

# SUPERVISED VISITATION NETWORK (SVN) CODE OF ETHICS<sup>1</sup>

## I. PREAMBLE

An historic and defining feature of supervised visitation is the profession's focus on the safety and well-being of children.<sup>2</sup> Fundamental to supervised visitation is an obligation to protect the rights and needs of all vulnerable family members. SVN is committed to providing a respectful, non-violent environment where all participants are safe from maltreatment.

### **Mission of the Supervised Visitation Network (SVN)**

*"The SVN provides communities with education and support that promote opportunities for children to have safe, conflict-free access to both parents through a continuum of child access services."*

### **SVN Core Values:**

- Respect
- Integrity
- Ethical Behavior
- Excellence in Service

## II. PURPOSE

A member of SVN has an obligation to follow the SVN values and ethical principles. The Supervised Visitation Network Code of Ethics (the "Code") sets forth these values and ethical principles to guide members' conduct. The Code applies to each member of SVN. A member is defined for the purposes of the Code as including individual and agency providers who are members of SVN, their staff, volunteers, students, and management, regardless of their function, the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve.<sup>3</sup>

## III. ETHICAL VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

### **1. Value: Respect**

*Ethical Principle: A member acknowledges the inherent worth of each individual.*

A member treats each person in a caring manner being mindful of individual difference and cultural and ethnic diversity. A member has a responsibility to understand that each parent has a relationship with his/her child and to acknowledge that relationship. A member demonstrates this principle in his/her behavior, language, and attitude toward clients, colleagues and him/herself.

### **2. Value: Integrity**

*Ethical Principle: A member behaves in an honest and trustworthy manner.*

A member acts honestly and responsibly and promotes ethical practices in his/her own work and on the part of the organizations he/she is affiliated with or represents.

### **3. Value: Ethical Behavior**

*Ethical Principle: A member behaves in a manner consistent with the mission and core values of the Supervised Visitation Network.*

A member remains aware of ethical principles and alert to ethical dilemmas and uses this awareness to guide their practice of supervised visitation. A member considers the implications of his/her actions and decisions on clients, colleagues, agencies, and on him/herself.

#### **4. Value: Excellence in Services**

Ethical Principle: *A member strives continually to improve his/her level of skill and provides only those services for which he/she is qualified and trained.*

A member knows and follows the SVN Standards for Supervised Visitation Practice and the Code of Ethics and does his/her best to implement best practices as they evolve. A member maintains the best interest of his/her clients as the primary professional obligation. A member strives to be aware of his/her own limitations in providing the service. A member responsibly maintains self care in order to promote his/her ability to provide excellence in service.

### **IV. ETHICAL STANDARDS**

#### **1. Misrepresentation, Fraud, and Dishonesty**

A member clearly states his/her purpose and intent for offering a service. A member does not participate in, or practice dishonest, fraudulent or deceptive activities.

A member does not exploit or take unfair advantage of persons over whom they have supervisory, evaluative, or other authority such as clients, students, supervisees, employees and colleagues.

A member providing direct services, consultation, or training or acting in another role, represents him/herself, his/her role and responsibilities, services provided, and results to be achieved accurately. He/she acknowledges the extent and limits of his/her skills, qualifications, education, credentials, competence and affiliations. A member neither claims nor implies professional qualifications exceeding those he/she possesses and is responsible for correcting any misrepresentations of his/her qualifications by others.

A member who offers supervised visitation training:

- Provides information about his/her own training and experience;
- Acknowledges sources from which training content and materials are drawn;
- States clearly what minimum requirements or guidelines for best practice, if any, the training meets;
- Notes what professional curriculum, if any, the training is based on; and
- Avoids using terms such as “certification,” “recognized,” or “approved” unless authorized to do so by an appropriate governmental body or professional organization.<sup>4</sup>

#### **2. Human Relations**

A member behaves and acts in a manner that is physically and psychologically safe and non-threatening.

##### **A. Physical Contact**

A member is responsible for setting clear boundaries that govern physical contact with clients, supervisees and other persons over whom they have authority.

##### **B. Sexual Relationships**

A member does not engage in a sexual relationship, sexual activities, or sexual contact with clients, supervisees or other persons over whom they have authority. A member does not provide services to a client with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship.

##### **C. Sexual Harassment**

A member does not sexually harass clients, supervisees, employees or colleagues. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

### 3. Conflict of Interest

A member has an obligation to be alert to, avoid, inform and take reasonable steps to resolve potential conflicts of interest.<sup>5</sup> In some cases, protecting a client's interests may require not accepting or terminating a professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

A member is alert to the possibility that advocating for a client may create a conflict of interest.<sup>6</sup>

A member does not engage in dual or multiple relationships with a client or former client in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Dual or multiple relationships occur when a member relates to a client in more than one relationship, whether professional, social or business. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, a member alerts all those involved in the supervised visitation to the dual or multiple relationship, takes appropriate steps to protect clients, and sets clear and culturally sensitive boundaries for proceeding from that point.

