

PCF

2026

Professional Capabilities Framework



Newly qualified 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.

I...

- understand and apply the profession's ethical principles ([Code of Ethics](#)) and legislation, taking account of these in reaching decisions
- recognise and manage the impact of my own values on professional practice
- recognise and manage conflicting values and ethical dilemmas to arrive at principled decisions
- demonstrate respectful partnership and co-production work with individuals, families and carers, using a range of approaches to respectfully elicit their needs and views, and promoting their participation in decision-making wherever possible
- recognise and promote individuals' rights to autonomy and self-determination
- promote and protect the confidentiality and privacy of individuals within and outside their families and networks, recognising the requirements of professional accountability and information sharing
- am able to communicate confidentiality and privacy in decisions effectively and compassionately.

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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- identify and take account of the significance of diversity, discrimination and inequality on the lives of people, and show application of this understanding in my practice
- understand the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs, and explore equitable ways to accommodate and support individuals, families and colleagues
- advocate on behalf of, and facilitate self-advocacy for, individuals and communities. Use story-telling and personal accounts to build empathy and promote integration
- recognise personal, organisational and systemic oppression and discrimination
- I am able to use a range of anti-oppressive approaches, such as anti-racist and anti-poverty practice, proactively to improve my own practice and that of others
- with reference to legislation, I am able to implement appropriate strategies to challenge others, in partnership and with the involvement of people affected where possible
- identify and understand the impact of the power invested in my role on relationships and interventions, and am able to adapt my practice accordingly, striving to reduce the risk of power misuse.

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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- begin to integrate principles of and entitlements to social justice, social inclusion, equity and equality in my analysis and practice, by identifying factors that contribute to inequality and exclusion, and supporting people to pursue options to enhance their wellbeing and challenge injustice
- recognise the impact of poverty, digital exclusion and social exclusion and promote enhanced economic status through access to education, work, housing, health services and welfare benefit
- am aware of political, social and structural factors impacting on human rights, social justice, inclusion, equity and equality and, with support, employ strategies to promote a positive environment.
- address oppression and discrimination applying the law to protect and advance people's rights, recognising how legislation can constrain or advance these rights
- apply in practice principles of human, civil rights and equalities legislation, and manage competing rights, differing needs and perspectives
- understand the processes and potential outcomes of compliments, complaints and whistleblowing procedures
- empower people using our services through recognising their rights and enable access where appropriate 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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- consolidate, develop and demonstrate comprehensive understanding and application of the knowledge gained in my initial training, and knowledge related to my specialist area of practice, including critical awareness of current issues and new evidence-informed practice research
- understand protective factors and forms of harm and their impact on people, and the implications for practice. Apply this knowledge to 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 knowledge and application of appropriate legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice. This may include Knowledge and Skills statements in adults or children's social work
- apply legal reasoning, using professional legal expertise and advice appropriately
- demonstrate 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 understand and work with the person or family in their environment, social context and relationships, and inform social work practice

Newly qualified social worker

- recognise where scope for professional judgement exists and the importance of this to ensure ethical practice
- 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
- recognise the contribution, and begin to make use, of research to inform practice. Demonstrate a critical understanding of research methods
- apply a critical understanding of the opportunities and risks of technologies such as Gen AI, digital resources, online communications, virtual environments and social media in social work
- with guidance, 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 expertise of people with lived experience of social work services, carers and professionals.

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...

- apply imagination, creativity and curiosity to practice, considering a range of options to solve dilemmas and problems
- seek information from a variety of sources, rigorously questioning and evaluating the reliability and validity of information; I am able to consider motivation and analyse reasoning
- use reflective practice techniques to evaluate and critically analyse information, to construct, test and review hypotheses and make explicit evidence-informed decisions
- formulate and make explicit, evidence-informed judgements and justifiable decisions. Acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements and, with support, override or escalate AI-generated recommendations where necessary
- use a variety of reflective models to explore and analyse situations and my own role and approach
- demonstrate logical, systematic, critical and reflective reasoning and apply the theories and techniques of reflective practice
- make proactive use of supervision to reflect critically on practice, explore different approaches to my work, consider the emotional impact of work, support my development across the nine capabilities and understand the boundaries of professional accountability

