

**TOP  
TIPS**

November 2024

# For Employers to Make Time for Social Work a Reality



Part of BASW England's 80-20 Campaign



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**Campaign**  
Promoting relationship  
based practice

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**BASW**  
**England**

The professional association for  
social work and social workers

Please also refer to the Local Government Association Standards for Social Work Employers in conjunction with this Top Tips resource.<sup>1</sup>

## What is this resource?



We know that therapeutic, reflective, relationship-based practice is the best way for social workers to bring effective and positive change to the lives of children, families and adults.

The BASW England 80:20 Campaign Top Tips for Employers to Make Time for Social Work a Reality sets out what needs to be in place to create the right conditions to develop, support, and embed relationship-based social work practice; to enable and support time for social work.

## Who is it for?



Employers of social workers, social workers, team managers, senior political and organisational leaders, children, young people, adults and families and key stakeholders across the sector.

## How can it be used?

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Flexibly. The Top Tips for Employers to Make Time for Social Work a Reality can be used to reflect on employment arrangements and working conditions in a range of settings to see how well supported social workers, teams, and services are, and to consider what needs to change to create time for direct work and relationship-based practice.

The Top Tips resource can be used to campaign and lobby for change in conjunction with other 80:20 campaign Top Tips resources, or by itself.

# Top Tips

1

## **For employers to build, value, and support a culture of relationship-based practice**

### What does this look like?

- Creating and maintaining an organisational culture that promotes and values relationships is key. A relationship-based approach is held by the organisation that recognises the impact of structural and societal inequalities.
- Employers support values driven practice rather than a task and process orientated approach. Ways to monitor and evaluate impact are implemented.
- Employers work in partnership with social workers and other employees to design systems, structures, services, and teams that reflect the values of the social work profession and are built upon trust, respect, collaboration, and open communication.
- Actively demonstrating the value of relationships at all levels, across teams and departments, from strategic leaders to front line practitioners; implementing strategies to support collaboration and an inclusive organisational culture such as holding regular 'Voice of the Workforce' meetings.

## **What employers can do to show that relationship based practice is a priority:**

- Simplifying processes that create unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to social workers, other employees, and those accessing support, so that they have more time for direct practice.
- Explore diverse recruitment practices e.g. CV, application form, assessment day including people with lived experience so that the workforce reflects the communities they serve.
- Creating “learning organisations” that promote good quality relational practice by using observation and learning across teams and roles; promoting a ‘kind critical friend’ approach that supports reflection and learning together.
- Learning continually - investment in social workers and other employees; holding reflective conversations that use a relationship-based practice framework. Creating the time and space for this to happen and reviewing impact through staff feedback forums.
- Evaluating the impact of relationship-based practice with children, adults, and families by listening to what has worked well and what needs to change. Do this through in person engagement, feedback via surveys and follow up calls, and responding to compliments and complaints.
- Cross referencing with criteria for quality assurance by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted.<sup>2</sup>
- Consider the benefits of ‘stay interviews’ as part of the LA’s recruitment and retention strategy.

## 2

## Embed the Local Government Association Standards for Employers of Social Workers in England<sup>3</sup>

The Local Government Association (LGA) employer standards and learning from the LGA Health Check are used to develop a working environment where relationship-based social work practice can flourish.

### What employers can do to embed the Standards:

- Employers mandate the LGA Standards for Employers.
- Publicly announce the commitment to implementing each one of the Standards for Employers.
- Commission and provide continuous professional development, coaching and mentoring programmes that are specific to social work.
- Include opportunities for supervision and learning that are specific to social worker's unique professional identity which reinforce the values of relationship-based practice.
- Complete the annual social work health check. Publish findings and triangulate information gathered with other activity happening nationally about the wellbeing of social workers.<sup>4</sup>

## 3

## Create the right working conditions to support and promote the wellbeing of the profession

Employers create and embed the culture, leadership and conditions needed to effectively support wellbeing through a relationship-based approach.

Employers recognise the distinct change in how social workers undertake their role following the Covid-19 Pandemic. The demands of hybrid working and achieving a work life balance, alongside the challenges of manageable workloads.

