

# PCF

2026

# Professional Capabilities Framework



Experienced 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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- demonstrate confident and critical application of professional ethical principles (using the [Code of Ethics](#)) to decision-making and practice, supporting others to do so using a legal and human rights framework
- model and support others to reflect on and manage the influence and impact of own values on professional practice and the skilled use of self
- provide guidance and support to analyse, reflect on and work with ethical dilemmas
- ensure my practice is underpinned by commitment to co-production and partnership working with individuals, carers, families, communities and networks, wherever possible. I negotiate and establish boundaries to underpin such partnership, using transparency and honesty
- promote co-production and participation, alongside individuals and carers, in developing service delivery
- promote and advance, wherever possible, an individual's right to autonomy and self-determination, providing support, guidance and challenge to others to promote human and citizenship rights and entitlements
- demonstrate skills in the sensitive exploration of issues of confidentiality, privacy and information-sharing in complex or risky situations, offering support and guidance to colleagues in managing such dilemmas.

## 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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- inform, guide and model good practice in relation to identity, diversity, equity and equality, taking positive action when issues arise in my organisation or work setting
- understand the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs. Model inclusive practice that supports individuals, families and colleagues equitably
- contribute to and implement organisational policy development and decision-making around diversity, equity and equality, using co-production approaches where possible
- model critically reflective practice and support others to recognise and challenge discrimination, racism and oppression
- identify and take action (individually or collectively) to challenge breaches and limitations in the ability of my own or others' organisations to advance equality and diversity and comply with the law
- demonstrate and model the effective and positive use of power and authority, whilst recognising and providing guidance to others to avoid oppressive practice.

### **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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- provide guidance and challenge to others about applying the principles of social justice, digital and social inclusion, equity and equality to decision-making
- support others to enable individuals to access opportunities that may enhance their economic status (eg education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefits)
- understand political, social and structural factors impacting on human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality, use this knowledge to support individual and organisational practice
- demonstrate ability to interpret and use current legislation and guidance to protect and/or advance people's rights and entitlements, balancing use of different legislation to achieve the best outcomes; support colleagues (both inside and outside the organisation) to do so
- am able to communicate legislative issues to other professionals and agencies
- make appropriate use of compliments, complaints and whistleblowing procedures, and support those using the service and colleagues to understand and make use of these procedures
- model best practice in applying human and civil rights, providing support to others and challenging where required
- promote access to independent advocacy, ensuring best practice and critical review, and contribute to the evaluation of independent advocacy
- promote, and guide colleagues to support strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities. I support them in raising 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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- develop knowledge in one or more specialist areas of my practice. I continue to expand and consolidate my knowledge to inform connections between my specialisms and other settings or fields of practice
- apply my understanding of protective factors and forms of harm and their impact on people and the implications for practice, drawing on concepts of strength, resilience, vulnerability, risk and resistance
- demonstrate, apply to practice and advise colleagues on a working knowledge of human growth and development throughout the life course
- have an advanced understanding of the centrality of relationships for people's wellbeing and how to apply key concepts of attachment, separation, loss, change and resilience
- 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
- demonstrate knowledge and application of appropriate legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice. Apply legal reasoning, using professional legal expertise and advice appropriately, recognising where scope for professional judgement exists
- demonstrate and apply a critical understanding of social welfare policy, its evolution, implementation and impact on people, social work, other professions and inter-agency working
- understand the value of systemic approaches and how they can be used to work with a person or family in their environment, social context and relationships, and inform my practice and that of others

## Experienced social worker

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- demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities, and the methods derived from them, and have a more specialised understanding of models and approaches most critical to work setting or role
- recognise the contribution and develop application of research and other evidence (eg practice evidence and evidence from experts by experience) to inform and improve my practice
- demonstrate a critical understanding of research and evaluation methods
- confidently apply a critical understanding of the opportunities and risks of technologies including Gen AI, digital resources, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- promote digital literacy and a judicious use of technology, evaluating and challenging AI generated outputs and AI use where these are not in line with social work values and good practice
- value and take account of the expertise of individuals, families, carers and professionals and seek their feedback on my practice/role.

## 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 and encourage in others use of imagination, creativity and curiosity in practice, exploring options to solve dilemmas and problems. I involve people who use services in reflections and creativity wherever possible
- draw critically on a wide range of evidence sources to inform decision-making
- ensure hypotheses and options are reviewed to inform judgement and decision-making. I acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements and override or escalate AI-generated recommendations where necessary
- demonstrate confidence and skills to provide professional opinion to social workers and other professionals
- routinely and effectively apply critical reflection and analysis to increasingly complex cases and situations
- expect and seek supervision that facilitates a critically reflective approach and covers practice, organisational, leadership and management aspects of role
- participate in group reflective exercises.

