

# **Code of Ethics of the Illinois Society for Clinical Social Work**

## **Preamble**

**The principal objective of the profession of clinical social work is to offer a particular contribution to humanity with full respect for enhancing the inherent worth and integrity and dignity and well-being of each individual, the right to self determination and a firm belief in equal opportunity for all. Ethical principles affecting the practice of clinical social work are rooted in the basic values of the social work profession.**

**The following represents codified ethical principles which serve as a standard for clinical social workers in the various roles, relationships, and responsibilities in which they function professionally. These principles serve as a basis for the evaluation of ethical conduct by the individual clinical social worker. The clinical social worker is expected to take into consideration all the principles in this code that have a bearing upon any situation in which ethical judgment is to be exercised, and to select a course of action consistent with the spirit as well as the letter of the code.**

**It is recognized that the practice of clinical social work is complex and varied and does not lend itself to limitation by a set of rules which will particularize all of its functions. The primary goal of this code is not to restrict the practice of clinical social workers, but to offer general principles to guide their conduct and to inspire their will to act according to ethical principles in all of their professional functions.**

## **I. Moral and Legal Standards**

**The moral and legal standards of the behavior of clinical social workers are a personal matter to the same degree as for any other citizen except insofar as this behavior may compromise the fulfillment of their professional responsibilities or reduce public trust in the profession.**

**Clinical social workers do not, in any of their capacities, practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, or national origin.**

## **II. Responsibilities of Clinical Social Workers**

**The ideals of the profession of clinical social work imply that the responsibilities of clinical social workers extend primarily to individuals. The maintenance of the highest standards of professional competence is the responsibility of every clinical social worker in all of his or her professional roles. Clinical social workers value objectivity and integrity and constantly examine, use, and attempt to increase the knowledge upon which practice is based.**

- a) As practitioners, clinical social workers know that they bear a heavy responsibility, because their recommendations and professional actions may alter the lives of others. When the interest of the individual client conflicts with the welfare of the community at large, the clinical social worker must weigh the consequences of any action and arrive at a judgment based on all considerations.**
- b) As employees of institutions or agencies, clinical social workers are responsible to remain alert to and attempt to moderate institutional pressures and/or policies that conflict**

with the standards of their profession. As institutional employees, clinical social workers remain accountable as individuals to the ethical standards of their profession.

- c) Clinical social workers shall recognize the need for continuing professional education to maintain and enhance their competence. They shall avail themselves of educational opportunities, and if indicated, seek consultation from colleagues or other appropriate professionals.
- d) As teachers, clinical social workers shall be responsible for careful preparation so that their instruction maintains high standards of scholarship and objectivity.
- e) Clinical social workers shall recognize that their usefulness depends, in part, upon their ability to maintain effective interpersonal relationships. They shall refrain from undertaking any professional activity in which their personal difficulties might lead to the inadequate provision of service; and, if involved in such a situation, they shall seek competent professional assistance and determine whether they should suspend, terminate, or limit the scope of their professional involvement.

### **III. Responsibility to Clients**

The client is the primary responsibility of the clinical social worker. Clinical social workers shall make every effort to respect the integrity, protect the welfare, and maximize self-determination of the clients and groups with whom they work.

- a) The clinical social worker should inform clients of the extent and nature of services available to them, as well

as the limits, rights, opportunities, and obligations associated with service which might affect the client's decision to enter into or continue the relationship. When engaged in private practice, the clinical social worker should set fees that are fair, reasonable, and commensurate with the service performed.

- b) Professional relationships, and the continuation thereof, should be based on meeting the needs of the client. The clinical social worker who anticipates the termination or interruption of service to clients should give reasonable notification and provide for the transfer, referral, or continuation of service in relation to the client's needs and preferences. Clinical social workers should withdraw services only under unusual circumstances, giving careful consideration to all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse effects.
- c) The clinical social worker shall not exploit relationships with clients for undue personal advantage, profit or interest. Clinical social workers shall make every effort to avoid relationships which might impair professional judgment or otherwise increase the risk of client exploitation. The clinical social workers shall not engage in sexual activities with clients.
- d) When the clinical social worker must act on behalf of a client, the action shall always safeguard the interests and concerns of that client. When another person has been authorized to act on behalf of a client, the clinical social worker shall deal with that person with the client's best interests in mind.

