Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru
Social Care Wales

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Social work practice guidance

for the

Code of Professional Practice for Social Care Workers

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About this guidance

This practice guidance explains how social workers can follow the Code of Professional Practice for Social Care Workers. The Code sets out the standards expected of everyone working in social care in Wales. It promotes high standards, public confidence, and professional accountability.

Social workers and social work students who are registered with us **must** follow the Code, so they're fit to practise and are allowed to be registered.

The guidance explains how social workers, student social workers and those who manage and employ social workers can use the Code in day-to-day practice. It shows what good practice looks like and helps practitioners make informed, ethical and evidence-based decisions in difficult situations. It also supports a shared understanding of standards across different settings.

Throughout the guidance there are links to useful resources. We regularly review the guidance so it reflects current social care practice.

It doesn't cover everything, and social workers are expected to use their professional judgement, applying the general principles and taking advice, where necessary. Social workers must keep to requirements placed on them by legislation, statutory regulations and guidance.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance applies to:

- Social workers registered with Social Care Wales
- Social work students
- Social work managers
- Social work employers

'Social worker' is a protected title. This means that it's illegal for someone to use the title unless they've completed the required training and are registered with us. Student social workers also need to register at the start of their course and must remain registered throughout their studies.

How does this guidance help you?

The guidance helps you:

- understand and follow the Code in your role
- provide high-quality, person-centred care
- recognise when to look for support or supervision
- promote anti-discriminatory practice

- safeguarding
- uphold public trust in social care.

Section 7 is most relevant to managers and employers of social workers.

Use this guidance alongside the Code. If you're an employer, you should actively share and promote this guidance - through induction, team meetings, training and supervision - to make sure staff understand and apply it in their day-to-day work. Self-employed social workers should also use this guidance to support their practice. Managers who are not registered social workers should also use this guidance when managing registered social workers.

Within this guidance:

- the term 'you must' is something you are required to do
- the term 'you should' is used where there may be things outside your control that affect how you can follow the guidance.

Section 1: Respecting views, wishes, rights and interests

I must respect the views and wishes, and support the rights and interests of individuals, their carers, and my colleagues.

1.1 Person-centred practice

Everyone is unique. A person-centred approach means treating each individual with respect and taking the time to understand **what matters** to them - including their beliefs, culture, and preferences. Don't make assumptions based on age, gender, ethnicity, or appearance. Stereotyping can lead to poor care, but meaningful conversations help uncover real needs and wishes.

Our guides and e-learning modules about person-centred approaches (for adults, children, and young people) can support your practice.

Person-centred practice also applies when you're supporting unpaid carers.

Good communication matters

Effective communication is key to understanding individuals' needs. Our e-learning covers different communication methods and highlights the importance of:

- respecting language preferences - including English, Welsh, or other languages
- understanding the 'Active Offer' – which means services should be provided in Welsh without someone having to ask
- using qualified interpreters when needed – see section 4.2 for more on this
- supporting individuals who use British Sign Language or other communication methods
- adapting for the individual's communication needs, including individuals with learning disabilities, neurological conditions, and dementia
- listening to those who know the person best when an individual lacks capacity to make decisions.

1.2 Equality, diversity and inclusion

People accessing and working in social care come from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and identities. The Equality Act 2010 protects individuals from discrimination based on nine protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity

- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Social workers must promote equality, diversity, and inclusion by recognising and valuing each individual's distinct identity, needs, and preferences. This includes being confident and respectful when working with difference - listening to what matters to individuals and responding sensitively. For example, someone may prefer a same-sex care worker, need support to practise their faith, or want to communicate in their preferred language. Meeting these needs isn't discriminatory, it reflects a person-centred approach.

Understanding intersectionality – how overlapping characteristics such as disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation can make disadvantage worse - is essential to providing fair and inclusive care. It means we focus on the whole individual.

Inclusive practice is also guided by human rights legislation and international frameworks:

- the Human Rights Act 1998 brings the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. It protects fundamental freedoms such as the right to life, privacy, freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination. Public authorities must act in ways that respect and uphold these rights
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has 41 articles covering children's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. It makes it clear that every child has the right to be treated with dignity, take part in decisions that affect them, and be protected from harm
- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) promotes dignity, autonomy, and full participation in society for disabled individuals. It highlights the importance of accessibility, equality, and removing barriers that prevent inclusion. The social model of disability reminds us that individuals are often disabled by the barriers placed by society - not by their impairments. Removing these barriers allows everyone to participate fully and equally
- the United Nations Principles for Older Persons affirm the rights of older individuals to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment, and dignity. These principles support age-inclusive services that value their contributions and respect their preferences.

Managers and employers are responsible for making sure staff are trained, supported, and follow inclusive and rights-based practice. Employers play an important role by setting clear policies and leading by example.

