

NEW YORK CITY SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION CONSORTIUM CHILD WELFARE CURRICULUM COMPETENCIES

Purpose statement

These child welfare competencies are developed to support the ongoing enhancement of social work education in child welfare practice, to provide educational guidelines for students interested in a career in child welfare, and in particular, to focus the educational experience of child welfare employees who are social work students.

The competencies are supported by the comprehensive dimensions of social work education and practice methods, *which* include:

- 1) Educational preparation through course content and demonstration of knowledge gained;
- 2) Field education experiences including evaluation of knowledge, values, and skills and abilities;
- 3) Field placement sites that provide supervision and practice opportunities related to the knowledge, values, skills and abilities identified by the competencies;
- 4) Ongoing review of theoretical advances and evidence based practice approaches; and
- 5) Opportunities to apply and integrate diverse knowledge bases and theoretical perspectives into day-to-day child welfare practice.

Focus on safety, permanence and well-being

A focus on safety, permanence and well-being define the role of child welfare social workers. These principles permeate every point of casework practice within child welfare and define parameters of service with children and families. The New York City Administration for Children's Services' Action Plan (2006), which serves as a working focus for this document, states "the primary focus of every part of NYC's child welfare system, from child protection to family support to foster care. Each and every service provided by Children's Services and its provider agency partners is designed to protect children and ensure their well-being. Each interaction with a child and her family is an opportunity to assess safety and well-being." This perspective requires that child welfare workers understand their role as managers of safety at every point of casework practice.

Child Welfare Competency Principles

In keeping with the above and in consort with child welfare practice the following principles guide child welfare competencies for social work practice:

1. Every family who needs and wants help to keep their children safe will receive the help it needs.
2. Every child deserves the help (s)he needs to be healthy and achieve his/her full educational and developmental potential.

3. A permanent home is every child's right.
4. The least restrictive environment in a caring and loving family is the best environment for raising children.
5. Varying ethnic and cultural differences within families and communities can provide adequate care for children.
6. Collaborative collateral work with stakeholders involved in the child's care, including caregivers and extended family, is integral to care planning.
7. Services must be available, accessible, timely, and effective; incorporate clear and direct communications; and include full family involvement whenever possible.
8. Every child, family, foster parent, community member, and colleague is treated with respect and concern to achieve the aims and goals of child welfare practice.
9. Legal frameworks mandate the protection and safety of children.

Further, the following competencies are not conceived as discrete. The knowledge, values and skills articulated in one competency are expected to carry over into all areas of practice. Demonstration of these competencies is viewed as occurring on a continuum. They are written to exemplify competencies that, dependent on field placement opportunities and assignments, reflect all aspects of child welfare practice that may be achieved by the time a student completes the advanced concentration. Achievement includes mastery of course content, and the application and demonstration of obtained skills through field education experiences. Although field education provides a vibrant means to aid in the evaluation of a student's demonstrated skill level and ability to integrate classroom and field practice experiences, demonstration of competency can be achieved through a variety of means.

Organization

This document is divided into two main sections (I) Knowledge for child welfare practice and, II) Competencies for child welfare practice. Section two is sub-divided into competencies that address professional ethics and those that address various components of child welfare practice.

I. Knowledge for child welfare practice incorporates a range of theories and perspectives that provides an essential foundation to the work within the field of child welfare. This section identifies areas that may be delivered in a variety of curricular contexts – in the classroom or specifically within field education. For example, knowledge described below in #1 "*traditional and culturally based child nurturing practices which are utilized in all phases of work*" will be covered in courses that deal with cultural components of child rearing and child developmental issues. Likewise in field education, students will be exposed to specific information related to this knowledge content area and the populations served.

II. Competencies for child welfare practice incorporates two main categories: Professional Behavior, Ethics and Values; and Practice. Practice is sub-divided into six areas that include 1) culturally competent approaches, 2) role and function, 3) policy practice, 4) organizational practice, 5) community practice, and, 6) child focused and family focused practice.

Each category and sub-category identifies bulleted competencies that exemplify the category under consideration. Each is then further explicated by numbered practice behaviors that provide guidance to faculty and field educators on ways that students may demonstrate their achievement of the specific competency. These practice behaviors provide concrete activities or actions for faculty and field educators to consider in supporting a student's efforts to achieve competency.

Note: The "client" or "client system" is viewed broadly and takes into account individuals in the home, extended families, community networks, as well as organizations and social institutions interacting with children and families. The complex environment within which child welfare practice operates requires an equally comprehensive perspective of the networks and client systems involved.

I. Knowledge for child welfare practice: Child welfare practice incorporates a range of theories and perspectives that provide an essential foundation. Essential components include knowledge of the:

1. traditional and culturally based child nurturing practices, which are utilized in all phases of work.
2. pre-placement preventive services to construct a supportive system for clients based on the individual needs of the family system.
3. child safety assessments and risk assessment protocols to monitor ongoing safety of the child.
4. major family, health, and social factors contributing to child abuse and neglect, as well as positive factors that act to preserve the family and protect the child.
5. signs of abuse occurring in out-of-home placements and how to take corrective action to protect children.
6. legal, socioeconomic and psychosocial issues facing immigrants, refugees, and vulnerable groups and how to devise culturally competent and effective interventions.

7. signs and symptoms of, and the impact of, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health, and developmental disabilities, in children and adults.
8. theories of human development and attachment to create and manage effective case plans with clients.
9. strengths-based "person in environment" perspective and its use in engaging and assessing the total client system.
10. community and family resources that can be used in both safety planning and service planning.
11. effects of family transitions that may include trauma such as family conflict, divorce, family or community violence and the impact of becoming a client of the child welfare system.
12. role of spirituality in promoting individual wellness and family functioning.
13. influences of modern technology (e.g., the Internet) on human behavior and family functioning.
14. helping process including the termination process, with clients and with systems.
15. methods of motivating mandated clients to accept and utilize services.
16. issues of disproportionality and inequalities within the child welfare system.

