

Hunter  
Central Coast  
Mid North Coast

# Youth Worker Code Of Ethics

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# 1. Introduction

The process of professionalism has been occurring in other sections of the human services industry for the last century. This Code of Ethics has been developed through a “grassroots” process utilizing consultation and involvement by youth workers, and those that work with young people.

In identifying the need for a Code of Ethics; the working party previewed a range of existing Code of Ethics from the Human Services industries. In response to sector feedback from the consultations and workshops held at the Regional Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON) Annual Conference in 2004, 2005 and 2006 the Hunter/Mid-North Coast/Central Coast Youth Worker’s Code of Ethics and Decision Making Framework (COE/DMF) has been developed. The group who developed the code has consisted of workers and others who have an interest in this area of youth work practice.

From a youth worker perspective, it is vital to have access to a COE. This provides a resource that supports the professional relationship workers have with young people. Access to such a resource is particularly vital where complex situations and issues presented by young people may not be covered or supported by organisational policies and procedures.

In terms of the sector’s work with other agencies a COE aims to provide guidelines and clarity with regard to authority, roles and responsibilities within that partnership. The COE identifies and describes the professional relationship a youth worker has with a young person who is their primary client.

## 2. A Word About Ethics

At its most basic level “ethics” is about how we behave in relationship to that which is other than ourselves (persons, society, environment...) and the framework(s) within which we choose our actions. At a minimum a Code of Ethics describes “good practice” for a group of practitioners. At best a “Code of Ethics” is an attempt to apply ethical principles in a particular practice context. It both guides practice and shapes clients’ expectations.

Some commonly accepted ethical principles are:

**Non-maleficence** - as Hippocrates said “first do no harm”.

**Beneficence** - to maximise benefits and minimise possible harms.

**Justice** - includes fairness, rightness, equity; standards/ expectations within a society about relations between members; the rights & services due any member of that society.

All ethical practice is grounded in:

**Autonomy/ respect for persons** – that individuals are autonomous agents and that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection; that respect for persons includes regard for their welfare, rights, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage.

In any caring profession “respect for persons” includes the recognition that the relationship is grounded in an unequal power relationship. The “client” can benefit from the relationship only if they feel secure that the “professional” will never use them to meet their own needs.

Within this framework the key virtues intrinsic to Youth Work are:

**Integrity** - honesty in intention and in action.

**Respect** - respect for the young person; professional trust as basis for relationship

**Empathy** - ability to see issue/ event from young person’s perspective

**Optimism** - a positive view of the young person and his/her potential.

# 3. Youth Work Code Of Ethics

## (Hunter/ Mid North Coast/Central Coast)

The primary purpose of Youth Work is the provision of assistance that will enable young people to navigate their life choices in the wider context of community, family and other services.

In order to do this Youth Workers:

**Respect** young people's skills and abilities. **Listen** to young people. **Inform** young people about their options. **Support** the right of young people to make choices. **Involve** young people in decisions about their lives. **Advocate** for young people's access to resources and facilities. **Educate** young people both formally and informally. **Promote** the contributions of young people to the wider community.

### 3.1. The principles that Youth Workers base their practice on are:

- Primary Client:** - The young person is the primary client
- Best Interest:** - Youth Workers act in the best interest of, and never at the expense of, young people.
- Equity:** - Youth Workers work to overcome unfairness caused by unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources and power.
- Empowerment:** - Youth Workers enable young people to realise and exercise their rights and to be protected from human rights abuse.
- Transparency:** - Youth Workers are open and truthful in their relationships with young people, being clear about both the possibilities in and constraints on the relationship.
- Boundaries:** - Youth Workers have a professional relationship with young people focused on the young person's needs, concerns and life aims.
- Confidentiality:** - Young people will be made aware of the legal obligations and limits to confidentiality. Youth Workers will seek consent for any disclosures.
- Cooperation:** - Youth Workers work with other individuals/services to achieve the best outcomes for young people.
- Professional Development:** - Youth Workers are responsible for keeping their skills/knowledge updated.
- Self Awareness:** - Youth Workers will be aware of their own beliefs, values, biases, strengths and weaknesses and ensure these do not compromise optimal service delivery.
- Self Care:** - Youth Workers need to be aware of their own needs and ensure that these are met – but never at the expense of young people.

