



Zambia Youth Workers Association

Supporting Youth Workers, Advancing the Field, Impacting Youth

Ethical Principles of Youth Workers and Code of Conduct

Background/Introduction and Applicability

The first Youth Workers General Conference was held in 2006 in Lusaka, at the Commonwealth Youth Programme Regional Centre for Africa (CYP RCA), attended by various youth workers both from civil service and civil society organisations. At that conference, we sought responses from participants about the draft Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct through group discussions. Diverse opinions about the content were given and subsequently the conference reached consensus and adopted the Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct. The Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct have now been revised by the Review Ethics Committee of the Zambia Youth Workers Association's (ZYWA), in consultation with Prof. Howard Sercombe, in readiness for its launch.

This document consists of a Code of Ethics and Code of Practice. The Code of Ethics sets the parameters of commitment and behaviour in line with the highest ideals of youth work. The Code of Practice spells out in practical terms the way that these commitments carry through into practice. While the Code of Ethics establishes lines that should not be crossed, there may be particular circumstances where individual points of the Code of Practice may need developing or modifying in practice. However, this should not be at the discretion of individual workers, but in agreement with peers, supervisors or constituencies.

The Code of Ethics is written broadly, in order to apply to youth workers and youth development staff in varied roles: the application of an ethical standard may vary depending on the context. Ethical judgments will still need to be made: the fact that a given conduct is not specifically addressed by an ethical standard does not mean that it is necessarily either ethical or unethical, and discussion and reflection will need to continue to happen to work out how ethical standards apply in various circumstances.

Membership in ZYWA commits members and student affiliates to comply with the standards of the ZYWA Code of Ethics and to the rules and procedures used to enforce them. Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of an ethical standard is not itself a defence to a charge of unethical conduct.

Purposes of the Code of Ethics

- To provide a statement of professional identity and commitment to young people on the part of youth workers in Zambia.
- To ensure fair and balanced relationships between youth workers and young people.
- To establish, strengthen and protect professional traditions that govern the practice of those engaged in the youth work profession.
- To offer a guide in new or difficult situations.
- To protect young people from malpractice by youth workers.
- To maintain the good reputation of ZYWA and enhance its standing before all entities.
- To defend our profession from being used merely to control and contain young people.
- To promote trust and public confidence in youth workers as members of ZYWA
- Generally, to augment the public confidence in youth work and youth development activities and those engaged therein, through defining such profession to the public and its economic and social role as well as correcting any behaviour that may undermine such confidence.
- To set the rules and principles that support the welfare of youth workers, enhance their professional status and guarantee high standards of professional conduct and practice.



Code of Practice

This code establishes standards of conduct and performance for youth workers and youth development staff within the field of youth work.

The young people with whom you build relationship must be able to trust you with their wellbeing. To justify that trust, you must:

- Make the young people your primary client and their empowerment your first concern.
- Treat them as persons and respect their dignity.
- Seek to understand the social conditions that give rise to problems, and work both to change these conditions and to help young people deal with them productively.
- Provide a high standard of practice at all times.
- Be open and honest, act with integrity and uphold the reputation of your profession.

As a professional, you are personally accountable for actions and omissions in your practice and should always be able to justify your decisions. Failure to comply with this code may bring your fitness to practise into question and endanger your membership in the association.

Consent

- Ensure that you gain consent before you begin activities with young people.
- Respect young people's rights to accept or decline a relationship with you, or to engage with particular activities.
- Uphold young people's rights to be fully involved in decisions about their empowerment.

Collaborate with young people you have built a relationship with

- Listen to the young people and respond to their concerns and preferences.
- Support young people in helping themselves to improve and maintain their lives.
- Recognise and respect the contribution that people make to their own development and wellbeing.
- Make arrangements to meet young people's language and communication needs.
- Share with young people, in a way they can understand, the information they want or need to know about their development.

Treat young people as individuals

- Treat young people as persons with agency and respect their dignity.
- Don't discriminate in any way against those with whom you have built a relationship.
- Treat young people kindly and considerately.
- Act as an advocate for those young people with whom you have built a relationship, as well as general young people population, helping them to access relevant information and support.

Respect young people's confidentiality

- Respect young people's right to confidentiality.
- Ensure young people are informed about how and why information may need to be shared.
- Disclose information if you believe someone may be at risk of harm, in line with agency policy and the law of the country.

Maintain clear professional boundaries

- Refuse any gifts, goods, favours or hospitality that might be interpreted as an attempt to gain preferential treatment.
- Don't ask for or accept money for yourself from any young person you have a relationship with or anyone close to them.
- Do not buy and sell with young people who are your clients.
- Establish and actively maintain clear sexual boundaries at all times with young people with whom you have a relationship. Do not have any sexual physical contact with clients, or engage in sexual communication including phone calls or text messages.
- Follow agency policy with respect to sharing personal telephone numbers and residential addresses. Be careful of blurring the lines of professional and personal relationships.
- If social networking sites like Facebook are to be used in your work, establish a page that is different from your personal page.
- Don't hang out with young people you have a relationship outside working hours in bars or night clubs.

Work with others to protect and promote the empowerment and wellbeing of young people with whom you have a relationship

- Work cooperatively within teams and respect the skills, expertise and contributions of your colleagues.
- Be willing to share your skills and experience for the benefit of your colleagues.
- Consult and take advice from colleagues when appropriate.
- Treat your colleagues fairly and without discrimination.
- Make a referral to another practitioner when it is in the best interests of young people with whom you have a relationship.

Manage risk

- Be vigilant and aware about the risks in the environment you are working with young people.



Code of Practice

- Act without delay if you believe that you, a colleague or anyone else may be putting young people at risk.
- Inform someone in authority if you experience problems that prevent you working within this code or other nationally agreed standards.
- Report your concerns in writing if problems in the environment you are working are putting young people at risk.

