

COMPETENCIES FOR PROFESSIONAL CHILD & YOUTH WORK PRACTITIONERS

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Editor's Note: This article provides an overview of the NACP, as well as a summary of the competencies necessary for fully professional practice across the various settings in which child and youth care professionals work. *Competencies for Professional Child and Youth Work Professionals*, (Revised 2010), with a complete description of the project can be found at www.acycp.org or www.cycb.org/competencies.

This document is the result of many years of work by North American Child and Youth Care Professionals. Initial development was undertaken by the North American Certification Project (NACP) and, sponsored by the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP). The NACP arose from a broad opinion that North American certification for child and youth care practitioners was urgently needed.

GUIDING FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROJECT

The project was guided by the following description of the field and guiding principles.

Description of the Child & Youth Care Field

Professional child and youth care practice focuses on infants, children, and adolescents, including those with special needs, within the context of the family, the community, and the life span. The developmental ecological perspective emphasizes the interaction between persons and their physical and social environments, including cultural and political settings.

Professional practitioners promote the optimal development of children, youth, and their families in a variety of settings, such as early care and education, commu-

nity-based child and youth development programs, parent education and family support, school-based programs, community mental health, group homes, residential centers, day and residential treatment, early intervention, home-based care and treatment, psychiatric centers, rehabilitation programs, pediatric health care, and juvenile justice programs.

Child and youth care practice includes assessing client and program needs, designing and implementing programs and planned environments, integrating developmental, preventive, and therapeutic requirements into the life space, contributing to the development of knowledge and practice, and participating in systems interventions through direct care, supervision, administration, teaching, research, consultation, and advocacy.

Guiding Principles

1. **Inclusion:** All national, state, and local organizations, as well as persons concerned with setting standards for child and youth care practitioners are invited and encouraged to participate.
2. **Credibility:** The process is based on standards which are professionally recognized and established by respected assessment methods.
3. **Generic Standards:** The standards are based on standards applicable to all child and youth care practice areas.
4. **Reciprocity:** The credential is designed to support and encourage reciprocity
5. **Ethics:** The certification process and standards are based on the Standards for Practice of North American Child and Youth Care Professionals developed by the Association for Child and Youth Care Practice (ACYCP) and the International Coalition for Professional Child and Youth Care Work (ILC). Other ethical statements can be included as the collaboration develops.

LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION NEEDED

Discussions in a variety of professional forums have led to the conclusion that three levels of certification in child and youth care work can be considered: entry level, professional level, and advanced level. The focus of this article is the professional level.

WORK OF THE COMPETENCY GROUP

Clarification of the Task

This was an unfunded project with all participants, who were mature practitioners and academics in the profession, volunteering their time. Documents related to standards and competency in the field were collected and reviewed.

The task of the domain teams partly resembled a meta-analysis. The database reflected the wisdom of our past, but the field has changed and continues to evolve. The domain team members had an understanding of these changes and at least an educated guess about future directions. In a sense, we stood on these documents in order to look ahead.

The task was to use the documents as useful, but to also include our interpretation of meaning, fill in gaps, remove what was not useful, articulate new directions, make the language clear and direct, and establish congruence with current scholarship.

The field of child and youth care operates within a developmental ecological perspective. As such, this perspective is also applicable to the practice of the art and science of child and youth care. The domains of practice have application in a range of contexts. Organizing the competencies into discrete elements is useful for observing, assessing, and testing specific areas and for the design of training curricula. Professional practitioners have fully integrated the attitudes, skills, and knowledge components into any action they engage in and they adjust their practice according to the context. Skills are demonstrated within a context in a manner that demonstrates the practitioner's awareness of the meaning, atmosphere, and nature of the activities in that context. Communication with a supervisor, for example, is different from communication with a youth, yet the basic skills would be described in the same manner. It is the context within which the action occurs and the integration of the appropriate attitudes and knowledge that differentiate the application. While the skills and knowledge within a particular subcategory of a domain are described in a generic manner, when they are integrated with the foundational attitudes for each contextual layer, their unique qualities emerge. It is intended that each domain be developed by the professional practitioner at the professional level through the contexts of application: self, relationship, environment, organization (system), and culture.

