

IASW Code of Ethics

Principles of Social Work Practice (Contd.)

6. Social workers engaged in education, training or supervision will seek to ensure that their professional relationships in these areas are constructive and non-exploitative and will foster knowledge and understanding of the social work profession and this Code
7. In seeking to respond to the needs of individuals, groups and communities social workers will seek to involve other professionals and agencies as appropriate.
8. Social workers, having taken into account the rights of others, will provide service users with full information, including access to records pertaining to work on their behalf. Social workers should be prepared to state the reasons for their decisions and be accountable for them.
9. Social workers will respect a service user's right to confidentiality in the social worker/service user relationship. It is the duty of the social worker to ensure that the nature and limits of the privacy inherent in their relationship are clearly understood and applied. In particular, social workers must inform service users:

- Of the circumstances in which information relating to the service user will be disclosed on a 'need-to-know' basis with other colleagues and agencies;
- That their views regarding disclosure of any information relating to the service user will always be sought;
- That disclosure of information against the service user's wishes will occur in clearly defined circumstances such as those required by law, or for the protection of a service user or for the protection of a third party.

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Irish Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics

Definition of Social Work

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work
(International Federation of Social Workers 2000).



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Representing Social Work in Ireland since 1971
A Member of the International Federation of Social Workers

Irish Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics

Preamble

This document outlines the values and ethics underpinning the social work task. It offers to social workers a definition of their task and a set of principles to provide a reference point in guiding day-to-day decision making.

The definition of social work is centred on the social context of people's lives and the right of individuals to make decisions for themselves. Because social work often operates on the edge of the individual's normal social functioning, or the limits that social systems can tolerate, there can be a tension between the social control, social care, social justice and social change functions of social work. This tension may be resolved by consideration of what is right or wrong; what is good or bad; or the impact on the individual's happiness – all as determined by the service user, or by reference to a professional standard. Difficulties in resolving this tension may arise where a social worker has to balance the rights and needs of the service user, the sometimes contradictory rights and needs of others, the rights and duties owed to colleagues and other professionals and the limited resources available. However, any decision made must be respectful of a service user's overriding right to know and challenge the basis on which the decision was made.

It is expected, therefore, that social workers will use this Code of Ethics as a foundation on which to frame procedures guiding day-to-day practice. It is designed to be applied in working with individuals, in groups, or within communities. Similarly, in emphasising the professional nature of social work, it respects and encourages the worker's own judgements which are a fundamental part of the social work task.

The term '*social worker*' as used in this Code refers to the members of the Irish Association of Social Workers.

The Irish Association of Social Workers and its members adhere to the International Federation of Social Workers' Ethics in Social Work (IFSW 2004)

Values Statement

The members of the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) acknowledge:

- That every person is unique and has an intrinsic worth;
- That every person and every group in society, with due regard to the rights of others, is entitled to their own beliefs, to freedom of expression and action irrespective of nationality, ethnic background, social and economic status, ability, health, gender, sexual orientation, age, or contribution to society;
- That truly valued, fully human life is generally realised by individuals living and acting interdependently in communities;

- That society has an obligation to pursue justice, in all its forms, on behalf of every person including the assertion and protection of their human rights.

The members of the Association, in undertaking their roles and tasks will seek to promote and maintain these values.

Principles of Social Work Practice

1. The social worker's primary focus is the needs of the people using the social work service. While respecting the social, cultural and environmental context in which they live, this focus must recognise, take account of and balance possible conflicts between their needs and the human rights of different individuals and the communities in which they share their lives. This focus must take precedence over the self-interest and personal convictions of the social worker.
2. Constraints such as poverty, inequality or discrimination may constrain service user's ability to fulfil their needs. These constraints cannot always be resolved at the level of the individual. Social workers will advocate with and on behalf of those whom society excludes and in doing so should engage with service users and facilitate them in contributing their views to such developments. In addition, social workers should use their professional association as a forum for critical debate and dialogue with other professional agencies, the government and the public at large, to advocate for and to promote positive social change.
3. Social workers in focusing on individuals, groups and communities in which they live will be aware of the potential power imbalance in the relationships that follow. Social workers will strive to use their power appropriately within such relationships and will place special emphasis on the consideration of and promotion of service users' views in all decisions that are related to the quality of their lives. Social workers will promote the participation of service users in order to maximise the potential of any service user or group for self-determination now and in the future.
4. The practice of social work operates within systems that have a regulatory function. Social workers must be cognisant of the inherent tensions between support and control that may arise. In addressing such tensions, social workers will at all times strive towards the objective of the service user maximising their own ability to make and carry out decisions affecting their quality of life.
5. Social workers must aim continuously to achieve high standards of professional practice in pursuit of which they will engage in Continuing Professional Development by undertaking further training and education on a regular basis and take active steps to ensure that they receive appropriate supervision.