



Ethics Policy

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Ethics Policy

INTRODUCTION

ICON's mission is to broaden public awareness and improve access to opportunities in the community for people who have historically been excluded because of disability.

This code of ethics is intended to serve as a straightforward and relevant ethical guide for the accomplishment of our mission, shedding some light on the shared path to a self-directed life. It is intended to guide ICON professionals in resolving ethical dilemmas they face every day and to encourage them to achieve the highest ideals of the profession. Professionals themselves must know that it is part of their role to foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual responsibility with other professionals regarding ethical practice.

Acceptance in the community as a valued, interdependent member occurs when human dignity is respected and opportunities are provided for each individual to pursue their unique path of development and fulfillment. While employment service providers cannot create inclusive communities, they can positively impact their emergence and growth. Accordingly, as employees of ICON Community Services, Inc., we hereby adopt these:

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Individuality

People receive support as unique individuals with varying interests, aptitudes, and preferences. They should be regarded as individuals, not as part of a group based upon level of functioning, name of disorder, or expedience of support.

Choice

Adequate options must exist relating to each individual's interest and desires in life so that they may exercise control and autonomy over the direction of their lives. These choices are the consequence of being fully informed through direct personal experience and/or considering information on possible alternatives.

Respect

Assistance is always dignified, age appropriate, and skill-enhancing.

Participation

Individuals have the opportunity to actively participate in all their chosen pursuits.

Competence

Persons are provided opportunities to develop skills of interest and use in their lives by discovering and expressing gifts and capacities.

Social Inclusion

Individuals have access to a wide variety of people in the community in order to build friendships, working relationships, and networks of individuals who go to shared places, have similar interests, or experience other commonalities.

Community Settings with Minimal Intrusion

Services are designed to support persons in their pursuit of a quality life in natural settings in ways which minimize artificiality or restrictiveness.

Career Planning

Employment should be an option for any person interested in working, regardless of label, support need, or perceived level of functioning. Job seekers or, at their request, family, friends, or co-workers, are the best source to convey information about their personal interests, preferences, skills, aptitudes, and life goals. Emphasis must be placed upon abilities, not limitations.

Job Development

Approaches for developing employer relations and linking individuals with private and public sector labor needs are respectful and image enhancing. Jobs developed reflect personal interests, preferences, and abilities, as well as employer needs. People are portrayed in ways which enhance their positive qualities and abilities. Hiring is never pursued on the basis of charity.

Job Acquisition

Job placement decisions are made by the individual based on reliable information on job quality, work culture, and employee/employer benefit. While some entry-level work experiences can be productive for building an employment history and developing skills, these experiences are thought of as initial career steps and not as career fulfillment. Accordingly, individuals should have opportunities for advancement in responsibilities and in pay.

Work Support

Natural supports in the workplace are utilized for training and ongoing support. Best training practices and technology appropriate to the setting and culture are implemented. Evaluations and outcome measures are provided appropriately. Language that is readily understood will be used as much as possible in lieu of the jargon frequently encountered in the disability field. The business culture is at all times respected and integrated into the support network for the individual to succeed. Accommodations, technology, or other job modifications needed are used, explored, and developed to maximize potential for success, non-intrusiveness, and use in other life areas.

ETHICAL CONDUCT

Confidentiality

Staff should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured. Staff should not discuss confidential information in public or semipublic areas such as hallways, waiting rooms, elevators, and restaurants. Staff should inform consumers of the limits of confidentiality at the onset of service (e.g. required reporting to funding agencies, the requirement to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect, etc.).

Staff should take reasonable personal action, inform responsible authorities, or inform those persons at risk, when the conditions or actions of an individual indicate that there is clear and imminent danger to others, after advising the individual that this must be done.

Staff will safeguard the maintenance, storage, and disposal of the records so that unauthorized persons shall not have access to these records. Staff will provide prospective employers with only job-relevant information about job applicants and will secure the permission of consumers or their legal guardians for the release of any information which might be considered confidential.

Some staff members have access to private and potentially sensitive information about other staff, including salary, performance evaluations, and personal information. Staff will maintain confidentiality of such information and discuss this information only when it is a function of the job duty.

Physical Contact

As a general rule, staff should not engage in physical contact with consumers except when necessary (e.g. conducting hand-over-hand training). In particular, staff should refrain from cradling or caressing people they serve in all but the most extreme situations. Staff members are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries governing physical contact.

Language

Staff should use accurate and respectful language in all communications, and avoid 'human services jargon' particularly when it serves to dehumanize or stigmatize the people we serve.