### 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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- communicate skilfully and confidently in complex or high risk situations. I model and help others to develop excellent communication skills in diverse contexts
- contribute to the development of my organisation's information strategy and systems
- take a relationship-based approach, sustain and model engagement with people in fluctuating circumstances and capacities, including where there are negative responses, rejection of help, hostility and risk
- am able to gather information quickly and effectively so as to inform judgement for interventions including in crises, and in response to challenge, or in the absence of complete/sufficient information
- use assessment procedures discerningly to inform judgement
- maintain and expand a range of frameworks for assessment and intervention at an individual, family, community and societal level. Demonstrate a skilled and person/child centred application of these frameworks
- actively support, initiate and co-produce community groups and networks for the benefit of people using services, carers and families
- support the development of professional groups and networks
- model and help others with direct work, including appropriate information sharing and managing changing circumstances
- anticipate, assess and manage risk, including in complex cases, and support others to develop risk management skills
- undertake assessment and planning for safeguarding in complex cases, and help others with safeguarding skills. with awareness of the implications for equity, equality, diversity and inclusion
- recognise and appropriately manage the authority inherent in your position.

## 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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- keep abreast of changing policy, political and professional contexts at local and national level, and take account of these in practice and my workplace
- work effectively within my own organisation, and identify and influence relationships between my organisation's culture and procedures, the demands of practice and wider changes in my context (eg changes in local communities and wider society)
- gain an insight into comparative organisational structures, and the implications of these for practice. Be aware of, for example, hierarchy and power, legal form, and stakeholders
- work to and explain the relevant legal structures in the organisation, including basic case law; know when and how to access support and appropriate legal advice and consultation
- explore, identify and communicate to supervisors, leaders and managers how organisational practice can improve to support better social work practice and citizen outcomes
- keep abreast of changing roles and services in the organisation, recognise, value and engage with other specialist perspectives
- am confident about my role in the team, working positively with others. I draw on and contribute to team working and collaborative support wherever possible and provide social work advice to support colleagues' practice
- take an active role in interprofessional and inter-agency work, building own network and collaborative 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.

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- promote and develop social work's purpose, practice and impact within my organisation, with colleagues including those of other disciplines, and more widely where appropriate
- have an understanding of different models of leadership and specific tools relating to models of leadership, and how these might be used to the benefit of the social work profession
- play a leading role in practice development in the team and help sustain a learning culture
- provide supervision to colleagues as required and appropriate, continuing to develop supervisory skills. I support others to manage and prioritise work
- assess and manage the work of social work students and newly qualified social workers
- contribute to collective/collaborative professional leadership through participating in or initiating purposeful peer support, social work forums, involvement in professional organisations and meetings within and/or outside my organisation
- hold courageous conversations about complex sensitive topics, using a direct, professionally curious and empathetic approach
- contribute to professional and organisational developments in my context, including developing skills to evaluate the value of new and existing models and interventions
- Engage effectively with the leadership of others, regardless of their role or position, demonstrating my own willingness to learn and develop
- Seek out increasingly challenging activities which give me an opportunity to showcase leadership skills in relation to individuals, families and colleagues, such as:
  - undertake Practice Educator training Standards Stage 2
  - advanced training (AMHP, MCA, supervisory training)

### 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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- am able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- demonstrate professionalism and excellent practice, aiming to be a role model for social work, setting expectations for others and contributing to the public face of the organisation and/or profession
- apply in practice and promote my understanding of social work as an international profession with a global definition supporting my professional identity, ethics and practice with diverse communities in England
- am aware of my own professional strengths and limitations and knowledge gaps and seek to continuously develop across all domains of the PCF
- model and help others with effective workload management skills
- model and help others to maintain professional/personal boundaries and skilled use of self
- recognise and seek ways to promote wellbeing and self-care for team and colleagues
- promote up-to-date standards of excellent practice, identifying and helping resolve poor practice and promoting continuous improvement
- understand my accountabilities and the dilemmas that can arise in complex contexts. I ensure the welfare, experience and outcomes of people using services are at the heart of my practice and decisions
- establish a network of internal and external colleagues from whom to seek advice and expertise
- contribute to creating and sustaining a learning environment for self, team and colleagues within and beyond social work. I may undertake advanced training, such as Practice Educator training
- seek, plan and undertake ongoing professional development and use diverse platforms and opportunities for learning within and outside my organisation/work setting.