### 4. Ethical Conduct

A member who is concerned whether he/she is facing an ethical dilemma should seek consultation.

A member who becomes aware that he/she has violated this code will cease the violation and will seek assistance through consultation or other remedial measures.

A member who becomes aware of a violation of the code by another member must:

- Attempt to resolve the issue by bringing their concern to the attention of that member; and/or
- Notify the Board of SVN or any committee created to respond to ethical violations; and/or
- Notify any licensing or credentialing entity that has jurisdiction.

A member will be careful to preserve confidentiality when taking any of the above steps.

A member defends and assists a colleague whom he/she believes has been unjustly charged with unethical conduct.

### 5. Continuity of Care

A member makes reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as the member's relocation, illness, disability, death, resignation or termination from an agency, agency closure, or other reason that causes the member to become unavailable.

A member makes reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of service in the event that service is interrupted by a client's financial difficulties, temporary relocation, illness, disability, or other reason that causes the client to become unavailable.

### 6. Termination of Services

A member ensures that a client is informed about the conditions and/or reasons for which services may be terminated.<sup>7</sup>

### 7. Clients who Lack Decision-Making Capacity

A member takes reasonable steps to safeguard the interests and rights of those clients who lack the capacity to make informed decisions.

## 8. Informed Consent

A member uses clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the service, risks and limitations related to the service, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives, consequences, client's right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent. A member informs the client of his/her right to ask questions. A member responds to client questions within the context of the services provided.

A member takes reasonable steps to ensure client's comprehension when the client is unable to understand, communicate, or use printed and written materials or when clients have difficulty understanding the primary language(s) used in the practice setting. This may include arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator whenever possible or providing the client with a verbal explanation he/she can understand.

A member obtains clients' written consent before audio taping or videotaping clients or permitting third party observation.

A member understands that clients may perceive an imbalance of power and makes reasonable efforts to mitigate this perception through the informed consent process. A member who engages in evaluation or research must obtain voluntary and written informed consent from participants without any adverse implication or penalty for refusal to participate. A member protects participants' well-being, privacy and dignity during the research and evaluation. Informed consent should include information about the nature, extent, and duration of the participation requested and disclosure of the risks and benefits of participation in the research. Informed consent also includes information about how the data collected will be used and reported

and about his/her right to withdraw from research and evaluation at any time without penalty.

## 9. Confidentiality

A member protects the confidentiality of clients and colleagues and informs clients of their rights to privacy and the limits of confidentiality when receiving supervised visitation services.<sup>8</sup> A member does not discuss confidential information in public settings.

A member is careful about relaying information about one participant to another.

A member protects the privacy and confidentiality of clients and colleagues in any contact with the media.

A member protects the privacy and confidentiality of clients and colleagues in the maintenance of records and the electronic transmission of information.

A member does not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting evaluation or research.

## 10. Competency

A member obtains ongoing education to stay informed about the developing field of supervised visitation.

A member practices only within the boundaries of his/her skills, education, training, knowledge base, and experience. A member accepts responsibility for providing only those services for which he/she is competent.

A member makes reasonable efforts to be informed about resources in his/her community that may be useful to clients.

## 11. Diversity

A member strives to understand culture, its function in society and its effect on human behavior, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures. A member strives to have a knowledge base about the cultures and ethnic groups he/she serves and the differences among them.

A member strives to behave and act in a manner that demonstrates cultural competency.

## 12. Acknowledgement and Credit of Professional Work Product

A member acknowledges and gives credit for materials he/she uses to the person(s) who have developed materials and, to the extent required by law, gets permission for their use.

### Footnotes

- 1 Adapted in parts from the NASW, CASW, and APA Codes of Ethics. Adopted by the SVN membership on May 29, 2009.
- 2 The preamble will be revised and modified by the Board of Directors; however, comments on recommended language for consideration are encouraged.
- 3 This definition is for the purposes only of this Code and does not affect the definitions of membership in Article II — Membership of the SVN Bylaws.
- 4 Certification means that training content and materials have been reviewed and approved by a governing body. Currently SVN does not provide this function and no such body exists for supervised visitation. Until a certification process exists, stating that any training confers such a certification is a fraudulent misrepresentation. At this time, a training provider may issue only a certificate of attendance or completion in the training. When a certification process is implemented, members may state that their training confers certification only if it is approved by and meets the criteria of the governing body.
- 5 See SVN Standards section 3.5.
- 6 See SVN Standards section 3.4.
- 7 See SVN Standards section 18.0.
- 8 See SVN Standards section 21.