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## NCFR Members Asked to Study Ethical Principles and Guidelines

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Some of you may recall that the Ethical Principles and Guidelines developed and adopted by NCFR's Family Science Section for its membership were printed in the December 1995 issue of **REPORT**. Since that time, suggestions that the entire council adopt them have been voiced both within and outside the Family Science Section.

As a result, at the NCFR Board of Directors 1997 spring meeting, as Family Science Section Chairperson, I brought forth the motion from our Section that the ethical principles and guidelines be adopted by NCFR. Board discussion was primarily positive, but concern was voiced regarding the potential for litigation if a family science professional were accused of not following the guidelines and principles.

Consequently, the motion was amended and approved that: NCFR's Executive Director consult with an attorney regarding the litigation issue; the ethical principles and guidelines be published in the **REPORT** so that NCFR members would have an opportunity to provide input, and that section chairs, student/new professionals and the Association of Councils include discussion of the document at their meetings in November. NCFR members are encouraged to contact their section/SNP/AC chairs prior to the November meeting with any comments they may have regarding the principles and guidelines.

Since the spring board meeting, Executive Director Mary Jo Czaplewski was informed by NCFR's legal counsel that because the ethical guidelines and principles are stated as educational in nature, they show that "...NCFR has good faith and willingness upheld its mission to encourage high standards of professional practice." Thus, it appears that the proposed guidelines support our mission statement:

*The National Council on Family Relations provides a forum for family researchers, educators, and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships,*

*establishes professional standards, and works to promote family well-being.*

*The NCFR Mission Statement adopted April of 1991*

In addition, through her executive director contacts, Dr. Czaplewski ascertained that some professional organizations include with their discussion of professional standards, a disclaimer from any expressed or implied warranties or guarantees. Our attorney indicated that while we may include such a disclaimer it is not necessary. She, in fact, was quite positive about the guidelines and voiced her approval of the board accepting them.

**Rebecca A. Adams**  
**Family Science Section Chair**  
**September 1997**

### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR FAMILY SCIENTISTS**

This article presents the Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Family Scientists that were drafted by a committee from the Family Science Section of NCFR and approved by the Section following membership feedback.\* The approach of providing general principles with illustrative guidelines was implemented because the guidelines are meant to be educational and sensitizing rather than legalistic code with enforcement potential.

We recognize that it is natural for guidelines to evolve as new issues and circumstances arise. Examples are offered because different concerns arise at various historical times. Thus, the examples help to identify specific issues so that family scientists can become sensitive to them. When modifications or additions to the principles and guidelines seem appropriate, family scientists should make known their concerns or ideas to officers of the Family Science Section of the National Council on Family Relations. Although the Family Science Section is the professional association vehicle that helps to clarify and publicize ethical principles and guidelines, this document is intended for all individual who consider themselves family scientist. This may include university students, social service professionals, educators, therapists and

administrators.

*PURPOSE: These ethical principles and guidelines were developed to inspire and encourage family scientists to act ethically; provide ethical guidance in areas that family scientists may overlook provide guidance in dealing with often complex ethical issues; and enhance the professional image and status of family scientists by increasing the level of professional consciousness.*

The principles that apply to family scientists in all their professional situations are included in the first section. The remaining sections relate to family scientists in specific professional arenas.

### **1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY SCIENTISTS**

This section identifies general ethical principles that are relevant to family scientists in all professional settings.

*Family scientists are respectful of all individuals, do not unethically discriminate, do not develop intimate personal relationships in their role as family scientists, are sensitive to the complications of multiple role relationships, protect the confidentiality of their students or clients, and do not engage in sexual harassment.*

#### Guidelines:

1.01 Family scientists are respectful of others, show sensitivity to the dignity of all humans, and avoid all forms of exploitation.

1.02 Family scientists are not unethically discriminatory on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic status. We recognize that discrimination occurs in our society, and when done wisely for positive purposes it may be appropriate. For example, we may allow a student with a vision impairment to sit on the front row of the classroom.

1.03 When attempting to influence the

behavior or attitudes of students or clients, family scientists should not use methods which involve undue influence, such as coercion or manipulation.

1.04 Family scientists segregate intimate personal relationships from their role as family scientists. Therefore, they do not develop inappropriate intimate personal relationships with students, clients, or research subjects.

1.05 Family scientists are sensitive to the complications in dual or multiple role situations and are ethical in those roles. For example, family scientists may teach classes in which a son or daughter is enrolled. Others may have professional colleagues in a workshop where some form of personal evaluation is an expected outcome.

1.06 Family scientists protect confidentiality in their professional role as family scientists whether it be in teaching, service, public speaking, writing or consulting activities. For example, if family scientists share information with students about others, the confidentiality of those involved should be protected. This can be done by changing identifying information, creating composite cases or summarizing information.

1.07 If information is shared with a family scientist that mandates reporting (such as child abuse or the possibility of extreme hurt) such information is to be reported to the appropriate authorities. Whenever possible, individuals should be informed in advance of the family scientists's need to report.

