

# Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS) Program Staff Code Of Ethics

Adopted by the FaDSS Council  
2020

## **Preamble**

The mission of the Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program (FaDSS) is to improve the lives of families at risk of long-term welfare dependency or family instability by creating opportunities for self-sufficiency. FaDSS program staff work to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all FaDSS Participants. Workers must demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty, and fortitude in the FaDSS program in order to inspire confidence and trust within the community. Workers are models of ethical behavior to the families in the FaDSS program and this code outlines those expectations and guidelines.

## **Purpose of the Code of Ethics**

This Code of Ethics offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide decision-making and ensure workers have knowledge of ethical conduct. It does not provide a set of rules that prescribe how the worker should act in all situations. Specific applications of the Code must take into account the context in which it is being considered and the possibility of conflicts among the Code's values, principles, and standards. Further, the Code does not specify which values, principles, and standards are most important and ought to outweigh others in instances when they conflict. When a worker encounters these conflicts they should consult their supervisor.

A code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behavior. Moreover, a code of ethics cannot resolve all ethical issues or disputes or capture the richness and complexity involved in striving to make responsible choices within a moral community. Rather, a code of ethics sets forth values, ethical principles, and ethical standards to which professionals aspire and by which their actions can be judged.

Workers should consult their supervisors when ethical dilemmas arise. In addition to adhering to the FaDSS Code of Ethics, workers must also follow agency and program policies, procedures, state, and federal laws.

## **Key Definitions**

**Family Development and Self-Sufficiency Program Staff** All staff providing direct family development services, staff that supervise them, staff that provide office support to FaDSS, those responsible for the daily operations of FaDSS and anyone with access to family records shall be referred to as the "*Worker*" in the Code of Ethics.

### **Family Participant**

A person or persons receiving services from an approved FaDSS Grantee. Referred to as "*family participant*", "*family member*" or "*family*" in the Code of Ethics. For purposes of applying the Code of Ethics, families are considered Family Participants for five years beyond the date they exit from the program.

### **Records**

All documentation related to FaDSS services involving a family.

### **Relationship**

Used to describe the professional, working relationship between the family participant and the worker.

### **Third Party**

Person other than the family or the worker and not an employee of the FaDSS Program.

### **Personnel Policies**

These are guidelines that have been established by each individual Grantee's Administration and/or Board of Directors.

## **Program Philosophy**

The philosophy of the FaDSS program is that comprehensive, capacity-building and early intervention with at-risk families can be successful in improving stability and self-sufficiency. The primary objectives are to foster healthy, nurturing family environments and to strengthen the families' resources within the broader community. Support is provided in order to promote parental competencies and behaviors that will lead to healthy and positive personal development of parents and children. Workers employ a strength-based approach to working with families and must have positive regard for families they serve.

## **1. RESPONSIBILITY TO FaDSS PARTICIPANTS**

### **1.1. Commitment to Families**

The worker's primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of the families served. In general, participant's interests are primary. However, the worker's responsibility to the larger society or specific legal obligations may, on limited occasions, supersede the primary responsibility owed to family participants, and participants should be so advised. (Examples include when a worker is required by law to report that a family member has abused a child or has threatened to harm self or others. FaDSS workers are mandatory child abuse reporters).

### **1.2. Self-Determination**

The worker respects and promotes the rights of families to self-determination and assists family members in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals and their chosen means to achieve them.

### **1.3. Informed Consent**

There may be times when workers need to share information with other professionals regarding the families with whom they are working. Workers must use clear and understandable language to inform family members of the purpose of the services, the families' right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the period covered by the consent. *FaDSS Standard: Releases of Information* should not be for any longer than a period of one year and must be renewed, if warranted or needed. Family members must be provided with the opportunity to ask questions and receive a copy of the signed consent form.

In instances when family members are not literate or have difficulty understanding the language used, the worker must take steps to ensure the family member's comprehension of informed consent. This may include providing family members with a detailed verbal explanation or arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator.

Workers must obtain family member's written informed consent before audio taping, videotaping, or photographing families, or permitting observation of services to families by a third party. Workers must discuss with families the policies concerning the use of technology in the provision of services.

Workers should obtain family consent before conducting an electronic search on a family in accordance with FaDSS program policies. Exceptions may arise when the search is for purposes of protecting the family or other people from serious, foreseeable and imminent harm, or for other compelling professional reasons.

#### **1.4. Competence**

Workers must provide services and may represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience and within the boundaries of their current position. Workers who use technology in the provision of services should ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide such services in a competent manner. This includes an understanding of the special communication challenges when using technology and the ability to implement strategies to address these challenges.

#### **1.5. Cultural Competence and Social Diversity**

Workers must understand culture and its functions in human behavior and society, recognizing that all cultures have strengths.

Workers must have a knowledge base of the families they work with and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to families' cultures as well as to the differences between people and cultural groups.

Workers must obtain and continue education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

Workers who provide electronic services should be aware of cultural and socioeconomic differences among clients, and how they may use or view technology. Workers should assess cultural, environmental, economic, mental or physical ability, linguistic, and other issues that may affect the delivery or use of these services.

