

APPENDIX G



NASW CODE OF ETHICS

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Preamble

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic human needs, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable, oppressed and poor people. An historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well being in a social context. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forms that created, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change on behalf of and with clients. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to alleviate discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, clinical practice, case management, community organizing, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs and to become contributing members of the community. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems

The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective:

- # Service
- # Social justice
- # Dignity and worth of the person
- # Importance of human relationships
- # Integrity
- # Competence

These six core values are ordered giving greater weight to those values that are more general and reflect what is unique to the social work profession. However, no ordering of values can be fixed. Core values, and the principles which flow from them must be balanced within the context and complexity of lived experience.

Purpose of the Code of Ethics

Professional ethics are at the core of social work. The profession has an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. The NASW Code of Ethics

sets forth these values, principles, and standards to guide social workers' conduct. The code of ethics is relevant to all social workers, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in which they work or the populations they serve.

This NASW Code of Ethics serves six purposes:

- # The code identifies core values on which social work's mission is based.
- # The code summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that should be used to guide social work practice.
- # The code of ethics is designed to help social workers identify relevant issues when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise.
- # The code provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable. One of the essential features of a profession is its willingness to regulate itself and to establish standards by which the public can judge its performance.
- # The code socializes practitioners new to the field to social work's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards.
- # The code articulates standards that the social work profession itself can use to assess whether social workers have engaged in unethical conduct. NASW has formal procedure to adjudicate ethics complaints filed against its members. (For information on NASW adjudication procedures, see NASW Procedures for the Adjudication of Grievances.) In subscribing to this code social workers are required to cooperate in its implementation, participate in NASW adjudication proceedings, and abide by any NASW disciplinary rulings or sanctions based on it.

This code offers a set of values, principles, and standards to guide decision making and conduct when ethical issues arise. It does not provide an unambiguous set of rules that prescribe how social workers should act in all situations. Specific applications of the code must take into account the context in which it is being considered and the possibility of conflicts among the code's values, principles, and standards. Ethical responsibilities flow from all human relationships, from the personal and familial to the social and professional.

Further, the code of ethics does not specify which values, principles, and standards are most important and ought to outweigh others in instances when they conflict. Reasonable differences of opinion can and do exist among social workers with respect to the ways in which values, ethical principles, and ethical standards should be rank-ordered when they conflict. Ethical decision making in a given situation must apply the informed judgment of the individual social workers and should also consider how the issues would be judged in a peer review process where the ethical standards of the profession would be applied.

Ethical decision making is a process. There are many instances in social work where simple answers are not available to resolve complex ethical issues. Social workers should take into consideration all the values, principles, and standards in this code that are relevant to any situation in which ethical judgment is warranted. Social workers' decisions and actions should be consistent with the spirit as well as the letter of this code.

In addition to this code, there are many other sources of information about ethical thinking that may be useful. Social workers should consider ethical theory and principles generally, social work theory and principles, laws, regulations, agency policies, and other relevant codes of ethics, recognizing that among codes of ethics social workers should consider the NASW Code of Ethics as their primary source. Social workers also should be aware of the impact on ethical decision-making of their clients' and their own personal values, cultural and religious beliefs, and practices. They should be aware of any conflicts between personal and professional values and deal with them responsibly. For additional guidance social workers should consult relevant literature on professional ethics and ethical decision making, and seek appropriate consultation when faced with ethical dilemmas. This may involve consultation with an agency-based or social work organization's ethics committee, regulatory body, knowledgeable colleagues, supervisors, or legal counsel.

Instances may arise where social workers' ethical obligations conflict with agency policies, relevant laws or regulations. When such conflicts occur, social workers must make a responsible effort to resolve the conflict in a manner that is consistent with the values, principles, and standards expressed in this code. If a reasonable resolution of the conflict does not appear possible, social workers should seek proper consultation before making a decision.

This code of ethics is to be used by NASW and by other individuals, agencies, organizations, and bodies (such as licensing and regulatory boards, professional liability insurance providers, courts of law, agency boards of directors, government agencies, and other professional groups) that choose to adopt it. Violation of standards in this code does not automatically imply legal liability or violation of the law. Such determination can only be made in the context of legal and judicial proceedings. Violations of the Code would be subject to a peer review process. Such processes are generally separate from legal or administrative procedures and insulated from legal review or proceedings, in order to allow the profession to counsel and/or discipline its own members.

