

# CLD

STANDARDS COUNCIL  
FOR SCOTLAND

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SCOTLAND

WHAT DOES THE CODE  
OF ETHICS MEAN FOR  
ME?

A Youth Work Commentary on a Code of Ethics for  
Community Learning and Development: Summary

Dear colleague,

Thank you for opening this copy of the Commentary on the Code of Ethics for Community Learning and Development. This paper has been prepared by youth workers, youth work managers and others with an investment in ensuring that our contribution to the lives of young people is of the highest quality at all times.

This paper is a contribution to that aspiration. It is based firmly on work completed for the Standards Council in 2010 by Professor Howard Sercombe, University of Strathclyde, and Peter Taylor, independent consultant, who, following an extensive consultation, proposed the series of ethical statements for consideration.

The idea of a companion commentary focusing on youth work and youth workers arose when a number of youth workers and managers suggested that such a document would be helpful in teasing out issues raised by the Code.

Following debate and challenging dialogue all of the youth agencies and practitioners involved in this process, they agreed that it was a core value of youth work to aspire to the most effective, creative and progressive programmes of youth work that can often be the main influence on young people growing up in Scotland.

This challenged us all to consider what the values\* underpinning work in the ever broadening field of CLD are. What do they mean for us on a daily basis? What are the challenges for us, our agencies, employers and those in a lead role? These ethical statements are not unique to youth work – these are the same ones that all others involved in CLD should consider- those in community work and development, adult learning and in more formal settings.

The challenge of these statements suggests that we can reflect on our own practice, in the main be responsible for our own contributions, development and impacts on and with young people.

In leading on this exercise, YouthLink Scotland, its members and their youth workers hope that this document can prompt debate and dialogue, challenge perceptions, develop new thinking and result in a growing effective field of practice to build on the excellent work that already exists. Though a small contribution to the overall CLD panorama, it is a critical one.

The Standards Council for CLD for Scotland is grateful to YouthLink Scotland and its officers, membership and individual youth workers who contributed to this document.

I hope it works for you. Enjoy the debate.

**Rory Macleod**

**Director, CLD Standards Council for Scotland**

\*for material on values and associated areas, access [www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk](http://www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk)

## **1. Primary client**

**Our primary client (our 'constituent') is the community, the young person or the adult learner with whom we engage.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We place the young person at the centre of our work.

We are motivated to serve their best interests.

We work from their unique individual starting points.

We try to understand life from their perspective.

We take account of the individual circumstances of young people and their own unique biographies.

### **QUESTIONS**

Is the primary constituent in youth work always the individual young person?

Whose interests should take second place?

Who gets priority – the individual young person, a group of young people, or the wider community of which young people are part?

What might putting young people at the centre of practice look like?

What factors affect our ability to put this into practice?



ARE YOUR SERVICE HOURS AND YOUR OWN WORK PATTERNS ORGANISED AROUND YOUR EMPLOYER, YOUR OR THE NEEDS OF YOUR COMMUNITY?

How do we balance the young people as primary clients against organisational requirements?

How does Article 12 of the UNCRC inform this ethic?

Would you support a group of young people to campaign against something your employer was doing?

## **2. Social context**

**Our work is not limited to facilitating change within individuals, but extends to their social context and environment. It recognises the impact of ecological and structural forces on people.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will try to understand young people within the wider social, political and economic context.

We will help young people to connect to the wider community and nation.

We will work with young people to help them develop an appreciation of other sectors of society with differing views and perspectives.

We should view change as a complex process, not solely the responsibility of the individual young person.

We realise that barriers for young people are often rooted within wider social attitudes and other institutions in society.

## QUESTIONS

How does poverty and inequality affect the young people you work with?

How does ageism and stereotyping affect the young people you work with?

How can you build young people's capacity to challenge structures?

How can you support young people to facilitate change? Are there limits?

Are you a 'drive through' practitioner, i.e. do you live outwith the local community? Does this affect how you address this?

Does your personal social context and biography affect the way you work with young people?

When did you last chat about issues in the community you work in at the bus stop, shop, street corner, sports centre?

To what extent is it permissible for youth workers to discuss politics and to politicise young people?

