

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

NASW Standards for  
Social Work Practice in

Child  

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Welfare



2005

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## **National Association of Social Workers**

Elvira Craig de Silva, DSW, ACSW  
President (2005-2008)

Elizabeth J. Clark, PhD, ACSW, MPH  
Executive Director

## **Child Welfare Standards Work Group**

Allison Blake, PhD, MSW  
Priscilla Gibson, PhD, ACSW, LICSW  
Jayne Pietrass, MSW  
Ramon Salcido, DSW  
Nelly Rojas Schwan, LCSW, ACSW  
Susan Wells, PhD, MSW  
Millicent Williams, ACSW

## **NASW Staff**

Nancy Bateman, LCSW-C  
Nancy McFall Jean, MSW

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# Standards

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## **Social Work Practice in Child Welfare**

### **Background**

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The child welfare system serves some of our nation's most vulnerable and troubled children and families. The goal of child welfare services is to provide an array of prevention and intervention services to children and families, particularly children who have been or are at risk of abuse or neglect; children with special medical or mental health needs; delinquent children; and children who do not have adult caregivers. This "system" has been dubbed by some experts as merely an amalgamation of programs with efforts to prevent out-of-home placements, reunify families, and provide long-term care and solutions to families in need. Regardless of how it is characterized, the child welfare system is designed to support families and to protect children from harm.

Historically, social workers have played a key role in the child welfare system by protecting children at risk and supporting families in need. Indeed, the social work profession is strongly rooted in the tradition of social reform, much of which was directed toward alleviating the problems of children in postindustrial society. Voluntary agencies and government services for children were created by concerned citizens and public officials during the past 70 years.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) led the field in the development of best practices for social workers in child welfare. The *NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Protection* (NASW, 1981) served as an initial effort to formulate standards in this important and continually evolving area of practice. Because it is essential that these standards reflect and promote sound social work practice, they have been revised and expanded beyond child protection to reflect changing practices and policies for social work practice in a variety of child welfare settings. These standards can be regarded as a basic tool for social work practice in child welfare that might include family preservation and support, out-of-home care, family foster care, kinship care, residential group homes, adoption, independent living, child day care, adolescent pregnancy and parenting services, hospitals, and nontraditional settings such as faith-based facilities.

Since the NASW child protection standards were published in 1981, there have been many profound changes in the child welfare system. Many of these were driven, in part, by high-profile child death cases and an overwhelmed foster care system, resulting in increased attention to the needs of these vulnerable children. There were also several important shifts in law and policy, particularly with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). ASFA focused on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the child welfare system, for example, by further tying funding to agency performance and stipulating time frames in cases of out-of-home care.

The implementation of ASFA has had profound implications on social work practice as the delivery of services has become more outcome-based, with a focus on staff and supervisors who have the values, knowledge, cultural competence, and skills necessary to assist the families they serve. This law sets specific guidelines and timeframes for moving children from unstable, out-of-home placements to permanent, loving homes.

As the next decade unfolds, a range of economic, social, and political factors will affect the child welfare system and the number of children needing adoption and other types of supportive services. These forces are likely to challenge current policy and practice and place greater demands on the child welfare system to respond to the needs of a growing number of foster children who cannot be reunited with their birth families, a disproportionate number of which are children of color. Public policies will need to address the growing number of children in the child welfare system, which is a truly troubling phenomenon.

### **Workforce Issues**

Practitioners and researchers are continually challenged by the difficulties agencies face in recruiting and retaining a competent child welfare workforce. Recent studies indicate that social work degrees are the most appropriate degrees for the field of practice (Child Welfare League of America, 2003b). A social work-educated workforce has been directly linked to better outcomes for children and families and to lower staff turnover in child welfare settings.

As the country has grappled with the continuing crisis in its public child welfare system, states are increasingly turning to recruitment and retention strategies aimed at increasing the number of BSW and MSW social workers practicing in these systems. Efforts to accomplish these goals have included loan forgiveness, enhanced training opportunities, employer payment of licensing renewal fees and continuing education units, and improved supervisory practices (Cyphers, 2001). In addition, the past several years have seen continued support for federally funded partnerships between schools of social work and the public child welfare systems to support the reprofessionalization of this workforce.