A code of ethics cannot guarantee ethical behavior. Moreover, a code of ethics cannot resolve all ethical issues or disputes, or capture the richness and complexity involved in striving to make responsible choices within a moral community. Rather a code of ethics sets forth values, ethical principles and ethical standards to which professionals aspire and by which their actions can be judged. Social workers' ethical behavior should result from their personal commitment to engage in ethical practice. This code reflects the commitment of all social workers to uphold the profession's values and to act ethically. Principles and standards must be applied by individuals of good character who discern moral questions and, in good faith,

seek to make reliable moral judgments.

Ethical Principles

The following broad ethical principles are based on social work's core values of: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. These principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire.

1. Service
2. Social Justice
3. Dignity and Worth of the Person
4. Importance of Human Relationships
5. Integrity
6. Competence

VALUE I: Service

Ethical Principle: Social workers' primary goal is to serve.

Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers volunteer some portion of their professional skills with no expectation of significant financial return (pro bono service).

VALUE II: Social Justice

Ethical Principle: Social workers challenge social injustice.

Social workers pursue social change, particularly on behalf of individuals and groups of vulnerable or oppressed people. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression, and cultural ethnic diversity, as well as to ensure equality of opportunity, and access to needed information, services, and resources.

VALUE III: Dignity and Worth of the Person

Ethical Principle: Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.

Social workers treat each person in a caring and nonjudgmental fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers promote clients' socially responsible self-determination. Social workers seek to enhance clients' motivation, capacity, and opportunity to change and to address their own needs. Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients' and the broader society's interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession.

VALUE IV: Importance of Human Relationships

Ethical Principle: Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.

Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, or organizations, and communities.

VALUE V: Integrity

Ethical Principle: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.

Social workers are continually aware of the profession's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards, and practice in a manner consistent with them. Social workers act honestly and responsibly and promote ethical practice on the part of the organizations with which they are affiliated.

VALUE VI: Competence

Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

Ethical Standards

The following ethical standards are relevant to the professional activities of all social workers. These standards concern:

1. social workers' ethical responsibilities to clients,
 - # 1.01 Commitment to Clients
 - # 1.02 Self-Determination
 - # 1.03 Informed Consent
 - # 1.04 Competence
 - # 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
 - # 1.06 Conflicts of Interest
 - # 1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality: Clients
 - # 1.08 Access to Records
 - # 1.09 Sexual Relationships
 - # 1.10 Non-sexual Physical Contact
 - # 1.11 Sexual Harassment
 - # 1.12 Defamatory Language
 - # 1.13 Payment for Services
 - # 1.14 Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity
 - # 1.15 Interruption of Services
 - # 1.16 Termination of Services
2. Social workers' ethical responsibilities to colleagues,
 - # 2.01 Respect
 - # 2.02 Confidentiality: Colleagues
 - # 2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration
 - # 2.04 Disputes Involving Colleagues
 - # 2.05 Consultation
 - # 2.06 Referral for Services
 - # 2.07 Sexual Relationships
 - # 2.08 Sexual Harassment
 - # 2.09 Addressing Impairment
 - # 2.10 Addressing Incompetence
 - # 2.11 Reporting Unethical Conduct
3. social workers' ethical responsibilities in practice settings,
 - # 3.01 Supervision
 - # 3.02 Education and Training
 - # 3.03 Performance Evaluation
 - # 3.04 Records
 - # 3.05 Billing
 - # 3.06 Client Transfer
 - # 3.07 Administration
 - # 3.08 Providing for Continuing Education
 - # 3.09 Commitments to Employers
 - # 3.10 Labor-Management Disputes
4. social workers' ethical responsibilities as Professionals
 - # 4.01 Competence
 - # 4.02 Acknowledging Credit

- # 4.03 Discrimination
- # 4.04 Private Conduct
- # 4.05 Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception
- # 4.06 Misrepresentation
- # 4.07 Solicitations
- # 4.08 Impairment
- 5. social workers' ethical responsibilities to the profession
 - # 5.01 Integrity of the Profession
 - # 5.02 Evaluation and Research
- 6. social workers' ethical responsibilities to the broader society
 - # 6.01 General Welfare
 - # 6.02 Public Participation
 - # 6.03 Public Emergencies
 - # 6.04 Social and Political Action

1. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients

- # 1.01 Commitment to Clients
- # 1.02 Self-Determination
- # 1.03 Informed Consent
- # 1.04 Competence
- # 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
- # 1.06 Conflicts of Interest
- # 1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality
- # 1.08 Access to Records
- # 1.09 Sexual Relationships
- # 1.10 Non-sexual Relationships
- # 1.11 Sexual Harassment
- # 1.12 Defamatory Language
- # 1.13 Payment for Services
- # 1.14 Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity
- # 1.15 Interruption of Services
- # 1.16 Termination of Services

1.01 Commitment to Clients

Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the welfare of clients. In general, clients' interests are primary. However, social workers' responsibility to the larger society or specific legal obligations may on limited occasions supersede the loyalty owed clients and clients should be so advised. (Examples include when a social worker is required by law to report that a client has abused a child or has threatened to harm self or others.)