Understanding equity and equality

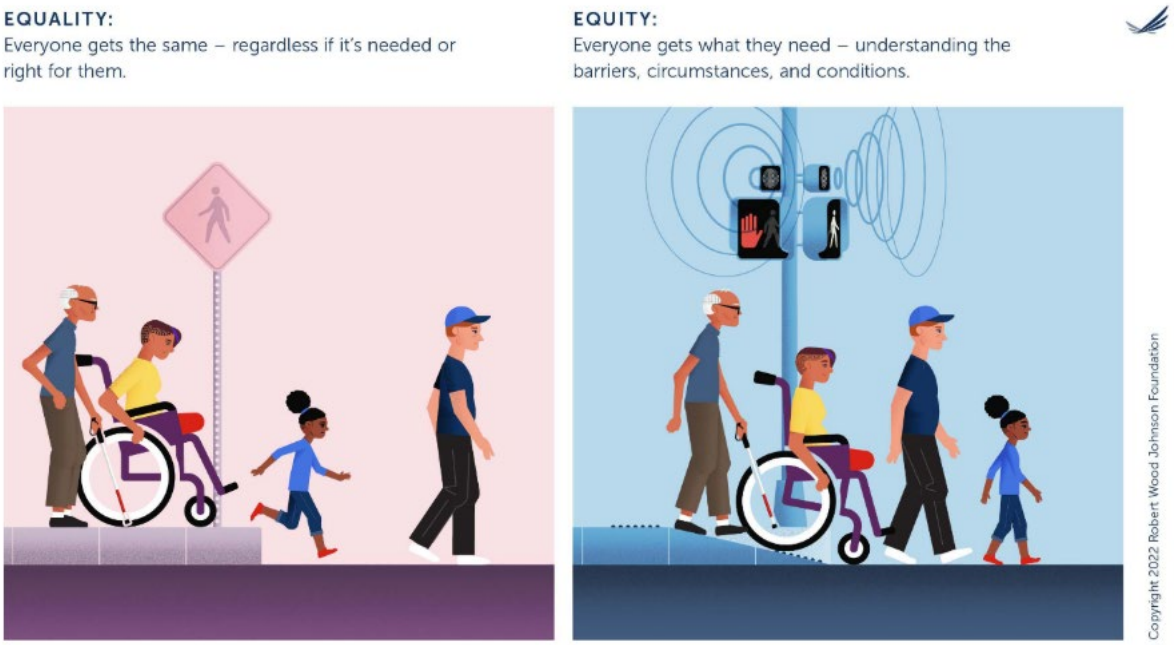
So that you can provide inclusive, culturally competent care, it's important you understand the legal protections under the Equality Act, and how to respond to individuals' needs in practice. This means recognising the difference between equality and equity.

- Equality means giving everyone the same treatment or resources.
- Equity means recognising that people have different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities, and they may need different types of support to have the same opportunities.

In social care, equity is about making sure each individual gets the help they need to live well and feel respected. For example, giving everyone the same written information may seem fair, but it's not equitable if someone needs it in an Easy Read, or audio format.

Focusing on equity means we remove barriers so everyone can take part fully, no matter what their circumstances are. This is an important part of person-centred and inclusive care.

The graphic below, developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, shows the difference between treating everyone equally and making adjustments so people overcome barriers, leading to fairer outcomes. This reflects the social model of disability, which recognises that individuals are often disabled by the environment around them, not by their impairments.



Reproduced with permission of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, N.J.

1. 3 Discrimination

Unlawful discrimination

Unlawful discrimination happens when someone is treated unfairly or less favourably because of a protected characteristic (see section 1.2), as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This includes:

- direct discrimination – treating someone unfairly because of a protected characteristic, such as race, sex, or disability
- indirect discrimination – applying a rule or policy that disadvantages someone because of a protected characteristic
- harassment – unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic that causes distress, humiliation, or offence
- victimisation – treating someone badly because they've made or supported a complaint about discrimination
- discrimination by association – treating someone unfairly because they're connected to someone with a protected characteristic
- discrimination by perception – treating someone unfairly based on the assumption that they have a protected characteristic, even if they don't.

Discrimination can also include microaggressions. These are subtle, often unintentional comments or actions that reflect bias or prejudice. They may seem minor, but when repeated, they can seriously affect someone's confidence, mental health, and sense of belonging. Sometimes this behaviour is dismissed as 'banter', but it's never acceptable in social care.

Using sexist or racist language, for example, doesn't just offend - it can make someone feel unsafe and undermine trust in the care being provided and in the social care profession. There's a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination within social care in Wales.

We all have biases, it's part of being human. Some of these are unconscious, meaning we may not realise we're making assumptions or responding based on stereotypes. That's why it's important to think about our own attitudes and challenge unconscious bias, so it doesn't lead to unfair or discriminatory treatment in social care.

We also need to be careful that we don't assume what care someone needs based on stereotypes. It is always better to ask and have a high quality 'what matters' conversation with the individual. Sometimes when we make assumptions or stereotype, we can discriminate without meaning to.

Remember, we all make mistakes. If you do, you should acknowledge it, apologise, and learn from it.

Don't forget that we're all different and have different beliefs. Sometimes, an individual's beliefs might be different from, or even clash with our own. In these

situations, it's important to stay professional, open-minded, and focused on the individual's needs, to create a safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Some of these beliefs are protected in law. You can find out more on the Equality and Human Rights Commission's website.

Responding to unlawful discrimination

Unlawful discrimination can be difficult to challenge. but everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, including in the workplace. If you witness or experience discrimination:

- challenge the behaviour directly if you feel safe to do so. A calm, respectful response can help raise awareness
- report the incident if you don't feel able to challenge it yourself. You have a duty under the Code of Professional Practice to speak up
- seek support from your manager, trade union, or the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas).
- keep a record of what happened and note whether it was a one-off or part of a pattern.

The Code supports you in opposing discrimination and promoting inclusion. You're not alone - speak to your manager if you need help or guidance.

In Wales, we're working towards a sector that not only responds to unlawful discrimination but is also actively anti discriminatory. For example, anti-racism means actively recognising, challenging, and addressing racism so that everyone using care or working in social care is treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, regardless of their race or ethnicity. You can learn more about anti-racism through our anti-racism e-learning modules.

Justifiable discrimination

The Code also asks us to consider what justifiable discrimination means. For example, if someone prefers personal care from a worker of the same sex, it isn't discriminatory to meet that preference - it reflects a person-centred approach. If you're unsure, speak to your manager for guidance.

Employer responsibilities

Employers play a vital role in creating inclusive workplaces where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. This means having clear anti-discrimination policies, offering regular training about equality, diversity and inclusion, and fostering a culture where discrimination isn't tolerated.

Employers also have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, helping ensure safer and more respectful working environments. There's more guidance about this on the Equality and Human Rights Commission's website.