## Definitions

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### **Child Welfare**

Child welfare encompasses programs and policies oriented toward the protection, care, and healthy development of children. Within a national, state, and local policy and funding framework, child welfare services are provided to vulnerable children and their families by public and nonprofit agencies with the goals of ameliorating conditions that put children and families at risk; strengthening and supporting families so they can successfully care for their children; protecting children from future abuse and neglect; addressing the emotional, behavioral, or health problems of children; and when necessary, providing permanent families for children through adoption or guardianship (Liederman, 1995).

### **Out-Of-Home Care**

Out-of-home care is an array of services, including family foster care, kinship care, and group residential care for children who have been placed in the custody of the state and who require living arrangements away from their birth parents (Child Welfare League of America, 2003a).

### **Permanency Planning**

This is a guiding principle of child welfare practice intended to limit placement into, and the time spent in, out-of-home care. It includes an array of social work and legal efforts directed toward securing safe, nurturing, life-long families for children (Child Welfare League of America, 2003a).

*Note: The terms “social worker” and “social worker in child welfare” will be used interchangeably throughout the document.*

## Standards for Professional Practice

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### Standard 1. Ethics and Values

**Social workers in child welfare shall demonstrate a commitment to the values and ethics of the social work profession, emphasizing client empowerment and self-determination, and shall use the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) as a guide to ethical decision-making.**

#### Interpretation

The NASW *Code of Ethics* establishes the ethical responsibilities of all social workers with respect to themselves, clients, colleagues, employees and employing organizations, the social work profession, and society. Acceptance of these responsibilities guides and fosters competent social work practice in all child welfare tasks and activities. As an integral component of the child welfare system, social workers have a responsibility to know and comply with local, state, and federal legislation, regulations, and policies. Legal and regulatory guidelines as well as administrative practices may conflict with the best interests of the child and/or family. In the event that conflicts arise, social workers are directed to the NASW *Code of Ethics* (1999) as a tool in their decision-making.

### Standard 2. Qualifications

**All social workers practicing in child welfare should hold a BSW or MSW degree from an accredited school of social work.**

#### Interpretation

The knowledge requirements considered fundamental to all social work practice, which

are met by completion of BSW and MSW programs within colleges and universities accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), must include knowledge about the history and development of social work, including child welfare. Furthermore, social workers in child welfare should have a proven ability to apply this knowledge to intervene constructively in family, organizational, or social systems. These interventions should support the child and family in addressing identified needs and difficulties to prevent harm to the child and to maximize the family's chances for positive functioning and stability.

Currently, hiring requirements for social workers in child welfare vary. In some agencies, only MSWs are hired; in others, not even a BSW is a prerequisite to practice. Child welfare requires knowledge and skills in assessment, active engagement, intervention, the use of authority, and an expert ability to negotiate and manage appropriate community resources.

### Standard 3. Continuing Education

**Social workers are responsible for their continued professional development in accordance with the NASW Standards for Continuing Education (2002) and state licensing requirements.**

#### Interpretation

Continuing education is an essential activity for ensuring quality social work services for consumers. By consistent participation in educational opportunities beyond the basic, entry-level professional degree, social workers

are able to maintain and increase their proficiency in service delivery. New knowledge is acquired, skills are refined, professional attitudes are reinforced, and individuals' lives are changed. Social workers who practice in child welfare shall continue to stay current on knowledge and understanding basic to the social work profession, particularly concerning the findings and implications of research for the most effective practice interventions.

Social workers in child welfare shall attend continuing education opportunities that challenge existing theories and use multiple methods of learning to ensure the integration of theory into practice. These opportunities should be consistent with the social work licensing requirements set forth by the state in which they practice. They should include a specified number of continuing education units (CEUs) in social work ethics each year.

#### **Standard 4. Advocacy**

**The professional social worker in child welfare practice is expected to advocate for resources and system reforms that will improve services for children and their families, as appropriate, within the context of their job.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers in the field of child welfare should use a range of skills to advocate for and with clients for policies that promote the welfare of children and child protective services. Advocacy should be directed at improving administrative and public policies to support children and their families. Such advocacy should move toward the

empowerment of children and their families in both urban and rural settings. System changes can be implemented by making changes in direct practice as well as by making changes in laws or policies.