## 4. A Framework For Ethical Decision Making

Some decisions can be made at leisure. Some have to be made at high speed under considerable stress. Sometimes sorting the issues is easy. Often the right path is unclear-ethical principles conflict; time presses; too many people with too many different needs are involved.

When code statements of ethical principles are in conflict it helps to go back to the basics: first do no harm (non-maleficence); maximise benefits/ minimise harms (beneficence); check for fairness & equity (justice); and ensure respect for the person(s) involved (autonomy).

The framework below is useful if there's time to reflect before acting and useful for reflecting on decisions after an event and across time.

### **4.1. What's the problem?**

Describe it briefly, write it down, get the facts, examine your assumptions about the person or the issue, take the time to clarify the issues in some detail. This helps you clear your head and gives you a way to discuss the problem with a supervisor or peer support person if appropriate.

### **4.2. Whose problem is it?**

It may be the worker's; it may be the young person's; it may be a shared problem; it may be someone else's altogether. Knowing who owns the problem helps sort out who needs to be involved in the solution.

### **4.3. Consider all available legal and ethical principles and guidelines.**

The *legal* guidelines:

1. What actions are prohibited by law?
2. What actions are required by law?
3. What are people involved, including yourself, entitled to by law?

The *ethical* guidelines:

1. Beneficence:  
What will achieve the greatest good for the young person?
2. Non-maleficence:  
What will cause the least harm to the young person?
3. Justice:  
What will be fairest? How are different interests balanced?
4. Respect for autonomy:  
What are the young person's preferences?  
What maximises the opportunities for everyone involved to implement their choices?

### **4.4. Identify all possible courses of action**

#### **Select best course of action**

- A quick test for "best course":

1. Universality  
Could I recommend it to others?  
Would I condone it if others did it?
2. Publicity  
Could I explain it to others?  
Am I willing for it to be open to scrutiny in a public forum?
3. Justice  
Would I do the same for others in similar circumstances?  
Would I do the same for a well-known or influential client?

### **4.5. Make a decision**

- State the reasons for the decision
- Take responsibility for it
- Document it
- **Evaluate the outcome**

## **5. Policy For Incorporating The Hunter/ Central Coast/ Mid North Coast Youth Workers' Code Of Ethics Into The Organisation**

The Hunter/Central Coast/Mid North Coast Youth Workers' Code of Ethics has been developed in close consultation with the Youth Sector.

In order to implement the Youth Workers' Code of Ethics as a useful working document, the following must be remembered:-

- The Youth Workers' Code of Ethics does not negate or override the Agency's Code of Conduct Policy or other legal requirements of the worker/s.
- The Youth Workers' Code of Ethics should be included as part of the agency's orientation kit for new workers.
- The Youth Workers' Code of Ethics should be provided to all management and/or management committee members.
- If external supervision is provided, the supervisor should be supplied with The Youth Workers' Code of Ethics.
- The Youth Workers' Code of Ethics poster should be displayed for the users of the service.







## Hunter/Central Coast/Mid North Coast Youth Workers' Code Of Ethics

### Registration of Interest for training/workshop

This form is to register your interest in receiving a training session/workshop for your service in the Code of Ethics. By registering your interest, you will receive a specifically planned workshop tailored to your service's needs and ongoing support as requested.

Please nominate a designated person to receive any further information and include the number of people to be involved.

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Organisation:</b>	
<b>Postal Address:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>	
<b>Phone:</b>	
<b>Fax:</b>	
<b>Email:</b>	
<b>No. of People:</b>	
<b>Any further Information or Inquiries:</b>	

Please return to: Secretary, RYDON,  
PO Box 43, Broadmeadow 2292

*You will be contacted by a RYDON representative who will organise a suitable time and format for your training session/workshop as soon as possible.*

See [www.rydon.org.au/contact](http://www.rydon.org.au/contact) for details of how to contact your local Youth Development Officer.