



Australian Children's Contact Service Association

"Advancing the CCS Sector"

Australian Children's Contact Services Association

CODE OF ETHICS

November 2009

The Australian Children's Contact Services Association
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1. PREAMBLE

Children's Contact Services (CCSs) provide a child focused, safe, non-threatening, neutral environment for supervised visits and changeovers between children, parents and others who are significant in the child's life where there is a concern for the safety of the child and /or the adults or there are relevant issues present (such as unresolved, post-separation parenting arrangements).

The Australian Children's Contact Service (ACCSA) is a voluntary association of CCSs that have the following purposes embedded in its Rules of Association:

- (i) To provide a forum to promote debate and a sound analysis of the role and the limitations of Children's Contact Services.
- (ii) To establish a network for those involved in establishing or operating Children's Contact Services.
- (iii) To disseminate and act as a clearinghouse for information in relation to Children's Contact Services.
- (iv) To encourage government and non-government funding for the establishment of, research into, training and evaluation of Children's Contact Services.
- (v) To develop and promote the use of standards and protocols for the use and operation of Children's Contact Services, and to provide monitoring and support for compliance with these standards.
- (vi) To advise on funding criteria for the establishment of Children's Contact Services.
- (vii) To provide a forum where collective action for the promotion of Children's Contact Services can be facilitated.
- (viii) To participate in the formulation of competency standards, skills and qualifications for persons operating Children's Contact Services, and to participate in the formulation of procedures for the acquisition and development of such skills.
- (ix) To provide assistance, support and guidance to individuals, families and children affected by parenting arrangement issues, family violence and conflict. To alleviate feelings of helplessness, distress, suffering and misfortune as a result of family violence and family conflict.
- (x) To develop research that will assist in responding to the projected needs of people and their families affected by parenting arrangement issues, family violence and conflict and to identify areas of development in respect to service delivery in areas such as children's contact, changeover and supervised contact services, parenting skills and play groups relating to the special needs of affected people and their families.

- (xi) To provide backup, support and education to other agencies and organisations in order to assist in appropriate service delivery in areas related to parenting arrangement issues, family violence and conflict for affected people and their families.
- (xii) To develop research documents that will assist in defining the causes of family violence and the needs of children affected by family violence.
- (xiii) To print and publish any newspapers, information, periodicals, books or leaflets that the Association may think desirable for the promotion of its objects.
- (xiv) To act as advocate on behalf of people affected by family violence and conflict and to ensure their rights are promoted.

2. PURPOSE OF CODE

The ACCSA Code of Ethics articulates a set of ethical values and standards to guide the conduct of both full member CCS practitioners and associate members of ACCSA. Members of ACCSA agree to abide by the terms of this Code: This applies to all employees of CCS member services who engage in any facet of CCS service delivery and individual associate members of ACCSA.

3. ETHICAL VALUES

3.1 Respect

The ACCSA member demonstrates a respect for the rights, abilities and strengths of each individual they engage with.

An ACCSA member treats each person in a respectful manner and with particular deference to cultural identity and individual differences. There is a commitment to respecting the privacy of individuals, attending to serious matters and making appropriate reports to appropriate statutory bodies when the best interest of the individual is in question. The ACCSA member is mindful of the vulnerability of clients, understands the potential power and influence of their position and therefore ensures that they deliver services in a manner that most appropriately meets the needs, and is in the best interests of, the client.

An ACCSA member also treats colleagues with respect, and accurately and fairly represents the qualifications, views and role of colleagues to others. At no time should a colleague criticize or act to undermine the professional integrity of another. There is an expectation that CCS workers will cooperate with other CCS workers and CCS services, and appreciate

and respect diversity across the CCS Services. Likewise, with colleagues of other Family Relationship Service providers/associated services whenever such cooperation serves the well-being and best interests of clients.

Concern with the performance or behaviour of a colleague, service or organisation is to be addressed through appropriate channels rather than in communication with clients or other colleagues.

3.2 Professional Integrity

The ACCSA member behaves with integrity. This integrity is conveyed through honesty, reliability and consistency in service provision and engagement.

A member behaves honestly, responsibly and upholds ethical practices both in the workplace and on behalf of the broader organisation he/she is engaged with.

3.3 Quality of Service Provision

The ACCSA member demonstrates a best practice focus for service delivery and continuous improvement. This focus includes regular review of work performance, professional development of staff, and meeting the requirements articulated in the ACCSA Standards and the Code of Ethics and not extending their role beyond the defined limits.

A commitment is made to professional development, research and review of current international and local sector practice issues, supervision and evaluation of work performance. Also, by encouraging and responding promptly to client feedback, concerns and complaints.

3.4 Access and Equity to Service Provision

The ACCSA member will endeavor to identify and address barriers to accessing their CCS service to ensure equity of access for those most vulnerable members of the community.

In particular, ACCSA recognizes that people with disabilities, those from rural and remote locations and people from culturally diverse backgrounds may require additional support in accessing the service. CCS service provision is to be provided from an anti-discriminatory stance, within a framework of empowerment. CCS service provision is to be provided without discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, race, cultural background or religious belief. The ACCSA member will respond to the inherent strengths within every person.

3.5 Ethical Behaviour

The ACCSA member behaves in a manner that reflects the Rules, Standards and Ethics of the Association.

These conditions are clearly articulated in:

- a) *The ACCSA Rules of Association*
- b) *The ACCSA Standards*
- c) *The ACCSA Code of Ethics*

Each of these references can be located in the Member's Area of the ACCSA website.

