

Code of Conduct and Ethics

I. Preamble

The ethical principles of an organization derive from both its core values and the core values of its individual members. The purpose of the ethical principles of an organization is to clarify the values that are instrumental in making decisions and to promote consideration of both direct and indirect effects of choices and organizational procedures.

The Core values of Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, Inc (“Agency”) guide Agency Board Members, Employees and Volunteers in appropriate behaviors and activities toward the fulfillment of our Mission. Our values describe the Agency’s most cherished beliefs and principles, relative to our internal culture and the wider environment in which we serve.

Ethical conduct, however, is not simply living “within the letter of the law.” Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska, Inc., desires to be an organization where all employees participate in on-going discussion of ethical issues. We seek not just to “Do no harm” but also to actively inquire, “What is right?” We desire to respond to ethical concerns not only reactively but also proactively. We intend for ethical concerns to truly become a part of all we do.

A high standard of ethical professional conduct is the responsibility of each Board Member, Employee and Volunteer. The good name of the Agency depends on the way it conducts its service and the way the public perceives that conduct. Unethical actions, or the appearance of unethical actions, are not acceptable. Board Members, Employees and Volunteers are expected to apply the following principals of behavior in carrying out their professional duties within the Code of Conduct and Ethics:

- *Loyalty.* No Board Member, Employee or Volunteers should be, or appear to be, subject to influences, interests or relationships that conflict with the best interests of the Agency.
- *Compliance with Applicable Laws.* The Agency, Board Members, Employees and Volunteers are expected to comply with laws, rules and regulations applicable to their professional activities.
- *Observance of Ethical Standards.* In the conduct of service, Board Members, Employees and Volunteers must adhere to high ethical standards. These include honesty (i.e., truthful in dealing with everyone, including clients, Board Members, and fellow staff members) and fairness (i.e., treating another in the same manner as one would expect to be treated).

This Code of Conduct and Ethics applies to all Members of the Board, Employees and Volunteers of the “Agency”. The Code of Conduct and Ethics is neither exhaustive nor complete. The “Code of Ethics” of each individual employee’s profession also binds every staff member.

II. The Code

I. OUR LUTHERAN CHRISTIAN HERITAGE: We believe our faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit motivate us to serve others as Christ has served us.

- a. The Agency staff should serve clients with devotion, loyalty, determination and the maximum application of professional skill and competence.
- b. The Agency will contribute to solving community problems, promote justice, and assist community institutions in becoming more responsive to human need.
- c. The Agency will serve clients in reverence to their intrinsic value, worth and dignity and uphold all of God’s creation at every stage of development.
- d. The Agency accepts our responsibility to uphold the social statements and policies of both the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

II. ALL PEOPLE: We believe all people are created by God in God’s image and we will treat every person with dignity, compassion and respect.

- a. The Agency staff should not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical handicap, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or status.

III. STAFF: We believe employees are our Agency’s greatest asset and that the contribution of each individual is fundamental to the Agency’s total success.

- a. The Agency staff should distinguish clearly between statements and actions made as a private individual or as a representative of the Agency or their individual profession.

- b. The private conduct of the Agency staff is a personal matter to the same degree as is any other person's except when such conduct compromises the fulfillment of Agency professional responsibilities.
- c. The Agency staff should not participate in, condone or be associated with dishonest, fraudulent, deceitful or misrepresentative acts.
- d. The Agency staff should accept responsibility or employment only on the basis of existing competence or the intention to acquire the necessary competence.
- e. The Agency staff should not sexually harass supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- f. The Agency is committed to complying with all applicable laws regarding collection, protection, and dissemination of personal identification information collected from staff.
- g. The Agency staff should not exploit a dispute between a colleague and the Agency to obtain a position or otherwise advance the staff person's interest.

IV. QUALITY: We believe the pursuit of excellence and the provision of high quality service reflect our love and unconditional positive regard for all people.

- a. The Agency staff should terminate service to clients and professional relationships with them when such service and relationships are no longer required or no longer serve the clients' needs or interests. Direct service staff will not maintain clients on their caseloads beyond the time that it is reasonable to believe services will benefit the client. Direct service staff should not terminate services to pursue a social, financial or sexual relationship with a client.

V. INTEGRITY: We believe our Christian agency must act ethically, morally, and honestly to build trust and maintain credibility.

- a. The Agency staff should under no circumstances engage in sexual activities with clients. It is the responsibility of the staff for setting clear, appropriate and sensitive boundaries.

- b. The Agency staff should not sexually harass clients. *Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.*
- c. The Agency staff should use with scrupulous regard, and only for purposes for which they are intended, the resources of the Agency.
- d. The Agency staff should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge and mission of their individually chosen professions.

VI. TEAMWORK: We believe working cooperatively toward identified goals builds unity of purpose and enables us to do more than we could do individually.