#### **1.6. Conflicts of Interest**

Workers must be alert to and avoid conflicts of interest that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Workers must consult supervisors and inform families when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the family's interests primary and protects the family's interests to the greatest extent possible. In some cases, protecting the family's interests may require termination of the professional relationship.

Workers must not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

Workers must not engage in dual or multiple relationships with current or former participant family members. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, workers should take steps to protect family members and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. (Dual or multiple relationships occur when workers relate to family members in more than one relationship, whether professional, social, or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively).

When workers provide services to two or more people who have a relationship with each other (for example, couples, family members), workers should clarify with all parties the nature of their professional obligations to the various individuals who are receiving services. Workers who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals receiving services or who anticipate having to perform in potentially conflicting roles (for example, when a worker is asked to testify in a child custody dispute or divorce proceeding) must clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest.

Workers should avoid communication with families using technology (such as social networking sites, online chat, e-mail, text messages, telephone and video) for personal or non-work-related purposes in accordance with FaDSS program policies.

Workers should avoid searching or gathering family information electronically unless there are compelling professional reasons, and when appropriate, the family's informed consent and in accordance with FaDSS program policies.

When real or perceived conflicts of interest arise, workers should consult their supervisors.

### **1.7. Privacy and Confidentiality**

Workers must respect all families' rights to privacy. Workers must not solicit private information from or about family participants unless it is essential to providing services or conducting an evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.

Workers may disclose specific, confidential information when appropriate with valid, written consent from the family participant.

Workers must protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that workers will keep information confidential does not apply in cases when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a family member or other identifiable person or when laws or regulations require disclosure without a family's consent. In all instances, workers should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed.

Workers must inform families, to the extent possible, about the disclosure of confidential information and the potential consequences, when feasible, before the disclosure is made. This applies whether workers disclose confidential information on the basis of a legal requirement or family consent.

Workers must discuss with families and other interested parties the nature of confidentiality and limitations of families' rights to confidentiality. The worker must review with families' circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. This discussion should occur as soon as possible in the relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.

Workers must not discuss confidential information, electronically or in person, in any setting unless privacy can be ensured. Workers must not discuss confidential information in public or semi-public areas such as hallways, waiting rooms, elevators or restaurants. Workers should take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information transmitted to other parties through the use of computers, electronic mail, facsimile machines, telephones and telephone answering machines, and other electronic or computer technology. Disclosure of identifying information should be avoided whenever possible.

Workers must protect the confidentiality of family members during legal proceedings to the extent permitted by the law.

Workers must protect the confidentiality of families' written and electronic records and other sensitive information. Workers must take reasonable steps to ensure that families' records are stored in a secure location and are only available to persons who are authorized to have access to such records.

Workers must not disclose identifying information when discussing families for teaching or training purposes, unless the family has consented to the disclosure of such confidential information.

Workers must protect the confidentiality of deceased members of families consistent with the preceding standards. Workers must take reasonable steps to protect the confidentiality of electronic communications, including information provided to families or third parties. Workers should use applicable safeguards (such as encryption, firewalls, and passwords) when using electronic communications such as e-mail, online posts, online chat sessions, mobile communication and text messages.

Workers should develop and disclose policies and procedures for notifying clients of any breach of confidential information in a timely manner.

In the event of unauthorized access to client records or information, including any unauthorized access to the worker's electronic communication or storage systems, workers should inform families of such disclosures, consistent with applicable laws and professional standards.

Workers should avoid posting any identifying or confidential information about families on professional websites or other forms of social media.

#### **1.8. Access to Records**

Workers must provide family members with reasonable access to paper and electronic records concerning their family. Families who wish to examine their records or want to request copies may contact their worker and schedule a time during normal business hours. A FaDSS staff member must be present during the examination of paper and electronic records.

Workers should develop and inform families about their policies, consistent with FaDSS standards, on the use of technology to provide families with access to their records.

#### **1.9. Physical Contact**

Workers must not engage in physical contact with a family member when there is a possibility of psychological harm to the family member as a result of the contact (such as cradling or caressing family members.) Workers are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that govern such physical contact. Workers must ask for permission prior to engaging in each incident of physical contact with a family member.

#### **1.10. Derogatory Language**

Workers must not use derogatory or negative language in their written or verbal communications to or about families. Workers must use accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about families.

#### **1.11. Sexual Harassment**

Workers must not sexually harass family members. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors and other verbal, written, electronic, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

#### **1.12. Sexual Relationships**

Workers must under no circumstances initiate or engage in sexual activities, inappropriate sexual communications through the use of technology or in person, or sexual contact with current family members.

