government agency, and truthfully represent and disclose facts to such.

*By signing this Code of Ethics, I affirm that I have read through and understand all of the information provided in this document including Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C. By signing below, I also understand that I will be held responsible and accountable to the above mentioned principles, rules and procedures. If a complaint is made, or it is alleged that I have broken any of these principles, rules or procedures, I agree to have these actions or inactions reviewed and assessed in accordance with the complaint guidelines of the Code of Ethics Disciplinary Policies and Procedures. If it is found that I have violated any of these principles, rules and/or procedures, then I understand that measures will be taken against me by the Youth Peer Services Advisory Council, up to and including the revocation of my Youth Peer Advocate and Training Credential.*

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Advocate Name (Printed)

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Advocate Signature

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Date

<sup>†</sup>see: Appendix C: definition of terms

## CASSP Principles

CASSP (Child and Adolescent Service System Program) is based on a well-defined set of principles for mental health services for children and adolescents with or at risk of developing severe emotional disorders and their families. These principles are summarized in six core statements.

### **Child (Youth)-centered**

Services are planned to meet the individual needs of the young person, rather than to fit the young person into an existing service. Services consider the young person's family and community contexts, are developmentally appropriate and youth-specific and build on the strengths of the young person and their families to meet the mental health, social and physical needs of the young person.

### **Family-focused**

The family is the primary support system for the young person and it is important to help empower the family to advocate for themselves. The family participates as a full partner in all stages of the decision-making and treatment planning process including implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A family may include biological, adoptive and foster parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, and other adults who are committed to the young person. The development of mental health policy at state and local levels includes family representation.

### **Community-based**

Whenever possible, services are delivered in the young person's home community, drawing on formal and informal resources to promote the young person's successful participation in the community. Community resources include not only mental health professionals and provider agencies, but also social, religious, cultural organizations and other natural community support networks.

### **Multi-system**

Services are planned in collaboration with all the child/youth-serving systems involved in the young person's life. Representatives from all these systems and the family collaborate to define the goals for the young person, develop a service plan, develop the necessary resources to implement the plan, provide appropriate support to the young person and their family, and evaluate progress.

### **Culturally competent**

Culture determines our worldview and provides a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality that are reflected in our behavior. Therefore, services that are culturally competent are provided by individuals who have the skills to recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices characteristic of a particular group of people.

### **Least restrictive/least intrusive**

Services take place in settings that are the most appropriate and natural for youth and families and are the least restrictive and intrusive available to meet the needs of youth and families.

## **Youth-Guided Practice and Family-Driven Care Principles**

Youth-guided and Family-driven means young people and their families have a primary decision making role in the care of their own lives as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all youth in their community, state, tribe, territory and nation.

This includes:

- Choosing culturally and linguistically competent supports, services, and providers;
- Setting goals;
- Designing, implementing and evaluating programs;
- Monitoring outcomes; and
- Partnering in funding decisions.

### **Guiding Principles of Youth-Guided Practice and Family-Driven Care**

1. Youth and families, providers and administrators embrace the concept of sharing decision-making and responsibility for outcomes.
2. Youth and families are given accurate, understandable, and complete information necessary to set goals and to make informed decisions and choices about the right services and supports for individual youth and their families.
3. All children, youth, and families have a biological, adoptive, foster, or surrogate family voice advocating on their behalf and may appoint them as substitute decision makers at any time.
4. Youth and families and youth and family-run organizations engage in peer support activities to reduce isolation, gather and disseminate accurate information, and strengthen youth and family voice.
5. Youth and families and youth and family-run organizations provide direction for decisions that impact funding for services, treatments, and supports and advocate for youth and families to have choices.
6. Providers take the initiative to change policy and practice from provider-driven to youth-guided and family-driven.
7. Administrators allocate staff, training, support and resources to make youth-guided and family-driven practices work at the point where services and supports are delivered to children, youth, and families and where youth and family run organizations are funded and sustained.
8. Community attitude change efforts focus on removing barriers and discrimination created by stigma.
9. Communities and private agencies embrace, value, and celebrate the diverse cultures of their children, youth, and families and work to eliminate mental health disparities.
10. Everyone who connects with children, youth, and families continually advances their own cultural and linguistic responsiveness as the population served changes so that the needs of the diverse populations are appropriately addressed.

## Definition of Terms

### **Appropriate Channels**

This is speaking to respecting the chain of command and recognizing those channels. When trying to resolve an issue that raises ethical concerns by a team or employer's decision, the YPA should raise this concern with the team or employer before raising this concern to other complaint or governing committees.

### **Self-Care**

YPAs should have knowledge of oneself, including one's stressors and stress reactions, one's coping skills, and one's personal support network. YPAs have access to more information and resources on self-care in Level 1: Module 4 of the YPA online Credentialing.

### **Significant Value**

The Youth Peer Services Advisory Council has placed a cap of no more than \$15.00 value on gifts that YPAs can accept. If the agency with which the YPA works does not allow gifts to be accepted, the YPA should adhere to the agency's policy. If the agency allows gifts to be accepted over the \$15.00 cap the YPA must adhere to the YPA Code of Ethics. In summary, the YPA must adhere to the lesser value.

### **Confidentiality**

YPAs must legally protect a young person and their families' privacy, by not revealing any information about the young person and their family without their written consent. YPAs have access to more information on confidentiality in Level 1: Module 4 of the YPA online Credentialing. If a YPA has further questions on confidentiality they should seek guidance from their supervisor.

### **Conflicts of interest**

Any situation that puts a YPA in an opposing role that can make it difficult to fulfill one's responsibilities. This can include; dual relationships, working with someone who is in the YPAs family, a family friend, or if the YPA is or was in any relationship with the young person or their family member.

### **Dual relationships**

When one is in a dual relationship, this means that they have more than one relationship with a family. This can include working with a young person whose family also attends the same church or utilizes the same resources or supports such as self-help/support groups. In these circumstances a YPA should seek further guidance from their supervisor.

### **Interdisciplinary teams**

A coordinated group of experts from several different fields and backgrounds who come together to work towards a common goal. Interdisciplinary teams should also include youth and family voice.