IASW
Irish Association of Social Workers

St. Andrews Resource Centre
114-116 Pearse Street
Dublin 2

Code of Ethics

Definition of Social Work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global definition-of-social-work/ (International Federation of Social Workers 2014).

Preamble

This document outlines the values and ethics underpinning the social work profession. It offers 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 and families to make decisions for themselves. Because social work often operates on the edge of the individual's usual social functioning, or the limits that social systems can tolerate, there can be a tension between the social control (see Principle 4 below), 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 well-being - all as determined by the service user, or by reference to a professional standard, particularly the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics. 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, agency demands, the rights and duties owed to colleagues and other professionals and the 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, families, groups, or communities. Similarly, in emphasising the professional nature of social work, it respects and encourages the social worker's use of their own professional judgements which are a fundamental part of the social work function.

The term 'social worker' as used in this Code refers to the members of the Irish Association of Social Workers. Such members include those social workers registered with CORU, student social workers and retired social workers. The Irish Association of Social Workers and its members adhere to the International Federation of Social Workers' Statement of Ethical Principles (IFSW 2016).

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 there are biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions to people's lives and that individuals should be understood and treated as whole persons. Such recognition should be used to carry out holistic assessments and interventions with the full participation of people, organizations, and communities with whom social workers engage.
- 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.
- That the climate emergency affecting the world is significant and urgent, and particularly its impact on the lives of social work service users. The social environment is part of the wider natural environment where the relationship between humans and all other species and the planet are mutually interdependent. IASW supports and stands in solidarity with its social work colleagues and service users in Ireland and around the world in their efforts to work to address the devastating effects of climate change.

The members of the Association, in undertaking their roles, 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 person or 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, families, 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 users ability to fulfil their needs. These constraints cannot always be resolved at the level of the individual. Social workers promote social justice in relation to society generally and to the people with whom they work. In doing this, social workers will challenge discrimination, respect diversity and advocate with and on behalf of those whom society excludes. Social workers 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, families, 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 (or the views of the service user's legally appointed representative) 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 will adhere to the CORU Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics.

6. Social workers must aim continuously to achieve high standards of professional practice in pursuit of which they will engage in. Continuing Personal and Professional Development (CPPD) by undertaking further training and education on a regular basis. Such CPPD activity should follow the guidelines laid down by CORU.

7. Social workers must undertake professional supervision to help maintain high-quality social work practice. Social workers will take active steps in seeking to ensure that they receive such supervision.

8. 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.

9. In seeking to respond to the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities, social workers will seek to involve other professionals and agencies as appropriate.

10. 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.

11. 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:

    a. 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
    b. That their views regarding disclosure of any information relating to the service user will always be sought
    c. 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
    d. Social workers will be cognisant of the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations

12. The principles in this code apply to all contexts of social work practice, education, and research, whether it involves direct face-to-face contact, written communications, through use of digital technology and social media