

PCF

2026

Professional Capabilities Framework



Advanced social worker

BASW
England

The professional association for
social work and social workers

1. VALUES AND ETHICS

Apply social work ethical principles and value to guide professional practices

Social workers have an obligation to work in accordance with our [Code of Ethics](#), in terms of our conduct, our processes and decisions, and our interventions. We involve individuals, carers and communities meaningfully at both an individual and a structural level, up to and including partnership working and co-production. We promote human rights and social justice. We develop and maintain our understanding of the value base of our profession throughout our career, its ethical standards and relevant law.

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- model and promote confident and critical application of professional ethics to decision-making, using a legal and human rights framework, and support others to do so
- model and promote a culture which encourages reflection on the influence and impact of own values on professional practice
- demonstrate confident leadership, management and arbitration of ethical dilemmas, providing guidance and opportunities for the professional development of others
- ensure my practice is underpinned by commitment to co-production and partnership working with people who use services, carers, families, communities and networks, wherever possible. I negotiate and establish boundaries to underpin such partnership, using transparency and honesty, providing guidance, clarity and reasoning when this approach is not appropriate/possible
- promote people's rights to autonomy and self-determination, supporting, challenging and guiding others as appropriate
- provide support and leadership when dealing with the sensitive exploration of issues of confidentiality, privacy and information sharing in complex or risky situations.

2. DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

Recognise diversity and apply anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles in practice

Social workers understand that diversity characterises and shapes human experience and is critical to the formation of identity. Diversity is multi-dimensional and includes race, disability, class, economic status, age, sexuality, gender (including transgender), faith and belief and the intersection of these and other characteristics. We understand that because of difference, and perception of difference, a person's life experience may include oppression, marginalisation and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim. We identify this and promote equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

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- promote positive approaches to diversity, identity and equality in my area of responsibility, providing guidance and challenge as required
- facilitate individuals and communities to recognise the nuances around their identity within the political and social context, and to advocate for themselves and tell their own story in order to build empathy and connect diverse groups across society
- contribute to and implement organisational and national policy development and decision-making around diversity, equity and equality
- create and sustain an environment where people feel supported to challenge on issues of discrimination, racism and oppression
- provide or seek out expert professional advice to ensure legal compliance. I contribute to the development of relevant organisational and professional practices and procedures
- model and contribute to the development of evidence-based good practice in use of power and authority within my sphere of influence. I ensure situations where power is used inappropriately or ethics are transgressed are appropriately challenged.

3. RIGHTS, JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC WELLBEING

Advance human rights and promote social justice and economic wellbeing

Social workers recognise and promote the fundamental principles of human rights, social justice and economic wellbeing enshrined in national and international laws, conventions and policies. These principles underpin our practice and we use statutory and case law effectively in our work. We understand and proactively address the effects of oppression, discrimination and poverty. We are committed to the ethical and accountable use of technology, including AI and we promote digital inclusion. Wherever possible, we work in partnership with people using services and their carers and families, to challenge inequality and injustice, and promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination.

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- monitor, review and evaluate practice to ensure application of the principles of social justice, digital and social inclusion, equity and equality to decision-making. I lead on and contribute to policies and development opportunities to support these principles
- understand the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs. Model practice and support others to accommodate and support individuals, families and colleagues equitably
- demonstrate an awareness of effective rights-based practice and how this is supported by sound systems and policies; advocate for change when necessary
- model and guide others on accessing appropriate opportunities that may enhance economic status and income. I advocate and use influencing skills to increase access to opportunities for people within my sphere of influence
- am aware of political, social and structural factors impacting on human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality. Employ and promote strategies to promote a positive environment
- ensure that practice is compliant with the law through the provision of or access to expert professional social work advice. I challenge situations where the interpretation or application of the law is unjust/unethical or disproportionate
- model best practice, provide or seek out expert professional social work/legal advice, applying human and civil rights understanding in complex situations where there are competing issues
- Encourage an open and transparent culture; promote and support the appropriate use of compliments, complaints, and whistleblowing procedures, and support individuals, families and colleagues to understand and confidently engage with these procedures

- offer professional social work consultation and liaison to independent advocacy. Support others to identify when independent advocacy is appropriate, and advocate for necessary resources. I provide review and challenge as necessary
- develop organisational and practice strategies to promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities. Support people in raising their own challenges and finding solutions to inequality, social injustice and rights violations.

4. KNOWLEDGE

Develop and apply relevant knowledge from social work practice and research, social sciences, law, other professional and relevant fields and from the experience of people who use services

We develop our professional knowledge throughout our careers and sustain our curiosity. As a unified profession, we develop core knowledge that relates to our purpose, values and ethics. We also develop specific knowledge needed for fields of practice and roles. Our knowledge comes from social work practice, theory, law, research, expertise by experience, and from other relevant fields and disciplines. All social workers contribute to creating as well as using professional knowledge. We understand our distinctive knowledge complements that of other disciplines to provide effective services.