### What employers can do to create and sustain working conditions through a relationship-based approach:

Implement and embed the BASW and SWU Social Worker Wellbeing and Working Conditions: Good Practice Toolkit<sup>5</sup>. This toolkit is aimed at accelerating action across all parts of the workplace and provides practical suggestions to achieve:

- A positive workplace culture built on supportive relationships.
- Working conditions to enable social workers to thrive.
- Manageable workloads to prevent physical and mental ill health, burn out and loss of staff.
- Commit to setting and maintaining safe working levels using a transparent system, jointly agreed with the workforce and publishing information about this in line with LGA annual health check.<sup>6</sup>

## 4

## Prioritising and supporting time for critical reflective supervision

Standard five of the LGA Standards for Employers relates to supervision.<sup>7</sup>

As a fundamental aspect of a relationship-based culture, prioritising and supporting time for critical reflective supervision for social workers is fundamental and should be standard practice. A rapid review of reflective supervision in social work found this to be one of the key approaches that can be used to support better working conditions, the wellbeing of social workers (at all levels) and their practice.<sup>8</sup>

### What employers can do to create time for supervision:

- Review administrative support services for social work teams and create an enhanced offer based on feedback from the workforce.
- There is a clear and demonstrable leadership commitment to prioritising and enabling time for reflective versus managerial supervision.
- This includes promoting the different ways in which reflective supervision can be provided: 1:1 between a social worker and their manager/supervisor, supplemented by peer, team or group, multi-disciplinary and across teams and services.



## 5 Systems and processes are driven by good social work practice

The values of social work and relationship-based practice need to influence system design and development within organisations. The information required by different processes within organisations, and the way information is captured and presented, can detract from the time social workers have available to spend building and maintaining relationships.

### What employers can do to ensure systems and processes reflect the values of relationship based practice:

- Information that is captured and held within systems to include the aspirations, views and wishes, life journey and who and what is important to a child, adult, and family in their life.
- Information is presented in an accessible, diverse and inclusive format.
- Support ethical social work practice and critical challenge to new processes or systems that do not support or promote relationship-based practice.
- Supporting ethical social work practice and challenge to proposed changes ways of working through new processes or systems that do not support or promote relationship-based practice.
- All social workers and people with lived experience need to be encouraged and supported to be involved in the design and development of systems and processes to ensure they enable relationship-based ways of working.

## **6 Promote choice and control of digital 'person centred' technology.**

### **Ways that employers can ensure that social workers promote the ethical use of technology and digital ways of working to build relationships:**

- Social workers and people with lived experience to be involved at all levels.
- Promote rights and choice in methods of communication focusing on a benchmark of relationship practice.
- It is crucial to ask questions about the technology available and ensure that it is accessible to children, adults and families. This includes:
  - Understanding barriers and accessibility needs.
  - Explore ways of communicating using digital systems and technology.
- Ensure the workforce is equipped with the level of digital literacy required to use technology ethically and safely to build and sustain relationships.
- Identify person centred, quality assured tools that can support information to be captured and recorded.

## 7 Promote proportionate and purposeful recording with relationships at the heart

### Ways that employers can support proportionate and purposeful recording:

- Co-design a policy, with specific training and guidance to promote proportionate and purposeful recording underpinned by social work values and ethics. To include:
  - Reflection on what is being recorded and why - see Ten Top Tips for Recording in Social Work<sup>9</sup>.
  - The audience – who is the record being written about, who is it for, how will it be used?
- When and how recording of information takes place and evidence of the person's involvement, choices and rights.
- Work to reduce bureaucracy, excessive form filling and repetition of information but beware of ethical issues with copy and pasting.<sup>10</sup>
- Provide clear information about subject access requests including easy read versions and how people who use services can access their records with appropriate support in their preferred method of communication.
- Co-design and co-produce guidance on relationship based recording. Provide or reference examples of best practice. Develop skills through training, peer reflection and feedback in supervision.

## 8

## Meaningful data capture across the system

There is a risk of overload to organisations linked to the demands for data collection from internal and external requirements, government departments, regulators and partner organisations. There is a case for employers to review the data they are gathering the impact this is having on social worker's ability to spend time doing direct work.

### **Ways employers can evaluate data collection to ensure this is focused on experience and outcomes linked to relationship-based practice:**

- Consider whether all of the data that systems collect is useful e.g. the quality of practice, the experience and outcomes for children, adults and families and the impact of the relationship.
- Critically evaluate where the voice of people with lived experience feeds into data collation.
- Apply the "so what" question or test to check if what is being captured is meaningful.

## 9

## Celebrating and sharing examples of good relationship-based practice

### Ways that employers can encourage feedback to be captured on an ongoing basis in a meaningful way:

- Ensure accessible tools and approaches to gathering feedback based on understanding the impact of a particular relationship for the child, adult, family, and community are available.<sup>11</sup>
- Share good practice examples of relationship-based ways of working through:
- Use of *Professional Social Work* magazine and the BASW England e-bulletin, giving individuals and teams a national platform to showcase the work they are doing.
  - Celebration events; Social Worker of the Year Awards, Amazing Social Workers, Media awards.
  - Testimonials from people with lived experience and colleagues.
  - Managers and leaders to join cross service events and provide staff with the opportunity to showcase activity and outcomes.
  - Internal and external communications.
  - In-person and online events.
  - Including as a standing agenda item at all meetings.
  - Supervision.
  - Away days.

