

**Nagalro** is the Professional Association for Children's Guardians, Family Court Advisors and Independent Social Workers.

Full members of Nagalro must be registered as social workers with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Through this registration members agree to comply with and uphold the GSCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, which Nagalro endorses. Nagalro has been approved by the GSCC to 'endorse and validate' applications by members of Nagalro for the renewal of their registration with the GSCC, for members who require this service.

Full Membership is open to practitioners working with children and families as independent social workers, children's guardians, family court advisers, expert witnesses, chairs of children's reviews and child protection conferences, counsellors, psychotherapists, trainers and mediators.

**Nagalro** aims to promote high professional standards. All full members have professional obligations to the children and families who are the focus of their work, as well as to the agencies and individuals for whom they undertake work. The exercise of members' professional judgement must be based on clear principles.

**This Practice Guidance sets out the principles to which all full members of Nagalro are expected to adhere, in addition to the GSCC Code of Practice.**

## **Nagalro's Principles**

**Members should:**

- 1. Act in a child's best interests whilst undertaking their work.**
- 2. Maintain independence in all aspects of their work.**
- 3. Act without prejudice and respect diversity.**
- 4. Be clear about their role and function before undertaking any piece of work.**
- 5. Take responsibility for maintaining their professional development, knowledge and skills.**
- 6. Comply with the GSCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers, and other relevant legislation and guidance.**
- 7. Be accountable for their work, and conduct their work expeditiously.**

## **These principles are now explored more fully in the following sections.**

(NB. Some areas of good practice will be more relevant to some roles than others)

### **1. Act in a child's best interests whilst undertaking their work**

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- 1.1** The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 specify that the child's welfare is the paramount consideration. All practitioners concerned with children are expected to act in accordance with this principle.
- 1.2** Members have a duty to take appropriate action relating to any child protection concerns arising from their enquiries and assessment work.
- 1.3** In reaching a recommendation about what is in a child's best interests, members should carry out a thorough investigation and a careful analysis of the issues. They should bring all of the relevant issues to the attention of the court or the agency involved, within the confines of their role or instructions.
- 1.4** Members must use their skills and professional judgement in the best interests of the child. The interests of the organisation or agency which has commissioned their involvement must not take precedence over the child's interests.
- 1.5** Members should present their conclusions in a clear, balanced, well-thought-out manner, taking account of any ambiguous or contradictory evidence.
- 1.6** Members should actively assess and accurately report a child's wishes and feelings, where required.
- 1.7** Members are expected to value each child as an individual, and to value a child's legal and moral rights.
- 1.8** Although a practitioner's role is usually time limited, consideration should always be given to the child's long term interests, and how decisions are likely to impact on the child in the future.

### **2. Maintain independence in all aspects of their work**

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- 2.1** Members must at all times ensure that they maintain professional independence and that they do not act in such a way as to compromise this.
- 2.2** When accountable to a court, members must ensure their independence from other parties to the proceedings is not compromised. They should also be seen to be independent of any other party.
- 2.3** Any previous knowledge of a particular child or family, or a potential conflict of interest, must be declared as soon as it is recognised. Details of any previous involvement must be noted in any written report.

**2.4** When involved in court proceedings, members must comply with the latest Family Court Proceedings Rules and other relevant law and practice guidance. Members working within the Court arena must be familiar with the '*Public Law Outline*', and in addition, all expert witnesses must be aware of the Practice Direction, dated 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 - "*Experts in Family Proceedings Relating to Children*", before undertaking any work as an expert witness.

### **3. Act without prejudice and respect diversity**

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**3.1** Members must demonstrate an awareness of the prejudices that exist, both in society and in themselves, and demonstrate values and standards which challenge prejudice wherever it exists.

**3.2** Members must demonstrate their commitment to respecting diversity in relation to age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, social class, race, ethnicity and status.

**3.3** Members must approach every individual without preconceived judgements and with sensitivity to the differences that they find.

**3.4** Members must promote anti-discriminatory practice at all times. Interviews and reports should explicitly address issues of diversity, if applicable.

### **4. Be clear about their role and function before undertaking any piece of work**

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**4.1** Members must have a clear understanding of the role they have been instructed or commissioned to undertake, and also the limits of that role. They are expected to work within the limitations set by the remit of their instructions or work contract.