1.02 Self-Determination

Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients' right to self-determination when, in their professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others.

1.03 Informed Consent

(a) Social workers should obtain clients' informed consent for services delivered to them. Social workers should use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the service, risks related to the service, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives, clients' right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent. Social workers should provide clients with an opportunity to ask questions.

(b) In instances where clients are not literate or have difficulty understanding the primary language used in the practice setting, social workers should take steps to ensure clients' comprehension. This may include providing clients with a detailed verbal explanation or arranging for an interpreter and/or translator.

(c) In instances where clients lack the capacity to provide informed consent, social workers should protect clients' interests by seeking permission from an appropriate third party, and inform clients consistent with their level of understanding. Social workers should take reasonable steps to enhance such clients' ability to give informed consent.

(d) In instances where clients are receiving services involuntarily, social workers should provide information about the nature and extent of clients' right to refuse service.

(e) Social workers should provide services only in the context of a negotiated professional relationship based on informed consent. Social workers who provide services via electronic mediums (such as computers, telephone, radio, and television) should inform recipients of the limitations and risks associated with such services.

(f) Social workers should obtain clients' informed consent before audiotaping or videotaping clients, or permitting third party observation of clients.

1.04 Competence

(a) Social workers should provide services only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, license, consultation received, supervised experience or other relevant professional experience.

(b) Social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after engaging in appropriate study, training, consultation, and supervision from persons who are competent in those interventions or techniques.

(c) When generally recognized standards do not exist with respect to an emerging area of practice, social workers should exercise careful judgment and take responsible steps--including appropriate education, training, consultation, and supervision--to ensure the competence of their work and to protect clients from harm.

1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity

(a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.

(b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' culture and to differences among people and cultural groups.

(c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status,, political belief, religion and mental or physical development.

1.06 Conflicts of Interest

(a) Social workers should be alert to and avoid conflicts of interests that interfere with the exercise of professional discretion and impartial judgment. Social workers should inform clients when a real or potential conflict of interest arises and take reasonable steps to resolve the issue in a manner that makes the clients' interests primary and protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible. Occasionally, protecting clients' interests may require termination of the professional relationship with proper referral of the client.

(b) Social workers should not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, political or business interests.

(c) Social workers should not condone or engage in any dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. (Dual or multiple relationships occur when social workers relate to clients in more than one relationship whether professional, social, or business--and in a manner that has the potential to exploit or be harmful to clients. Dual or multiple relationships can occur simultaneously or consecutively.) Social workers are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

(d) When social workers provide services to two or more persons who have a relationship with each other (for example, couples, family members), social workers should clarify with all parties (i) which individuals will be considered clients and (ii) the nature of the social workers' professional obligations to the various individuals who are receiving services. Social workers who anticipate a conflict of interest among the individuals receiving services, or who anticipate having to perform in potentially conflicting roles (for example, when a social worker is asked to testify in a child custody dispute or divorce proceedings involving clients), should clarify their role with the parties involved and take appropriate action to minimize any conflict of interest. Appropriate action may include negotiating and adjusting the nature of social workers' relationships with clients and other individuals with whom their clients have relationships, or withdrawing from roles in a manner that protects clients' interests to the greatest extent possible.

1.07 Privacy and Confidentiality: Clients

(a) Social workers should respect clients' right to privacy. Social workers should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing service. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.

(b) Social workers may disclose confidential information when appropriate with a valid consent from a client or a person legally authorized to consent on behalf of a client.

(c) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person or when laws or regulations permit or require disclosure without a client's consent. Disclosure of confidential information without client consent may be appropriate or necessary to arrange emergency services for a client or obtain professional consultation. Social workers may disclose confidential information to collect overdue payment for professional services when all other efforts have failed. In all instances, social workers should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed.

(d) Social workers should inform clients about the disclosure of confidential information, to the extent possible, and when feasible, before the disclosure is made. This applies whether social workers disclose confidential information as a result of a legal requirement or based on client consent.