Emphasis on system reforms should seek to make child welfare services more responsive to children and their families, communities, and diverse cultures. Such advocacy should emphasize the strengths and assets approach in the development of social services and child welfare programs, as well as the use of documented evidence regarding the most effective programs and policies for children and their families.

#### **Standard 5. Knowledge Requirements**

**Social workers in child welfare shall demonstrate a working knowledge of current theory and practice in child welfare to include compliance with state and federal child welfare laws.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers in child welfare shall possess knowledge related to child development, parenting issues, family dynamics, and the community/local systems where the client resides. Recommended areas of knowledge include:

#### **Child Development**

- effects of deprivation of parental care
- effects of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect on children
- effects of partial separation from parents, as in day care, and of total separation, as in

foster family care, and issues of loss, anger, grief, and identity

- effect on children of repeated changes in living arrangements, adverse community conditions, and cultural or interracial problems
- issues of bonding and attachment with adoptive families or foster families
- opportunities for children who live independently, such as those who “age out” of foster care, to obtain education, training and development of job-related skills
- importance of working with children in nontraditional environments in which they feel comfortable
- ways to provide peer education and increase decision-making and leadership skills for children
- effect of lifelong connections for children; for example, the impact of long-term mentoring.

### **Parenting Issues**

- methods of child rearing and child care including basic health care
- responsibilities, obligations, duties, and rights of parents
- factors affecting parental capacity to meet their children’s needs
- cultural differences affecting child rearing
- positive guidance, discipline strategies, and formation of ideas and values
- parental feelings and attitudes associated with asking for help in relation to the child or the impact of partially or fully surrendering their childrearing function
- effects on children of parental personality disturbances, mental illness, substance abuse, and marital conflicts

- relationship of the parents’ childhood experiences on their capacity to parent
- specified needs and training for foster parents
- community and cultural attitudes toward parents who cannot carry their full parental responsibility.

### **Family Dynamics**

- dynamics of families who abuse or neglect their children and the impact of domestic violence
- impact of socioeconomic stress upon families
- evaluation of risk to the child
- concept of family culture, and an assessment of family strengths
- emotional aspects of parent-child relationships
- problems involved in divided allegiance in cases of parental conflict, separation, divorce, or in placement.

### **Community/Local Systems**

- political, legal, and judicial structures, processes, and practices
- needs of people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and sexual preferences and the community resources that are available to address these needs
- purpose and structure of public and voluntary social and child welfare servicing agencies; the functions and the relationships among federal, state, and local agencies
- functions of, and services provided by, schools, health, mental health, and medical agencies, including special education services, child guidance services, parenting and life enrichment courses

- interrelationship between the individual, the family, the neighborhood, and the community
- child abuse and neglect prevention strategies through family advocacy (for example, legislative and educative efforts), and the appropriate use of the media to promote public awareness of the needs of children and families and available community resources.

### **Compliance with Child Welfare Laws**

Social workers practicing in child welfare have a dual responsibility to keep current about practice models and to stay abreast of new laws and regulations that have an impact on child welfare practice. This can be accomplished through continuing education programs, professional journals, and state and federal resources. Child welfare organizations must ensure information on new laws and their requirements are shared with staff in a timely manner. Also, social workers in child welfare must be aware of changes to state, federal, and local laws affecting practice with children and families and should be competent to explain legislative and legal changes to the individuals they serve.

### **Consultation**

Social workers in child welfare should seek the advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interests of clients. Social workers should seek consultation from colleagues who have demonstrated knowledge, expertise, and competence related to the consultation subject. Consultation should include advice and counsel from social workers and other

disciplines with relevant expertise. Social workers should seek consultation when issues arise as to whether the child is of an age to consent. When consulting with colleagues about clients, social workers should disclose the least amount of information necessary to achieve the purposes of the consultation *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999).

### **Compliance with Agency Policies and Procedures**

Social workers in child welfare are expected to conform to the policies and procedures that are set by the agency. However, the assumption of this standard is that the agency's policies and procedures and the professional social worker's practice are compatible. In the event that some incompatibility arises between the two entities, social workers shall conform to the *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999).

