

# VISION AND VALUES FOR CHILD AND FAMILY WELLNESS

## I. Introduction

Children are to be seen, but not heard! Women are not fit for politics! Jews are to blame for the ills of the world! Every culture has its own prejudice and misconceptions. Just like these opening statements were believed by people for decades if not for centuries, our culture has its own myths: We could never invest in social programs as much as Sweden does! We don't know enough yet to launch programs to reduce risk factors for children and families! Family matters are private and the state should not intervene in family affairs! Certain notions, such as these, gain currency in society without much reflection.

Unless we have a clear set of values, we run the risk of perpetuating myths and misconceptions that harm children and families. By applying a set of values, we could challenge the received wisdom of these statements. We could show, for instance, that Canada or the United States have more comparative national wealth than Sweden, but that they have less regard for the value of distributive justice and this is why they don't invest more in children and families. Policy decisions are not always a matter of resources, but of value priorities.

Government policies suffer from contradictions. Whereas some policies dictate that we invest in prevention, others order the elimination of social programs designed to do just that: prevention. Child welfare and mental health workers know that child abuse derives from family dynamics as much as from social and economic factors, yet most interventions focus on the mother and neglect systemic forces that contribute to abuse. Contradictions abound. This is why we need to pause and reflect on the values that drive our programs and policies.

By vision we refer to a desirable state of affairs for children and families. A vision may include opportunities for children to develop their potential, or a family atmosphere of cohesion and mutual support. A positive vision is an end state in which abuse and neglect no longer occur. Values, in turn, are the principles that guide our actions toward a vision. Values steer the process of working toward an outcome. Box 1 contains three definitions that reflect our conception of values.

### **Box 1: Three Useful Definitions of Values**

Values are *"enduring prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs that a specific mode of conduct (instrumental value) or end state of existence (terminal value) is preferred to another mode or conduct or end state"* (Mayton, Ball Rokeach, & Loges, 1994, p. 3).

Values are *"humanly caused benefits that human beings provide to others...by way of illustration, we may say that love and justice are moral goods"* (Kekes, 1993, p. 44).

Values *"serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity"* (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21).

## **II. The Role of Values in Child and Family Wellness**

Austria, 1940s, doctors kill children with disabilities to examine their brains. Brazil, 1980s, off-duty police execute street children because they are considered a public nuisance. United States, 1990, the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect declares society's lack of response to the crisis of child abuse a national moral disaster. Canada, 1989, The House of Commons passes a resolution which seeks "to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000." Canada, 1997, the number of children living in poverty reaches almost a million and a half, 500,000 more than in 1989, an increase of 58 percent. Children's rights are violated everywhere because children have no vote and no power. No vote, no voice; no voice, no power; no power, no rights.

Children, no doubt the most vulnerable members of society, have no social movement to advance their cause. Unlike other groups claiming their legitimate rights, such as seniors, labour, women, and ethnic minorities, children are political orphans. Until adults embrace their plight seriously, children will continue to suffer from blatant as well as subtle forms of abuse. The role of values in child and family wellness is to ensure that our actions reflect the needs of children, parents, and the community at large. Values can inform our personal, civic, and professional actions to promote children's rights. Box 2 points to six benefits of having a clear set of values.

### **Box 2: Six Benefits of Having a Clear Set of Values**

Guide Thinking and Action

Set Priorities

Avoid Contradictions

Challenge Myths and Misconceptions

Evaluate Programs and Policies

Overcome Passivity and Challenge the Status Quo

The values we choose to promote child and family wellness should derive from the needs and lived experience of children, parents, and community members, as much as from moral thinking. Box 3 lists the criteria that should be employed in selecting values for child and family wellness.

### **Box 3: Criteria for Choosing Values for Child and Family Wellness**

1. Values should be complementary and not contradictory.
2. Values should be comprehensive enough to cover the essential needs of families.
3. Values should sustain the holistic development of children.
4. Values should inform processes and actions.
5. Values should point to desirable outcomes or end states.

### **III. Basic Values for the Promotion of Child and Family Values**

Based on the criteria listed in Box 3, we constructed a framework of values for the promotion of family wellness. Our framework relies on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and on extensive consultations we conducted with stakeholders of the child welfare system, primarily across Canada, but in other countries as well, including the United States, Israel, England, Ghana, Cuba, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. The composition of our values is informed by other sources as well; including the lived experience of families in the child welfare system and statements produced by policy makers, child advocates, practitioners and academics.

#### ***Values for Personal, Collective, and Relational Wellness***

A content analysis of our data reveals the presence of seven main values. These are briefly presented in Table 1. As the table shows, the values can be classified into three categories: (a) values for personal wellness (self-determination, education and personal development, caring and protection of health), (b) values for collective wellness

(social justice, support for strong community structures), and (c) values for relational wellness (collaboration and respect for the community and respect for human diversity). These categories reflect very well the need for balance between individual and social goods, as well as the necessity of having mediational values for people to co-exist peacefully. Our findings show that there is a dialectic between personal and collective values, and that one kind cannot exist without the other. What is often missed in the literature and nicely captured in our findings is the absolute necessity to have the third kind of values, relational values, that ensure the pursuit of private goals in harmony with the objectives of others. Neither personal nor collective wellness can exist without mechanisms for bridging the gap between what one person or group want and what other members of society desire.