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- pursue and encourage in others a culture of professional curiosity and continuous learning
- refresh and maintain a relevant knowledge that informs my practice, leadership, supervisory, educational and/or management role. I maintain self-awareness of my knowledge limits and my need for continuous learning
- continue to develop knowledge in one or more specialist areas of practice. I continue to expand and consolidate this knowledge and understand the connections between my specialisms and other fields of knowledge and practice
- support others to apply knowledge and evidence to practice, enabling and challenging them to develop their knowledge base and make evidence-informed judgements
- maintain a strong understanding of team and organisational dynamics, structures and resources, and use this understanding to perform my role effectively within the broader organisational context
- develop and maintain my expertise, informed by knowledge base and evidence, in both established and emergent areas relevant to my field of practice
- demonstrate a critical understanding of research and evaluation methods and develop skills in using these
- demonstrate specialist knowledge, understanding and application of the opportunities and risks of technologies such as Gen AI, digital resources, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- explore team-wide and organisational approaches to ensure that any technology is adopted, challenged or applied judiciously in line with social work skills, knowledge and values

- access and make critical use of knowledge and evidence from a variety of sources. Integrate the expertise and knowledge of individuals, families, carers and professionals into my role and seek feedback on my practice/roles from those who use our services.

5. CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Apply critical reflection and analysis to inform and provide a rationale for professional decision-making

Social workers critically reflect on their practice, use analysis, apply professional judgement and reasoned discernment. We identify, evaluate and integrate multiple sources of knowledge and evidence. We continuously evaluate our impact and benefit to those using services. We use supervision and other support to reflect on our work and sustain our practice and wellbeing. We apply our critical reflective skills to the context and conditions under which we practise. Our reflection enables us to challenge ourselves and others, and maintain our professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness.

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- maintain an environment where use of imagination, creativity and curiosity, along with critical reflection and analysis, is valued and supported
- provide critical reflection, challenge and evidence-informed decision-making in complex situations. I also support others in developing these capabilities and finding their own solutions
- hypothesise and make complex judgements in uncertain and ambiguous situations. I acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements and override or escalate AI-generated recommendations where necessary. I support and challenge others to develop their ability to make similarly skilled social work judgements
- routinely provide professional social work opinion, based on clear rationale and advanced professional knowledge. Support and empower others to develop the confidence and skills to provide professional opinion
- develop and maintain a system within which all social workers (including me) are able to access professional supervision from appropriately experienced social workers. Model good practice and reflective supervision skills
- ensure protected time is available for reflective social work supervision across the team. Lead group reflective exercises, involving people who use services in reflections and creativity wherever possible.

6. SKILLS AND INTERVENTIONS

Use judgement, knowledge and authority to intervene with individuals, families and communities to promote independence, provide support, prevent harm and enable progress

Social workers engage with individuals, families, and communities, working alongside people to determine their needs and wishes, and what action may be helpful. We build productive, empathetic working relationships and communicate effectively. Using our professional judgement and values, we employ appropriate interventions, promoting self-determination, support, protection and positive change. We develop and maintain skills relevant to our roles. We understand and take account of power differentials and use our authority appropriately. We evaluate our own practice and its impact, and how we improve outcomes for those we work with.

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- model and promote a culture of clear, empathetic communication, support the development of effective communication skills in others
- communicate effectively in highly charged, complex or challenging circumstances to a wide range of audiences, for different purposes and at different levels, including public speaking and presenting
- advise, model and support others to share information appropriately and in timely ways, including in complex situations where there are competing or contradictory rights involved
- model effective, empathetic engagement with a wide range of people in challenging situations, and support others to develop and maintain effective engagement, including in situations of hostility and risk
- take a relationship-based approach, promote a culture which supports compassionate relationships with other professionals, people who use services and those who care for them
- am able to gather, analyse and review complex and/or contradictory information quickly and effectively, using it to reach informed professional decisions
- support and encourage professional decision-making in others. I identify when more strategic/expert advice or decision-making is needed
- provide specialist assessment and intervention expertise, supporting and developing social workers through guidance and consultation. Promote equitable, inclusive practice by embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of work
- engage in and facilitate research and/or evaluation of practice and/or outcomes
- develop and maintain a culture that supports social/professional networks, for individuals, communities and professionals

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- evaluate and analyse recording and the use of information systems. I use evidence gained to inform good practice and maintain a focus on positive outcomes for individuals, families, carers and communities
- lead organisational change and development, supporting others to do so in ways which maintain a focus on positive outcomes for people who use services, families, carers and communities
- model the appropriate use of authority across a range of situations, supporting others to understand and work with the authority inherent in their positions.