Do you discuss current Scottish political or social issues with young people?

To what extent do you help young people think about ethical issues on a wider global scale? Are there any potential pitfalls in having such discussions?

### **3. Equity**

**Our work promotes equality of opportunity and outcome. Our practice is equitable and inclusive.**

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will be sensitive to the particular needs of individuals.

We should actively challenge discriminatory attitudes in our work with young people and in the wider environment.

We review our own practices and agency policies to ensure that we are offering an equitable service to young people.

We will not shy away from difficult situations or dilemmas regarding equitable and inclusive practice. We will try to find ways forward.

We should develop practices to work with the most marginalised and disenfranchised young people in society.

We work with other agencies promoting equality and inclusiveness.

## QUESTIONS

Do you treat all young people the same regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation?

How do you get beyond the 'labels'?

Do your personal values and beliefs impact on your practice?

Do you find it difficult to work with young people who have particular issues or difficulties?

How many young people do you work with who are dissimilar to you? How do you deal with this?

Have to taken into account young people's additional support needs?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of targeting services?

How can you help young people to explore the barriers they face?

What do you do to challenge institutional barriers that discriminate against young people?

#### **4. Empowerment**

**We seek to enhance constituents' capacity for positive action by:**

- **enabling them to clarify and pursue their chosen priorities**
- **building skills of decision-making, engagement and co-operation**
- **making power relations open and clear**
- **supporting constituents in holding those with power accountable**
- **facilitating disengagement from the professional relationship.**

**Our starting point is that constituents are capable of assessing and acting on their interests.**

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will be conscious of our position of power in relation to young people.

We will give young people increasing levels of autonomy matched to their capacity to manage it.

We will help young people to become self determining.

We will work with young people to assist them to develop a credible and influential voice.

## **QUESTIONS**

What are the barriers to young people's participation?

How do you support 'hard to reach' groups of young people?

How do you help young people to explore power dynamics and broaden their horizons?

How can you support them without getting in the way?

Is the information you provide accessible to young people?

How do you support young people to make their own decisions?

What steps do you put in place to manage the expectations of young people?

Would you facilitate a session with young people knowing that it could fail?

## **5. Duty of Care**

**We will avoid exposing our constituents to the likelihood of harm or injury.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We should develop clear policies and practices that guide us in managing risk in our work with young people.

We will be aware of our statutory obligations in protecting young people from harm or injury.

We will operate safe working practices in our work with young people, taking account of related policy and practice guidance in the workplace and, where appropriate, legislation.

We realise that the nature of our work involves taking managed risks and that this can lead to very positive developmental outcomes for young people.

### **QUESTIONS**

Do you avoid risk, manage it, or ignore it?

What procedures are in place to prevent young people facing injury, harm or abuse through youth work?



WHAT PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE TO PREVENT YOUNG PEOPLE FACING INJURY, HARM OR ABUSE THROUGH YOUTH WORK

Does the organisation you work with take risks, or is it risk averse?

How aware are you of relevant current legislation? How does this impact on your practice?

How do you support colleagues to adhere to this ethic?

What are the potential limitations for young people when youth workers adhere to this ethic?

## **6. Corruption**

**We will not seek to advance ourselves, our organisations or others, personally, politically or professionally, at the expense of our constituents.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will work towards the best interests of young people rather than be driven by our own self interest.

We will not manipulate situations for our own, or our organisation's ends.

We will ensure that the interests of young people are at the centre of everything we do.



HAVE YOU EVER USED YOUNG PEOPLE AS PART OF A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN?

## QUESTIONS

Do you ever put your own interests before the young people you work with?

Have you ever used young people as part of a political campaign?

Has successful work with young people advanced your career? Is that acceptable?

What are the potential pitfalls in chasing funding sources that change the nature of our work with young people?

## **7. Transparency**

**Engagement with the young person, adult learner or community, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful. Potential conflicts of interest will be openly declared.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will work with young people in a climate of honesty, trust and respect for the individual.

We will be mindful of managing competing interests and expectations of other stakeholders.

We will declare any external interests that may conflict or impact on our work at the earliest opportunity.