4. ETHICAL STANDARDS

4.1 Interactions

At all times, ACCSA members agree to engage and behave in ways that are physically and psychologically safe, non-intimidating and non-threatening. This includes:

4.1.1 – Physical Contact

A member is responsible for setting clear boundaries that govern physical contact with all clients, staff under their supervision and other persons over whom they engage with in the workplace.

CCS workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern any such physical contact.

4.1.2 – Personal Relations

A member is responsible for setting clear boundaries where there are personal relationships involved. If a client is known to a worker outside of their role at the CCS, appropriate action is to be taken to ensure objectivity and professionalism at all times.

4.1.3 – Sexual Relations

An ACCSA member does not engage in a sexual relationship, sexual activities, or sexual contact with clients, staff under their supervision or other persons over whom they have authority.

Members recognise that dual or multiple relationships may increase the risk of harm to, or exploitation of clients, and may impair their professional judgment.

A member does not provide services to a client with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship.

4.1.4 – Sexual Harassment

A member does not sexually harass clients, students or those on placement under their supervision, employees or colleagues.

Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

4.2 Conflicts of Interest

ACCSA members are to avoid direct or indirect, actual or apparent, conflicts of interest and advise all appropriate parties of any potential conflict.

A member has an obligation to be alert to, avoid, inform and take reasonable steps to resolve potential conflicts of interest. In some cases, protecting a client's interests may require not providing, or terminating service, followed by appropriate referral of the client.

Members are to refrain from engaging in any activity that would prejudice their ability, or the ability of others to carry out duties ethically.

Members are to refuse any gift, favor, or hospitality that would influence or would appear to influence their actions and objectivity, or the actions of others involved with service delivery.

A member does not engage in dual or multiple relationships with a client or former client in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Dual or multiple

relationships occur when a member relates to a client in more than one relationship, whether professional, social or business.

4.3 Confidentiality

ACCSA members protect the confidentiality of clients and colleagues and inform clients of their rights to privacy and the limits of confidentiality when utilising CCS services.

A member does not discuss confidential information in public settings.

ACCSA members protect the privacy and confidentiality of clients and colleagues in the maintenance of records and the electronic transmission of information. Processes that safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of others when relaying electronic transmissions are to be established between the CCS and other services.

ACCSA members protect the privacy and confidentiality of clients and co-workers in any contact with the media.

A member is aware of safety and privacy issues about relaying information about one client to another.

ACCSA members who present personal information, obtained during the course of professional work, in writings, lectures, or other public forums either obtain adequate prior consent to do so or disguise all identifying information.

ACCSA members do not seek or accept information from clients unless is it essential to providing services or conducting evaluation/research.

4.4 Consent

ACCSA members are to take special care to protect the best interests of minors or other persons who are unable to give voluntary, informed consent.

Members are to use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the service, the limitations of service provision, all service costs, the client's right to refuse or withdraw consent and the time frame covered by the consent. A member informs the client of his/her right to ask questions and access information with regards to the Privacy Act (2000)

and Freedom of Information principles. A member responds to client questions within the context of the services provided.

It is the member's responsibility to take action so as to be satisfied that the client understands all elements of the service agreement and other conditions associated with the use of, and engagement with, the CCS.

ACCSA members take reasonable steps to ensure client's comprehension when the client is unable to understand, communicate, or use printed/written materials or when clients have difficulty understanding the primary language(s) used in the practice setting. This may include arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator whenever possible or providing the client with a verbal explanation he/she can understand.

ACCSA members obtain client's written consent before any form of recording clients or permitting third party observation of the client.

4.5 Competency

ACCSA members practice within the context and limitations of the service delivery model defined by their particular organisation. This includes a member only providing those services for which he/she is competent.

ACCSA members are responsible for ensuring that they remain informed of resources and services in the community that may be of value or benefit to their clients.

When compulsory accreditation standards do not exist with respect to CCS practice, members should exercise careful judgment and take responsible steps (including appropriate education, research, training, consultation and supervision) to maintain professional competency so as to protect clients from harm.

4.6 Termination of Service

ACCSA members ensure that a client is informed about the conditions and/or reasons for which services may be terminated. The decision to terminate a service should take into consideration the needs of the client, and the best interests of the child and the carer/parents. Where possible, this termination process is to be graduated and accompanied by an appropriate referral to a support service when this is in the client's best interest.

ACCSA members are to take reasonable steps to avoid withdrawing services to clients who are still in need of CCS services. Appropriate referrals are to be made in each instance where it is determined that there is no option other than termination of CCS service.

4.7 Ethical Conduct

An ACCSA member who is concerned whether he/she is facing an ethical dilemma should seek consultation with a duly qualified professional. Client privacy and confidentiality is to be maintained in the course of any such consultation.

A member, who becomes aware that they have transgressed the ACCSA Code of Ethics, will cease the associated behaviour and seek assistance where necessary.

ACCSA members are to take responsibility to discourage, prevent, expose and correct conduct of colleagues which transgresses this code.

ACCSA members should be knowledgeable about established policies and procedures for handling concerns about unethical behavior. Members should be familiar with national, state and organizational procedures for handling ethics complaints.

ACCSA members should defend and assist colleagues who are unjustly accused of engaging in unethical conduct.

4.8 Code Violation Procedure

ACCSA members who become aware of a violation of this Code of Ethics by another member must:

- A) Attempt to resolve the issue by bringing their concern to the attention of that member, and/or
- B) Notify the Board of ACCSA or any sub-committee created to respond to ethical violations, and/or
- C) Notify the Australian Government Department who has the designated responsibility for the funding and/or management of the CCS services program.
- D) An ACCSA member will maintain confidentiality when taking any of the above steps.

Acknowledgements

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The Supervised Visitation Network (SVN) “Code of Ethics”
and
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