## **10 Recruitment and Retention strategies that focus on the wellbeing of the workforce and reflect a relationship-based culture**

The wellbeing of social workers is intrinsically linked to their ability to work within systems that enable them to make a positive difference to people's lives. Employers approaches to creating a relationship-based culture are key.<sup>12</sup>

### **Ways in which employers can demonstrate they are focussed on the wellbeing of the workforce:**

- Employers acknowledge and advocate the unique contribution of social workers including their experiences at work, and public service to communities.
- Social workers face a high risk of moral injury, fatigue, and burnout and as such need the right support and resources to do their job within a culture of respect and recognition of their valuable contribution.<sup>13</sup>
- Employers proactively respond to challenging racism and other forms of discrimination and commit to embedding the Workforce Race Equality Standard.<sup>14</sup>
- Employers recognise the potential for differences based on workers protected characteristics, identity, and culture e.g. disproportionate numbers of Black and global majority social workers:
  - Failing qualifying social work courses.<sup>15</sup>
  - Failing assessed and supported year in employment.<sup>16</sup>

- Experiencing higher workloads.<sup>17</sup>
- Greater likelihood of a move to agency social workers.<sup>18</sup>
- Employers need to ensure social workers receive ongoing support, learning and development opportunities to meet regulatory professional standards<sup>19</sup> and enable career progression.
- In multi-agency settings social workers should be recognised as equal partners with the knowledge, skills and values they bring to creating and sustaining relationships. This should be reflected in their terms and conditions.
- Conduct and share the outcomes of 'stay interviews' with the workforce to demonstrate active listening and action.

### **Employers need to demonstrate that they can support social workers to have:**

- Control over their workload.
- Autonomy to use their professional skills to the full.
- Opportunities for critical reflection through supervision- 1:1 and peer support.<sup>20</sup>
- Opportunities for collaborative working.
- Ability to influence at a strategic level, helping to shape services that make a difference.

## **At a strategic level employers need to commit to:**

- Employers have a clear policy and strategy about addressing racism and other forms of discrimination in the workplace.
- Using recruitment opportunities to share their approach to creating and embedding a relationship-based culture.
- Liaising with media organisations to spotlight the positive contribution that social workers make to local communities.
- Employers commit to embedding the Workforce Race Equality Standard.
- Feeding into local, regional, and national activity about recruitment and retention.
- Employers highlight through local and national governance structures the pressures that social workers face including the impact of national and local socio-economic policies.

## **Challenging racism in the workplace:<sup>21</sup>**

- Commit to embedding the Social Care WRES.<sup>22</sup>
- Implement “reverse mentoring” of senior managers by staff from black and minority ethnic communities.
- Create a fair and equitable system for the allocation of work that recognises bias in the system.
- Acknowledging placed based factors and demographics.
- Promoting leadership pathways to address lack of diversity in senior leadership roles.



# Best Practice examples

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## **The Family Safeguarding Model:**

The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/business/services-for-businesses-charities-and-other-public-bodies/centre-for-family-safeguarding-practice/centre-for-family-safeguarding-practice.aspx>

## **Brighton & Hove – implemented relationship-based practice as a whole system change across Children’s Social Work Services.**

This model of practice is called the Team Around the Relationship: [www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/empathy-tenacity-and-compassion-an-evaluation-of-relationship-based-practice-in-brighton-and-hove/r/a110f00000Nelw1AAF](http://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/empathy-tenacity-and-compassion-an-evaluation-of-relationship-based-practice-in-brighton-and-hove/r/a110f00000Nelw1AAF)

## **Hertfordshire- SC-WRES Improvement Programme:**

highlighting the challenges and driving action:

[www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Supporting-a-diverse-workforce/SCWRES/SC-WRES-case-study-Hertfordshire-County-Council.pdf](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Supporting-a-diverse-workforce/SCWRES/SC-WRES-case-study-Hertfordshire-County-Council.pdf)

## **Anti-Racism Supervision Template**

– created by BASW’s Black and Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium member Shabnam Ahmed:

[https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/relation\\_al\\_and\\_anti-racist\\_supervision\\_form18.pdf](https://basw.co.uk/sites/default/files/resources/relation_al_and_anti-racist_supervision_form18.pdf)

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