7. CONTEXTS AND ORGANISATIONS

Engage with, inform and adapt to changing organisational contexts, and the social and policy environments that shape practice. Operate effectively within and contribute to the development of organisations and services, including multi-agency and interprofessional settings

Social workers are informed about and proactively respond to the challenges and opportunities that come from changing social, policy and work contexts. We fulfil this responsibility in accordance with our professional values and ethics, as individual and collective professionals and as members of the organisations in which we work. We collaborate, inform and are informed by our work with individuals and communities, other social workers and other professions.

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- maintain an awareness of changes in national and local contexts and their impact on practice and communicate this effectively within and outside of the organisation. I positively influence developments that affect social work practice
- influence organisational development, proactively using feedback from your areas of responsibility and drawing on an evidence informed understanding of comparative organisational structures
- provide professional leadership and facilitate collaboration within a multi-agency context as appropriate
- maintain a sophisticated knowledge of the law relevant to my area of practice, advise others and facilitate access to and dissemination of more specialist advice where necessary
- contribute to and provide professional leadership of organisational change and development, including the identification of gaps in service
- address and oversee performance and practice issues that arise, supporting people to positively resolve difficulties where possible, taking action within the organisation or with the regulator where necessary
- promote positive working relationships in and across teams, using strategies for collaboration and contribute to a supportive organisational culture
- develop and contribute to liaison across agencies at a local and regional level, maintaining a collaborative working approach, resolving dilemmas actively where necessary.

8. LEADERSHIP

Promote the profession and good social work practice. Take responsibility for the professional learning and development of others. Develop personal influence and be part of the collective leadership and impact of the profession

We develop and show our leadership, individually and collectively, through promoting social work's purpose, practices and impact. We achieve this through diverse activities, which may include: advancing practice, supervising, educating others, research, evaluation, using innovation and creativity, writing, using social media positively, being active in professional networks and bodies, contributing to policy and taking formal leadership/management roles. We promote organisational contexts conducive to good practice and learning. We work in partnership with people who use services and stakeholders in developing our leadership and aims for the profession.

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- promote and develop professional leadership within my area of responsibility, and identify and develop leadership potential within other staff
- promote, articulate and support a positive social work identity within my organisation and through external collaboration with social workers
- demonstrate a nuanced understanding of leadership models within the organisational culture, drawing on a range of skills and approaches to lead effectively in different situations
- ensure individual and workplace practice is informed by and informs research and current professional knowledge
- promote a culture of professional curiosity, encouraging the involvement of social workers in research and evaluation
- confidently hold courageous conversations on complex and sensitive issues at all levels, using a direct, professionally curious, and empathetic approach
- contribute to the identification, planning and meeting of staff development needs within the workplace, informed by the PCF and other relevant policy and practice guidance (eg the KSS)
- understand the requirements of the standards for employers of social workers and promote these within the workplace
- ensure systems are in place to provide professional, reflective supervision, appraisal and support to others using critical reflection and a range of other supervisory techniques
- engage effectively with the leadership of others, regardless of their role or position, demonstrating my own willingness to learn and develop.

9. PROFESSIONALISM

Identify and behave as a professional social worker, committed to professional development

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession. Our title is protected in UK law. We demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for our conduct, practice, self-care and development. We seek and use supervision and other professional support. We promote excellent practice and challenge circumstances that compromise this. As representatives of the profession, we safeguard its reputation. We are accountable to people using services, the public, employers and the regulator. We take ethical decisions in the context of multiple accountabilities.

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- meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- model the social work role, promote social work and decision-making within and outside the organisation
- promote awareness that social work is an international profession with a global definition that supports my professional identity, ethics, evidence base and practice with diverse communities in England
- maintain awareness of own professional strengths and limitations, knowledge gaps and conflicts of interest, actively seeking to address issues for self and others
- model and use critical reflective skills in leadership, management, practice or organisational supervision settings to enhance my own and others' practice
- model and demonstrate professionalism, ensuring professional social work standards are maintained throughout my area of responsibility
- model and help others to maintain professional/personal boundaries and the skilled use of self in more complex situations
- foster and maintain a work environment which promotes health, safety and wellbeing and self-care for self and others
- identify and collaborate to share learning from good practice and resolve concerns about practice, following procedures as appropriate
- contribute to the development and implementation of procedures that are fit for purpose, enhance best practice and contribute to better outcomes
- model and take responsibility for the positive use of workload tools, using workload data to inform the organisation's workload management and risk management approaches
- develop and maintain a network of internal and external colleagues, with whom to seek and share advice, expertise and new developments in social work

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- foster and support an environment that promotes learning and practice development within the workplace, providing social work supervision as appropriate
- take responsibility for seeking, planning and undertaking ongoing professional development and use diverse platforms and opportunities within and outside my organisation/work setting.