Values should both reflect and meet certain needs. Table 1 shows the needs that are addressed by each value.

### *The Relationship Between Needs, Values, and Ecological Levels of Wellness*

We saw in Table 1 how values promote personal, collective, and relational wellness. In a similar vein, we can see how the seven values promote child, parental, family, community, and social wellness. Table 2 marks the connection between the needs and values required to achieve wellness at different ecological levels.

### *The Role of Values in Programs and Policies*

Values can promote the needs of individual children and parents, of groups like families and communities, and of entire societies. But in addition to that, values can also inform programs and policies designed to promote wellness. Table 3 provides examples of how personal, collective, and relational values can be actualized in programs and policies to advance child and family wellness.

#### **Table 1**

##### *Basic Values for the Promotion of Child and Family Wellness*

<b>Values for</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Needs Addressed</b>
<b>Personal Wellness</b>		
<i>Self-determination</i>	Promoting the ability of children and adults to pursue chosen goals without undue frustration and in consideration of other people's needs	Mastery, control, self-efficacy, voice, choice
<i>Caring and protection of health</i>	Expressing care, empathy, and concern for the physical and emotional health of children	Empathy, nurturance, emotional and physical well-being
<i>Education and</i>	Providing children and adults opportunities for education and	Cognitive, emotional, physical, and

<i>personal development</i>	personal growth	spiritual growth; autonomy
<b>Values for Collective Wellness</b>		
<i>Provision of resources based on social justice</i>	Promoting the fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in society	Economic security, shelter, clothing, nutrition, access to vital health and social services
<i>Support for strong community structures</i>	Promoting vital community structures that facilitate the pursuit of personal and communal goals	Sense of community, cohesion, formal support
<b>Values for Relational Wellness</b>		
<i>Collaboration and respect for the community</i>	Fostering peaceful, respectful, and equitable processes whereby children and adults can have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives	Solidarity, mutuality, peace, involvement, participation
<i>Respect for human diversity</i>	Promoting respect and appreciation for diverse social identities and for people's ability to define themselves	Identity, dignity, self-respect, self-esteem, acceptance

**Table 2**

*The Relationship Between Selected Values, Needs, and Ecological Levels of Wellness*

	<b>Social Wellness</b>	<b>Community Wellness</b>	<b>Family Wellness</b>	<b>Parental Wellness</b>	<b>Child Wellness</b>
<b>Selected Needs</b>	Economic security, housing, health insurance, culture of peace, harmony and sustainability, democratic institutions	Safety, formal and informal support, solidarity, cohesion, social services, high quality schools, recreational facilities	Affective bonds, communication, intimacy, conflict resolution, quality time, support from extended family, interdependence	Personal space, support from spouse, opportunities for personal growth, health, recreation, occupational satisfaction	Love, nurturance, self-esteem, cognitive, physical and emotional development, psychological and physical health, acceptance, social skills
<b>Selected Values</b>	Social justice in provision of resources	Collaboration and respect for the community	Caring and protection of health	Caring and protection of health	Caring and protection of health

Support for strong community structures	Support for strong community structures	Opportunities for education and personal development	Opportunities for education and personal development	Opportunities for education and personal development
Respect for human diversity	Respect for human diversity		Self-determination	Self-determination

**Table 3**

*The Actualization of Values in Programs and Policies*

<b>Values for</b>	<b>Programs</b>	<b>Policies</b>
<b>Personal Wellness</b>		
<i>Self-determination</i>	Promote voice and choice of children and adults in selection and administration of programs	Devise child and family policies in consultation with children, families, and communities
<i>Opportunities for education and personal development</i>	Build into programs competency enhancing components for personal and occupational growth	Address needs for growth and development and not just reduction of deficits
<i>Caring and protection of health</i>	Establish networks of support for parents and foster in them ability to empathize with child	Facilitate access to health care services through universal and outreach programs
<b>Values for Collective Wellness</b>		
<i>Social justice</i>	Provide families with comprehensive supports that meet the needs for housing and economic security	Allocate resources for disempowered children and families on basis of need and not just on basis of merit
<i>Support for strong community structures</i>	Create awareness and support for creation and preservation of effective formal and informal supports	Allocate sufficient funds for preservation of social institutions that promote family and social wellness
<b>Values for Relational Wellness</b>		
<i>Respect for human diversity</i>	Consult with diverse groups of stakeholders and develop inclusive	Promote inclusive family policies that do not discriminate on basis of marital status, gender, ability, sexual orientation,