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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- use a range of person-centred methods to engage and communicate effectively with people using our services, eliciting the needs, wishes and feelings of all those involved, taking account of situations where these are not explicitly expressed
- record information in a timely, respectful and accurate manner. Write records and reports, for a variety of purposes with language suited to purpose and audience, using accessible language and optimising use of information management systems. Distinguish fact from opinion and record conflicting views and perspectives
- share information consistently in ways that meet legal, ethical and agency requirements
- demonstrate clear communication of evidence-informed professional reasoning, judgements and decisions, to professional and non-professional audiences/stakeholders
- recognise complexity, multiple factors, changing circumstances and uncertainty in people's lives and am able to prioritise my intervention
- taking a relationship-based approach to practice, build and use effective relationships with a wide range of people, networks, communities and professionals to improve outcomes, showing an ability to understand and work effectively with negative responses
- use appropriate assessment frameworks, applying information gathering skills to make and contribute to assessments, whilst continuing to build relationships and offer support
- select, use and review appropriate and timely social work interventions, informed by evidence of their effectiveness, that are best suited to the individual(s), family, carer, setting and self

- use a planned and structured approach informed by social work methods, models and tools to promote positive change, independence and to prevent harm, drawing on principles of participation to ensure approach and outcomes are appropriate
- develop an understanding of how intervention at a community and societal level, as well as at an individual or family level, might be achieved
- recognise how the development of community resources, groups and networks enhance outcomes for individuals and the role of social work in promoting this
- demonstrate understanding of and appropriate response to risk factors in my practice. Contribute to the assessment and management of risk, including strategies for reducing risk, distinguishing levels of risk for different situations and the value of positive risk taking when this supports self-determination and autonomy
- demonstrate application of principles and practice for safeguarding adults and children including consideration of potential abuse. Apply strategies that aim to reduce and prevent harm and abuse
- use authority appropriately in my 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...

- develop my understanding of changing economic, social, political and organisational contexts, and the impact of these on my organisation and on social work practice and experience
- understand legal obligations, structures and behaviours within organisations and how these impact on policy, procedure and practice
- take account of legal, operational and policy contexts, proactively engage with my own organisation and contribute to its evaluation and development
- am able to work within an organisational remit and contribute to its evaluation and development
- understand and respect the role of others within the organisation and in the wider professional and service system, and work effectively with them
- work effectively as a member of a team, demonstrating the ability to develop and maintain appropriate professional and inter-professional relationships, managing challenge and conflict with support
- proactively engage with colleagues, and a range of organisations to identify, assess, plan and support the needs of individuals and communities.

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...

- show capacity for leading practice through the way I conduct my professional role, my contribution to supervision and to team and other professional meetings, promoting our purpose, practice and impact
- have an understanding of different models of leadership, the potential for these to be relational, values-based and practice informed, and an insight into how different models might impact on me and on those using the service
- take steps to enable the learning and development of others
- contribute to collective/collaborative professional leadership through participating in peer support, social work forums and meetings within and/or outside my organisation
- hold courageous conversations about sensitive topics, using a direct, professionally curious and empathetic approach
- can engage appropriately with the leadership of others, using reflective skills and guidance to assess when and how to challenge and accept guidance
- can confidently undertake increasingly complex activities which give me an opportunity to showcase leadership skills in relation to individuals, families and colleagues.

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 that supports professional identity and practice with diverse communities in England
- recognise my own professional strengths and limitations, and how to seek advice
- demonstrate professionalism in terms of presentation, demeanour, reliability, honesty and respectfulness
- demonstrate effective use of self in practice
- recognise and balance my own personal/professional boundaries in response to changing and complex contexts
- develop ways to promote wellbeing at work, identifying strategies to protect and promote my own and others' wellbeing and self-care
- identify and implement strategies for responding appropriately to good practice and to concerns about practice or procedures, seeking guidance if required
- am developing skills for workload management and prioritisation
- identify my learning needs; assume responsibility for improving my practice through appropriate developmental activity; seek, plan and undertake ongoing professional development.