

# PCF

2026

# Professional Capabilities Framework



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...

- demonstrate confident application of ethical reasoning to professional practice, supporting individuals and communities to access their rights and entitlements
- question and challenge others when needed, using a legal and human rights framework
- critically reflect on and manage the influence and impact of my own and others' values on professional practice
- recognise and manage conflicting values and ethical dilemmas in practice, using supervision, team discussion and other professionally justifiable sources of support, questioning and challenging others, including those from other professions
- ensure my practice is underpinned by commitment to co-production and partnership working with people who use services, carers, families, communities and networks, wherever possible. I negotiate and establish boundaries to underpin such partnership, using transparency and honesty
- ensure practice is underpinned by policy, procedures and code of conduct to promote individuals' rights to determine their own solutions, promoting problem-solving skills, whilst recognising how and when self-determination may be constrained (by the law)
- work to protect privacy and promote trust, whilst being able to justify, explain and take appropriate action when the right to privacy is overridden by professional or legal requirements.

## 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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- recognise the complexity of identity and diversity of experience and apply this to practice
- understand the impact and social determinants of characteristics, including neurodiversity, sensory impairment and mental or physical health needs; accommodate and support individuals, families and colleagues equitably
- advocate on behalf of, and facilitate self-advocacy for, individuals and communities. Use story-telling, personal accounts and shared cross-societal activities to promote diversity and inclusion in order to address oppression and build empathy and societal connections
- recognise discriminatory and oppressive practices and inequality. I proactively use a range of evidence informed anti-oppressive approaches, such as anti-racist and anti-poverty practice, to improve my own practice and that of others
- with reference to legislation, use a range of approaches to appropriately challenge individuals and families, colleagues and senior staff, in partnership and with the involvement of people affected where possible
- critically reflect on and manage the power of my role in my relationship with people using services and others, adapting my practice accordingly and 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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- routinely integrate the principles of and entitlements to social justice, digital and social inclusion, equity and equality in my practice, and with support as needed, consider how and when challenge may be required
- enable and support people to consider and pursue a range of options that may enhance economic status (through access to 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 employ strategies to promote a positive environment
- routinely apply the law to protect and advance people's rights and entitlements, identifying and highlighting situations where interpretations of the law are neither proportionate nor fair to promote autonomy and self-determination
- apply the principles and entitlements of human and civil rights to analyse, evaluate and challenge interventions that are unlawful and/or disproportionate
- feedback the views and experiences of those using the service and colleagues, in order to contribute to ongoing service improvement. Make appropriate use of compliments, complaints and whistleblowing procedures
- analyse differing needs, perspectives and competing rights and apply to practice
- where appropriate, set up and/or enable access to effective independent advocacy
- promote strengths, agency, hope and self-determination in people using services, carers, families and communities and support them in raising their own 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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- demonstrate a comprehensive understanding and use of knowledge related to my area of practice, including critical awareness of current issues and new evidence-informed practice research
- understand protective factors and forms of harm, their impact on people, and the implications for practice. Apply this understanding 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, recognising where scope for professional judgement exists
- 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 my practice
- demonstrate a critical knowledge of the range of theories and models

## Social worker

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for social work intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities and the methods derived from them

- recognise the contribution and use research and other evidence (eg practice evidence and evidence from experts by experience) to inform and develop my practice. Demonstrate a critical understanding of research methods
- consolidate 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
- 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 receiving services, carers and other 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 imagination, creativity and curiosity to practice, considering a range of options to solve complex dilemmas and problems and involve people who use services in reflections and creativity wherever possible
- draw on a wide range of evidence sources to inform decision-making
- start to provide professional opinion to others, including in interdisciplinary contexts
- ensure hypotheses and options are reviewed to inform judgement and decision making. Acknowledge and evaluate any AI-derived contribution to social work judgements and 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
- routinely and effectively apply critical reflection and analysis to increasingly complex cases and situations
- take responsibility for obtaining regular, effective and reflective supervision from a professional supervisor/manager to ensure effective practice, reflection, wellbeing, continuing professional development and career opportunities.

## 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 with compassion and authority in challenging situations, and am able to understand and work effectively with negative responses
- routinely explain and accountable for my professional reasoning, judgements and decisions
- demonstrate and promote appropriate information sharing use contingency planning to anticipate complexity and changing circumstances
- take a relationship-based approach to practice, engaging effectively with people in complex situations, both short-term and when building productive relationships over time
- gather information to inform judgement for interventions in complex situations and in response to challenge or negative responses to my offer
- clearly report and record analysis and judgements, and use assessment procedures discerningly to inform judgement
- continue to expand my range of intervention methods, use them effectively and evaluate them in practice. Demonstrate particular expertise in one or more specific methods relevant to my work setting, at an individual, family, community and/or societal level
- make timely decisions when positive change is not happening
- 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
- demonstrate confident and effective judgement about risk and accountability in my decisions
- build expertise and confidence when assessing and planning for safeguarding
- recognise and appropriately manage the authority inherent in my 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.

I...

- keep abreast of changing policy, political and professional context at local and national level and take account of this in my practice and workplace
- demonstrate the ability to work effectively within my own organisation and identify and begin to 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)
- keep up to date with changing roles and service developments in the organisation, recognising, valuing and engaging with other disciplines and specialist perspectives
- work within and am able to explain the relevant legal structures in my organisation or workplace, including basic case law. I know when and how to access support and appropriate legal advice and consultation
- explore, identify and communicate to supervisors and managers how organisational practice can improve to support better social work practice and citizen outcomes
- am confident about my role in my team or setting, working positively with others. I draw on and contribute to team working and collaborative support
- 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.

I...

- promote social work's purpose, practice and impact within my organisation, with colleagues, including those of other disciplines, and more widely where appropriate
- have a critical and applied understanding of different models of leadership
- contribute to the learning of others, including 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 and meetings within and/or outside my organisation
- hold courageous conversations about complex and sensitive topics, using a direct, professionally, curious and empathetic approach
- contribute to and promote the development of practice, taking the initiative to test and evaluate new and existing approaches
- can engage appropriately with the leadership of others at various levels of seniority, using reflective skills and guidance to develop a constructive professional relationship
- seek out increasingly challenging activities which give me an opportunity to showcase leadership skills in relation to individuals, families and colleagues, such as Stage 1 Practice Educator 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.

I...

- am able to meet the requirements of the professional regulator
- actively promote the profession and its reputation in a growing range of contexts
- understand that social work is an international profession with a global definition that supports my professional identity, ethics and practice with diverse communities in England
- maintain awareness of own professional limitations and knowledge gaps and seek to address these
- maintain professionalism in more challenging circumstances
- make skilled use of self as part of my interventions
- maintain appropriate personal/professional boundaries in more challenging circumstances
- routinely promote wellbeing at work and self-care for myself and others, and have an awareness of organisational and shared responsibility for wellbeing
- promote excellence in practice and raise and address issues of poor practice or inadequate working conditions for professional practice, internally through the organisation, and then independently if required
- manage workload more independently, seeking support and suggesting solutions for workload and demand management difficulties
- establish a network of internal and external colleagues from whom to seek advice and expertise
- embed continuous professional development; take responsibility for seeking, planning and undertaking ongoing professional development and use diverse platforms and opportunities within and outside my organisation/work setting.