### **QUESTIONS**

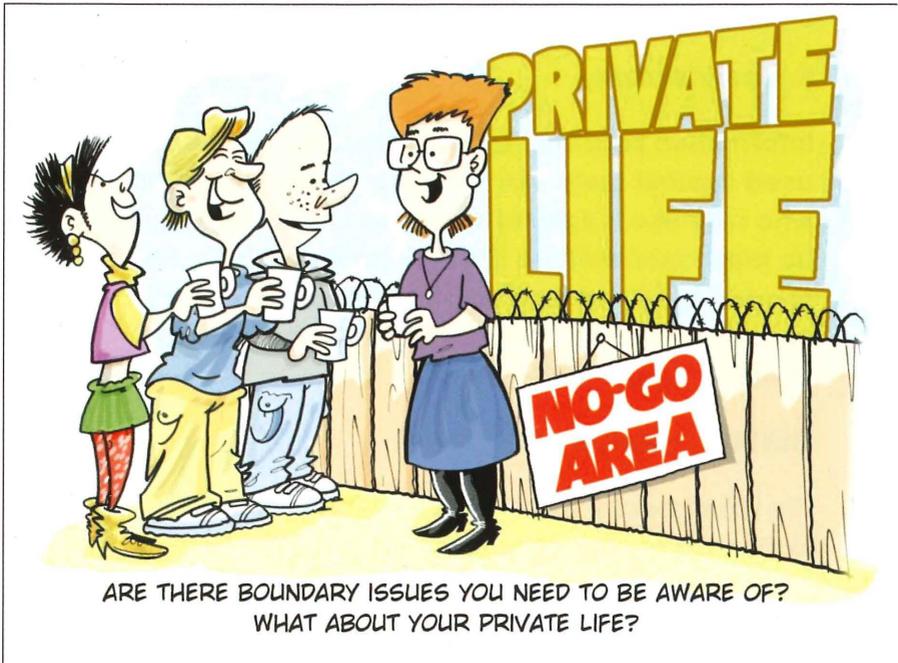
Do you make it clear to the young people who you work for and what they can reasonably expect from you?

Do you let other stakeholders have access to young people you work with? Can this present ethical dilemmas?

Have you knowingly withheld information from young people?

Is this ever justifiable?

What are the implications of being 'open and truthful' with young people'?



ARE THERE BOUNDARY ISSUES YOU NEED TO BE AWARE OF?  
WHAT ABOUT YOUR PRIVATE LIFE?

Are there boundary issues you need to be aware of?  
What about your private life?

Are there situations in your work with young people  
when it's not possible to be open and truthful?

## **8. Confidentiality**

**Information provided by constituents will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them. Constituents should be made aware of the limits to confidentiality. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality should apply. Wherever possible they should be consulted before disclosure.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will respect a young person's right to confidentiality in their working relationships.

We will be clear with young people what a confidential relationship involves and the subsequent limitations e.g. if they are at risk of harm we have a clear responsibility to pass information on.

We will attempt, where possible, to advise and inform young people of any steps required which breach their confidentiality.

We will make effective use of supervision to explore issues around confidentiality when this is appropriate.

We will not abuse our position to make information about young people available to others when there is no apparent need.

In terms of wider care and protection issues we will work collaboratively with other agencies when required.

## **QUESTIONS**

What are some of the complexities around managing confidential relationships with young people?

What difficulties can confidentiality create for the youth worker?

How do you work out what is in a young person's best interests?

How do you deal with delicate or sensitive information that you come across from third parties, or unsubstantiated sources?

How do you get support or seek reassurance that you are managing a confidential situation well?

## **9. Cooperation**

**We will actively seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for our constituents.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We should have a clear understanding of the essential ingredients in building a partnership approach in working with young people.

We will seek to canvass the views of young people to help them articulate their voice to a wider audience on issues that are important to them.

We will work collaboratively with other professionals showing due respect for their views, opinions and perspectives.

We recognise that joint working has the potential to achieve better results for young people.

We will attempt to find a way forward through difficult situations where conflict might be apparent between agencies.