1.08 Family scientists avoid sexually harassing all persons with whom they come in contact in a professional or personal setting. Sexual harassment involves unwelcomed intimate or sexual advances, requests, or other conduct of a sexual nature which is used as grounds for providing benefits or services for terms of or conditions of employment or for the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering

with an individual's learning or work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive learning or working environment. Such things as inappropriate hugging, touching, or language are considered harassment.

1.09 Family scientists who belong to other professional organizations with more elaborate or role specialized guidelines should abide by them. For example, professional family therapists should use the ethical guidelines of AAMFT and medical doctors should utilize the ethical guidelines of the AMA.

## **PRINCIPLE II: FAMILY SCIENTISTS ARE RESPECTFUL OF STUDENTS AND CLIENTS**

*Family scientists are respectful of diverse family forms. They are respectful of students' family issues. Family scientists do not exploit the hierarchical relationship with persons they serve and are respectful of privacy issues.*

### **Guidelines:**

2.01 When family scientists teach marital and family courses, they inform students that sometimes students in classes of this nature have painful memories of personal or family experiences. They should inform students of appropriate counseling resources available to them.

2.02 Family scientists recognize the strengths and weaknesses of various family forms and do not operate from a deficit perspective in discussing various family forms.

2.03 When giving examples, family scientists utilize examples with families from diverse cultures and forms.

2.04 When subjects are discussed in a course or class, including controversial issues, family scientists encourage an open, respectful, and thoughtful atmosphere which acknowledges and respects diversity of values, beliefs, and attitudes.

2.05 Family scientists do not insist that students agree with or adopt a particular perspective. In fairness to

students, teachers should, where appropriate, divulge personal values and biases.

2.06 When teaching, family scientists differentiate between knowledge or insight gained from clinical or personal experience and knowledge obtained from published theory or research.

2.07 Family scientists who are also clinicians do not pursue, or allow, clinical relationships to develop with students during the course of instruction. If students request clinical relationships to develop with students during the course of instruction. If students request clinical services, they should be directed to an appropriate provider of the clinical service.

2.08 Family scientists who are not clinician do not cross into a therapeutic role while interacting with students. Family scientists make referrals for clinical services when appropriate.

2.09 Family scientists avoid any situation or the perception of any situation in which grades may be exchanged for favors of any kind.

2.10 Family scientists who ask (or allow) students in courses or classes to share personal and family experiences in class regularly remind students to treat any information received as confidential information not to be shared or discussed with anyone outside the classroom. However, the fact that confidentially cannot be assured should be stated.

2.11 While teaching a for-credit course, family scientists do not make assignments that require students to divulge potentially painful personal or family experiences or information without providing an alternative assignment for those who do not wish to participate. An exception exists if the class is part of professional training program which required such educational activities.

2.12 When family scientists request (or require) students to obtain

potentially sensitive and painful information from family members (e.g., in a genogram assignment) or others, students are carefully instructed and cautioned about potential harm and allowed to use their own discretion about which information to seek.

- 2.13 Family scientists do not coerce their students to participate as subjects in research. If students enrolled in courses do not wish to participate in or assist with research projects, they should be offered alternative assignments of equal value and be assured that their decision not to participate will in no way affect their grade.
- 2.14 In giving assignments in which students are required to discuss their values, family scientists develop grading criteria that do not include evaluation of the students' values.
- 2.15 When family scientists return papers or post scores, confidentiality of the students' grades is maintained. For example, scores should not be posted nor papers returned in any hierarchical order of points earned.
- 2.16 Family scientists bade material taught on what is appropriate for students rather than solely the instructor's personal or professional needs or interests, such as a research agenda.

### **PRINCIPLE III: FAMILY SCIENTISTS ABIDE BY HIGH PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

*Family scientists are responsible to uphold high professional standards. They are encouraged to be cooperative with other family scientists in gathering and sharing of scientific information. They strive to keep current with material in their domain. They are ethical in representing their profession at their place of employment as well as other settings.*

#### **Guidelines:**

- 3.01 Family scientists are supportive of, and cooperative with, other family scientists and the profession at large

regarding the timely sharing of new ideas, theories, research findings, and/or innovative program developments.

- 3.02 Wherever possible, family scientists promote the profession in such a way that members can make contributions to society for the enhancement of families and the growth and development of individuals in various family settings.
- 3.03 Family scientists give proper credit or acknowledgment to the works of others when formally sharing that information.
- 3.04 Personal information gained from or known about a colleague is treated with discretion. Sharing the information with others should be done only for the welfare of the colleague, except where appropriate disciplinary action may be involved. When questionable professional or personal conduct may have a bearing upon professional activities that concern initially should be discussed with the involved colleagues(s) where feasible. If in the judgment of the family scientist that is not practical or resolution of the matter is not apparent, such behavior should be reported appropriately.
- 3.05 Family scientists are adequately prepared for their professional responsibilities. If there are professionally recognized standards of certification or licensing requiring experience, supervision, or additional education, family scientists seek such credentials.
- 3.06 Family scientists use the times under which they are under obligation to an employer for professional purposes.