<i>Collaboration and respect</i>	and culturally sensitive programs Foster climate of respect and develop skills for meaningful and democratic participation in programs	class, culture, or any other source of social power Balance policies for personal responsibility with policies that promote obligations toward the community at large
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#### **IV. The Role of Change Agents in Promoting Child and Family Values**

##### ***Seeking a Balance Between Personal and Collective Values***

Value identification is important, but it is only the first step in promoting child and family wellness. Establishing an equilibrium between personal and collective values is the next step. This task requires an analysis of our culture. Once we realize what moral principles we favour and what values we ignore, we can take corrective action. If we have veered too far in the direction of personal values, we can take action to recover collective ideals. If we have neglected personal freedoms, we should moderate collectivist tendencies that suppress individual liberties. Therefore, it is incumbent upon change agents to nurture this balance between values for personal and collective wellness.

##### ***Using Values to Promote Child and Family Wellness***

Values should be guides for action. Improving child and family wellness entails the reduction of risk and the enhancement of protective factors, the promotion of empowering processes and the elimination of disempowering processes, and the pursuit of a balance between personal and collective values. These tasks are carried out by parents, teachers, school administrators, cultural workers, professionals, community helpers, employers, policy-makers, legislators, and advocates, to name but a few. Virtually every member of society, perhaps with the exception of highly dependent individuals, has the potential to act as an agent of prevention and promotion. Table 4 offers a synopsis of value-driven interventions by a sample of change agents.

##### ***Values, Commitment, and Accountability***

For the purpose of becoming more accountable to ourselves and to children, we propose a checklist of personal value interventions. Table 5 asks to what extent our personal, professional, and political actions reflect the seven key values of child wellness. If a particular value is promoted to a satisfactory degree, we can ask ourselves what we can do to maintain it. If a value is not promoted to a satisfactory degree, we can ask what we can do to enact it.

We invite you to examine your work in light of family wellness values. We encourage you to ask to what extent does your work reflect the ideals of caring and protection of health, personal growth, children's rights, collaboration and respect for others, diversity, support for community structures, and social justice.

**Table 4**

*The Role of Change Agents in Promoting Child and Family Wellness*

<b>Change Agents</b>	<b>Sample of Value-Driven Actions to Promote Wellness</b>
Parents and extended family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster secure attachments with children</li> <li>• Become involved in child's education</li> <li>• Promote child's empowerment and self-efficacy</li> <li>• Respect child's unique identity</li> <li>• Respect child's voice in personal and social issues</li> <li>• Expect from child age-appropriate social contributions</li> <li>• Procure basic necessities</li> </ul>
School personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create safe and nurturing environments, teach health education</li> <li>• Enhance competencies and open doors for personal growth</li> <li>• Foster meaningful involvement and afford choice in curriculum</li> <li>• Educate on effects of power imbalances</li> <li>• Provide social skills training</li> <li>• Teach political awareness and importance of social institutions</li> <li>• Afford families opportunities to become involved in school</li> </ul>
Professionals and community helpers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement programs to prevent abuse and teen pregnancy</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for training in community programs</li> <li>• Empower youth and workers to have choice in programs</li> <li>• Promote inclusive programs</li> <li>• Model and expect respect in programs</li> <li>• Advocate for preservation of vital public institutions</li> <li>• Provide services in fair, equitable, and accessible manner</li> </ul>
Artists, journalists, and media workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique norms of violence and promote peaceful</li> <li>• Convey vision of growth that includes civic duties</li> <li>• Make children's issues a national priority</li> <li>• Produce shows that deal with discrimination</li> <li>• Eliminate violent role models from the media</li> <li>• Reinforce in media benefits of public institutions</li> <li>• Clarify for public role of social justice in promoting wellness</li> </ul>
Policy-makers and child advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish national office to promote family wellness</li> <li>• Promote and fund educational opportunities</li> <li>• Establish office of ombudsman to advocate for children's rights</li> <li>• Implement legislation against discrimination</li> <li>• Balance rights with obligations</li> <li>• Reverse current trend of eliminating public services</li> <li>• Distribute social resources not just on basis of merit but also on basis of need</li> </ul>

## Table 5

### *Questions for Assessing the Values of Programs, Practices and Policies in Family Wellness*

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#### Domain Questions

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Caring and protection of health Do they promote the expression of care, empathy, and concern for the physical and emotional well-being of children and families?

Self-determination Do they promote the ability of children and adults to pursue their chosen goals without excessive frustration and in consideration of other people's needs?

Human diversity Do they promote respect and appreciation for diverse social identities?

Collaboration and respect for the community processes whereby children and adults can have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives? Do they promote peaceful, respectful, and equitable

Education and personal development Do they promote educational and personal growth?

Support for strong community Do they promote vital community structures that structures facilitate the pursuit of personal and communal goals?

Provision of resources based on social justice bargaining powers, obligations, and resources in society? Do they promote the fair and equitable allocation of

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