### **Standard 6. Confidentiality of Client Information**

**Social workers in child welfare shall maintain the appropriate safeguards for the privacy and confidentiality of client information.**

### **Interpretation**

Social workers must protect client information at all times. Access to written client information (paper and electronic) is limited and maintained securely. Social workers shall use private offices/areas when meeting with clients or discussing client information. Social workers in child welfare shall conform to the *NASW Code of Ethics* (1999) and to relevant state and federal regulations to ensure that client information is protected.

Information obtained by the social worker from or about the client shall be viewed as private and confidential, unless the client gives informed consent for the social worker to release or discuss the information with another party. There may be other exceptions to confidentiality as required by law or professional ethics. Social workers should be familiar with national, state, and local exceptions to confidentiality, such as mandates to report when the client is a danger to self or others and for reporting child or elder abuse and neglect. Clients should be informed of the agency's confidentiality requirements and limitations before services are initiated.

#### **Standard 7. Supervision**

**Social workers who act as supervisors in child welfare shall work to develop and advance the social workers' skills and ensure quality service delivery to clients.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers who act as supervisors in child welfare shall provide the necessary skills to ensure the professional development of the social workers in their charge. Social workers who act as supervisors should ensure quality service delivery, provide for the in-service training needs of their staff, and assess the needs of the persons served. They must also possess knowledge of the political, legislative, and economic factors that affect service delivery in their community and be able to mentor staff in learning to negotiate those systems.

Social workers who act as supervisors should receive training specific to supervision of social

workers in direct practice, including a specified number of CEUs in social work ethics each year. Supervisors in child welfare should possess enhanced knowledge and skills in the field and must have a graduate degree from a social work program accredited by CSWE. They must be licensed and shall have a minimum of two years experience in the field directly related to the work of the staff they are supervising. The supervisor must provide clear performance expectations and periodic performance evaluations that allow the social worker to evaluate his or her own practice. The supervisor should allow time to provide workers with guidance and decision-making on complex cases, as necessary.

#### **Standard 8. Cultural Competence**

**Social workers in child welfare are expected to be knowledgeable about cultural competency practices and standards as described in the *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence* (2001).**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers in child welfare should use social work methods and skills that include knowledge of the role of culture, race, and ethnicity in the helping process. Supervisors should develop training for social workers on culturally competent practice. When providing services, social workers may need to explore the role of spirituality, religion, sexual orientation, and age as factors affecting outcomes.

Social workers in child welfare should engage in recruitment and retention of potential foster care and adoptive parents consistent

with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382), the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-188), and the Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608). Social workers must include tribes in decision-making and for assistance in locating appropriate placement resources when a Native American child requires out-of-home care. Consideration should also be given to addressing the particular needs of other children of color, especially African American children, who are over represented in the child welfare system. If children are placed with parents of a different race, ethnicity, or culture, such parents should receive diversity training, when appropriate.

There has been an increase in the number of immigrants and their children in the United States; such changes could affect the needs that child welfare services will address. Social workers in child welfare should be familiar with the latest data on population changes in their region related to immigrant children and their families. Such changes will require learning about the emerging immigrant cultural heritage, needs, and support networks.

#### **Standard 9. Collaboration**

**Social workers in child welfare shall have demonstrated competence in collaborating with child welfare agencies and other relevant entities in the provision of services to children and families.**

#### **Interpretation**

There is a collaborative relationship between child welfare professionals and other

professionals whose mission includes child protection. The social worker should understand the roles and goals of other professionals in the field and work toward enhanced collaboration and understanding. Such collaboration may include other professionals, paraprofessionals, and community leaders. The collaboration can ensure that the services are available to community members and can identify emerging problems of service delivery plans. In addition, such collaborations can monitor the implementation and effects of child welfare programs on the community.

#### **Standard 10. Focus on Prevention**

**Social workers in child welfare shall identify and promote the use of supportive and preventive services to strengthen and enhance family functioning in order to avoid the need for protective services.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers recognize families' and individuals' growth potential and ability to improve their functioning to protect and nurture their children. Social workers also have knowledge of personal, familial, and social factors that decrease or tax a family's resources to care for its members. Social workers in child welfare have the responsibility to:

- identify opportunities for growth and address risk factors for increased family stress
- identify and recommend families' use of community resources
- advocate for the development of preventive services and strong community programs.