1.4 Supporting communication

Clear, respectful communication is essential to delivering inclusive, person-centred care. People may have different communication needs because of language, disability, or their cultural background. Good practice includes:

- respecting individuals' preferred languages, such as English, Welsh, or British Sign Language (BSL). For people who are Deaf or have hearing loss, using BSL or other communication methods helps them be fully involved in decisions about their support
- applying the Active Offer, which means providing Welsh language services to people without them having to ask. This supports dignity and makes sure people feel respected and understood.
- using professional interpreters to support clear communication, especially where there are safeguarding concerns. While family or informal interpreters can sometimes help, you shouldn't rely on them in sensitive situations, as this can risk confidentiality and safety
- providing information in accessible formats such as large print, audio and digital
- supporting individuals with learning disabilities, neurological conditions, or dementia to communicate in ways that suit their needs, such as through Makaton, signing boards, or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- adapting your communication style so it's accessible and inclusive for people who are neurodivergent or have non-visible disabilities
- recognising that individuals who lack capacity may still express preferences.

Inclusive communication also means avoiding assumptions and being aware of how unconscious bias can affect interactions. Everyone deserves to be heard and understood in a way that works for them.

Section 2: Building trust and confidence

I must do what I can to gain and maintain the trust and confidence of individuals and carers.

2.1 Honesty, reliability and integrity

Social workers hold a position of significant trust, often supporting individuals during vulnerable and challenging times. Being honest, reliable, and acting with integrity is essential to building and maintaining that trust.

You must:

- be truthful and reliable in your actions and communication
- respect individuals' privacy, choices, beliefs, and culture
- never misuse your position or take advantage of individuals, their families or others
- follow agreed procedures when entering someone's home, including showing identification and securing the property
- explain clearly if you're unable to carry out a task or follow a care plan, and ask your manager/employer for guidance when needed
- explain clearly if you need to act against their wishes due to safeguarding concerns and ensure their voice is heard during any statutory interventions.

Being honest, reliable and acting with integrity helps individuals and carers feel safe and respected.

2.2 Confidentiality and handling information

You'll often learn personal and sensitive information about individuals and their families. You must treat this information with care and respect.

Confidentiality means:

- not sharing private information inappropriately
- only sharing information with colleagues or agencies when necessary and, where possible, with informed consent
- being mindful of how you share information, especially in informal settings or on social media. Always follow your organisation's social media policy, and only use messaging platforms - such as email services, WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram and Teams - that have been formally approved by your organisation and meet data protection requirements. Sharing information through unapproved apps can expose sensitive data to insecure systems and lead to breaches of confidentiality
- only using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or similar technologies where they have been approved through organisational processes and comply with data

protection laws. Using unapproved technologies may put sensitive information at risk and may lead to breaches of confidentiality or expose your organisation to cyber security risks
- following the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) when handling personal data, as well as your organisation's internal policies and procedures.

But confidentiality doesn't mean you should never share information. You have a duty to share information if someone is at risk of abuse or neglect. This is an important part of safeguarding. There's more on this in section 4.2.

If you're unsure whether to share information:

- determine whether the risk of harm to the individual would justify the sharing of information
- follow the Wales Safeguarding Procedures guidance – Pointers for practice: Seven golden rules for information sharing
- speak to your manager, supervisor or employer
- never guess - always get advice
- if there's a breach, report it immediately and follow your organisation's procedures.

2.3 Professional boundaries

While it's important to build warm, respectful relationships, you must maintain clear professional boundaries. These boundaries protect both you and the individuals you support.

You must not:

- form intimate or inappropriate personal relationships with individuals or their families
- borrow or lend money from individuals or their families
- accept gifts or hospitality, unless your employer's policy says it's allowed.

You must also follow the information in section 5.1 about professional conduct.

If you're not sure whether something crosses a boundary, speak to your manager or employer. It's better to ask than risk a complaint or a fitness to practise investigation.

2.4 Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest happens when your personal relationships or circumstances could affect your professional judgement or actions.

Examples include:

- supporting someone you know personally
- having a financial or business connection with an individual or their family

- being offered gifts or favours.

In these situations, you must:

- tell your manager or employer immediately
- follow your organisation’s policies
- politely explain to individuals why you can’t accept gifts or favours (unless your employers’ policies say it’s allowed), while acknowledging their kindness

Being aware of potential conflicts and acting transparently helps maintain trust and professional standards.

Section 3: Promoting well-being, voice and control

I must promote the well-being, voice and control of individuals and carers, while supporting them to stay safe.

3.1 Understanding well-being

Promoting well-being is central to social care. Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, well-being is defined broadly across several areas, including:

- physical and mental health
- emotional well-being
- protection from abuse and neglect
- education, relationships, and social inclusion
- rights, independence, and suitable living arrangements
- control over daily life (for adults)
- development and welfare (for children).

What supports well-being will be different for everyone. That's why person-centred practice is essential. This means you focus on what matters to them and recognise their unique strengths, goals, and circumstances.

The term 'voice and control' means putting the individual and their needs at the centre of their care. You should give them a voice in, and control over, reaching the outcomes that help them achieve well-being.

You can find out how well-being is measured on Welsh Government's website.

3.2 Strengths-based and co-produced practice

A strengths-based approach focuses on what people can do, not what they can't. It involves:

- identifying someone's strengths, abilities, and support networks
- working together with individuals and carers to co-produce care and support plans
- using 'what matters' conversations to understand an individual's goals and how to achieve them.

This approach reflects the social model of disability, which says that individuals are often disabled not by their impairments, but by barriers in society. This could mean negative attitudes or environments that aren't designed to be inclusive.

There are resources to support strengths-based practice and ‘what matters’ conversations on our website.

3.3 Advocacy and representation

Advocacy helps people express their views, secure their rights, and access the support they need, especially if they struggle to speak up for themselves. There’s more information about advocacy on our website.

There are two types of advocacy:

1. informal advocacy, which is provided by someone the individual knows and trusts (such as a family member or friend)
2. formal advocacy, which is provided by an independent professional advocate when an appropriate informal advocate isn’t available.

Advocates support individuals to:

- say what matters to them
- make informed decisions
- take part in assessments, planning, reviews, and safeguarding processes.

The Mental Capacity Act (2005)

The Mental Capacity Act protects individuals aged 16 or older who may not be able to make some decisions for themselves. It applies in England and Wales and is especially important in social care.