Assistance in Decision-Making

When staff advises individuals who need assistance in making informed decisions, they should take reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those individuals. This does not mean that ICON staff may control the actions of the consumer. Staff may advise but the final decision must always rest with the individual.

Respect to Colleagues and Supervisors

Staff should treat colleagues fairly, with dignity and with respect and should represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of colleagues and supervisors. Staff should avoid spreading gossip or other negative attitudes which would reflect poorly on the organization.

Staff should take adequate and appropriate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues. Staff who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek resolution by discussing their concerns with the colleague when feasible. When necessary, staff who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should inform supervisors so that resolution can take place.

Billable Hours and Work Quality

Staff should report billable hours that accurately reflect the nature and extent of services provided. Staff should make every effort to utilize time wisely and to conscientiously give a full day's work for a day's pay. Staff should render full and efficient service and provide the highest level of service possible.

Impairment

Staff must not allow their own personal or health problems to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility. Those who find themselves in this situation should seek consultation and take appropriate corrective action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating employment, or taking any other steps necessary to protect consumers and others.

Misrepresentation

Staff should make clear distinctions between statements made and actions taken as a private individual and as a representative of the agency. Staff are not permitted to take any action which is outside the scope of their job while acting as a representative of the organization.

Conflict of Interest

Staff should be aware of and avoid personal and professional circumstances that may cause a conflict of interest and hinder the ability to make judgments in the best interest of the persons served, their family members and or friends. Staff should notify his or her supervisor of potential or existing conflicts of interest.

Dual Relationships

Business, sexual, and most social relationships with people receiving services are strictly prohibited. Staff is prohibited from providing direct service to any client with whom they previously have had a social, sexual, or business relationship. ICON recognizes that friendships between staff and consumers will sometimes develop; however, which such friendship goes beyond the level of common working relationships, staff should request that the consumer be reassigned to someone who is capable of providing more objective services.

Social relationships between staff are permitted with the understanding that the staff member with the greater authority must be alert and responsive to the issues of equal access for all staff and fairness in treatment of those he or she supervises. Supervisors of the staff members involved must be notified so that they may be alert to any real or perceived conflict of interest. Staff must recognize that the professional relationship takes precedence over the social relationship at all times.

Gift Giving or Receiving

Gifts received by staff members from people they serve shall always be discussed with the staff member's supervisor in order to ensure that the gift is appropriate. Gifts given by staff must be offered in such a manner that there is no suggestion of discrimination or favoritism, and should not be different either in frequency or kind than gifts normally exchanged between acquaintances or co-workers. Gifts should be neither given nor accepted more than once or twice a year.

Lending money to consumers is discouraged and shall occur only with a supervisor's approval. Borrowing money from consumers is expressly forbidden under any circumstances.

Advocacy

Staff should serve as advocates for people with disabilities, striving to eliminate attitudinal barriers, including stereotyping and discrimination. Staff should strive to understand accessibility needs of people with varying types of disabilities and demonstrate such understanding in the practice of their profession. Staff should, through their words and actions, model desired attitudes and behaviors towards persons with disabilities.

Miscellaneous

When staff encounter additional ethical issues not addressed in this policy, they must immediately address such issues with their supervisor.

Staff should uphold the Constitution, laws and legal regulations of the United States, and of local jurisdictions.

GUIDELINES FOR DECISION MAKING

The Golden Rule – Are you treating others as you would want to be treated?

Publicity – Would you be comfortable if your reasoning and decision were to be publicized? How would you feel about seeing it on the front page of tomorrow's papers?

Legality – Is it legal?

Kid on Your Shoulder – Would you be comfortable if your children were observing you? Are you practicing what you preach?

CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATION OF THIS POLICY

Every ICON employee, as a condition of employment, must accept and honor the Ethics Policy in full. Violation of this policy can be cause for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Every ICON employee also has a responsibility to report any observed instances of violation of the Ethics Policy by other staff members. All reports of unethical behavior, whether from staff, consumers, or other stakeholders, should be made to the Executive Director, in writing if possible, within 24 hours of discovery of the alleged violation.

The Executive Director, assisted by members of the management team, will investigate the allegation and act upon the allegation as appropriate. If a violation of the Ethics Policy is determined to have occurred, discipline can take one of the following forms, in order of severity, as provided for in ICON's Personnel Policies and Procedures:

- Verbal counseling;
- A written warning or reprimand;
- Probation; or
- Suspension from work (for a period not exceeding three scheduled work days) subject to discharge.

Keep in mind, however, that ICON has no obligation to use any one or more of these forms of discipline prior to discharging employees.