

# Standards of Practice & Code of Ethics

American  
Association  
of  
SERVICE  
COORDINATORS

Developed and Edited by the American Association of  
Service Coordinators Standards of Practice Committee



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## *Message from the Executive Director*

The American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC), a national nonprofit membership association, has prepared this handbook containing guidelines for those persons involved in the expanding profession of service coordination. AASC members have established these standards of practice with the focus on quality, excellence, and the highest ethical conduct for all service coordinators in an effort to assist them in serving their clients.

Since 1999, the American Association of Service Coordinators has provided a national training, education, networking and advocacy forum for service coordinators and others committed to serving the most vulnerable persons in our communities. Our membership represents nearly 1,000 individual service coordinators, federal and state agencies, public housing authorities, HUD multifamily assisted housing facilities, nonprofit organizations, corporations, developers, management companies, apartment communities, managers, and other social service practitioners involved in providing service-enhanced housing.

Every day, our members serve thousands of families, seniors and persons with disabilities nationwide, linking them with supportive and health care services that help them achieve self-sufficiency while maintaining their dignity and autonomy. As consumer preferences for service-enriched residential options continues to grow over the coming decades, AASC will remain at the forefront, providing a foundation of leadership and direction to this new and exciting field.

We hope you find this handbook useful as you go about your work serving the people whose lives you touch.

*Janice C. Monks, LSW, Executive Director*

American Association of Service Coordinators  
*Professional Standards of Practice  
and Code of Ethics*

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## Overview

The American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) is a national not-for-profit organization representing the interests of service coordinators (SC). Membership consists of individual SC's in Public Housing Authorities (PHA's), HUD Assisted or Multifamily Federally-Subsidized Housing, State Housing Finance Agencies (HFA's), Community Action Agencies, for profit and nonprofit service organizations, as well as, housing providers, owners, developers, management companies, and other housing "SCs," staff who assist residents with obtaining services.

Service coordinators are an integral part of residential communities that house families, elders and persons with disabilities. SCs link residents with supportive services allowing them to maintain self-sufficiency in their homes. Some of the services typically arranged for on behalf of residents are:



meals, transportation, health care and homemaking as well as other health and supportive services available through the local aging and family service networks.

Service Coordinators play an increasingly important role in family housing where the needs of the residents can be vastly different from those of the elderly. If these needs remain unresolved, they may directly impact the quality of life of the community and may create problems for management. SCs in family housing communities benefit the management team in a variety of ways that may include helping residents maintain independence, gain job training, find employment and child care, improve education and connect with health care and other social services.

In both family and senior housing, the primary goal is to empower residents and promote independence. For those in family housing, this may include employment and education strategies (such as job counseling, training, placement, help with child care, and family management) as well

as securing provisions for food, health care, and transportation. Persons with disabilities may be interested in job training and placement, education, transportation, and referral to supportive services and arrangement of medical appointments.



It is most important that the SC understand the characteristics of the resident population and property in which they serve. Issues that may impact the differential use of services are socio-economics, age, culture, gender, race, sexual orientation, and others. Service coordination is based on the recognition that a trusting and empowering relationship between the SC and residents is essential to expedite the use of services and to restore or maintain the resident's independence and quality functioning to the fullest extent possible.

The American Association of Service Coordinators recognizes that each SC works with a variety of populations in different settings and demographic areas. This code of ethics is intended to serve as a guide to the professional conduct of the SC in the housing environment. Therefore, AASC believes that by following these standards all service coordinators will uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge and mission of the profession. AASC hereby establishes the following code as standard protocol for the ethical behavior of all professional Service Coordinators.

### *Preamble*

The American Association of Service Coordinators (AASC) standards of practice is a guide for social service professionals who perform service coordination in this specifically designated role and program. This document has been created in accordance with established social work practice addressing the ethical standards that all service coordinators serving families, elders, persons with disabilities, and/or other population groups in housing should adhere to as professional conduct.

### *Mission*

The primary mission of the service coordination profession is to serve residents/clients who need and desire services, while empowering



them to remain self-reliant whenever possible and paying particular attention to the preservation of independent and affordable housing and the quality of life for the resident/client population at large. AASC serves and represents service coordinators nationwide who are involved in addressing the service needs of the residents in their respective communities. The AASC mission is to advance the interests of the service coordination profession and provide guidance to members in the sustained operation of service-enhanced housing through leadership, advocacy, networking, education and other services.