An individual has mental capacity if they can:

- understand the information needed to make a decision
- remember it long enough to decide
- weigh up the options
- communicate their decision in any way.

The Act is based on five key principles.

1. Assume capacity unless proven otherwise.
2. Support individuals to make their own decisions.
3. Respect unwise decisions.
4. Act in the individual’s best interests if they lack capacity.
5. Use the least restrictive option.

Remember to check whether the individual has already been assessed and if protections like Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are in place. This may involve reviewing their care plan and speaking with the people responsible for coordinating or providing their care.

Capacity can vary and may change over time. Someone may have capacity to do certain things, but not everything. If someone lacks capacity, you must involve others who know them well and act in their best interests. If it's not clear whether someone lacks capacity to make their own decisions, you should always assess this.

Assessing mental capacity may be a core part of your social work role, particularly if you're working with adults. Social workers undertaking capacity assessments must be able to interpret and apply:

- the Mental Capacity Act .
- the Mental-capacity-act-code-of-practice.pdf
- associated case law
- other key legislation such as the Mental Health Act.

3.4 Collaborative working

Promoting well-being often involves working with others - colleagues, professionals, carers, and families. You must:

- share information appropriately and securely, following your organisation's policies
- use agreed systems and processes, especially in safeguarding situations
- record information factually and sensitively - individuals have the right to see what's written about them
- understand services have a duty to cooperate and share information to support care and safeguarding.

If you're not sure how or when to share information, always ask your manager or employer for advice.

3.5 Assessment, planning and providing care and support

Assessment, planning, and the provision of care and support are key elements of social work practice which are defined by legislation and associated codes or practice, guidance and statutory instruments such as:

- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Mental Health Act 1983
- Children Act 1989
- Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016.
- Key legislation (social care) | Law Wales

Not all roles will involve all three activities, but where they do, social workers must carry them out in a way that's ethical, legal, person-centred, evidence-based and proportionate. To act proportionately means providing the right level of response to suit the needs of the individual, the situation, or the level of risk.

Sound professional judgement and decision making based on an analytical and reflective approach are vital to all aspects of practice.

You should identify and address any dilemmas, conflicts or disputes relating to the assessment and planning processes. You must be able to explain your professional judgement and modify your judgement where new evidence is presented, and take advice when necessary.

You must know about and implement specific legal duties relating to carers. This includes a carer's right to an assessment of their needs and circumstances and to information, support and services in their own right, as appropriate.

Assessment

Where your role includes assessment, you must:

- have appropriate training or qualifications to carry out the type and level of assessment
- understand and explore the individual's strengths, needs, risks, and circumstances
- analyse the nature, level, urgency and implications of any risks identified
- assess the balance of people's rights and responsibilities around risks
- listen actively to an individual's own account of their situation and what matters to them
- work with others, for example carers and professionals, to gather relevant and informed perspectives
- analyse risks and balance rights and responsibilities
- make and record professional judgements that inform planning clearly, accurately, and respectfully
- let individuals know about their rights and the steps being taken
- record the assessment accurately and as soon as possible after the assessment.

Planning

If you're involved in planning care and support, you should:

- support individuals to understand the planning process and their role in it
- co-produce plans that reflect the individual's goals, preferences, outcomes and how progress will be measured
- explore a range of solutions with the person, including informal, community-based, and formal support and discuss their feasibility.
- provide information to individuals, families, carers and other professionals about resources that may support planning and providing care and support, and any limitations on resources
- promote choice, independence, and aspiration

- include strategies for managing risk positively
- make sure plans are flexible and reviewed regularly
- record plans clearly, including timescales, responsibilities, and review arrangements
- explore and agree contingency plans
- include arrangements for involving and informing people if there are changes
- agree arrangements for keeping in contact
- agree arrangements for sharing information with the people and professionals involved in the person's care and support.

Providing care and support

If your role involves arranging or providing care or support, you must:

- follow agreed risk assessments, plans and organisational procedures
- communicate clearly and respectfully with individuals and carers
- adapt your approach to meet changing needs and preferences
- promote dignity, safety, and well-being in all interactions
- record actions and observations accurately
- report any concerns promptly, in line with your organisation’s procedures and, where relevant, the Wales Safeguarding Procedures
- work within your competence and ask for support when needed
- take any action required of you to implement the plan such as arranging services, finding information or making referrals to other organisations, in a timely way.
- you must confirm with people the planned outcomes that need resources. You must carry out any actions required of you to secure resources, and let people know about progress or any problems. You must be open and honest about resource constraints. If there’s a dispute, you should tell people their rights and relevant processes
- you must be mindful of your responsibility to make effective use of limited resources
- you must work with others to review and evaluate the outcomes of practice for people, as appropriate. This should include reviewing the assessment and progress on outcomes with the person, as well as the effectiveness of resources
- make sure everyone who has a role in the care and support plan understands what’s expected of them and when
- anticipate, where possible, the likelihood of any disruptions to the smooth running of the plan and include contingency plans if necessary. Together, these activities help ensure that care and support are safe, effective, and tailored to each individual’s life and goals.

3.6 Ending professional relationships

Endings should be planned and respectful. You should:

- explain the reason for ending involvement
- provide information about continuity or closure of support
- signpost to other sources of help
- make sure records are updated and closed appropriately.

Sensitive endings help maintain trust and dignity.

3.7 Raising concerns and complaints

Everyone has the right to feel safe and raise concerns if something isn't right. You must:

- support individuals and carers to recognise and report concerns
- take all complaints seriously and follow organisational procedures
- reassure individuals that raising concerns won't result in them losing support
- report any unsafe, abusive, or discriminatory behaviour
- cooperate fully with any investigation if a complaint is made about you
- speak to your manager or employer if you see something that doesn't feel right - don't ignore it
- understand that raising concerns can be part of safeguarding.

Concerns can be raised through internal processes or, if necessary, through whistleblowing to a relevant regulator.

You're protected when raising concerns in good faith, and doing so helps keep people safe.

There's more on safeguarding and information sharing in section 4.2.