### **PRINCIPLE IV: FAMILY SCIENTISTS CONDUCT RESEARCH ETHICALLY**

*Family scientists contribute to society and to the profession through research and evaluation activities. When conducting research or evaluation, family scientists recognize that their ultimate*

*responsibility is to the participants. Family scientists honestly report the findings of their study.*

#### **Guidelines:**

- 4.01 Family scientists conduct all aspects of the research process with respect for the dignity of those who participate in the research and they ensure that those who assist in the research process do likewise.
- 4.02 Family scientists inform research participants of the purpose of their research, any potential risk of involvement, how confidentiality will be protected, the right to withdraw from the study at any time, the way the data will be used, and available referral resources if risks are involved.
- 4.03 Family scientists avoid "doing therapy" with research participants (unless therapy is a part of the research design). Researchers should provide a referral to an appropriate resource for those who request it.
- 4.04 Family scientists give credit to others for contributions to scholarship in proportion to the contributions made.
- 4.05 Family scientists use research money for the stated purpose described in the research proposal.

### **PRINCIPLE V: FAMILY SCIENTISTS ARE ETHICAL IN THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH EMPLOYING ORGANIZATIONS OR AGENCIES**

*Family scientists are respectful of the internal policies and procedures of current and past employers. Family scientists seek to promote the highest standards of policies and practice by their employers.*

#### **Guidelines:**

- 5.01 When family scientists and those in training have information pertaining to an organization's internal activities or planning, and the knowledge may hinder or harm the organization if known by outsiders,

the information is treated as confidential unless those activities are unethical or harmful to others.

- 5.02 Family scientists abide by the policies and procedures of their respective employing organizations. Where such policies or procedures are believed to violate professional standards or cause unprofessional conduct by employees, attempts are made to rectify the situation. If such attempts are unsuccessful, concerns for the pertinent policies or procedures are reported to an appropriate governing or investigative body.
- 5.03 Family scientists cooperate with other community organizations that provide services to mutual clients. However, family scientists do not share client information with other agencies unless the client has given written permission or it is mandated by policy or law.
- 5.04 Family scientists are aware of other resources which may benefit their students or clients and make appropriate referrals.

#### **PRINCIPLE VI: FAMILY SCIENTISTS ARE INVOLVED IN IMPROVING SOCIETY**

*Family scientists are advocates for individuals and families and participate in developing policies and laws that are respectful and empowering to them.*

##### Guidelines:

- 6.01 Family scientists are concerned for the general welfare of all individuals and families in society. Whether as professionals or private citizens, they engage in family advocacy at the local, state and national levels.
- 6.02 Family scientists are encouraged to participate in developing laws and policies that are respectful of and empowering to all individuals and families and in modifying such policies and laws that are not.

#### **PRINCIPLE VII: FAMILY SCIENTISTS UNDERSTANDS AND ABIDE BY ETHICAL PRINCIPLES**

#### **AND ASSIST OTHERS TO DO SO.**

*Family scientists understand and abide by ethical principles, encourage and assist other family scientists to know and apply them, and teach ethical principles to students of family science.*

##### Guidelines:

- 7.01 Family scientists understand and abide by ethical principles.
- 7.02 Family scientists assist other family scientists to know and apply ethical principles by encouraging understanding and adherence to them and by their willingness to discuss the principles.
- 7.03 Family scientists teach students of family science to understand and abide by ethical principles in their professional roles.
- 7.04 Family scientists who are involved in an ethical dilemma consult with other family scientists about the situation. A written record of the problem, the resolution, and the justification for the resolution is given to another family scientist so that if one is accused of unethical conduct the record can be used to demonstrate that the family scientist was aware of the ethical concern and dealt with it conscientiously.
- 7.05 Family scientists assist the profession to further identify and articulate ethical issues. Additional ethical principles and guidelines (beyond those included herein) are to be communicated to the chair of the Family Science section of the National Council on Family Relations.

#### **PRINCIPLE VII FAMILY SCIENTISTS ARE ETHICAL WHEN REVIEWING PROFESSIONAL WRITING**

*When a reviewer for a professional work family scientists avoid conflicts of interest, read materials carefully in their entirety and evaluate them fairly.*

##### Guidelines:

- 8.01 Family scientists do not review

articles where there is conflict of interest, such as when the work is that of a friend, or other where they may feel a sense of obligation to the author.

- 8.02 Family scientists carefully read in their entirety materials that are accepted for review and provide explicit reasons for their evaluations.

\*Members of the Family Science Section of NCFR had discussed for years the need for a code of ethics. Many of the section members feel that a major component in establishing a discipline is a code of ethics. At the 1992 NCFR annual conference, Family Science Section members voted the development and adaptation of a code of ethics a top priority. Section Chairperson, Kathleen Gilbert appointed Rebecca A. Adams, Ph.D., Department of Family & Consumer Sciences, Ball State University to be the chairperson and David Dollahite, Ph.D., Department of Human & Family Resources, Northern Illinois University as committee members. During the 1993 NCFR conference, the committee presented its draft and solicited feedback from section members. This was done again the following year, and those in attendance designated the ethical code be referred to as guidelines and principles. Additional suggestions were integrated into a document which was mailed to all section members for additional input. The preceding is the final version approved by the section membership in April of 1995. The committee especially thanks Wes Burr for his significant contributions.\*