### **Standard 11. Engagement**

**Social workers in child welfare shall engage families as partners in the process of assessment and intervention.**

#### **Interpretation**

Engagement requires social workers in child welfare to be clear about the reasons for the family intervention, whether it is an investigation or services following an investigation. The social worker shall seek to understand and incorporate, as appropriate, the family's perspective and definition of the problem and potential solutions. It is important that the social worker be able to convey an understanding and empathy for the family's situation or difficulties. Engagement involves "contracting" for services and assisting the family to look forward to a better future, with no need for services.

### **Standard 12. Comprehensive Service Planning**

**Social workers in child welfare shall develop, in collaboration with the family, a comprehensive service plan to strengthen the family's ability to care for their children, with specific attention to their developmental needs, and to enhance the overall functioning of its members. It must include a system for documenting progress and case closings.**

#### **Interpretation**

The goal of the service plan is to ensure that the child's needs for safety and nurturance are met, with particular attention to child developmental stages and special needs. Implementation of the service plan needs to be flexible and adapted to the changing circumstances of the family, their response to

the interventions, and the social worker's increased understanding of the family, the child welfare system, and the larger community. Technology should be used to facilitate the casework process.

The social worker shall seek the family and child's participation, input, and feedback to ensure that service is a mutual undertaking between social worker, family, and child. Input of other community collaborators should be sought at specific intervals and incorporated into an ongoing assessment and understanding of the family's needs and response to interventions. The service plan should include:

- a timely, comprehensive assessment of family, parent or other caretakers, and children to understand their overall functioning, and to identify strengths and family resources, needs, and their ability to provide a safe and nurturing home for their children
- specific desired outcomes, how they will be measured, and time frames for accomplishment
- periodic evaluations of progress towards goals specifying how progress will be evaluated and who will participate in this evaluation
- responsibilities of the social worker and family members
- community resources and how they will be used on behalf of the family
- specific interventions and action steps
- specific expectations and consequences if the family is not a voluntary participant
- specific legal issues and court involvement, if applicable

- family's rights to legal counsel and information on access to legal resources if the family is not a voluntary participant and services include any legal or court action.

### **Monitoring Progress**

The social worker in child welfare shall monitor and document the child's and family's progress and evaluate the outcome of the service plan. Intervention and implementation of the service plan is a mutual undertaking between the social worker and the family, with expectations and responsibilities clarified for both parties. Monitoring and evaluation are ongoing and need to address both the family's progress towards goals, as well as the effectiveness of the social worker's interventions. Social workers in child welfare have a responsibility to provide feedback to the family and to seek feedback about their professional activity. The social worker is also responsible for informing family members of their right to provide an assessment of the services rendered and to request changes, including a change of social worker, if necessary.

### **Case Closing**

The social worker in child welfare shall follow the service plan and prepare the family for the termination of services when goals and objectives are accomplished and the child is safe, or when goals and objectives are not accomplished and there is a need for alternative intervention. An important element at the end of service provision is consideration of the resources, both within the family and in the community, that will support and sustain the family's gains and further development.

The social worker will partner with the family to identify community resources and facilitate the child's and family's use of these resources by providing information and referrals when appropriate. When necessary, the social worker in child welfare should advocate for community services for the family.

### **Documentation/Management of Information**

Social workers shall keep records and gather the statistics necessary to manage and plan service delivery and agency programs. Social workers in child welfare shall ensure that client information contained in case records is accurate, thorough, and entered in a timely manner. Social workers providing crisis services or services in high-risk cases should ensure documentation is completed as soon as possible and is current. To protect privacy, case records should include only the information necessary for the provision of services.

Social workers must be aware of any legal requirements relating to client information and case records. Social workers in child welfare should understand the implications of collecting client information as it relates to the safety, permanence, and well-being of the child and family.

### **Use of Technology**

Social workers shall utilize available technology to increase the efficiency of services in a way that ensures the protection of clients' rights and privacy. The Internet, e-mail, electronic case record systems, and data analysis software have increased the efficiency of child welfare services. The

Internet has become a place for organizations to educate the public and prospective clients about the services they provide. Internet adoption photo-listings have drastically increased the accessibility of information available about children awaiting adoption. E-mail has increased social workers' abilities to communicate with clients and other service providers and is being used as a mechanism for providing counseling and education services. Electronic case record systems and data analysis software have increased the speed and accuracy of accessing, aggregating, and analyzing client data. Although these advances have greatly improved service delivery, administrators and social workers must ensure that confidential client information is protected at all times.