Provide a high standard of practice and youth development activities at all times

Use the best available evidence

- Deliver youth development activities based on the best available evidence or best practice.
- Ensure any advice you give is evidence based if you are suggesting interventions, services or policy alternatives.

Keep your skills and knowledge up to date

- You should have the knowledge and skills for safe and effective practice when working without direct supervision.
- Recognise and work within the limits of your competence.
- Keep your knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life.
- Take part in appropriate learning and practice activities that maintain and develop your competence, performance, creativity and personal development.

Keep clear and accurate records

- In line with agency policy, keep clear and accurate records of important discussions you have, the activities conducted, outputs and outcomes of the activities and how effective these are.
- Complete records as soon as possible after an event has occurred.
- Do not tamper with original records in any way.
- Ensure any entries you make in someone's paper records are clearly and legibly signed, dated and timed.
- Ensure any entries you make in someone's electronic records are clearly attributable to you.
- Ensure all records are kept securely.

Manage money and other resources faithfully and with integrity

- The resources given to us for our work belong to young people. Apart from authorised wages and allowances, they should not be used for our personal needs (this is corruption) and should be kept separate from personal finances.
- Systems should be set up so persons responsible for handling money are accountable and appropriate checks and balances are in place. Unaccountability leads to corruption.
- Financial records should be carefully maintained, honestly and truthfully entered, and up to date.
- Borrowing work money, even small amounts, is regarded as stealing under the law.

- Board members should take their responsibility for oversight of expenditures and the general financial health of the organisation seriously, and ensure they understand what is going on.

Be open and honest, act with integrity and uphold the reputation of your profession

- Demonstrate a personal and professional commitment to equality and diversity.
- Respect the laws of the country in which you are practising.
- Inform ZYWA if you have been cautioned, charged or found guilty of a criminal offence.
- Inform any employers you work for if your fitness to practise is called into question.

Deal with problems

- Give a constructive and honest response to anyone who complains about the relationship they have had with you.
- Don't allow someone's complaint to prejudice the care you provide for them.
- Act immediately to put matters right if someone in your care has suffered harm at your hands.
- Explain fully and promptly to the person affected what has happened and the likely effects.
- Cooperate with internal and external investigations.

Be impartial

- You should not use your privileged position for your own ends, to the disadvantage of clients and those who entrust you with resources.
- Make sure that your judgment or actions are not influenced by external persons.
- Ensure that your professional judgment is not influenced by any commercial considerations.

Alcohol and other drugs (other than caffeine)

- Do not turn up for work in a state impaired by alcohol or other recreational drugs.
- Do not share or trade in recreational drugs with young people, or use such drugs in their presence.
- You should not appear in public in an intoxicated state
- If your own alcohol or other drug use is becoming problematic, seek professional help early.

Uphold the reputation of your profession

- You should not use your professional status to promote causes that are not related to youth work.
- Cooperate with the media only when you can confidently protect the confidential information and dignity of those in your relationship.
- Uphold the reputation of your profession at all times.

Contact details:

General Secretary, Zambian Youth Workers' Association, PO Box 31852, Lusaka, Zambia

Code of Ethics, Zambian Youth Workers' Association

Youth work is a profession committed to serve young people in their struggle for agency in their own lives and inclusion in the common wealth of their society. We are engaged with the environments in which they live, walking alongside them in their journey towards full citizenship and participation, working towards clearing the barriers that they face, and advocating for social change where this is needed. The following principles are informed by this core purpose.

1. **Primary client** – Youth work and youth development is defined by the relationship with the young person. In this relationship, the interests of young people have priority.
2. **Empowerment** – We respect the rights of young people to participation and self-determination, and presume that young people are competent to assess and act on their interests. We affirm the dignity and worth of all young people and reject views that cast young people as the problem.
3. **Duty of Care** – We take responsibility for the safety of services we provide, ensuring young people do not come to harm during youth development activities, and answering for our own judgments and actions.
4. **Equity** – We treat young people equitably and fairly and do not negatively discriminate on the basis of race, religion, political affiliation, gender, disability, national origin or other stereotypes. We strive to be aware of our own prejudices and approach differences in others with humility.
5. **Transparency** – We promote honesty, openness and truthfulness in the practice of youth development. We do not steal, cheat, or engage in fraud or intentional misrepresentation of fact. We recognise the precedence of objectivity in our practice over institutional pressures and personal interest.
6. **Corruption** – We will not advance ourselves or our organisations at the expense of the young people we serve. We avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest whenever possible, and disclose them to affected parties when they exist.
7. **Integrity** – We recognise our responsibilities in leadership: to lead, manage, and give vision to the work to which we are called and to be an example of what is good and a standard to follow.
8. **Commitment to development** – We are at the heart of communication processes. We assess, record and report on the progress of our interventions, handle information sensitively, deal with complaints effectively, and are conscientious in working for change in things we are concerned about.
9. **Cooperation** – We are team oriented, working collaboratively with our peers and with other professionals in making sure youth development interventions are coordinated, of a high standard and have the best possible outcomes for young people.
10. **Knowledge** – We are aware of our own needs for knowledge and development and are committed to be lifelong learners.
11. **Boundaries** – The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person and the purpose of our work. These limits should be clarified, established and maintained. We do not engage sexually with clients.
12. **Confidentiality** – Information provided by young people belongs to them: we hold it in trust. Young people should be made aware of any limits to confidentiality. If this has not happened, they have a right to expect protection. Wherever possible they should be consulted before disclosure.
13. **Self-care** – Youth work practice should foster self-respect and care of self, and practitioners should avoid unhealthy risk behaviours especially in relationship to HIV and AIDS.