The original competency document was updated in 2010 in an effort to adjust the competency language to better represent the wide diversity of settings within the field.

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The objective of the NACP is to set credentialing standards for North America. However, it is important to recognize that there are significant differences between the United States and Canada, particularly in relation to educational programs.

In the United States, the baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university will be the minimal educational requirement to engage in the certification process at the professional level. The educational requirement will be waived for an applicant who can document five years or more of experience in the field for a 7-year grandfathering period that ends December 31, 2012.

Educational standards for engaging in the certification process for Canadians will be determined by the professional child and youth care community in Canada, using the structures in place. In Canada the educational requirement to engage in the professional level will include a minimum of one of the following:

1. Diploma (2 years or more) from a program in child and youth care studies at a provincially accredited college.
2. Baccalaureate degree in CYC or a related field from a provincially accredited college or university.

For a 7-year period (2006 -2012) following the implementation of NACP certification, the educational requirement will be waived for anyone with 5 years experience who was employed as a CYC practitioner at the time of, or prior to, implementation. This period ends December 31, 2012. It was further understood, that the credential planning and implementation group could specify whatever specific coursework and training may be deemed appropriate. Such requirements would be for those applicants not using the waiver of the educational requirement.

FOUNDATIONAL ATTITUDES FOR PROFESSIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORK

The child and youth care professional demonstrates the following attitudes which underlie all professional work:

- accepts the moral and ethical responsibility inherent in practice
- promotes the well-being of children, youth, and families in a context of respect and collaboration
- values care as essential for emotional growth, social competence, rehabilitation, and treatment
- celebrates the strengths generated from cultural and human
- diversity
- values individual uniqueness
- values family, community, culture and human diversity as integral to the developmental and interventive process

- believes in the potential and empowerment of children, youth, family, and community
- advocates for the rights of children, youth, and families
- promotes the contribution of professional child and youth care to society

THE COMPETENCIES

I. Professionalism

Professional practitioners are generative and flexible; they are self-directed and have a high degree of personal initiative. Their performance is consistently reliable. They function effectively both independently and as a team member. Professional practitioners are knowledgeable about what constitutes a profession, and engage in professional and personal development and self-care. The professional practitioner is aware of the function of professional ethics and uses professional ethics to guide and enhance practice and advocates effectively for children, youth, families, and the profession.

A. Foundational Knowledge

- History, structure, organization of child and youth care work
- Resources and activities of CYC
- Current and emergent trends in society, services, and in CYC
- Structure and function of Codes of Ethics applicable to practice which includes the Code of Ethics, Standards for Practice of North American Child and Youth Care Professionals (www.acycp.org)
- Accepted boundaries in professional practice
- Stress management and wellness practices
- Strategies to build a professional support network
- Significance of advocacy and an array of advocacy strategies
- Relevant laws, regulations, legal rights, and licensing procedures governing practice

B. Professional Competencies

1. Awareness of the Profession
2. Professional Development and Behavior
3. Personal Development and Self Care

4. Professional Ethics
5. Awareness of Law and Regulations
6. Advocacy

II. Cultural and Human Diversity

Professional practitioners actively promote respect for cultural and human diversity. The Professional Practitioner seeks self understanding and has the ability to access and evaluate information related to cultural and human diversity. Current and relevant knowledge is integrated in developing respectful and effective relationships and communication and developmental practice methods. Knowledge and skills are employed in planning, implementing and evaluating respectful programs and services, and workplaces.

A. Foundational Knowledge

The professional practitioner is well versed in current research and theory related to cultural and human diversity including the eight major factors which set groups apart from one another, and which give individuals and groups elements of identity: age, class, race, ethnicity, levels of ability, language, spiritual belief systems, educational achievement, and gender differences.

