

National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA)

CODE OF ETHICS

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) exists exclusively to advance the science, processes, and art of juvenile justice and detention services. NJDA contributes to the analysis, interpretation, understanding, and resolution of detention-related issues by providing programs, services, policy statements, conferences, and publications.

As an educational, scientific, and professional organization, NJDA recognizes that its membership reflects the full range of diversity in the juvenile justice system. The specification of ethical standards enables NJDA to clarify for all members and to those served by its members, the nature of ethical responsibilities shared by members.

The Code of Ethics serves to stimulate greater concern by NJDA members for their own professional functioning and for the conduct of fellow professionals within the juvenile justice system. As the ethical code of NJDA, this document establishes principles that define the ethical behavior of NJDA members.

Recognizing the critical role of conscience in choosing among courses of action and taking into account the moral ambiguities of life, the members of NJDA commit themselves to the following:

- **Demonstrating the highest standards of personal conduct.**

Juvenile detention is rarely defined by the public or the helping professions as a high status career. Public perceptions often imply that everyone has the ability to work with youth in a locked setting. For these reasons, members must continually demonstrate a pride in juvenile detention and a self-respect reflective of the highest level of personal conduct. This conduct specifically refers to personal integrity, honesty, truthfulness in dealing with both youth and the public, and the courage of one's convictions.

Juvenile detention is charged with the public responsibility for the safe care of juvenile offenders. Cognizant of this public trust, members understand that any individual or collective compromise of their integrity or self-respect can damage the ability of juvenile detention to accomplish its mission. The best insurance against a loss of public confidence is strict adherence to the highest standards of personal conduct.

- **Demonstrating the highest standards of professional conduct.**

Progress as a profession depends not only on public trust but on professional competency. Therefore, members strive for excellence in job performance, which advances the cause of the profession by gaining increased public respect in order to further the best interest of youth. Members support and encourage programs which develop knowledge, skills, and abilities directly relevant to juvenile detention services. Members demand regular and periodic feedback regarding their job performance and career goals.

Members understand that the important component of juvenile detention services is the relationship between staff and detained youth. Members emphasize training and skill acquisition in the area of interpersonal communication.

Members are concerned with providing the highest quality of care. In keeping with this concern, members endorse the concepts of the American Correctional Association standards and encourage others in detention to adhere to them.

Members refrain from performing their duties in an intrusive or overbearing manner. Neither do they permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities, or friendships to influence their decisions. Members implement detention programs without fear or favor, without malice or preferential treatment. Members consistently refrain from violent or hostile responses toward youth and from employing unnecessary force.

- **Avoiding any interest or activity which is in conflict with or which produces undue personal gain through the execution of official duties.**

Members refrain from any task which is in conflict or could be viewed as conflicting with job responsibilities.

Members also refrain from activities or interests related to partisan politics when they create a conflict of interest, produce undue personal gain, or occur at the work place and interfere with official duties.

The only gains members seek from public employment are salaries, fringe benefits, respect, and recognition for their work. Personal gain may also include the satisfaction of doing a good job, helping youth and their families, and achieving career goals. Public property, funds, and power should never be directed toward personal or political gains.

Members understand that in the relationship between staff and detained youths, dependency and vulnerability are frequently present. Youths often use this relationship as a method of acquiring adult approval and as a means to bolster their self-esteem. Therefore, members value the human worth of these youth by steadfastly refusing to behave in a manner which satisfies their personal needs at the expense of youth.

- **Safeguarding the confidentiality of detained youth.**

Members adhere to Federal and State statutes regarding issues of confidentiality for juvenile offenders. Members refrain from identifying youth and discussing critical problems and incidents in situations outside the official work setting.

- **Advocating the legal and ethical rights of youth.**

Members work to define and articulate policy and procedure which specifies the legal and human rights of detained youths. Members educate youth and others about policies and practices that either ensure or violate these rights. Members refuse to remain silent when these rights are violated, and they speak on behalf of the affected youths.

Members subscribe to the idea that youth have the right to be detained in a psychologically and physically safe and secure environment. Members encourage program development that generates a therapeutic social climate within the detention facility.

- **Eliminating all forms of unethical and illegal behavior.**

As a component of the criminal justice system, members are committed to legal standards of behavior. Therefore, members will confront and report illegal or unethical behaviors that occur in juvenile detention. Sensitive to the correlation between effective detention programs and harmonious working relationships among staff, members are committed to ethical standards that transcend issues of friendship, efficiency, and loyalty to their agency.

Members do not tolerate discrimination, theft, or any form of child abuse (i.e., physical, mental, or sexual abuse), and they advocate removing from the profession those who condone or engage in such activities.

- **Maintaining an optimum level of physical conditioning and mental alertness.**

Members realize that juvenile detention is a highly stressful profession. Part of this stress derives from the potential for physical interventions. Members maintain an optimum level of physical conditioning in order to respond to physical situations in the most efficient manner. Members realize that both staff and residents are less likely to be injured whenever staff are physically capable of controlling the situation.

The stress associated with juvenile detention also affects the mental attitude of staff. Members support and encourage training and continuing education in stress management and other mental health concepts provided directly to detention staff. Members endorse and encourage the development of support groups within staff and among staff of other facilities to provide an appropriate forum to ventilate frustrations, to discuss problem situations, to share ideas that work, and to rejuvenate.