

PERSONAL MASTERY

You have been reading about the practice model and the ideals that guide our practice. You may recall that a Code Of Ethics was among this list. Let's take a closer look at the profession's ethics. DCS workers are bound by the same ethical standards that the Code of Ethics of the *National Association of Social Workers* (NASW), lays out for all professional social workers. Individual DCS workers are not except from these ethical standards even if they are not social workers themselves. It is important, therefore, to have a thorough understanding of the ethical standards to which we are bound. Read the ethical standards in the box to the right.

Think about how these principles apply to your work at DCS. Make note of any points of interest or concern and bring these with you to class.

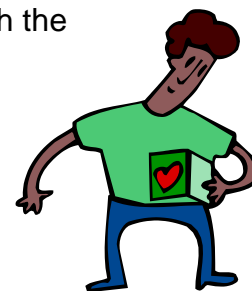
Assigned Readings:

1. Read the **NASW Code of Ethics** at: <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>. **Print** the article for you participant guide.
2. For a more focused discussion of selected issues from the Code of Ethics, briefly **review** the reading from the Overview Module in the **Child Welfare text, pages 132 – 134** (beginning at "Client Self-Determination" and ending at "Task-Centered, Solution-Focused Casework Practice."

Assigned Readings 1. CPS: A Guide for Caseworkers, pages 11-15. (Beginning at "Caseworker Competence") *The first part of this chapter is another look at the foundation for practice. You may skip this section, and*
2. Child Welfare text, pages 476-484 (Beginning at Professional Responsibility and ending at Self-Care)

Did you notice that one of the core ethical values for social workers is competence? It is vitally important that child welfare workers be competent in their work. When workers are not competent, they can easily do damage to children and families. For example, imagine a CPS worker who does not understand how to competently assess risk. There is a likelihood that this worker will either put children in danger by leaving them in an unsafe home, or destroy a family by removing a child unnecessarily. Let's explore the issue of competence a bit further with the next reading. Within this reading on

competence is a discussion on core values that a competent worker must have. Having an understanding of your position on these values is the first step to self awareness. Can you accept and commit to this set of values? If the answer to this question is no, you may need to consider another career path.



Self Awareness

You should also note from your assigned readings that there is a focus on the importance of self-awareness for those that work in social services. Self-awareness is a critical part of our ability to provide family-centered, strengths-based, culturally responsive practice. The skill of self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize our own thoughts, beliefs, emotions, personality traits, personal values, habits, biases, strengths, weaknesses, and the psychological needs that drive our behaviors. We must be able to recognize and understand how and why we react emotionally and behaviorally to our environment and how this impacts our way of relating with others. If we are unaware of our own values, beliefs, personal strengths and personal difficulties, we are much more likely to react to our clients from our own internal (and often unconscious) processing rather than from a professional standpoint.

*People of the world
don't look at
themselves so they
blame one another.
~ Rumi*

Engaging with family members is founded on the ability to cultivate positive relationships with people who may be very different from yourself. There may be

differences in age, race, personality, gender, socioeconomic status, health, sexual orientation, rank, power, and privilege, as well as beliefs and values. The experience of these differences can cause a worker to feel emotionally and cognitively uncomfortable. The ability to become aware of and consciously attend to these internal reactions will affect the quality of the relationship you are able to establish with the people you serve.

A compassionate cultivation of self-awareness is an essential skill, vital to the professional growth and development of being a competent child welfare worker. It requires dedication and commitment to an on-going practice of mindful, non-judgmental attention to what is happening inside of us as we interact with others.

(Adapted from University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, School of Social Welfare, Field Assignment Guide)

Assigned Reading: "Developing Self-Awareness" at:

<http://academics.css.edu/swk/PDFs/2006%20Spring%20Field%20Manual/Developing%20Self%20Awareness.pdf>

This article is taken from the Field Manual from the St. Scholastica Social Work Dept. **Reflect** on the terms "baggage" and "issues". What are they and why do we need to be aware of them? **Reflect** on your own "personal baggage". What has shaped you into the person you are? **Print** this document for your participant guide.

The “Three E’s” in Developing Self-Awareness

Enabling

Within the helping profession, enabling means that we keep someone from feeling the negative consequences of their own behavior choices. There is a fine line between helping and enabling, as described in the second reading for this section. Enabling describes behaviors that are intended to help, but actually perpetuate the problem. The term “enabling” is most often used in the addiction and recovery field in reference to family and friends of the addict who make excuses and allowances for the addict, and preventing them from feeling the pressure to change. However, enabling is an important concept in all helping relationships and can interfere with our ability to engage the family in the change process.

Assignment: Read the following articles on Enabling Behavior:

http://www.internet-of-the-mind.com/enabling_behavior.html

and

<http://www.mentalhealthminute.info/enabling.htm>

Print the second article and include it in your participant guide.

Enmeshment

Another important “E” is “enmeshment.” Enmeshment in the helping professions means that the professional boundaries of the helping relationship have been breached.

Reading Assignment: Read about violations of professional boundaries in *Child Welfare at:*

http://www.socialworker.com/home/Feature_Articles/Ethics/Client_Relationships_and_Ethical_Boundaries_for_Social_Workers_in_Child_Welfare/

As case workers, we have to be mindful of our relationship with the families we serve. We have to walk the fine line between being engaged enough to gain trust, but not so much that we enmesh ourselves with the family. There are clearly outlined boundaries that we to which we adhere. In some cases, especially in small counties, workers may have prior relationships with families involved in child welfare cases. You should always notify your supervisor as soon as you realize that there is a family that you know. Whenever possible, these cases should be managed by a worker who does not know the family.

Reamer (2001) discusses how workers can use their own self-awareness when working through concerns about boundary issues. Workers need to examine their motives when becoming increasingly involved with a family member. For example, if you give a client your home phone number is it because you are a concerned professional or because it makes you feel needed? If you accept an offer of food from a family, is it because it because you don’t want to risk offense or are you signaling that you are open to a more personal relationship? He notes that a given action may feel to the work like it is good

in the short run, but it is not necessarily good for the client. “So the use of self concept is to put yourself under your own microscope and take a close look at what you’re doing and why you’re doing it... When being self-reflective, social workers should try to recognize that their reflection involves bias.” Therefore, when in doubt, ask your supervisor.

Empowerment

Our fourth “E” is “empowerment.” In the helping relationship, empowerment is the process by which we help others gain control and mastery over their own lives. Empowerment is a concept relevant to many fields. Our first reading on empowerment is from the Education field, but the concepts are equally relevant in child welfare. Underlying the concepts of strengths-based, family-centered practice is the idea that people can draw upon strengths and resources in their natural environment to produce change in their lives. In most cases, the families that we work with need encouragement and support in order to accomplish these changes. Empowerment is the process by which we achieve these goals.

If you’re interested: You can read more about professional boundaries at:

http://www.iowahospice.org/documents/filelibrary/documents/pdf/2008_iho_fall_conference/6D_Social_Work_Boundaries_as_an_Ethical_Consider.pdf

and

http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/swt_0704p26.htm

Assignment: Read about empowerment at:

<http://www.joe.org/joe/1999october/comm1.html>

and **view** a brief slide show on empowerment in social work at:

http://www.malone.edu/media/1/7/71/Empowerment_Presentation_A_Napier.s06.pdf

Please continue to the Module on Engagement