(e) Social workers should discuss with clients and other interested parties the nature of confidentiality and limitations of clients' right to confidentiality. Social workers should review with clients circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. This discussion should occur

as soon as possible in the social worker-client relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.

(f) Social workers who provide services to families, couples, or groups should protect the privacy and confidentiality of all clients. However, social workers should inform clients who are receiving such services that legal requirements may, under limited circumstances, require the release of confidential client information.

(g) When social workers provide counseling services to families, couples, or groups, social workers should seek agreement among the parties involved concerning each individual's right to confidentiality of information shared by others. Social workers should inform participants in family, couples or group counseling that social workers cannot guarantee that all participants will honor such agreements.

(h) Social workers should inform clients involved in family, couples, marital or group counseling of the social worker's and/or agency's policy concerning the social worker's disclosure of confidential information among parties involved in the counseling. This includes the social worker's policy concerning disclosure of secret shared by parties involved in the counseling.

(i) When social workers receive requests for confidential information from third party payors, social workers should vigorously attempt to protect clients' confidentiality, unless clients have authorized such disclosure.

(j) Social workers should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be assured. Social workers should not discuss confidential information in public or semi-public areas (such as hallways, waiting room, elevators, private homes, and restaurants).

(k) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients during legal proceedings to the extent permitted by law. When a court of law or other legally authorized body orders social workers to disclose confidential or privileged information without a clients' consent and such disclosure could cause harm to the client, social workers should ask the court to withdraw or limit the order and/or maintain the records under seal and unavailable for public inspection.

(l) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients when responding to requests from members of the media.

(m) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of deceased clients.

(n) Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients' written and electronic records and other sensitive information. Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that clients' records are stored in a secure location and that clients' records are not available to others.

(o) Social workers should transfer or dispose of clients' records in a manner that protects confidentiality and is consistent with state statutes governing records and social work licensure.

(p) Social workers should take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information transmitted to other parties through the use of computers, electronic mail, facsimile machines, telephones and telephone answering machines, and other electronic or computer technology. Disclosure of identifying information should be avoided whenever possible.

(q) Social workers should take reasonable precautions to protect client confidentiality in the event of the social workers' termination of practice, incapacitation, or death.

(r) Social workers should not disclose identifying information when discussing clients for teaching or training purposes, unless the client has consented to disclosure of confidential information.

(s) Social workers should not disclose identifying information when discussing clients with consultants or in peer supervision, unless the client has consented to disclosure of confidential information or there is an emergency circumstance requiring such disclosure.

1.08 Access to Records

(a) Social workers should provide clients with reasonable access to records concerning them. Social workers who are concerned that clients' access to their records could cause serious misunderstanding or harm to the client should provide assistance in interpreting the records and consultation with the client regarding the records. Social workers should limit client access to social work records concerning them only in very limited circumstances when there is compelling evidence that such access would cause serious harm to the client. Only that portion of the record should be withheld. Both the client's request and the rationale for withholding some or all of the record should be documented in the client's file.

(b) When providing clients with access to their records, social workers should take steps to protect the confidentiality of other individuals identified or discussed in such records.

1.09 Sexual Relationships

(a) Social workers should under no circumstances engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with current clients, whether such contact is consensual or forced.

(b) Social workers should avoid engaging in sexual activities or sexual contact with clients' relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a close, personal relationship. Sexual activity or sexual contact with clients' relatives or other individuals with whom clients maintain a personal relationship has the potential to be harmful to the client and may make it difficult for the social worker and client to maintain appropriate professional boundaries. Social workers--

not their clients' relatives or other individuals with whom the client maintains a personal relationship--assume the full burden for setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries.

(c) Social workers should not engage in sexual activities or sexual contact with former clients because of the potential for harm to the client. In the exceptional circumstance of such a relationship, social workers--not their clients--assume the full burden of demonstrating that the former client has not been exploited, coerced, or manipulated, intentionally or unintentionally (based on such factors, for example, as the amount of time that has passed since the termination of the professional-client relationship, the duration of the professional-client relationship, the circumstances surrounding termination of the professional-client relationship, and the foreseeable likelihood of harm to the client or others).

(d) Social workers should not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship. Providing clinical services to a former sexual partner has the potential to be harmful to the individual and is likely to make it difficult for the social worker and individual to maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

1.10 Non-sexual Physical Contact

Social workers should not engage in physical contact with clients where there is a significant possibility of psychological harm to the client as a result of the contact (such as holding, cradling, or caressing clients). Social workers are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries that limit physical contact. Social workers who engage in physical contact with clients assume the full burden of demonstrating that their clients have not been and will not be harmed by such contact.