#### **Standard 13. Child Protection**

**The social worker must be able to assess imminent risk and ensure that arrangements are made to protect the child in accordance with state and federal laws, agency policies, and administrative directives governing child protection. The assessment must take into account the child's best interests.**

#### **Interpretation**

When a child's safety is at risk, the social worker in child welfare is required to report and document the risk to protective authorities. If the social worker's role involves child protection, the worker is required to use the legal process available to protect the child and to document evidence and concerns to guide the child protective intervention.

Social workers should explain to the family the rationale for their actions, allow the family to ventilate feelings, inform them of their rights, and facilitate legal representation. Social workers shall treat the family respectfully, humanely, and professionally. As necessary, social workers shall seek protection to ensure their own safety.

Child protection or child welfare services in the most egregious cases may also involve termination of parental rights. It is imperative that the worker be well-versed in the biopsychosocial indicators of absolute inability to care for a child in the foreseeable future as well as the legal requirements regarding taking such measures.

#### **Standard 14. Out-of-Home Care**

**When children are unable to remain in their homes, social workers in child welfare shall place children in out-of-home care that meets the needs for safety, permanency, and well-being.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers in child welfare shall consider the strengths and needs of the child and the caregiver when assessing the safety and appropriateness of placement options (for example, kinship care, foster care, treatment foster care, group home, residential treatment). Children are encouraged to maintain connections with family, friends, and other individuals with whom the child has a relationship, except in situations where there are legal constraints, such as protective orders. Social workers in child welfare shall ensure that the child's medical, dental, mental health,

developmental, cultural, spiritual, social, and recreational needs are met while in out-of-home care. Social workers should not assume that because a child is in out-of-home care that the child is safe. Social workers should make assiduous efforts to ensure the child receives appropriate services, placement is safe, discipline is appropriate, and all necessary authorizations are secured before medical treatment is performed.

#### **Standard 15. Permanency**

**Social workers in child welfare shall strive to achieve permanency and well-being for children in out-of-home care.**

#### **Interpretation**

Permanence for children is achieved within a family relationship that offers safe, stable, and committed parenting, unconditional love and lifelong support, and legal family membership status. Permanence can be the result of preservation of the family, reunification with the birth family, or legal guardianship or adoption by kin or other caring and committed adults.

For children who cannot return to their family of origin, social workers in child welfare should continuously use a range of recruitment options. Recruitment should occur from existing connections and relationships. Child welfare agencies, in collaboration with the child and family, shall identify a range of permanency options without imposing limitations based on the age of the child, beginning with an extensive exploration of the possibilities within the family of origin. The permanency option

chosen should reflect the child's situation, needs, and preferences, represent the child's best interests, and be reassessed regularly until a plan is achieved that includes a permanent family relationship as well as life skills, supports, and services.

Social workers in child welfare should also use strategies to recruit new adoptive and foster families who reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious/spiritual backgrounds of the child in need of placement consistent with the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. An array of methods and media should be used to raise awareness about the needs of the child, as well as to communicate recruitment messages. Recruitment is especially critical for children of color, African American and Native American children in particular, because they are significantly over represented in the child welfare system.

Social workers providing adoption services shall ensure that children in need of permanent family relationships become members of stable, loving families. Social workers must ensure that all adoptions are done in the best interests of children and are conducted in an ethical manner, in accord with all foreign, federal, and state legal and regulatory requirements. Children shall be matched with prospective adoptive families that can best meet their needs, and birth and prospective adoptive families shall receive sufficient information and time to make informed decisions about adoption.

Social workers should provide biological parents, adopted children and adults, prospective adoptive parents, and adoptive families with:

- non-directive pregnancy counseling services
- information about adoption options, financial and legal issues and resources
- names of reputable adoption agencies
- home study services that help participants decide whether to pursue adoption, when, and how
- pre- and post- adoption support and counseling for all participants
- services for families who have children with special emotional, behavioral, medical, and educational needs
- search and reunion counseling, support, and technical assistance.