- Cultural structures, theories of change, and values within culture variations
- Cross cultural communication
- History of political, social, and economic factors which contribute to racism, stereotyping, bias and discrimination
- Variations among families and communities of diverse backgrounds
- Cultural and human diversity issues in the professional environment

B. Professional Competencies

1. Cultural and Human Diversity Awareness and Inquiry
2. Relationship and Communication Sensitive to Cultural and
3. Human Diversity
4. Developmental Practice Methods Sensitive to Cultural and
5. Human Diversity

III. Applied Human Development

Professional practitioners promote the optimal development of children, youth, and their families in a variety of settings. The developmental-ecological perspective

emphasizes the interaction between persons and their physical and social environments, including cultural and political settings. Special attention is given to the every day lives of children and youth, including those in high risk situations and with special needs, within the family, neighborhood, school and larger social-cultural context. Professional practitioners integrate current knowledge of human development with the skills, expertise, objectivity, and self-awareness essential for developing, implementing and evaluating effective programs and services.

A. Foundational Knowledge

The professional practitioner is well versed in current research and theory in human development with an emphasis on a developmental-ecological perspective.

- Life span human development
- Child/adolescent development (as appropriate for the arena of practice), including domains of
 - Cognitive development
 - Social-emotional development
 - Physiological development
 - Psycho-sexual development
 - Spiritual development
 - Exceptionality in development including at-risk and special needs circumstances such as trauma, child abuse/neglect, developmental psychopathology, and developmental disorders
 - Family development, systems, and dynamics

B. Professional Competencies

1. Contextual-Developmental Assessment
2. Sensitivity to Contextual Development in Relationships and Communication
3. Practice Methods that are Sensitive to Development and Context
4. Access Resources that Support Healthy Development

IV. Relationship and Communication

Practitioners recognize the critical importance of relationships and communication in the practice of quality child and youth care. Ideally, the service provider and client work in a collaborative manner to achieve growth and change. "Quality first" practitioners

develop genuine relationships based on empathy and positive regard. They are skilled at clear communication, both with clients and with other professionals. Observations and records are objective and respectful of their clients. Relationship and communication are considered in the context of the immediate environment and its conditions; the policy and legislative environment; and the historical and cultural environment of the child, youth, or family with which the practitioner interacts.

A. Foundational Knowledge

- Characteristics of helping relationships
- Characteristics of healthy interpersonal relationships
- Cultural differences in communication styles
- Developmental differences in communication
- Communication theory (verbal and non-verbal)
- Group dynamics and teamwork theory
- Family dynamics and communication patterns, including attachment theory as it relates to communication style

B. Professional Competencies

1. Interpersonal Communication
2. Relationship Development
3. Family Communication
4. Teamwork and Professional Communication Skills

V. Developmental Practice Methods

Practitioners recognize the critical importance of developmental practice methods focused in CYC practice: Genuine Relationships, Health and Safety, Intervention Planning, Environmental Design and Maintenance, Program Planning and Activity Programming, Activities of Daily Living, Group Work, Counseling, Behavioral Guidance, Family (Caregiver) Engagement, and Community Engagement. These are designed to promote optimal development for children, youth, and families including those in at-risk situations and with special needs within the context of the family, community, and the lifespan.

A. Foundational Knowledge

- Health and safety

- Intervention theory and design
- Environmental design
- Program planning and activity programming
- Behavioral guidance methods
- Behavior management methods
- Counseling skills
- Understanding and working with groups
- Understanding and working with families
- Understanding and working with communities

B. Professional Competencies

1. Genuine Relationships
2. Health and Safety
3. Intervention Planning
4. Environmental Design and Maintenance
5. Program Planning and Activity Programming
6. Activities of Daily Living
7. Group Process
8. Counseling
9. Behavioral Guidance
10. Family (Caregiver) Engagement
11. Community Engagement

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