We recognise the importance of skills in negotiation, compromise and consensus in moving situations forward.

## **QUESTIONS**

How well do you work as an extended part of the team within your service?

What do you think are the key factors that enable related professions to work effectively together?

What are the key barriers that get in the way?

How do you manage conflict, differing views, and value systems, in your relationships with other professionals?

What are the key differences in practice interventions between various professions that work with young people?

How do you think youth workers are perceived by other agencies?

What are some of the central skills, qualities and personal/professional attributes that promote co-operative working practices?

## **10. Professional Development**

**We will work reflectively, identifying and using the information, resources, skills, knowledge and practices needed to improve our capacity to meet our obligations to constituents.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will take responsibility for our own professional development and future training needs.

We will try to be reflective practitioners and take account of the views of young people and stakeholders we work with.

We will continually develop our skills, knowledge base and values to better serve the young people we work with.

We will take account of developments in new media and communication tools in our work with young people and will undertake to refresh our skills in this area regularly.

We will take account of up-to-date research to validate the work we do and add credibility.

### **QUESTIONS**

How are you encouraged to reflect on your practice/direct interventions with young people?



YOU ARE ON A BOARD OR COMMITTEE AND THE FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS ARE PRODUCED - DO YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND THEM? WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU DIDN'T?

To what extent are you open about your own mistakes and see them as an opportunity for learning?

To what extent do you feel that you are part of a professional community with the same underpinning values and beliefs about young people?

To what extent are you committed to improving your practice in your work with young people?

To what extent do you drive your own professional development and take responsibility for identifying your future learning?

## **11. Self-awareness**

**We should be conscious of our own values and interests, and approach cultural and other difference respectfully. While the need to challenge may arise, we must try first to understand.**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We should have a well developed sense of our personal and professional values and be aware of potential conflicts.

We should be sensitive to the differing needs of others and be respectful of the values and beliefs that they might hold.

We should know our own limitations and be prepared to seek help and guidance when required.

We should try to become aware of our 'blind spots'.

We should encourage feedback from others, e.g. young people and colleagues, to help us be more self-aware.

We should be prepared to ask ourselves difficult questions about our own working practices with young people.



IS THERE A GAP BETWEEN WHAT YOU SAY PUBLICLY ABOUT YOUR WORK AND WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF AND IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS YOU KNOW TO BE TRUE?

## QUESTIONS

What strategies do you use to help you to become more self aware especially in relation to your practice?

How well do you respond to critical feedback from young people or colleagues?

To what extent are you open to change regarding your practice with young people?

How well do you know your strengths and weaknesses?

How do you get feedback on your “blind spots”?

Are you aware of your own personal values and how they interface with the professional values of youth work

## **12. Boundaries**

**The CLD relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the constituent and the purpose of our work. These limits should be clarified, established and maintained. The relationship with an individual constituent is based on trust and is not available for sexual engagement.**

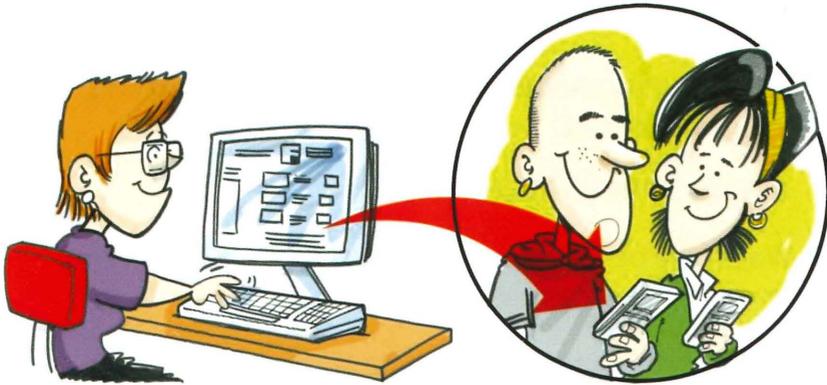
### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We will have a clear understanding of the responsibilities associated with a relationship built on trust.

We will be aware of the need to operate within a professional relationship, whichever context we are in, and what that means in terms of behaviour.

