

## **INTRODUCTION**

As a publicly funded organization, Family Resources is governed by laws that prohibit discrimination in the provision of our service on the basis of religious preference. This prohibition carries with it an affirmative requirement that we provide free opportunity for religious expression to those we serve. It also carries with it the requirement that we, as employees or representatives, do not engage in public practices or displays of our own preference that might be concerning to those who do not share our belief. The guidelines which follow will assure that we stay within the applicable parameters.

## **PUBLIC DISPLAYS OR EXPRESSIONS**

If, whenever we are acting in our capacity as an employee or representative of Family Resources, we engage in a clear religious practice or indulge in the display of an obvious religious sign or symbol we can be seen as promoting a particular set of religious beliefs. The problem with that is that clients, potential clients, or members of the public may not share those beliefs. As a result they may see the display or practice as exclusionary of one with their beliefs or, worse, may actually be offended by it. For those reasons, discretion requires that ostentatious displays or expressions of that type be avoided. As we also honor the diversity of our staff, we will judge any non ostentatious expression or display considered by any staff member as a necessary observance of their spiritual belief system on a case by case basis. The agency reserves the right, however, to make a final judgment in such instances in light of the essential functions of the individual's job and the potential impact of the display on those we serve and on fellow employees.

## **SPECIAL ISSUES--CHILDREN IN CARE**

These issues arise most acutely, for obvious reasons, in the case of the young people and children in our out of home care programs, particularly the residential programs of the Wittenmyer Youth Center, but also to children in foster care and, where applicable, day programming.

The requirement for care in regard to religious expression and opportunity for these children is reflected in both our licensing regulations (441 IAC 114 and 108) and our certification standards (Council on Accreditation CR 1.05). Though worded slightly differently they provide the same basic requirements as follows:

- ✓ We are to identify and assess the child and the child's family's religious or spiritual orientation.
- ✓ Ascertain the wishes of the child and his/her parent or guardian concerning religious or spiritual practice.
- ✓ Provide appropriate opportunities for that practice.
- ✓ Provide reasonable support, including transportation and/or schedule adjustments.
- ✓ Make sure, to the extent appropriate that the child is free to express legitimate religious and spiritual beliefs.



## ALLOWABLE AND NOT ALLOWABLE PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

The clear thrust of these requirements is that the religious practice or observance of the child is to grow from and be governed by the child and the child's family, not from us. It is entirely inappropriate, no matter the motivation, for us to in any way even seem to be imposing, promoting, or encouraging any particular religious practice or opportunity. The key is that the child does not have freedom of movement while involved with us. These children are court ordered into our care. They don't have a choice. Even in the unlocked residential programs, walking away is not an option without consequences. In any program, including day programming, which utilizes behavior modification models, there are consequences to actions which displease staff. The power imbalance which results creates a grave danger of undue influence. Under those circumstances any suggestion of religious practice, or collusion or appearance of collusion with any approach or invitation to worship, unsolicited by the child's family, violates these standards and cannot be permitted.

To put this into practice the following do's and don't's must be followed:

- ✓ **Do** inquire of each child and the child's family their religious preference and request for religious practice.
- ✓ **Do** encourage, allow and support the requested practice.
- ✓ **Do not** suggest, promote, or encourage any sect, denomination, or practice to a child.
- ✓ **Do not** allow or encourage access to the children by any sect, denomination or other religious organization for the purpose of inviting the children to participate in their form of worship or belief system, and carefully monitor allowed or promoted contact to avoid the impression of same.
- ✓ **Do** make sure that all initiatives concerning religious expression or practice come from the child and the child's family in an uninfluenced way.
- ✓ **Do** allow any religious or faith based organization or person associated with such an organization to contribute to or participate in activities with clients to the same degree as any other volunteer or set of volunteers or contributors, as long as that participation is not tied to or associated with promoting the practice of the particular religion, or an invitation to participate, or places that particular organization in a preferred position in attracting participation by the children.
- ✓ **Do not** allow or permit any staff member of Family Resources or person or persons associated with any staff member to promote, encourage or engage in any particular religious observance or practice with or in the presence of the clients.