## *Purpose*

This profession has an obligation to articulate its values, ethical principles, and standards. The ethical foundation of the service coordination profession is vital to its credibility and standing as a significant and irreplaceable part of the supportive housing team. The code of ethics is relevant to all service coordinators and service coordinator interns, regardless of their professional functions, the setting in which they work, or the population they serve. AASC code of ethics serves the following purposes:

- Identifies the core values on which the service coordination mission is based.
- Establishes a set of ethical standards that should be used to guide service coordination practice.
- Provides ethical standards to which service coordinator professionals should be accountable.
- To familiarize new service coordinators and other professionals to the service coordination program's mission, values, ethical principles, and standards.
- Aids service coordinators in identifying relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical questions arise.

This handbook offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide decision making and conduct when ethical issues arise. It does not provide a set of rules that dictate how service coordinators should act in all situations.

Further, the handbook does not specify which values, principles, and standards are most important and outweigh others in instances when they conflict. It is up to the individual service coordinator to make informed, ethical decisions in any given situation.

## Core Values

The mission of the service coordination profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values are the foundation of the service coordinator's purpose and perspective:

- Service
- Social justice
- Dignity and worth of the person
- Importance of human relationships
- Integrity
- Competence

## Ethical Standards

### A. Client Issues

**1. Commitment to Resident/Client:** *The service coordinator shall use his/her skills and competence to serve the resident/client whose interests are of primary concern.*

- Advocate for the resident/client.
- Always work to preserve the residents'/clients' civil rights, safety, in the least disruptive manner



- Do no harm: take no action that places the resident/client at risk of harm.

**2. Self-determination:** *The SC shall ensure the residents/clients are involved in all phases of service coordination. The service coordinator will respect and promote the right of self-determination and assist residents/clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals.*

- The involvement of residents/clients in identifying their own needs and decision-making is a basic standard of practice. The SC shall work in tandem with residents/clients empowering them whenever possible to utilize their own abilities and allow them to make decisions regarding the services they receive.



- Service Coordinators shall not impose their opinions or preferences on a resident, but are obligated to provide full and complete information of all options and rely on a resident to make a reasoned choice.
  - In issues involving a resident's right to freedom of choice over personal safety, the resident/client has a right to choose to live at risk of harm or leave needs unmet providing he/she is capable of making that choice, harms no one, and commits no crime.
  - All residents/clients have a right to choose their own life-style, as long as there are no lease violations and they are fulfilling their obligations of tenancy. The SC may limit a residents'/clients' right to self-determination when and if they believe in their "professional judgment" that the residents/clients poses a serious, foreseeable and imminent risk to themselves or others.
  - The resident/client is in charge of his/her decision making until he/she delegates that right to another person or a court grants that right to someone else.
  - The resident/client also has the right to refuse the services of the service coordinator or the service coordination program.
3. **Privacy and confidentiality:** *The SC shall ensure the residents'/clients' right to privacy and ensure appropriate confidentiality when information is released to others.*
- All information obtained by a SC about a resident/client is to be held in the strictest possible confidence.
  - The resident/client has a right to privacy and personal dignity, and must be made aware of the limitations of confidentiality, before the disclosure of private information.

- The SC shall disclose only the information necessary and relevant to the situation or purpose when imminent danger, harm, lease violations, or illegal activities are involved.
- The SC shall not disclose personal or confidential information unless privacy can be assured. Caution shall be used when transmitting information via e-mail, fax, answering machine, and other electronic/computer technology.
- The SC shall not discuss confidential matters in public or semipublic areas such as hallways, waiting rooms, elevators, restaurants, etc.
- All resident records, files, and documentation shall be kept in a secure location (locked file cabinet) with the assurance it is not accessible to others, including management staff.

**4. Informed consent:** *Service coordinators shall provide services to residents/clients only in the context of a professional relationship based, when appropriate, on valid informed consent (release of information).*

- The SC may disclose confidential information with a valid consent from a resident/client or person legally authorized to act on his/her behalf.
- A valid informed consent should detail: 1) what information is to be sought from whom, 2) what information will be disclosed and to whom, 3) in what time frame, and 4) who has access to the information and under what circumstances.
- The SC may otherwise disclose confidential information when legally necessary; to prevent serious, foreseeable and imminent harm to themselves or someone else (this can include medical emergencies, domestic violence, mental health crisis etc.) or in situations where there is a lease violation.



It is necessary to obtain informed consent before audio taping, videotaping, photographing or permitting third party observations.

