



The Code of Ethics for Social Work

Addendum

Additional guidance for

Independent Social Workers

Section 3: Ethical practice principles

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The BASW Code of Ethics for Social Work, revised in 2012, is binding in its entirety on all independent social workers who are BASW members. All members should have a copy of the Code.¹ They have a responsibility to apply the professional values and principles in the Code to their practice. This addendum to the Code highlights some additional responsibilities for independent social workers in relation to parts of Section 3, the Ethical practice principles. The particular principle(s) is identified in italics at the end of each responsibility below. The additional responsibilities apply to running a business, being an employer and having an independent practice. The guidance is not intended to be a Code of Conduct.

Independent social workers may choose to be self-employed as sole traders or partners. Alternatively they may set up their own limited company or limited liability partnership. Social work businesses may be a direct social work service, consultancy, social work practice or social enterprise. They may employ other people in their business. In any of these circumstances, independent social workers “are responsible for the legal and ethical accountability of their practice”.²



Running a business

Independent social workers should:

- ▶ Operate the business in a way that assesses and minimises risk to those who use services (*PP3.2 Assessing and managing risk*)
- ▶ Have systems in place to maintain confidentiality and keep records safe (*PP3.10 Maintaining confidentiality, PP3.11 Maintaining clear and accurate records*)
- ▶ Maintain adequate professional indemnity and public liability insurance cover and other insurances as appropriate to protect service users³ (*PP3.2 Assessing and managing risk*)
- ▶ Take professional advice in areas which lie outside their expertise and keep up-to-date with these areas such as keeping accounts⁴, tax, and legal affairs. This is in addition to using supervision/peer support on professional matters (*PP3.14 Taking responsibility for their own practice and CPD*)
- ▶ Ensure that any marketing or advertising reflects actual and substantiated skills, services and training (*PP3.12 Striving for objectivity and self-awareness in professional practice*)
- ▶ Have a responsible business model, including time management, to meet and carry out professional obligations. This should ensure that the commissioner, who may be a person who uses services or a provider, receives the service they have contracted, provided the stated aims are consistent with the Code of Ethics (*PP3.14 Taking responsibility for their own practice and CPD*)
- ▶ Price professional services in a way that both reflects professional and market value and is fair to customers (*PP3.1 Developing professional relationships*)
- ▶ Ensure any social media presence does not compromise ethical principles particularly sharing information and maintaining confidentiality (*PP3.5 Sharing information appropriately, 3.10 Maintaining confidentiality*)

Employing people

Independent social workers have the same responsibilities as any other employer. They should have in place systems and approaches to promote a climate which supports, monitors, reviews and takes the necessary action to ensure social workers employed by them can comply with the Code of Ethics and other requirements to deliver safe and effective practice.

This includes the following sections of the Code:

- ▶ Have effective whistleblowing and complaints policies in place (*PP3.9 Being prepared to whistleblow*)
- ▶ Provide appropriate professional supervision for social workers and promote effective team work and communication (*PP3.13 Using professional supervision and peer support to reflect on and improve practice*)
- ▶ Ensure social workers learning and development needs are met and seek adequate resources to do so (*PP3.14 Taking responsibility for their own practice and CPD*)
- ▶ Engage in ethical debate with employees and colleagues and seek changes to services, policies and procedures in order to improve services or working conditions, guided by the Code of Ethics (*PP3.15 Contributing to the continuous improvement of professional practice*)



Independent practice

Independent social workers should:

- ▶ Ensure that where the title ‘social worker’ is being used, the person is registered with the appropriate regulatory body (*PP3.14 Taking responsibility for their own practice and CPD*)
- ▶ Identify conflicts of interest and address them, alerting all affected parties to the situation and recommending how the conflict can be avoided. This can include conflicts of interest between social work practice and private life, former employment or other work that is carried out (*PP3.1 Developing professional relationships*)
- ▶ Ensure their position as a paid employee is not used to solicit for independent practice. This would apply when planning to leave employment to set up a full-time independent social work business and also to those who have concurrent employment/ agency work/self-employment (*PP3.1 Developing professional relationships*)
- ▶ Be clear about who their “customer” is and what their ethical responsibilities are particularly in relation to managing risk, acting with informed consent, providing information, sharing information appropriately and maintaining confidentiality (*PP3.2 Assessing and managing risk, PP3.3 Acting with the informed consent of service users, unless required by law to protect that person or another from risk of serious harm, PP3.4 Providing information, PP3.5 Sharing information appropriately, PP3.10 Maintaining confidentiality*)
- ▶ Draw to the attention of their customer or appropriate agencies any concerns about poor or unsafe practice (*PP3.9 Being prepared to whistleblow*)
- ▶ Arrange, or offer to arrange, appropriate temporary or substitute service for customers when unavailable or unable to continue practice (*PP3.1 Developing professional relationships*)

Independent practice

- ▶ Advise customers and others of all fee rates and charges before beginning to provide professional services and to charge only for hours and services contracted and provided (*PP3.4 Providing information*)
- ▶ Have correct procedures for managing records including Data Protection Registration in respect of personal data (*PP3.11 Maintaining clear and accurate records*)⁵
- ▶ Practice only within their areas of competence and offer suitable referral when customer's needs fall outside of them (*PP3.12 Striving for objectivity and self-awareness in professional practice, PP3.2 Assessing and managing risk*)
- ▶ Ensure they have access to appropriate professional supervision and discussion to meet professional needs such as high-quality professional support from a supervisor, consultant, mentor or peer group (*PP3.13 Using professional supervision and peer support to reflect on and improve practice*)

References

- ¹ BASW (2012) 'The Code of Ethics for Social Work: Statement of Principles' Birmingham: BASW (www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics)
- ² Tucker, G C, Sambidge, A and Ogilvy, H (eds) (2006) *Independent Social Work – A Risky Business? Some Reflections from the Independents' Forum* Venture Press: Birmingham (<http://shop.basw.co.uk>)
- ³ Ogilvy, H, Sambidge, A and Tucker, G C (eds) (2010) *When the going gets tough – are you tough enough? An exploration of independent social work in recessionary times*, (Ch.4) BASW/Venture Press: Birmingham (<http://shop.basw.co.uk>)
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, (Ch.3)
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, (pp.16-26)



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