

PCF

2026

Professional Capabilities Framework



End of last
placement/completion

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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- understand and apply the profession's ethical principles (as defined in the [Code of Ethics](#)) and legislation, taking account of these in my practice and when reaching decisions
- recognise and, with support, explore and manage the impact of my own values on professional practice
- manage situations of potentially conflicting or competing values, and, with guidance, recognise, reflect on, and work with integrity
- demonstrate respectful partnership work and co-production with individuals, families and carers, eliciting and respecting their needs and views, and promoting their participation in decision-making wherever possible
- recognise and promote individual's 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 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.

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- understand how an individual's identity is informed by factors such as culture, economic status, family composition, life experiences and characteristics – and the intersection of such factors – and take account of these to understand their experiences, questioning assumptions where necessary
- develop an insight into the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs. Explore equitable ways to accommodate and support individuals, families and colleagues
- recognise personal, organisational and systemic discrimination, racism and oppression
- am aware of a range of anti-oppressive approaches, such as anti-racist practice, that I might use proactively to improve my own practice and that of others
- with guidance, and with reference to legislative requirements, I make use of various strategies to challenge discrimination, racism and oppression, working in partnership with people using services, carers, families and/or communities where possible
- recognise and manage the impact on people of the power invested in my role in accordance with our [Code of Ethics](#).

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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- understand, identify and apply in practice the principles of human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality
- recognise the impact of poverty, digital exclusion and social exclusion. I take an anti-poverty approach, promoting enhanced economic status, income and equal opportunities through access to social work input, education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefits
- am aware of political, social and structural factors impacting on human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality, and the strategies which professionals can use to promote a positive environment
- understand how legislation and policy can advance or constrain people's rights and recognise how the law may be used to protect or advance their rights and entitlements
- work within the principles of human and civil rights and equalities legislation, differentiating and beginning to work with absolute, qualified and competing rights and differing needs and perspectives
- understand the processes and potential outcomes of compliments, complaints and whistleblowing procedures
- recognise the value of – and aid access to – independent advocacy
- demonstrate skills and approaches to practice that promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities.

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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- demonstrate a critical understanding of the application to social work of research, evidence and knowledge from social work and other relevant fields (eg sociology, social policy, psychology, health and human development, technological and digital spheres, and from the experience of people who use services)
- understand protective factors and forms of harm and their impact on people. Consider the implications for practice, drawing on concepts of strength, resilience, vulnerability, risk and resistance
- demonstrate and apply to practice a working knowledge of human growth and development throughout the life course
- recognise the short and long-term impact of psychological, socio-economic, environmental and physiological factors on people's lives, taking into account age and development, and how this informs practice
- acknowledge the centrality of relationships for people and the key concepts of attachment, separation, loss, change and resilience
- demonstrate a critical understanding of the legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice, recognising the scope for professional judgement and its importance to ethical practice. This may include Knowledge and Skills statements in adults and children's social work
- understand the value of systemic approaches and how they can be used to understand and work with the person in their environment, social context and relationships, and inform social work practice
- demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities, along with associated skills and tools

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- demonstrate a critical understanding of social welfare policy, its evolution, implementation and impact on people, social work, other professions, and multi-agency working
- recognise the contribution, and begin to make use, of research and evidence to inform practice. Demonstrate a critical understanding of research methods
- develop critical knowledge and understanding of the opportunities, risks and dilemmas of technology such as Gen AI, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- with support, evaluate and challenge AI generated and any other automated outputs to ensure that these align with professional expectations around values, reliability and standards
- value and take account of the knowledge and expertise of people with lived experience of receiving services, carers and other professionals. Reflect on this feedback and use it to build good practice.

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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- apply imagination, creativity and curiosity to practice
- inform decision-making through the identification and gathering of information from multiple sources, actively seeking new sources
- with support, rigorously question and evaluate the reliability and validity of information from different sources
- acknowledge and, with support, evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements, overriding or escalating AI-generated recommendations where necessary
- begin to formulate and make explicit, evidence-informed judgements and justifiable decisions
- know how to formulate, test, evaluate, and review hypotheses in response to information available at the time and apply in practice
- demonstrate a capacity for logical, systematic, critical and reflective reasoning and apply the theories, models and techniques of reflective practice to analyse situations and my own role and approach
- demonstrate effective and active use of supervision for accountability, professional reflection and development. Able to participate in reflective conversations about practice, supervisory needs and the supervisory relationship.