In instances where residents/clients are not literate or have difficulty understanding the primary language, the SC shall take steps to ensure residents/clients comprehension. (This may include seeking services

of a translator or providing detailed verbal or written messages.)

- When residents/clients lack the ability to provide informed consent, the SC shall seek out permission from the appropriate third party. The SC should seek to ensure that the responsible party acts in a manner consistent with the needs, desires and best interest of the resident/client.
- SC's who provide services via electronic mediums (computers, telephones etc....) should inform residents of the limitations and risks involved.



## **B. Service Coordinator Professional Issues**

**1. Competence:** *The SC shall provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education and/or experience.*

- The SC will accept responsibility or employment on the basis of existing competence or agree to participate in training to acquire necessary competence.
- Endeavor to be proficient in professional service coordination and in the performance of SC functions striving to improve in the proficiency, effectiveness, and quality of service given to residents.
- Critically examine and keep current with emerging related knowledge and participate in continuing education. Follow and, where required, comply with training requirements, follow the changes in funding and oversight of the position, and comply with the reporting requirements of the position as governed by authorized entities.
- Remain current on statutory and regulatory requirements governing the position.
- When a resident/client issue is outside the boundaries of the SC's knowledge or expertise, the SC shall seek additional guidance from a qualified party or make a referral to the appropriate agency.
- SC's shall have a knowledge base of their residents'/clients' cultures and services and be sensitive to the residents'/clients' cultures and to the differences among people of cultural groups.

**2. Qualifications:** *The SC shall possess the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to competently perform service coordination. The qualifications of an SC should be appropriately matched to the needs of the property or properties served. Service coordination is complex and calls for a variety of roles and skills such as, advocatelliaison, broker, planner, community organizer, consultant, educator, researcher, and more.*

- The SC is to understand the characteristics of the resident/client population and be familiar with the possible diversity of resident populations including the socio-economics, age, culture, gender, race, and sexual orientation issues that may affect the individual and the community in which he or she lives.
- The SC shall have the following characteristics or demonstrate a working knowledge of supportive services and other community resources.
  - Ability to advocate, organize and problem solve.
  - Possess necessary skills that promotes understanding, acceptance and enhances the general welfare of the residents /clients in the community
  - Possess leadership and communication skills
  - Additionally, the SC shall possess the desire and be able to work within a team
- Education and background preferences:
  - The SC shall possess the necessary experience, training and overall qualifications as appropriate for the given situation with a preference of possessing a bachelors degree or higher.



- The SC shall possess supervisory experience as appropriate to the situation

**3. Respect:** *The SC shall treat colleagues and residents/clients with courtesy and respect and strive to enhance inter-professional, intra-professional, and interagency cooperation on behalf of the resident/client, agency, and profession.*

- Treat all colleagues with respect.

- Avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues with residents or other professionals.
- Respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships and transactions.
- Take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues.
- Treat with respect the services, views, and actions of colleagues and supervisory and administrative directives and use appropriate channels to express judgment on these matters when in conflict.
- Outreach and work with community service providers in a manner that fosters mutual respect, courtesy, fairness, and cooperation in good faith.
- Never knowingly be party to any illegal or improper activity
- Never accept anything of value from an employee, resident/client, service provider, or other business associates who would impair or be presumed to impair their professional judgment.
- Maintain the integrity of the position by upholding and advancing the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession.

**4. Commitment to Employer: *The SC shall work to improve the management's policies and procedures, and the efficiency and effectiveness of services.***

- Identify service areas that require cooperative agreements and bring them to the attention of management for development.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure the employer is aware of the SC's obligations and standards.
- Assure that employer policies, procedures, regulations, and administrative orders are consistent with this code of ethics.
- Recognize the responsibility management has to the safety and security of the resident population and to the fiscal solvency of the building and its operations.
- Not perform management functions or duties.

## *References and Resources*

*Code of Ethics*, National Association of Social Worker (NASW, 1996)

HUD. *The Management Agent Handbook*; Chapter 8 4381.5 / REV-2 / CHG-2

NASW *Standards for Social Work Case Management*, prepared by the Case Management Standards Work Group

*Supportive Services Program in Senior Housing; Implementation Manual*.  
Policy Center on Aging / Brandeis University

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (1999). *A How to Guide: Service Coordination, Elderly Persons and People with Disabilities* . Prepared by Susan Lanspery Ph.D, HUD Contract Number DU100C000005980, Task Order No. 4, National Neighborhood Networks.

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