Workers must not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with the family's relatives or other individuals with whom the family maintains a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the family. Sexual activity or sexual contact with the family's relatives or other individuals with whom the family maintains a personal relationship has the potential to be harmful to the family and may make it difficult for the worker and family to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. Workers -- not their families, their families' relatives, or other individuals with whom the family maintains a personal relationship -- assume the full burden for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

Workers must not initiate or engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with former participant family members because of the potential for harm to the family. If the worker engages in conduct contrary to this prohibition or claim that an exception to this prohibition is warranted because of extraordinary circumstances, it is the worker -- not the family participant -- who assumes the full burden of demonstrating that the former participant family has not been exploited, coerced, nor manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally.

Workers must not provide services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual or intimate relationship. Providing services to a former sexual partner has the potential to be harmful to the individual and is likely to make it difficult for the worker and the individual to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

#### **1.13. Interruption of Services**

Workers must make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as unavailability, disruptions in electronic communication, relocation, illness, disability, or death, natural disaster or health crisis.

#### **1.14. Termination of Services**

Workers should terminate services to families and professional relationships with them when such services and relationships are no longer required or no longer serve the families' needs or interests.

Workers should not terminate services to pursue a social, financial, or sexual relationship with a family member.

Workers should anticipate the termination or interruption of services to families and must notify families promptly.

## **2. INTERPROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

### **2.1. Respect**

Workers must treat colleagues with respect.

Workers must avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues in verbal, written and electronic communications with families or with other professionals.

### **2.2. Confidentiality**

Workers must respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships and transactions.

### **2.3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Workers for whom a team decision raises ethical concerns must attempt to resolve the disagreement through the appropriate channels as outlined in the agency personnel policies.

#### **2.4. Disputes Involving Colleagues**

Workers must not exploit families in disputes with colleagues or engage families in any inappropriate discussion of conflicts between workers and their colleagues.

#### **2.5. Consultation**

Workers should seek the advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interest of the family.

When consulting with colleagues about families, workers should disclose the least amount of information necessary to achieve the purposes of the consultation.

#### **2.6. Impairment of Colleagues**

Workers who have direct knowledge of a worker's impairment that is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties and that interferes with practice effectiveness should follow personnel policies to deal with this.

Workers who believe that a colleague's impairment interferes with practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the impairment should take action through appropriate channels established by the agency.

#### **2.7. Incompetence of Colleagues**

Workers who have direct knowledge of a colleague's incompetence should follow personnel policies to deal with this.

Workers who believe that a colleague is incompetent and has not taken adequate steps to address the incompetence should take action through appropriate channels established by the agency.

#### **2.8. Unethical Conduct of Colleagues**

Workers should take measures as established by agency policy to discourage, prevent, expose and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues, including unethical conduct using technology.

Workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek resolution through the appropriate channels established by the agency.

### **3. FAMILY RECORDS**

Workers must take reasonable steps to ensure that documentation in records is accurate and reflects the services provided in accordance with contractual issues.

Workers must include sufficient and timely documentation in records to facilitate the delivery of services and to ensure continuity of services provided to families in the future.

The worker's documentation must protect the family's privacy to the fullest extent possible and should include only information that is directly relevant to the delivery of services.

Workers must store records following the termination of services to families to ensure reasonable future access. Records must be maintained for the length of time outlined in the FaDSS contract.

Records both current and closed must be kept secure in a locked storage area or password protected for electronic files.

Workers must provide families with reasonable access to the records concerning their family. Family members who wish to examine their records or want to request copies may contact their worker and schedule a time during normal business hours to do so. A FaDSS staff member must be present during the examination.

Documentation in family records should not be changed after it has been entered into the family file. If there is a dispute with the records, the worker should follow the appropriate agency procedures.

## **4. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY**

### **4.1. Private Conduct**

Workers must not permit their private conduct outside of their job to interfere with their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

### **4.2. Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception**

Workers must not participate in dishonesty, fraud, or deception.

### **4.3. Impairment**

Workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance nor to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility.

Workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect families and others.

## **5. RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY**

In promoting the general welfare of society, the worker must act to expand choice and opportunities for all persons.

The worker must demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty, and fortitude in the FaDSS program in order to inspire confidence and trust within the community.

The worker must act to prevent and eliminate discrimination against any person or group on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical handicap, or any other preference of personal characteristic, condition or status.

The worker must promote conditions that encourage respect for the diversity of cultures.

The worker must be strength-based when advocating for change in policy and legislation to improve social conditions and to promote social justice. Workers, during their work hours, must follow agency personnel policies and contractual agreements when advocating for change.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITY TO RESEARCH AND PUBLICITY**

The worker needs to follow agency policies in regards to contact with the media and to participate in research. While the worker will cooperate with research and publicity, the ultimate aim will be to preserve family dignity and integrity.

When participants volunteer to be involved in media and/or public forums, the worker will attempt to maximize the families' privacy and dignity.

When supplying information to the public, the worker will help participants understand that misrepresentations may occur.

When using electronic technology to facilitate evaluation or research, workers should ensure that participants provide informed consent for the use of such technology. Workers should assess whether participants are able to use the technology and, when appropriate, offer reasonable alternatives to participate in the evaluation or research.