

Code of Professional Ethics Preamble/Guiding Principles

The profession of social work is based upon a belief in the value and dignity of all human beings, and a concern for their social well being.

Social work is dedicated to the enhancement of the lives of human beings through the provision and development of appropriate services and through the promotion of social planning and action. Members of the profession have sought through formal education to equip themselves to meet their responsibilities for the welfare of society as a whole.

The social work profession accepts the responsibility to contribute its knowledge and skills, to lend support to programmes of social welfare and endeavours to protect the community against unethical or incompetent practice in the social welfare field, which may be harmful to human welfare.

The Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW) subscribes to the following basic principles and requires its members to observe them.

PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS A. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS

- Social workers avoid discrimination and prejudice, respect individual differences and accept that professional responsibility must take precedence over personal aims and views.
- Social workers respect and safeguard the rights of persons served in a relationship of mutual trust, to privacy and confidentiality in their use of the service and to responsible use of all information given and received.

Responsible use entails the following:

- a) Not discussing the case outside the professional context.
- b) Restricting access on any records e.g. written, audio, video, e-mail on the client unless subpoenaed by the Courts to do so.
- c) Before making a video/audio recording, informed consent from the client must be sought in writing.
- d) Before making a video/audio recording, social workers must make a written undertaking, in the presence of the client, about restricted use of the recording which is:
 - (i) for use within the agency and for purposes benefiting the client
 - (ii) for relevant professionals and for training/consultation purposes

Permission must be sought in writing from the client again if the audio/video recording is to be used for public viewing and/or hearing.

- e) In the event that information relating to the client has to be shared with a professional and/or professional body, the client's permission has to be sought
- f) In the event that the client is a minor or is unable for physical, mental or emotional reasons to give consent, a responsible adult who plays a significant role in the life of the minor or adult client, needs to be informed and have his/her consent sought.
- g) Names and other sensitive personal particulars of the clients must be removed from the records when used for training or other educational purposes. Pseudonyms and other altered particulars may be substituted so as to maintain anonymity of the clients.
- h) All records (e.g. written, audio, video and e-mail) must be kept strictly confidential and in a safe place away from public viewing accessible only to professionals involved in the case.
- i) When destroying all forms of records deemed no longer active and useful, care must be taken by social workers to ensure that the principles of confidentiality continue to be maintained, i.e. that the records are completely destroyed leaving no evidence traceable to the identity of the clients.

Responsibility for protecting the clients' rights continues even after termination of the professional relationship.

- Social workers affirm the rights of persons served to make their own decisions and to work out their own problems within the scope of their own resources, having due regard to their personal well-being.
- Social workers affirm the right to client self determination which needs to be preceded by ensuring that the client is both aware of and has assessed alternative options. The role of social workers in this instance is to provide all relevant information that would allow the client to make an informed decision.
- When social workers act on behalf of clients who lack the capacity to make an informed decision, social workers take steps to safeguard the interests and rights of these clients.
- Social workers limit the rights to self-determination where in the social worker's professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable and imminent risk to themselves and others.
- Social workers affirm that every person has the right to avail themselves to social services, unless this contravenes a specific policy of their employing agency. In practice, this means ensuring:

- a) that the client will be able to communicate in a manner comfortable to him/her.
- b) an atmosphere that respects all religions and cultures, race, and nationality regardless of political belief, gender, gender orientation, age, marital status, mental and physical ability.

- Social workers use clear and respectful language in all communications (written and verbal) to and about clients.
- Social workers take the responsibility for continuity of services for their own clients in the event that services are disrupted by any circumstance (e.g. going on leave, emergencies, resignation or termination of employment)
- Social workers do not, under any circumstance, engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current clients whether such contact is consensual or not. This principle applies also to:

- a) Client's relatives
- b) Other individuals with whom the client maintains a close personal relationship
- c) Where there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client.

- Social workers do not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship.
- Social workers do not get involved in close personal relationships with former clients unless the professional relationship was ended at least two years prior to the new contact.
- Social workers do not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Social workers do not engage in physical contact with clients where there is a possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact such as cradling or caressing clients.

B. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLEAGUES INCLUDING INTER-DISCIPLINARY COLLEAGUES

- Social workers act on the recognition that effective service depends on cooperation among professional disciplines and others with due regard to respective areas of competence.
- Social workers treat with respect the professional judgment, statements and actions of colleagues. When criticisms of these appear unwarranted, social workers need to refer the matter to the Association.
- Social workers who refer clients to other professionals take steps to facilitate an orderly transfer of responsibility, and to disclose all pertinent information to the new service providers, with clients' consent.
- When working or consulting with other professional disciplines, social workers are aware of the parameters of their own power and expertise as well as that of other professionals, thereby maximizing effective working relationships and ensuring that neither social workers nor clients have inappropriate or unrealistic expectations of themselves and of the results of the help offered.

C. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY IN PRACTICE SETTINGS

- Social workers are remunerated for their professional work, by a salary, fees, grants or other payments allowable under the terms of their service and by no other gain connected with their working practice. This means that social workers do not accept goods or services from clients as payment for professional services. Bartering arrangements particularly involving services create the potential for conflict of interests, exploitation and inappropriate boundaries in a social worker's relationship with clients.
- #### D. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY AS PROFESSIONALS AND TO THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

- Social workers work for the continued development of professional competence for both themselves and the profession. This includes their support of continuing professional education in its widest sense.
- Social workers strive to remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions by critically examining and keeping current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work, reviewing regularly professional literature and participating in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.
- Social workers provide services and represent themselves competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, licence certification, consultation received, supervised experience or other relevant professional experience.
- Social workers refrain from any personal behaviour which damage the functioning of the profession, in accordance with the values stated in this Code.
- When relevant, social workers make it clear in public statement or action, whether they are speaking or acting as individuals or as authorized representatives of a professional association, an agency, or any other organization.
- Social workers do not condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination, with regard to race, religion, nationality, gender, gender orientation, age, marital status, political belief, mental and physical ability.
- Social workers acknowledge the work of and the contributions made by others.
- Social workers take the responsibility of promoting the values of integrity and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, mentoring, research, consultation service, representation to public bodies, presentations to the community and participation in the activities of SASW.
- When engaged in evaluation or research, the same principles of confidentiality and informed consent and respect as given to clients should be accorded to research projects. The process should be governed by the accepted ethics of research.
- Social workers refrain from having any form of self-advertisement which makes unsubstantiated claims pertaining to

their work, the services provided and the results that can be expected.

E. SOCIAL WORKERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

- Social workers accept as their primary professional obligation the welfare of those served – individuals, groups or communities – with due regard to the common welfare. This obligation may require actions to influence social conditions or policies.
- Social workers are committed to correcting through professional channels, abuses to good standards perpetuated by those wrongly using the title “social worker”.
- Every social worker has the responsibility to give feedback on policies or social conditions which are detrimental to people he/she relates to in his/her professional capacity. The feedback should be given to appropriate bodies/persons with the aim of facilitating change.

The SASW Code of Professional Ethics (1st Revision) was edited by Dr Myrna Blake and Ms Prema Thirupathy in 1999. It was subsequently presented and accepted in principle by the SASW Annual General Meeting on 25 June 1999.

The SASW Code of Professional Ethics (2nd Revision) was edited further by Dr Myrna Blake, Mrs Ngiam Geak Kim and Mr Benny Bong in 2004. The edited version of the SASW Code of Professional Ethics was circulated at the 34th AGM in 2004 for approval. There were no objections made to the revised version.