As a social worker, you must also take proactive steps to maintain and improve quality of services. This includes:

- listening to individuals, carers, and staff, and using feedback to improve services
- identifying and sharing good practice across the organisation
- making sure care and support are safe, effective, and high-quality
- reporting concerns about other organisations or ineffective policies, procedures, and resource shortages to your manager
- referring serious concerns to the appropriate regulatory or advisory body in line with policy
- encouraging colleagues to raise concerns and follow whistleblowing procedures when necessary

recording and reporting unmet needs, service changes, issues, and actions taken.

Section 4: Balancing risk and safety

I must respect individuals' rights to take risks, while working with them to help manage and understand the risks of behaviours that could cause harm to themselves or others.

4.1 Positive risk-taking

Everyone takes risks in daily life. In social work, supporting individuals to take positive risks is part of respecting their rights, independence, and choices.

Positive risk-taking means:

- helping individuals make informed decisions about what matters to them
- balancing risks with potential benefits
- avoiding unnecessary restrictions on individuals' freedom
- supporting individuals to try new things, even if there's some risk involved.

You must:

- follow your organisation's risk assessment procedures
- involve individuals, carers, and professionals in decision-making
- record decisions clearly, including the reasons and any agreed safeguards
- review risks regularly as circumstances change.

Being overly cautious (risk-averse) can limit individuals' lives. Instead, focus on what they can do and how to support them safely.

Restrictive physical intervention

Social workers may play a key role in planning care and support where restrictive physical interventions are considered. These interventions should only be included within person-centred planning and used strictly as a last resort.

Where such interventions are necessary to prevent immediate risk of harm and all other strategies have been exhausted, they must be agreed through a multi-disciplinary approach, comply with human rights principles, and be clearly documented in the individual's care and support plan.

Any intervention must:

- be proportionate to the level of risk
- be legally and ethically justified
- never be used to punish, humiliate, intimidate, or coerce.

Managers and employers must make sure:

- staff are trained in recognised and approved methods
- organisational policies and legal requirements are followed

- incidents are recorded accurately and reviewed promptly
- staff and individuals involved receive appropriate support and debriefing.

Restrictive practices must be transparent, accountable, and regularly reviewed. The goal is always to reduce reliance on such interventions and promote safe, respectful, and person-centred care.

4.2 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. It means protecting children and adults from harm, abuse, and neglect. As a registered social worker, you must complete safeguarding training relevant to your role and area of practice. The local authority social services team are the lead agency in safeguarding enquiries and investigations.

You must be able to:

- recognise signs of abuse or exploitation and be able to identify a child or adult at risk
- follow the Wales Safeguarding Procedures
- know the threshold to start child protection or adult protection enquiries
- seek advice from your manager/employer if you're unsure which action to take.

Types of abuse include:

- physical: causing physical harm through actions like:
    - hitting
    - pinching
    - biting
    - slapping
    - pushing
    - misuse of medication
    - restraint
    - physical punishment
- sexual abuse: any sexual activity that a person doesn't consent to, can't consent to, or doesn't understand enough to refuse, including:
    - sexual assault
    - inappropriate touching
    - being forced to watch sexual acts
    - coercing others to take part in sexual activity. For children and individuals who may lack the capacity to make an informed decision, this also includes encouraging them to engage in sexual activity
- emotional or psychological: actions that harm an individual's emotional well-being, such as:

    - threats
    - humiliation
    - intimidation
    - isolation
    - verbal abuse.

  This also includes coercive control (see below)

- neglect: failing to meet an individual's basic needs, such as:
    - food
    - shelter
    - clothing
    - medical care
    - emotional support.

  It can be intentional or because of lack of awareness or ability

- financial: misusing or stealing someone's money, property, or financial resources. This includes:
    - fraud
    - pressure to hand over money
    - misuse of benefits

You must also be alert to specific risks, including:

- criminal exploitation: when criminal gangs exploit children and vulnerable adults and to carry out criminal activity, such as moving drugs, weapons and money. They may be groomed, threatened, or manipulated into working for the gangs. A common tactic is "cuckooing", where criminals take over the home of a vulnerable person to use as a base for drug dealing. For children and young people this is often called Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) or 'county lines'
- sexual abuse of children and young people: this can include sex or any form of sexual activity with a child, the production of indecent images and/or any other indecent material involving children. This is also called Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).
- domestic abuse and coercive control: domestic abuse includes a wide range of harmful behaviours that cause fear, distress, or alarm. It's not limited to physical violence, it also includes emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. Key aspects include:
    - controlling or coercive behaviour, which limits an individual's freedom or choices
    - threatening behaviour that causes fear
    - physical violence or threats
    - sexual violence, which involves any non-consensual sexual activity

    - economic abuse, where someone controls access to money or resources.

  Importantly, when children witness or hear domestic abuse, this is also recognised as a form of child abuse, as it can seriously affect their emotional well-being, development, and sense of safety.

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. This is a criminal offence and must be reported to the police immediately. You should also report any concerns about someone you believe may be at risk of FGM.
- forced marriage: when someone is made to marry without their full and free consent. This can happen through pressure, threats, or abuse. It's also considered forced if an individual is too young or vulnerable to understand what's happening or to make their own choice. Forced marriage is illegal in the UK.
- radicalisation and extremism:
    - radicalisation is when someone is influenced to support harmful or extreme views, which can lead to violence or terrorism.
    - extremism means strongly opposing shared values like respect, fairness, and freedom. In Wales, preventing radicalisation involves spotting the signs early, protecting vulnerable individuals - especially children - and promoting safe, respectful communities.
    - under the Prevent duty, professionals must take action when they have concerns, which may include making a referral through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) if someone is at risk of radicalisation or extremism.
- hate crime - any criminal act driven by prejudice or hostility toward someone because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity, or disability - whether real or perceived. It can involve physical attacks, damage to property, threats, harassment, verbal abuse, or online bullying. The person responsible could be a stranger or someone the victim knows.
- modern slavery and human trafficking - modern slavery is a serious abuse of human rights. It happens when individuals are forced to work or live in conditions they can't leave, often through threats, violence, lies, or taking advantage of their vulnerability. This includes human trafficking - where individuals are moved or recruited for exploitation - as well as slavery, servitude, and forced labour.

