

INTRODUCTION – CHILD PROTECTION STANDARDS

The **Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers** (SASW) is the professional body for registered social workers, that has regulatory responsibilities to ensure that the practice of social work is carried out competently and within the ethical guidelines of the profession. The ***Social Workers Act*** (1995) has defined specific responsibilities, some of which include the following:

- providing for a code of professional ethics;
- setting standards of professional conduct, competency, and proficiency of members;
- setting standards regarding the manner and method of the practice of members.

DEFINITION OF STANDARD

The definition of a standard is a ... ***"measure to which others should conform or against which others are judged."*** Standards in social work reflect the values of the profession and define expectations for social workers in the conduct of their duties.

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

Some of the applications of standards include the following:

- providing protection for the public by ensuring quality social work practice as defined by standards;
- creating the means by which self-regulation can be achieved by the profession within clearly defined expectations;
- establishing a set of references that can be applied in the conduct of practice and in the resolution of issues related to professional practice;
- creating administrative guidelines for hiring, performance appraisals, supervision, and management;
- providing legal reference for courts to judge the scope of practice and the expectations for social workers in the conduct of their duties;
- building sources of information for other professional groups and the general public about the work of the social work profession.

PURPOSE OF CHILD PROTECTION STANDARDS

The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers has developed standards in Child Protection Services for three reasons:

First, these standards will provide clear statements about the values, principles, and ethics upon which Child Protection Services are based and will define professional conduct in the delivery of these services by social workers.

Second, these standards will define responsibilities of supervisors, managers, and Child Protection agencies in relation to carrying out their supervisory functions, building quality programs of service delivery, and creating a positive work environment.

Third, these standards will be used by the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers as a means by which issues can be addressed on behalf of social workers in child protection agencies, consumers, and the general public.

INTENT OF THE DOCUMENT

The intent of this document is constructive. It is the intention of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers to use standards as a means of defining "best practice" and helping organizations achieve quality service-delivery on behalf of the children and families served.

STANDARD I: SOCIAL WORK VALUES

Each social worker in Child Protection Services shall adhere to the following values and beliefs:

1. Maintain the requirements provided in the ***Code of Ethics*** of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and the SASW ***Standards Of Ethical Practice For Social Workers in Saskatchewan***;
2. Believe that families, whether or not they are configured in a traditional or non-traditional way, are the primary social unit of society which provides physical, social, and emotional nurturance for children;
3. Believe that it is in the best interests of children to be part of a family and community, providing their safety and well-being can be maintained;
4. Believe that the provision of prevention services for families reduces risk and the need for intrusive interventions;
5. Believe that social workers in Child Protection Services carry the dual responsibilities of ensuring safety for children as the primary concern, while supporting families in carrying out their duties as care-givers;
6. Believe that intervention approaches to families should be completed in a cooperative, non-adversarial way, designed to build working relationships;
7. Believe that assessments, planning, interventions, and utilization of resources can occur as a collaboration between the social worker and the family, all of which can be used as a positive learning process;
8. Believe that as a last resort, if potentially dangerous situations exist which cannot be ameliorated with non-intrusive intervention, children must be apprehended and removed from the home;
9. Believe that reunification of the family following apprehension of the children should occur through a process of joint planning between the social worker and family, rather than court-ordered;
10. Believe that case planning must begin at intake, and for children who may be in out-of-home care for an extended period of time, permanency planning must be a priority;
11. Believe that minority groups from different cultures have the right to practice their traditions within the context of the laws of Canada, without fear of intervention by Child Protection Services.

STANDARD II: SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE

Each child protection worker shall achieve the following base of knowledge:

1. Have as a minimum a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from an accredited social work program at a university that is recognized by the Canadian Association of Social Workers and/or the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work;
2. Have a commitment to life-long learning and to maintain, at a minimum, the yearly requirements for continuing education as defined by the Canadian Association of Social Workers and SASW;
3. Be knowledgeable about the biological, psychological, and social development of children and adolescents, and understand how this development can be enhanced, limited, or changed within family structures;
4. Be knowledgeable about the importance of culture to children and families, and be able to recognize the differences in family values and child rearing practices from the perspective of cultural norms and traditions;
5. Be knowledgeable about the impact on families as the result of poverty, addictions, violence, racism, and the loss of family, culture, or community;
6. Be knowledgeable about the impact of abuse and neglect on children and families;
7. Be knowledgeable about the range of social interventions available to reduce the impact of abuse and neglect, including educational, psychological, and psychiatric interventions;
8. Be knowledgeable about the range of legislation, policies, protocols and procedures that must be met in the delivery of Child Protection Services;
9. Be knowledgeable about the range of services offered by different departments of government, non-profit agencies, and community programs that could be accessed by families;
10. Be knowledgeable about case and cause advocacy, networking, coalition building, and community organization, as a means of achieving desired end-goals for families;
11. Be knowledgeable about the purposes of supervision, consultation, and inter-disciplinary collaboration as a means of providing services to families;
12. Be knowledgeable about how to access research data on child protection and how to use this information in day to day practice.