II. Competencies for Child Welfare Practice

A. Professional Behavior, Ethics and Values

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- applies the values of the profession and its ethical standards, principles, and practices in day-to-day dealings and decision-making with clients and colleagues.
- demonstrates the ability and self-awareness necessary to assess his or her own value assumptions and emotional responses to clients, co-workers and situations and seeks consultation when needed.

Practice behaviors:

1. identifies how professional values, ethics and standards influence decision-making and planning in public child welfare practice.
2. identifies potential work-related stress factors and is able to develop and advocate for strategies to reduce its effects on self and colleagues.
3. appropriately seeks supervision and consultation in decision-making and implementation of service plan development.
4. accepts feedback and actively engages in critical self-reflection and self-correction to promote ongoing professional development.
5. seeks evidenced-based and best practices to enhance his/her work.

B. Practice

1) *Culturally Competent Approaches*

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- works respectfully and effectively with clients, community representatives and agency personnel of diverse backgrounds demonstrating appreciation for their views and contributions.
- demonstrates awareness of forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination pertaining to low income, traditionally marginalized, and culturally diverse families and uses this knowledge to provide equitable and effective child welfare services.

Practice behaviors:

1. communicates understanding of the importance of a client's primary language by ensuring that communication is possible with the child and his/her family.
2. uses available resources appropriately in providing child welfare assessment and intervention services.
3. seeks information, consultation and expertise as needed to assess and work effectively with clients from these groups.

2) *Role and Function*

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- identifies opportunities for preventive child welfare social work practice.
- demonstrates awareness of his or her authority as a child welfare worker and manages and balances that power to work effectively with families.

Practice behaviors:

1. balances the dual responsibility to protect children from harm and to provide services that support and preserve families.
2. implements collaborative decision-making and mutual planning opportunities with clients.
3. implements the roles of social workers in the child welfare legal processes in relation to other professions in the legal system.
4. prepares written reports for court that are clear, concise, pertinent and objective.
5. implements the principles of concurrent and permanency planning and takes into account the educational, health, social and emotional needs of children.
6. implements basic principles and responsibilities of contracting for services in public child welfare.
7. demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively with clients regarding both the benefits and consequences of the client's actions and inactions.

3) Policy Practice

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- understands how current political activities affect and influence client behavior and morale.
- understands the regulatory, legislative and judicial processes at local, state, and national and international levels and its effect on agency policies, procedures, programs, and service delivery.

Practice behaviors:

1. implements the provisions of mandated requirements in practice: The Indian Child Welfare Act and the Multi-ethnic Placement Act, ASFA, etc.

2. critically evaluates and makes recommendations for change in those agency and legislative policies and procedures that affect child well-being and families.
3. incorporates into practice understanding of disproportionality and disparities within the child welfare system.
4. uses practice-based information, technology, and evidence-based research to evaluate and improve program effectiveness.
5. demonstrates a beginning understanding of the roles/responsibilities of a leader/manager to plan and develop systems and policies that enhance staff diversity.

4) Organizational Practice

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- collaborates to enhance service quality in organizational settings.
- works effectively within the strengths and limitations of an organization, and contributes suggestions on how to improve services.

Practice behaviors:

1. effectively contributes to the work of a multidisciplinary team and integrates his or her work with the contributions of each member.
2. works to prevent or resolve potentially harmful situations within a risk management framework.
3. uses a collaborative process for the purpose of planning, and providing feedback that can potentially influence policy and implementing services.
4. analyzes policies and their implications for child welfare practice
5. plans, prioritizes and effectively completes activities and tasks within required time frames.

5) Community Practice

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- understands the importance of working with key stakeholders to build social capital toward the improvement of services to impoverished communities.

Practice behaviors:

1. negotiates and strategically advocates for the development of resources that children and families need to meet personal and administrative goals.
2. collaborates with individuals, groups, community-based organizations and government agencies to advocate for equitable access to culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and services.
3. seeks client, organization and community feedback for purposes of practice monitoring, service refinement, and outcome evaluation.

6) Child Centered and Family Focused Practice

At the advanced level of social work education, a student concentrating in child welfare:

- demonstrates the importance of working with biological and foster families and kinship networks in a respectful manner, which incorporates a strengths-based culturally competent perspective.
- demonstrates the ability to conduct a thorough, culturally competent and safety-based assessment of children and families.

Practice behaviors:

1. devises case plans and referrals to address potential for violence, suicide, and complex psychological difficulties.
2. works collaboratively with biological families, foster families, and kinship networks and involves them in assessment and planning strategies and decision-making.
3. gathers, assesses and presents pertinent information from interviews, case records, and collateral sources in evaluating an abuse or neglect allegations and makes effective referrals for services or further evaluation.

4. effectively serves children with special needs, including the balancing of parental and child rights.
5. demonstrates empathy, genuineness, and openness in work with involuntary clients in their homes, as well as in other settings, in a manner that promotes appropriate sharing of information with clients and encourages their active involvement in all phases of intervention.
6. critically evaluates with possible suggestions for change the relevance of assessment criteria and intervention models in terms of their usefulness with diverse ethnic and cultural populations.
7. identifies behaviors and conditions linked to the problem statement, which form the basis for the service/treatment plan.
8. implements knowledge of after-care services and skill in developing independent living or interdependent plans with foster youth.