

PCF

2026

Professional Capabilities Framework



Readiness for direct practice

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 the profession's ethical principles as described in our [Code of Ethics](#) and their relevance to practice
- demonstrate awareness of my own personal values and how these can impact on practice
- understand the importance of seeking the perspectives and views of individuals, carers and families
- identify potentially conflicting values and ethical 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.

I...

- recognise the importance of diversity in human identity and experience
- recognise the need to be aware of my own assumptions, preconceptions and biases
- recognise the need to apply anti-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles in social work 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.

I...

- understand the principles of rights, justice and economic wellbeing, and their significance for social work practice
- am aware that factors in the wider political and social context might contribute to the individual experience of rights, justice and economic wellbeing
- have an insight into practice dilemmas, such as the limitations created by resource constraints
- understand the principle of co-production and partnership working with individuals, families and carers wherever possible, to promote their rights and self-determination.

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...

- demonstrate an initial understanding of the application of research, evidence and knowledge from social work and other relevant fields (e.g. sociology, social policy, psychology, health, human growth and development and from the experience of people who use services)
- demonstrate an initial understanding of the legal and policy frameworks and guidance that inform and mandate social work practice
- gain an insight into the place of technology in social work, including Gen AI and online platforms, and how these might support or undermine social work values and skills such as assessment, evaluation, and reflection
- demonstrate an initial understanding of a range of theories and models for social work intervention, including the knowledge needed for the particular field of practice on placement/in work-based learning
- have an insight into methods for gathering feedback from individuals, families and carers.

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...

- understand the role of professional curiosity and reflective practice and demonstrate basic skills of reflection
- understand the need to construct and apply hypotheses in social work practice
- recognise and can describe why evidence is important and how it can be used in social work practice
- understand the purpose of supervision and can describe the mutual roles and responsibilities of supervision.

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...

- demonstrate core communication skills and the capacity to develop them further
- demonstrate the ability to write clearly and accessibly
- demonstrate the ability to engage with people empathetically and the potential to build compassionate, effective relationships
- demonstrate awareness of a range of frameworks, and the ethical implications of these, to assess and plan intervention
- demonstrate initial awareness of risk and safeguarding.

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...

- demonstrate awareness of the impact of organisational context on social work practice
- understand social workers have a role in shaping and challenging organisational effectiveness
- can work well as part of a team, collaborating with other team members effectively.

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...

- demonstrate awareness of the importance of professional leadership in social work. I understand that leadership is about more than managerial tasks, it is about how I present myself and my profession
- contribute with curiosity and enthusiasm to developmental activities and to discussions around social work issues
- am able to prepare for conversations about sensitive or difficult topics ('courageous conversations')
- am receptive to the contributions of others, regardless of their position or role.

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...

- can describe the role of the social worker
- demonstrate motivation and ability to learn, using a range of approaches
- can describe the importance of professional behaviour in all contexts and across all media
- can describe the importance of personal and professional boundaries
- can describe the importance of self-care and emotional resilience in social work.