STANDARD III: SOCIAL WORK SKILLS

Each child protection worker shall be able to administer the following skills:

1. Apply professional judgement in understanding families and assessing the needs of children based on empathy, knowledge, and objective reasoning;
2. Provide detailed assessments of families and children through a collaborative process that engages the participants in order to identify areas of strength, as well as areas of risk;
3. Intervene into the life of a family in a positive, goal-directed approach to improve family functioning and to reduce the need for Child Protection Services;
4. When confronted with attitudes of apathy, hostility, resistance, anger, or potential violence, use the power and authority provided under the ***Child and Family Services Act*** to carry out mandated responsibilities, while simultaneously attempting to build nurturing, supportive relationships to facilitate future planning;
5. Have the case management skills to transfer cases and maintain linkages with other workers, to reunite children with their families, to provide follow-up services, and to terminate involvement when joint planning goals have been met;
6. Have well developed communication skills;
7. Be sensitive in working with families from a different culture;
8. Use the formal and informal resources within communities to help families;
9. Be skilled in advocacy, networking, coalition building, and community organization as a means to generate support in working with families;
10. Record material that is factual and free of speculation or interpretation, unless clearly stated as such in the file;
11. Be able to present evidence in court in a clear, concise, factual, and non-judgmental way;
12. Know the limits of professional competence, and transfer cases that are beyond the level of expertise, experience, or personal ability of social workers to manage;
13. Know personal limits, ways of handling stress from work, and how to access resources designed to reduce stress.

STANDARD IV: SOCIAL WORK OBLIGATIONS

Obligations of social workers can be formally defined in legislation, regulations, codes, or policy, while informal obligations tend to be held as assumptions by the public about expectations governing professional conduct. Some of these obligations include the following:

1. Protect, in perpetuity, the confidentiality of all information acquired directly from the client or from collateral sources, except as authorized by the client, as required by law, as allowed through record keeping, or as allowed under the **Code of Ethics**;
 2. Maintain written and electronic case records, in accordance with established agency requirements, the **Code of Ethics**, and the **Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers in Saskatchewan**, that reflect factual data, which is clearly separated from opinion and conjecture;
 3. Ensure that storage and destruction of case records or other documents will occur according to policy that recognizes the importance of confidentiality in family matters;
 4. Be accountable for professional actions and recognize the potential impact of decisions on the lives of children and families;
 5. Seek to promote the competent and ethical practice of social work within the child protection field by reporting unethical practice of social workers, other professionals, or related agencies to managerial and professional Associations;
 6. Be prevented from entering into a professional relationship when encumbrances exist due to past personal relationships including: family, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, political, administrative, or legal involvement.
- If for some reason these dual relationships must occur, social workers must disclose the relationship to their supervisor, clearly detail the encumbrances in the written or electronic record, and receive written permission from the supervisor to continue;
7. Adhere to the **Social Work Code of Ethics** (1994) which in terms of relationships governs financial, social, romantic, and sexual involvement between social workers and clients;
 8. Support and contribute to public education about child welfare issues, to the development of the profession, and to the activities of social work organizations;
 9. Assess the effectiveness of child protection services and one's own practice to ensure that children in need of protection and their families receive the most effective and appropriate service possible;
 10. Use channels of communication appropriately to assist children and families by advocating for changes to service delivery models when necessary and to ensure case planning is at the highest possible standard to work in the best interests of children and their families;
 11. Identify gaps in services to better meet the needs of children in need of protection by advocating for the development of on-going quality services to meet the needs of mandated clients and to assist in positive family functioning;
 12. Facilitate community resource development to provide quality services to meet the needs of children in need of protection and their families, particularly where resources are limited or do not exist, and to advocate for prevention programs as part of the child protection service delivery model.

STANDARD V: OBLIGATIONS OF CHILD PROTECTION AGENCIES

The mandate of child protection agencies in Saskatchewan is established in legislation through The ***Child and Family Services Act*** that defines two basic responsibilities: protection of children; and the prevention of social conditions leading to the need for protection services. The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers holds that both these services are of equal priority in working with families.

SASW has the legislative mandate to set standards for its members. The Association expects that workers will meet or exceed these standards in their practice. Employers also have an obligation to the public and to their employees to establish the conditions of employment that enable social workers to meet these standards of practice. While SASW recognizes that it has no jurisdiction to enforce work-place standards, the Association regards work-place conditions to be a critical element in the delivery of quality services.

Agencies who provide protection services should incorporate the following provisions:

1. To integrate into the work of the agency the requirements provided in the ***Code of Ethics*** of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and the SASW ***Standards of Ethical Practice for Social Workers in Saskatchewan***;
2. To ensure that supervisors, managers, and senior staff of the organization understand, support, and implement the values of the social work profession;
3. To demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to the ethnic and cultural differences of families throughout all levels of the organization - - administrative, supervisory, support, and direct service staff;
4. To maintain equality of services regardless of race, creed, gender, color, or sexual orientation of clients and their families;
5. To build a learning environment within the organization by which child protection workers can gain information about all aspects of child protection services;
6. To provide quality supervision for child protection workers by supervisors with a Master of Social Work degree, at least five years of field experience, and training in supervision of staff;
7. To provide a minimum of 40 hours per year of training for each child protection worker;
8. To facilitate the participation of administrative, supervisory, and child protection workers in various programs of advocacy, networking, coalition building, and community organizations designed to support families;
9. To establish caseload sizes in keeping with standards set by the Child Welfare League of America, the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, or some other recognized standard setting body;
10. To provide support for child protection workers to protect their physical and mental health;
11. To establish means by which current research and new information coming into the field can be accessed routinely as part of the work of the organization;
12. To create a positive work-place environment that is committed to safety, well-being, and respect.