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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- identify and apply a range of verbal, non-verbal and written methods of communication and adapt them in line with people's age, comprehension and culture
 - am able to communicate information, advice, instruction and professional opinion, clearly and with empathy, in order to advocate, inform and convince
 - demonstrate skills in sharing information appropriately and respectfully, in line with the law
 - maintain accurate, comprehensible, succinct and timely records and reports in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidelines, to support professional judgement and organisational responsibilities
 - ensure that individuals, families and communities are involved in all interventions to their preferred level, including co-production, where possible and appropriate
 - recognise complexity, multiple factors, changing circumstances and uncertainty in people's lives, to be able to prioritise my intervention
 - appreciate the importance of relationship-based practice, demonstrating the ability to engage with people, and build, manage, sustain and conclude compassionate and effective relationships
- identify needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks, using a holistic, person-centred approach
- promote positive change and prevent harm through a planned and structured approach, informed by social work methods, models and tools
 - understand and can apply knowledge, skills and interventions in accordance with organisational and national policy while maintaining ethical, evidence informed critical perspectives

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- use appropriate frameworks to assess, give meaning to, plan, implement and review effective interventions and evaluate the outcomes, alongside individuals, families and carers
- demonstrate an awareness of intervention at community and societal levels, as well as at an individual or family level
- recognise how the development of community resources, groups and networks enhance outcomes for individuals and understand social work's role in promoting this
- recognise the factors that create or exacerbate risk to individuals, their families or carers, to the public or to professionals, including myself, and contribute to the assessment and management of risk
- with support, identify appropriate responses to safeguard vulnerable people and promote their wellbeing
- understand the authority of the social work role and begin to use this appropriately as an accountable professional.

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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- recognise that social work operates within, and responds to, changing economic, social, political and organisational contexts
- understand legal obligations, structures, culture and behaviours within organisations and how these impact on policy, procedure and practice, and on the experience of those using the service
- understand the roles and responsibilities of social workers in a range of organisations, lines of accountability and the boundaries of professional autonomy and discretion
- am able to work within an organisation's remit and contribute to its evaluation and development
- understand and respect the role of others within the organisation and work effectively with them
- take responsibility for your role and impact within teams and be able to contribute positively to effective team working
- understand the inter-agency, multi-disciplinary and interprofessional dimensions to practice and demonstrate effective 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...

- recognise the importance of, and begin to demonstrate, professional leadership as a social worker, promoting our professional purpose, practice and impact (as described in the super-domains)
- have an initial understanding of different models of leadership, appreciating that a central tenet of sound leadership is that it is relational, values-based and practice-informed, contributing to a confident, capable and stable team
- recognise the value of - and contribute to supporting - the learning and development of others
- begin to contribute to collective/collaborative professional leadership, for example participating in peer reflection
- am able to hold courageous conversations about sensitive topics, using a direct, professionally curious and empathetic approach, and taking the time to prepare and reflect thoroughly
- can engage appropriately with the leadership of others, regardless of their role or position, challenging with support if needed
- can, with oversight, 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 able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- am able to explain the role of the social worker in a range of contexts, and uphold the reputation of the profession
- understand that social work is an international profession with a global definition
- recognise my professional strengths and limitations and how to seek advice
- demonstrate professionalism in terms of presentation, demeanour, reliability, honesty and respectfulness
- recognise the impact of self in interaction with others, making appropriate use of personal experience and awareness, and begin to develop effective use of self in practice
- recognise and maintain personal and professional boundaries in all contexts and media
- with support, manage and promote own safety, health, wellbeing, self-care and emotional resilience
- identify both good practice and concerns about practice, procedures and ethos in the workplace, and seek support to find appropriate means of challenge and/or offer suggestions
- take responsibility for managing my time and workload effectively, and begin to prioritise my activities including supervision time
- demonstrate a commitment to my learning needs: seek, plan and undertake continuing professional development throughout my career, ensuring that I am in the best position to promote professional purpose, practice and impact.