Report, leading and supporting on safeguarding investigations

Depending on your role, you may be responsible for:

- contributing to or leading safeguarding enquiries or investigations
- gathering and recording information in a clear, factual, and timely manner

- working with safeguarding partners, such as the police or health professionals
- making sure decisions are made in line with legal duties and best practice.

You must understand your organisation's legal duties under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016, and other relevant legislation, including the requirement to respond to any reasonable suspicion that an individual is at risk of harm.

If you're reporting a safeguarding concern, you must give your details and explain your role. This helps safeguarding services understand the situation clearly and follow up if they need more information. It also shows that you're acting responsibly and in the best interests of the individual at risk. If you don't identify yourself, it can make it harder for others to respond quickly or safely - especially if important details are missing.

Where it's safe to do so, you should also let the individual know you're making a safeguarding referral. This helps build trust and transparency and gives them a chance to understand what will happen next. But, if telling them could put them or someone else at greater risk, it's okay not to share this information straight away. Your priority is always to keep individuals safe.

4.3 Information sharing

While confidentiality is important, you must share information if someone is at risk of abuse or neglect. This is essential for safeguarding.

Follow these golden rules for information sharing:

1. data protection laws don't prevent sharing when safety is at risk
2. be open and honest about why and how you're sharing information - unless doing so would increase the risk
3. get advice if you're unsure - ask your manager/employer or safeguarding lead
4. share with consent when possible, but you don't need consent if there's a serious risk
5. balance safety and privacy - consider the risks of sharing or not sharing
6. only share what's necessary, with the right people, at the right time
7. record your decisions - what was shared, with who, why, and how.

Whenever it's safe and appropriate, you should explain to the individual (or their carer or advocate) that you're concerned and may need to share information to keep them or others safe. Use clear, simple language and check they understand. Reassure them that your role is to help and they aren't in trouble.

If you're unsure, always get advice. Never ignore a concern - report it and follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures.

Section 5: Acting with integrity and maintaining public trust

I must act with integrity and in a way that maintains public trust and confidence in the social care profession – at work and outside work, online and in person.

5.1 Professional conduct

Your behaviour - both in and outside of work - must reflect the values of the social work profession. You must always act with honesty, integrity, and professionalism.

This includes:

- treating individuals, carers, colleagues, and others with dignity and respect
- not abusing, neglecting, or exploiting anyone
- maintaining appropriate professional boundaries
- following the law and your organisation's policies
- being a positive representative of the social care profession in public and online.

Theres more guidance in section 2 about acting with integrity (2.1), confidentiality (2.2), professional boundaries (2.3) and conflicts of interest (2.4).

Social media and online interactions

Social media includes platforms such as:

- Facebook
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- WhatsApp
- others, where people share content, exchange information, and connect.

Other forms of online interaction include email, messaging apps, forums and video calls (such as Teams or Zoom). These are all useful for staying connected, sharing resources, and offering support - both personally and professionally.

But you need to be aware of the risks:

- it's easy for personal and professional boundaries to blur online
- you might share confidential information without meaning to

- posts, comments, or opinions can be seen as inappropriate, offensive or unprofessional.

Always think before you post or share, and make sure your online behaviour is in line with your organisation's policies and the Code of Professional Practice.

Remember:

- you're responsible for everything you do online - whether on a personal or professional account. This includes posts, shares, re-posts, 'likes', and the accounts you follow or have any other form of interaction with
- even if you think your identity is hidden, you are still responsible for your actions
- every interaction reflects on you, and the profession, so make sure your behaviour aligns with the Code of Professional Practice.

Before posting, pause and ask:

- is this respectful?
- is it appropriate?
- is it professional?
- is it in line with the Code of Professional Practice?

To act safely, ethically, and professionally online you must:

- protect confidentiality: never post or share anything about individuals you support, or colleagues, unless it's part of your role and you have consent to do so. Even with consent, you must consider:
    - the person's capacity to consent
    - professional boundaries
    - safeguarding responsibilities
    - your organisation's policies.

  This includes comments, photographs, videos, audio recordings, or any other media featuring individuals who use care and support services. Remember, even if you blur faces, alter voices, or don't use names, people could still be identified because of their surroundings, or the context of the post. There's more about confidentiality in section 2.2

- keep boundaries clear: be careful about your online relationships. Unless your organisation's policy says otherwise, don't 'add', 'friend' or 'follow' individuals you're supporting, or their families. If you see anything online that could be a safeguarding concern, you must act immediately (see section 4.2). You should also check your privacy settings regularly and think about what you're comfortable sharing

- communicate with respect: be courteous and professional in all interactions, including online comments, videos, audio, messages, and posts. How you communicate reflects on you and your organisation
- use approved technology: only use applications, software, tools, and platforms your organisation has authorised for work purposes. This helps protect confidentiality and data security. There's more about confidentiality and data protection in section 2.2
- follow your organisation's social media policy: make sure your online activity aligns with organisational expectations and standards.

Under the Code of Professional Practice, you're expected to communicate respectfully with others, respect privacy and dignity, promote equality and inclusion, and treat personal information as confidential - both online and offline.

5.2 Fitness to practise

Fitness to practise means having the right skills, knowledge, and character to carry out your role safely and effectively.

To be fit to practise, you must:

- have the right qualifications
- be physically and mentally fit for your role, and be open about any health or personal issues that could affect your ability to practise safely
- keep your knowledge and skills up to date
- follow the Code of Professional Practice, relevant practice guidance, and make sure you understand and meet all wider legal duties and responsibilities associated with your role
- tell your employer and Social Care Wales immediately if any of the following apply to you:
    - you're arrested, charged, or convicted of a criminal offence
    - you receive a police caution
    - you're subject to a non-molestation, prevention, or restraining order
    - you're included on a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) barred list
    - you're being investigated in relation to a safeguarding concern, allegation, or incident - whether by your employer, a statutory agency, or another regulatory body.