- a. Agency staff will identify program goals and work cooperatively towards achieving common goals.
- b. The Agency staff, when working together, will work collaboratively with each other, respect each other and together work towards a common purpose.

VII. COMMUNICATION: We believe that direct, honest communication, both internal and external, is vital to the health and well being of our Agency and the people we serve.

- a. The Agency staff will fully disclose all associated fees for services prior to services being rendered.
- b. The Agency staff should provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent and nature of the services available to them.
- c. The Agency staff who supervises interns/practicum students should take reasonable steps to ensure that clients are routinely informed when students will be involved in the provision of services.
- d. The Agency staff should not use derogatory language in their written or verbal communications to or about clients.
- e. The Agency staff should use accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about clients.
- f. The Agency staff should inform clients fully about the limits of confidentiality in a given situation, the purposes for which information is obtained, and how it may be used.

- g. The Agency staff should afford clients reasonable access to any official case records concerning them.
- h. When providing clients with access to records, the Agency direct service staff should take due care to protect the confidences of others contained in those records.
- i. The Agency staff is responsible for guarding against unauthorized use or disclosure of Agency data and professional information.
- j. The Agency staff should obtain informed consent from clients before taping, recording, or permitting third party observation of their activities.

VIII. FAMILY: We believe that family is the primary system where physical, spiritual and emotional well-being are developed and nurtured.

- a. The Agency staff will respect the definition of family however the client defines it for themselves and their situation.
- b. Agency staff will follow all legal protocol regarding notification of family prior to finalizing adoption proceedings.
- c. Agency staff will conduct family assessments thoroughly to promote the best possible placement of a child in a home.
- d. The Agency staff that have responsibility to assign work duties will do so in a way that promotes a culture that respects the importance of balancing work and family.

IX. COMMUNITY: We believe that it is in our faith communities, our professional communities and our neighborhoods where people are supported, encouraged and sustained.

- a. The Agency staff should not exploit relationships with clients for personal advantage, or solicit the clients of the Agency for private practice.
- b. The Agency staff should extend to colleagues of other professions the same respect and cooperation that is extended to their own professional colleagues.

X. DIVERSITY: We believe our Agency must celebrate, reflect and respond to the diversity of those who serve and are served.

- a. The Agency staff should act to prevent and eliminate discrimination in Agency work assignments and its employment policies.

XI. EDUCATION: We believe empowering people with knowledge improves the outcomes of our service, advances quality, and increases innovation and openness to new ideas.

- a. The Agency staff should not misrepresent professional qualifications, education, experience, or affiliations.
- b. The Agency staff should seek advice and counsel of colleagues and supervisors whenever such consultation is in the best interest of clients and staff. Staff will disclose the least amount of information necessary to achieve the purpose of consultation.
- c. The Agency staff that have the responsibility for employing and evaluating the performance of other staff members should fulfill such responsibility in a fair, considerate, and equitable manner, on the basis of clearly enunciated criteria.
- d. The Agency staff should take individual responsibility for identifying, developing, and fully utilizing knowledge for their professional practice.

XII. ACCOUNTABILITY: We believe good stewardship demands that all individual and Agency actions represent honest, measurable outcomes and data.

- a. The Agency staff should avoid accepting goods or services from clients as payment for professional services. Bartering arrangements, particularly involving services, create the potential for conflicts of interest, exploitation, and inappropriate boundaries in relationships with clients.
- b. The Agency staff should prepare and maintain accurate and reliable client records in order to fulfill the Agency's financial, legal, and reporting obligations. Such data must not be falsified or altered to conceal or distort assets, liabilities, revenue, expenses or productivity. Staff members are responsible for safeguarding the Agency and for providing auditable records.
- c. Only for compelling reasons and with supervisory consultation, should direct service staff of the Agency share confidences revealed by clients, without their consent, with others.

XIII. COLLABORATION: We believe the strengths of our Agency can be maximized and end results enhanced through partnerships in which the identity, integrity and mission of our Agency are maintained.

- a. The Agency staff should cooperate with colleagues to promote professional interests and concerns.
- b. The Agency staff should respect confidences shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships and transactions.
- c. The Agency staff will work collaboratively with other social service agencies and will not engage in unfair competitive practices.
- d. The Agency shall work in collaboration with congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and other Church bodies to address the needs of individuals, families and communities.

XIV. CHANGE: We believe flexibility, creativity, and optimism increase our Agency's capacity to respond to evolving needs and opportunities to serve.

- a. The Agency staff should work to improve the Agency policies and procedures and the efficiency and effectiveness of its services.
- b. The Agency must be responsive to changes in our society, its structures, and human needs therefore, the Agency will evaluate, on a continuing basis, all programs and services and maintain a plan for identification of new areas of need.
- c. Agency growth must be integrated so it can be maintained at Agency Quality standards and not threaten the Agency's existence.
- d. Agency expansion into new service areas must be based on demonstrated community need, the availability of adequate resources, and the appropriateness of that service to our mission.