**4.2** Members must address any lack of clarity in their instructions or commission with the relevant contractor before undertaking any work, or as soon as any lack of clarity is identified.

**4.3** Members must make clear to all those whom they encounter how they will use the information they gather in the course of their work.

**4.4** Members must ensure they maintain confidentiality during and after their involvement in any matter.

### **5. Take responsibility for maintaining their professional development, knowledge and skills**

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**5.1** Members must undertake training and professional development regularly in order to maintain practice of a high standard. This will include training about new developments in social welfare practice, case law and research, changes in policy, procedures, practice guidance and family legislation.

5.2 Members must ensure they do not become isolated from changing sources of knowledge and debate, and should always have access to professional consultation.

## **6. Comply with the GSCC Code of Practice / other relevant legislation and guidance**

6.1 Members are expected to be familiar with the GSCC Code of Practice, which they have a responsibility to uphold.

6.2 Members are expected to act in accordance with the principles and specific terms of legislation and government guidance and be responsible for incorporating relevant aspects into their work. This legislation and guidance includes, but is not limited to, the Children Act 1989, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Human Rights Act and the UN Convention on Rights of the Child.

## **7. Be accountable for their work, and conduct their work expeditiously**

7.1 Members, whether paid from public or private funds, should be efficient in their use of time. They should carry out their work in an economical and transparent manner. Enquiries and investigations should be completed within the agreed time scales. If there is to be any delay, the relevant parties or commissioning agency must be informed as early as possible.

### ***Attendance at court and professional meetings***

7.2 Members should attend meetings only where this is relevant to their role.

7.3 Family court advisers are expected to attend all court hearings unless excused by the court. Children's guardians should use their discretion in attending professional meetings, and make clear their role at such meetings. In other roles, practitioners should attend meetings by invitation only. When attending court or professional meetings, members must be particularly careful to ensure the independence of their role is not compromised.

### ***Reports and investigations***

7.4 All investigations and assessments should follow a plan, while responding to emerging information. Members should be able to identify all sources of information on which facts and opinions are based.

7.5 Members should prepare reports in accordance with the requirements set for them when commissioned. Reports should be balanced, with clear distinction between fact and opinion, and written in non-discriminatory language. Reports should be submitted by the due date.

### ***Administrative arrangements***

7.6 Members must take care to keep professional matters separate and confidential from their private lives. It is recommended that members should have:

- a separate telephone line for their professional work
- secure arrangements for storing files and records
- secure arrangements for confidential waste disposal

**7.7** Members must also comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 in relation to storage of information.

**7.8** Full members have professional indemnity and public liability insurance cover administered by Nagalro through its group scheme. In order to maintain continuity of cover, membership subscriptions must be paid by the due date.

***Recording of work***

**7.9** Notes of interviews and telephone conversations must be recorded contemporaneously or as soon as possible after the event. These notes should be retained, so they can be produced if necessary.

**7.10** Most commissioning agencies require that a confidential file is maintained for each case, including member's own notes, reports, and other documents received during the course of their involvement.

**7.11** Members should maintain a system for recording details of activities undertaken, time spent, and disbursements, to enable accurate invoicing and accounting. Members should act in accordance with the requirements of the organisation or contractor who has commissioned the work, when submitting any claim for payment.

**7.12** Members should agree with the commissioning agency how their files should be stored during the course of their involvement, and how files should be disposed of upon completion of the work.

***Instructing solicitors and expert witnesses***

**7.13** Members acting as children's guardians have a duty under s.41 of the Children Act 1989 to appoint a solicitor for the child. Only solicitors on the Law Society Children Panel should be instructed. Those members should endeavour to appoint a range of such solicitors.

**7.14** Where members are involved in instructing experts, they should ensure that only suitably qualified and experienced people are appointed.

**7.15** Where members act as expert witnesses themselves, they should adhere to the current Practice Direction and Guidance for expert witnesses (see para 2.4).

**Nagalro Council**

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**NAGALRO PO BOX 264 ESHER SURREY KT10 OWA**  
 Tel: 01372 818504 Fax: 01372 818505 [nagalro@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:nagalro@globalnet.co.uk) [www.nagalro.com](http://www.nagalro.com)