Investigations and your responsibilities

Social Care Wales may investigate concerns about your fitness to practise, including your conduct both in and outside of work. These concerns may relate to:

- serious misconduct
- serious health conditions that affect your judgement or pose a risk to others
- criminal behaviour, legal restrictions or safeguarding concerns (see information above).

You must fully, openly, and honestly cooperate with any investigation carried out by your employer, Social Care Wales, any statutory agency, or regulatory body. This helps protect the individuals you support and maintain public trust in social care professions.

You must also cooperate with any investigation about other professionals.

5.3 Working with colleagues

Effective social work relies on strong collaboration between different organisations and professional groups. By working together - across health, housing, education, voluntary services, and other sectors - we can share knowledge, coordinate support, and respond more effectively to people's needs. This joined-up approach helps make sure care is safe, person-centred, and focused on what matters most to the individual.

Social workers deserve to feel safe at work, so you must treat colleagues with the same respect and professionalism you show the individuals you support. There's more information and guidance about equality, diversity and inclusion in section 1.2.

You must:

- treat others with courtesy and respect
- respect individuals' roles, beliefs, backgrounds and communication needs (see sections 1.2 and 1.4)
- encourage inclusive, respectful, and safe behaviour in the workplace
- not abuse your position or authority
- avoid personal relationships that could compromise your judgement or create conflicts of interest. You must also be honest if there are any conflicts
- take responsibility for your own work, and for any tasks you've delegated to others (see section 6.5).

If you're in a leadership or supervisory role, you must lead by example and support a positive, inclusive workplace culture.

5.4 Avoiding unnecessary risk

You have a duty to avoid putting yourself, your colleagues, or the individuals you support at unnecessary risk. This includes being aware of physical, emotional, and professional risks in your day-to-day work.

You must:

- follow your organisation's health and safety procedures
- use appropriate equipment and techniques, for example when moving and handling
- report any incidents, near misses, or unsafe situations
- record and share information about risks so others can be protected

- be aware of how your behaviour outside of work, such as alcohol and substance use, or social media activity, could affect your professional role
- take responsibility for your own health and well-being. If you're prescribed medication, make sure you take it as directed and consider how it may affect your ability to carry out your work safely. If your health or medication could affect your performance or judgement, speak to your manager or employer as soon as possible. There's more about this in section 5.2.

Your own safety matters too

Your safety is just as important as the safety of the individuals you support. You should:

- never put yourself in a situation where you feel unsafe - trust your instincts
- follow lone working policies and make sure to always let a manager or a designated colleague know where you are
- speak up if you feel unsafe or unsupported in your role
- ask for help or supervision if a situation feels risky or beyond your responsibility.

If you're injured, threatened, or feel unsafe at work, report it immediately to your manager or employer. Your employer has a duty to protect you and make reasonable adjustments if you have a health condition or disability.

Section 6: Accountability and professional development

I must be accountable and responsible for the quality of my work, and for maintaining and improving my knowledge and skills.

6.1 Safe and effective practice

You're responsible for providing safe, lawful, and high-quality care. This means:

- following your organisation's policies, procedures, and standards
- working within your role and competence
- asking for help when you're unsure or unable to carry out a task
- reporting any difficulties that affect your ability to work safely
- taking responsibility for your ongoing learning and development, including completing continuing professional development (CPD), as explained in section 6.3.

Record keeping

It's essential you keep accurate and timely records. You must:

- record information clearly, factually, and with respect - ideally at the time it happens or as soon as possible afterwards
- use plain language and avoid jargon
- reflect the individual's voice and preferences
- document what happened, what was agreed, and any follow-up actions
- record any mistakes or incidents honestly and promptly, in line with organisational policies and procedures
- store and retain records securely and appropriately, in line with organisational policies and processes

Good records help make sure there's continuity of care, they support accountability and protect both individuals and workers.

6.2 Being open and honest (duty of candour)

The duty of candour means being open and honest when something goes wrong that has harmed - or could have harmed - an individual's well-being.

You must:

- acknowledge when something has gone wrong
- tell your manager or employer immediately
- explain what happened to the individual (or their carer/advocate) in a clear and sensitive way

- apologise and involve them in deciding what should happen next
- support colleagues to be open and honest too.

You must never try to cover up mistakes or stop others from reporting concerns. Your employer should support a culture of learning and improvement.

6.3 Learning and development

To practise safely and effectively, you must:

- understand and follow your organisation's policies and procedures
- keep up to date with legislation, guidance, and best practice
- take part in supervision and appraisal
- complete the training and qualifications needed for your role
- reflect on your practice and ask for feedback.

You're responsible for your own continuing professional development (CPD). This includes formal training, e-learning, shadowing, reading, and reflective practice. Your employer should support you by providing time and opportunities for learning.

All social workers have a responsibility to contribute to the learning and development of other professionals, including training social work students. This can be done in a number of ways, such as sharing information and expertise, contributing to discussions, delivering training, or acting as a practice educator, coach or mentor. If you're involved in these activities, you must be prepared to develop the necessary competence.

You must do all you can to promote a learning culture in the workplace. You should contribute to an environment where others can share good practice, raise concerns, contribute ideas, be creative and consider research findings.

Social workers may contribute to a range of activities to improve services. These may include developing policies, contributing to service planning, review and evaluation. If you're involved, make sure your contribution is focused on quality and improvement, in particular the rights, safety and well-being of people using the service. Your activities should be guided by feedback from people using the service.

6.4 Managing workload

Being able to manage your workload effectively is essential for providing safe, high-quality care. You should take proactive steps to manage your time and look for support when needed. This includes:

- prioritising tasks and meeting deadlines so care and support are provided in a timely and reliable way
- avoiding unnecessary delays that could negatively affect the individuals you support

- using the right tools and equipment to carry out your duties safely, efficiently, and in line with good practice
- raising concerns with your manager or employer if your workload affects safety, quality, or your ability to carry out your responsibilities (see section 7)
- using supervision sessions to reflect on your workload, well-being, and any challenges you're facing (see section 7).

