

PCF

2026

Professional Capabilities Framework



End of first placement

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.

I...

- understand and, with support, apply the profession's ethical principles from our [Code of Ethics](#)
- recognise and with support, explore and manage the impact of my own values on professional practice
- identify and, with guidance, manage potentially conflicting values and ethical dilemmas
- elicit and respect the needs and views of individuals, carers and families, and with support, promote co-production and participation in decision-making wherever possible
- recognise and, with support, promote individuals' legal and ethical rights to autonomy and self-determination
- promote and protect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals within and outside their families and networks, recognising the requirements of professional accountability and appropriate information sharing.

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.

I...

- understand how an individual's identity is informed by factors such as culture, economic status, family composition, community, life experiences and characteristics – and the intersection of such factors – and take account of these to understand their experiences
- with support, gain an insight into the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs
- understand the need for professionals to acknowledge, support and celebrate diversity
- can reflect on and challenge my own assumptions, pre-conceptions and biases
- recognise personal, organisational and systemic discrimination, racism and oppression
- identify ways in which discrimination, racism and oppression might be challenged by me and by individuals and families who use the service
- am aware of relevant law and policy, and how these might be applied in the interests of equity, equality and integration
- recognise and, with support, manage the impact on people of the power invested in my role.

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.

I...

- understand and, with support, apply in practice the principles of human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality
- work within the principles of human and civil rights and equalities legislation
- recognise the impact of poverty, digital exclusion and social exclusion. I promote enhanced economic status, income and equal opportunities through access to social work input, education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefits
- have an insight into the wider political and social context, and how factors such as legislation and policy can impact on individual experience and on social workers ability to advance or constrain people's rights
- have an awareness of compliments, complaints and whistleblowing procedures
- recognise the value of independent advocacy.

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.

I...

- with guidance, apply research, evidence and knowledge from social work and other relevant fields (e.g. sociology, social policy, psychology, health, human growth and development, technological and digital spheres, and from the experience of people who use services) to social work practice
- understand protective factors and forms of harm, their impact on people, and the implications for practice
- understand the legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice, relevant to my placement setting
- apply knowledge from a range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities, and the methods derived from them
- develop knowledge and understanding of the opportunities, risks and organisational requirements around technology such as Gen AI, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- value and take account of the expertise of people with lived experience of receiving services and carers and other professionals in my practice and judgement.

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.

I...

- recognise the importance of applying imagination, creativity and curiosity to my practice
- inform my decision-making through the identification and gathering of information from more than one source and, with support, evaluate its reliability and validity
- recognise my duty to acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements, and to override or escalate AI-generated recommendations where necessary
- with guidance understand how to evaluate and review hypotheses in response to information available at the time and apply in practice
- with guidance use a variety of reflective models to explore and analyse situations and my own role in a scenario
- recognise the important role of supervision and make an active contribution.

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.

I...

- with guidance, use a range of verbal, non-verbal and written methods of communication relevant to the placement
- share and discuss any information, advice, instruction and opinion appropriately, clearly and with empathy, in order to advocate, inform and convince
- involve individuals, families and communities in all interventions to their preferred level, as far as possible
- demonstrate awareness of the impact of multiple factors, changing circumstances and uncertainty in people's lives
- demonstrate the ability to build and conclude compassionate and effective relationships appropriate to the placement setting
- with guidance, demonstrate a holistic and person-centred approach to the identification of needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks
- identify and use appropriate frameworks to assess, give meaning to, plan, implement and review effective interventions and evaluate progress and outcomes
- with guidance, take an ethically informed, planned and structured approach, informed by at least two relevant social work methods and models
- maintain accurate, comprehensible, succinct and timely records and reports in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines, to support professional judgement and organisational responsibilities
- recognise the importance of community resources, groups and networks for individuals
- with guidance, understand the authority of the social work role.

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.

I...

- with guidance, recognise that social work operates within, contributes to and responds to, changing economic, social, political and organisational contexts
- with guidance, understand the legal obligations, structures, culture and behaviours of an organisation. Appreciate that these factors impact on policy, procedure and practice, and on individual, family and carer experience
- with guidance, work within the organisational context of my placement setting and understand the lines of accountability
- understand and respect the role of others within the organisation and work effectively with them
- take responsibility for my role and impact within teams and with guidance contribute positively to team working
- understand the inter-agency, multi-disciplinary and interprofessional dimensions to practice and, with guidance, demonstrate partnership working.

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.

I...

- identify how professional leadership in social work can enhance practice. I understand that the leadership is about more than managerial tasks; it is relational, values-based and practice-informed
- recognise the value of sharing and supporting the learning and development of others
- understand my responsibility to develop individual and collective/collaborative professional leadership capabilities, working alongside others to achieve better outcomes and promote the goals of the profession
- with support, am able to hold courageous conversations about sensitive topics, taking the time to prepare and reflect thoroughly, planning for next steps if issues weren't addressed in the moment
- can engage appropriately with the leadership of others, regardless of their position or role
- can, with support, undertake activities which give me an opportunity to showcase leadership skills in relation to individuals, families and colleagues. This might include:
 - chairing meetings
 - presenting ideas
 - influencing practice
 - supporting peers
 - demonstrating ethical courage.

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.

I...

- am familiar with the requirements of the professional regulator
- recognise the role of the professional social worker in a range of contexts
- with guidance, recognise my strengths and limitations in professional practice, and how to seek advice
- demonstrate professionalism in terms of presentation, demeanour, reliability, honesty and respectfulness
- am able to show awareness of personal and professional boundaries in all contexts and media
- show awareness of my own safety, health, wellbeing, self-care priorities and emotional resilience, and seek advice as necessary
- identify both good practice and concerns about practice, procedures or ethos in the workplace and how they might be questioned and/or improved.
- with guidance, take responsibility for managing my time and workload effectively
- recognise and seek to meet my own learning needs in response to practice experience.