Social workers must ensure that fees for the provision of adoption services are charged and collected in an ethical and legal manner.

#### **Standard 16. Social Work Administrators in Child Welfare**

**Social work administrators in child welfare shall ensure appropriate, effective service delivery to children and families. The administrator, in accordance with legal mandates, shall establish the policies, procedures, and guidelines necessary for effective social work practice in child welfare.**

#### **Interpretation**

The administrator is expected to:

- have a graduate degree from a CSWE-accredited social work program and at least five years post graduate, direct child welfare experience

- be competent in management activities such as budgeting, financial planning, public speaking, fund raising, and navigating the political process
- be licensed to practice social work as prescribed by law in his or her state
- hire social work staff with accredited BSW and MSW degrees, demonstrated work skills, and characteristics that reflect the ethnic composition of the clientele served by the agency
- establish a salary schedule that is fair and reasonable with regard to the social worker's education, work experiences, and job responsibilities
- recruit and allocate program funds sufficient for emergency, ongoing, and family support services
- establish operational definitions of child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and exploitation of children.

Furthermore, the administrator should work to constantly improve services to clients by using written policies and procedures for monitoring day-to-day program operations to include: continuous quality improvement systems; workload and caseload size; clients' rights; training for leadership; and work environment safety.

#### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

Administrators in child welfare shall ensure that staff participate in continuous quality improvement efforts within the organization, which may include data collection, data analysis, and the development of program improvements. Administrators shall use supervision and self-evaluation as tools for

improving individual knowledge and skills. Supervision and self-evaluation offer opportunities for social workers to examine the effectiveness of the services provided.

### **Workload and Caseload Size**

Administrators must ensure that social workers are assigned a manageable workload to ensure that clients have access to the worker and receive the services they need. Administrators in child welfare should consider both the social worker's caseload size and additional responsibilities (for example, supervision or training of other staff) when evaluating their workload. National standards that specify recommended caseload sizes or care/supervision ratios (Council on Accreditation, 2001; CWLA, 1995) can be used to guide practice. Although such national standards exist, administrators should consider the following factors when adjusting caseload sizes:

- complexity of cases
- needs and strengths of clients
- number of children in the family
- risk of harm
- intensity of services
- duration of services
- status of the case (for example, new, ongoing, or termination)
- provision of service components by others (for example, case managers or other team members)
- travel time required
- bilingual or translation services required
- skills and experience of the provider and supervisor
- special personnel models (for example, team delivered services).

### **Clients' rights**

Administrators in child welfare agencies should ensure that their structure and policies reflect the mission, vision, and the core values of the social work profession. These should, therefore, ensure that people served are not discriminated against, are aware of their rights, and are treated in an ethical and professional manner, with easy access to services.

### **Training for Leadership**

The social work profession focuses heavily on the need for professionally educated and trained social workers to carry out the direct services work in child welfare settings. The social work profession should also train social workers to fill upper-level management positions in child welfare agencies to ensure that leadership decisions are made using social work skills and values. Social workers practicing as administrators in child welfare agencies should meet the educational and experience expectations as set forth in this standard.

### **Work Environment Safety**

Administrators in child welfare shall make efforts to ensure that the work environment is healthy and safe. Appropriate precautions should be taken to protect the social worker and the client from the spread of contagious or infectious diseases, especially in situations where the social worker is in contact with clients who have medical conditions that increase the risks associated with communicable diseases. Administrators should create and maintain an environment that is child and family friendly and is free from safety risks. Facilities, offices, vehicles used for

transporting clients, and toys or equipment shall be safe, appropriately inspected, and maintained.

Violence and threats of violence against social workers or other clients can occur in the office, in the community, and in the client's home. Administrators should ensure that social workers are trained in agency safety guidelines and any approved de-escalation or self-protection measures. Agency policy should require that social workers report and document all violence and threats of violence.

The NASW Standards can be downloaded for free on the NASW Web site: [www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org).

Purchase full document from NASW Press at 1.800.227.3590.

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF SOCIAL WORKERS

750 First Street, NE

Suite 700

Washington, DC 20002-4241

202.408.8600

[www.socialworkers.org](http://www.socialworkers.org)