6.5 Delegation and responsibility

Delegation is an important part of safe and effective teamwork. But it must be done thoughtfully and responsibly.

If you delegate a task to someone else, you must:

- only delegate to someone who's trained, competent, and authorised to carry out the task
- provide clear instructions and check they understand what's expected
- make sure the person has the support they need to complete the task safely
- continue to take responsibility for the outcome of the delegated work
- follow up to make sure the task has been completed correctly and safely.

If you're asked to do a task, you must:

- be honest about your skills, knowledge, and confidence
- ask for training, support, or supervision if needed
- speak to your manager/employer if you feel the task is beyond your role or competence.

Even when you delegate, you're still accountable for making sure the work's done properly and in line with professional standards. Delegation doesn't mean passing on responsibility, it means sharing work while still having oversight.

Section 7: Embedding the Code in leadership and management

If I'm responsible for managing or leading staff, I must also embed the Code in their work.

7.1 Leading with empathy, understanding, and respect

Compassionate leadership is about leading with empathy, understanding, and respect. It means creating a culture of psychological safety where everyone feels valued, supported, and able to thrive.

As a leader, you must:

- reflect the values of the Code of Professional Practice
- listen actively to staff and understand their needs, including their communication needs (see sections 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4), and well-being
- offer appropriate support to the people you lead
- help staff grow, develop, and feel confident in their roles.

Creating inclusive and supportive cultures

You're responsible for shaping a workplace culture that's:

- inclusive – where everyone feels respected and able to be themselves
- supportive – where staff feel safe to speak up, ask for help, and learn from mistakes
- fair – adopting a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, discrimination, and harassment
- positive – where good practice is recognised and celebrated.

There are resources about compassionate leadership on our website.

7.2 Staff development and supervision

As a leader, manager or employer, you're responsible for supporting the ongoing development, confidence, and well-being of your staff. This includes making sure they have what they need to provide safe, person-centred care and support.

Recruitment, induction, training, and appraisal

You must:

- recruit in line with legal and regulatory requirements. This includes verifying qualifications and documentation, checking references thoroughly, and using fair and robust selection processes to make sure candidates are suitable
- make sure all new staff complete a structured induction that's relevant to their role and responsibilities and reflects their prior experience, skills and

knowledge. This includes following guidance to support to transition from student to qualified social worker roles
- make sure staff have access to training relevant to their role, as well as broader development opportunities to support their continued growth and progression
- support staff to complete the qualifications needed for registration and to safely carry out their role
- offer regular appraisals to reflect on performance, set goals, and identify learning needs.

Supervision

Supervision should provide a space for staff to reflect on their practice, identify learning needs, and receive constructive support to improve. It should be used to manage performance and build confidence, competence, and accountability.

It should:

- take place regularly, be planned in advance, and comply with organisational policies, statutory and regulatory requirements, and good practice guidance
- focus on both well-being and workload
- provide a safe space to reflect on practice, raise concerns, and celebrate achievements
- include discussion about learning and development needs
- offer constructive feedback and support with problem-solving
- consider how research evidence, legislation, policy and guidance are being used to support safe effective person-centred social work practice
- be clearly recorded, with agreed actions and follow-up.

Remember, supervision can take different formats, including one-to-one, group, peer, or reflective sessions.

Good supervision helps staff feel valued, supported, and confident in their roles. It also contributes to safer, more effective care.

7.3 Monitoring, quality assurance and acting on concerns

As a leader, manager or employer, you must have a clear understanding of what's happening across your service and take proactive steps to maintain and improve quality.

This includes:

- observing practice by regularly watching staff interact with individuals
- responding to feedback – listening to individuals, carers, and staff, and using their views to make improvements
- reviewing records – making sure documentation is accurate, up to date, and reflects person-centred care

- auditing – using systems to monitor performance, identify trends, and address issues
- recognising good practice by identifying what works well and sharing it across the team
- making sure equipment and resources are fit for purpose, so it's in good working order. Staff should have access to the tools, materials and training needed to provide safe, effective, and high-quality care.

Quality assurance isn't just about meeting compliance requirements, it's about fostering a culture of learning, reflection, and continuous improvement to provide the best possible care and support.

You must also deal with poor performance and misconduct promptly and professionally. This includes:

- following organisational procedures
- maintaining confidentiality
- referring serious concerns to the appropriate regulatory body, in line with organisational policies. You should cooperate fully with any investigations and make sure staff are supported throughout the process.

Leaders must also act on concerns about poor systems, unsafe practice, or gaps in policy. This includes:

- encouraging staff to report concerns
- following whistleblowing procedures
- escalating unresolved issues to appropriate bodies
- recording concerns and actions taken.

This helps promote a culture of openness supports safety, accountability, and continuous improvement.

7.4 Safeguarding and whistleblowing

As a manager or employer in social care, you have a critical role in promoting safe practice and embedding safeguarding in your service's culture.

You must:

- lead by example by showing that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- promote a culture of openness where staff feel safe to raise concerns
- make sure staff are trained and confident in recognising and reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- respond to concerns quickly, appropriately, and in line with your organisation's safeguarding procedures
- support whistleblowing - protect staff who raise concerns so they're listened to and taken seriously.

As a social work manager or employer, you're responsible for:

- ensuring the individual's voice is heard in all assessments and care and support planning
- making decisions about child protection or adult protection enquiries and the direction needed
- making sure decisions are made in line with statutory obligations, and involving multi-agency partners.

Sharing information appropriately

You must also make sure that:

- information is shared without delay when someone is at risk of abuse or neglect
- the format and content of shared information is appropriate for the audience and purpose
- staff understand when and how to share information in line with data protection and safeguarding guidance
- records are accurate, objective, and up to date, and that they support safeguarding processes.

There's further guidance and training on safeguarding and whistleblowing in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, which provide detailed steps for recognising, reporting, and responding to concerns about abuse or neglect.