- e) **The clinical social worker shall take care to insure an appropriate setting for practice to protect both the client and the social worker from actual or imputed mental and/or physical harm, and from breach of confidentiality. Where the clinical social worker judges that there is a threat to safety, reasonable steps must be taken to prevent the client from causing harm to self or others.**

#### **IV. Relationships with Colleagues**

**Clinical social workers shall act with integrity in their relationships with colleagues and members of other professions. They shall become familiar with and take into account the traditions, practices, and areas of competence of other professions and cooperate with them fully for the welfare of clients.**

- a) **The clinical social worker shall treat with respect and represent accurately the views, qualifications, and findings of colleagues and, when expressing judgment on these matters, do so fairly and through appropriate channels.**
- b) **Clinical social workers shall take appropriate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical behavior of colleagues. Clinical social workers should be equally ready to assist and defend colleagues unjustly charged with unethical conduct.**

#### **V. Pursuit of Research and Scholarly Activities**

**In planning a study, the investigator has the responsibility to make a careful evaluation of its ethical acceptability, taking into account the following additional principles for research with human subjects. To the extent that this appraisal, weighing scientific and**

**humane values, suggests a compromise of any principle, the investigator incurs an increasingly serious obligation seek advice and to observe stringent safeguards to protect the rights of the human research participants.**

- a) **Ethically acceptable research begins with the establishment of a clear and fair agreement between the investigator and the research participant that clarifies the responsibilities of each. The investigator has the obligation to honor all promises and commitments included in that agreement.**
- b) **Responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of acceptable ethical practice in research always remains with the investigator. The investigator is also responsible for the ethical treatment of research participants by collaborators, assistants, students, and employees, all of whom, likewise, incur parallel obligations.**
- c) **Ethical practice requires the investigator to inform the participant of all features of the research that might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate, and to explain all other aspects of the research about which the participant inquires. Failure to make full disclosure is a breach of ethics, as it does not protect the welfare and dignity of the research participant. After the data are collected, the investigator shall provide the participant with information about the nature of the study in order to remove any misconceptions that may have arisen.**
- d) **When the methodological requirements of a study necessitate concealment, deception or risk, the**

investigator is required to insure, as soon as possible, the participant's understanding of the reasons for this action and of a sufficient justification for the procedures employed.

- e) Ethical practice requires the investigator to respect the individual's freedom to decline to participate in or withdraw from research. The obligation to protect this freedom requires special vigilance when the investigator is in a position of power over the participant, as, for example, when the participant is a student, client, employee, or otherwise is in a dual relationship with the investigator.
- f) The ethical investigator shall protect participants from physical and mental discomfort, harm, and danger. If a risk of such consequences exists, the investigator is required to inform the participant of that fact, secure consent before proceeding, and take all possible measures to minimize distress. A research procedure must not be used if it is likely to cause serious or lasting harm to a participant.
- g) Information obtained about the individual research participants during the course of an investigation is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. When the possibility that others may obtain access to such information exists, to protect the confidentiality, the participants will be informed that it is part of the procedure to obtain informed consent.
- h) Clinical social workers shall take credit only for work actually done in scholarly and research endeavors and give appropriate credit to the contributions of others.

## **VI. Confidentiality**

The safeguarding of the client's right to privacy is a basic responsibility of the clinical social worker. Clinical social workers have a basic obligation to maintain the confidentiality of material that has been transmitted to them in any of their professional roles.

- a) Confidential information revealed to a clinical social worker shall be shared only when there is a clear necessity, such as legal requirements, or a clear and imminent danger to an individual or to society. Whenever possible, clients will be informed in advance as to any limitations of confidentiality and their informed and written consent will be obtained before confidential information about them is revealed.
- b) Presentations for the purpose of professional education and consultation will conceal the identity of the client and will take care to disguise circumstances and information to insure that the client cannot be identified, and will be shared only with other responsible professionals.

## **VII. Public Statements**

Public statements, announcements of services, and promotional activities of clinical social workers shall serve the purpose of providing sufficient information to aid consumers in making informed judgments and choices. Clinical social workers shall represent accurately and objectively their professional qualifications, affiliations and functions, as well as those of the institutions or organizations with which they or their statements may be associated.

- a) Clinical social workers shall respect the rights and reputation of any professional organization with which they are affiliated. When making public statements, the clinical social worker will

**make clear which are personal opinions and which are authorized statements on behalf of the organization.**

- b) Clinical social workers shall adhere to professional rather than commercial standards in making known their availability for professional services. They shall not offer to perform any services beyond the scope permitted by law. They shall not engage in any form of advertising which is false, fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading.**

*\*Note: This Code of Ethics is adapted, in part, with several revisions, from the New York Society for Clinical Social Work.*