We will actively involve colleagues in discussions about appropriate boundaries to ensure that there is consistency of approach in the agency.

We will use supervision as an opportunity to explore boundary issues in our work with young people.



WHAT ARE THE KINDS OF THINGS THAT YOU MIGHT SAY OR DO THAT STEP OVER THE BOUNDARIES IN YOUR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE?

## QUESTIONS

What criteria and frames of reference do you use to determine where the boundaries are in your work with young people?

Specifically, what are the kinds of things that you might say or do that step over the boundaries in your work with young people?

Should work with young people involve pushing the boundaries e.g. taking measured risks? What criteria do you use to help you make those judgments?

In hindsight, have you found yourself in situations where the boundaries have become blurred?

### **13. Self-care**

**CLD practice should be consistent with preserving the health of CLD workers**

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

We should be aware of our role, the expectations placed upon us and our limitations.

We should assume some degree of responsibility for our own health and wellbeing within the workplace.

We should know when to ask for help and have a clear established system in place to seek support if required.

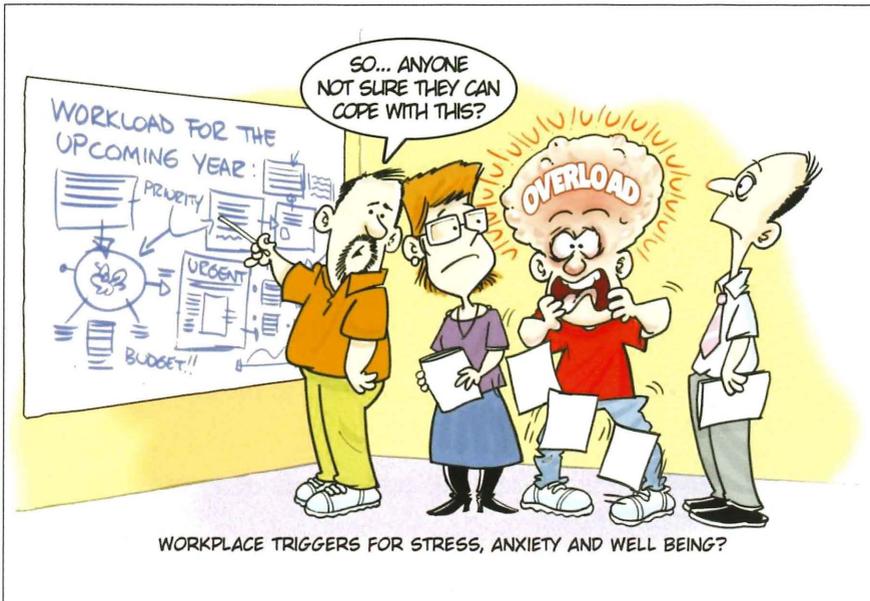
We should work co-operatively with our employers and take a preventative and proactive approach regarding our health and well-being.

We should support and encourage a wider workplace culture that promotes health and well-being at work.

#### **QUESTIONS**

What are the characteristics of an organisational culture that promotes the health and well-being of staff?

What are the triggers in the workplace for stress, anxiety and burnout?



How do you manage competing expectations and the resultant pressures?

What steps can you take to “look after yourself” in the workplace?

What are the responsibilities of line managers in relation to staff support?

What can you do to support colleagues at work regarding their own health and well-being?

## **FURTHER READING**

In the full Youth Work Commentary, available for download from the Standards Council website, you will find:

- ✓ Resources for every clause, directing you to further reading and additional materials
- ✓ Word clouds which can be used to prompt discussion
- ✓ Ethics in Practice – worked scenarios to provoke ethical debate
- ✓ A full account and analysis of the process, including insight from young people on what makes a good youth worker

Other resources available to download from the Standards Council website include:

- Using the Competences for Community Learning and Development: A Resource Pack
- The CPD Strategy for CLD
- The Guidelines for Professional Approval of CLD Learning Programmes

Visit [www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk](http://www.cldstandardscouncil.org.uk) to start exploring.

Thank you,

The CLD Standards Council for Scotland

**YouthLink**

**S c o t l a n d**

**The national agency for youth work**

**CLD**

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