1.11 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a nature that is unwelcome or offensive.

1.12 Defamatory Language

Social workers should not use defamatory language in their written or verbal communications to or about clients. Social workers should use accurate and respectful language in all communications to and about clients.

1.13 Payment for Services

(a) When setting fees, social workers should ensure that the fees are fair, reasonable, and commensurate with the service performed. To the extent feasible, consideration should be

given to the client's ability to pay.

(b) Social workers should avoid accepting goods or services from clients as payment for professional services. Bartering arrangements, particularly involving services, create the potential for conflicts of interest, exploitation and inappropriate boundaries in social workers' relationships with clients. Social workers should explore and may participate in bartering only in very limited circumstances where it can be demonstrated that such arrangements are a widely accepted practice among professionals in the local community, considered to be essential for the provision of service, negotiated without coercion and entered into at the client's informed consent. Social workers who accept goods or services from clients as payment for professional services assume the full burden of demonstrating that this arrangement will not be detrimental to the client or the professional relationship.

(c) Social workers should not solicit a private fee or other remuneration for providing services to clients who are entitled to such available services through the social workers' employing agency.

1.14 Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity

When social workers must act on behalf of clients who are not able to make informed decisions or who have been adjudged legally incompetent, social workers should, safeguard the interests and rights of those clients.

1.15 Interruption of Services

Social workers should make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of care in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as unavailability, relocation, illness, disability, or death.

1.16 Termination of Services

(a) Social workers should terminate services to clients, and professional relationships with them, when such services and relationships are no longer required or no longer serve the clients' needs or interests.

(b) Social workers should not abandon clients. Social workers should withdraw services precipitously only under unusual circumstances, giving careful consideration to all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse effects. Social workers should assist in making appropriate arrangements for continuation of services when necessary.

(c) Social workers in fee-for-service settings may terminate services to clients who are not paying an overdue balance if the financial contractual arrangements have been made clear to the client, and if the clinical and other consequences of the current non-payment have been addressed and discussed with them client.

(d) Social workers should not terminate services to pursue a social, financial, or sexual relationship with a client.

(e) Social workers who anticipate the termination or interruption of services to clients should notify clients promptly and seek the transfer, referral, or continuation of services in relation to the clients' needs and preferences.

(f) Social workers who are leaving an employment setting should inform clients of all available options for the continuation of service and their benefits and risks.

2. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues

- # 2.01 Respect
- # 2.02 Confidentiality: Colleagues
- # 2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- # 2.04 Disputes Involving Colleagues
- # 2.05 Consultation
- # 2.06 Referral for Services
- # 2.07 Sexual Relationships
- # 2.08 Sexual Harassment
- # 2.09 Addressing Impairment
- # 2.10 Addressing Incompetence
- # 2.11 Reporting Unethical Conduct

2.01 Respect

(a) Social workers should treat colleagues with respect and represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of colleagues.

(b) Social workers should avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues with clients or with other professionals. Unwarranted negative criticism may include demeaning comments that refer to colleagues level of competence or to individuals' attributes such as race, ethnicity, national origin, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, or any other preference, personal characteristic, or status.

(c) Social workers should cooperate with social work colleagues and with colleagues of other professions.

2.02 Confidentiality: Colleagues

Social workers should respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of

their professional relationships and transactions. Social workers should ensure that such colleagues understand social workers' obligation to respect confidentiality and any exceptions related to it.

2.03 Interdisciplinary Collaboration

(a) Social workers who are members of an interdisciplinary team should actively participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the welfare of clients by drawing on the perspectives, values, and experiences of the social work profession. Professional and ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team as a whole and of its members should be clearly established.

(b) Social workers for whom a team decision raises ethical concerns should attempt to resolve the disagreement through appropriate channels. If the disagreement cannot be resolved social workers may pursue other avenues to address their concerns, consistent with client well-being.

2.04 Disputes Involving Colleagues

(a) Social workers should not take advantage of a dispute between a colleague and employer to obtain a position or otherwise advance the social workers own interests.

(b) Social workers should not involve clients in a dispute with a colleague or engage clients in any discussion of a conflict with a colleague.

2.05 Consultation

(a) Social workers should seek advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interests of clients.

(b) Social workers should keep informed of colleagues' areas of expertise and competencies. Social workers should seek consultation only from colleagues who have demonstrated knowledge, and competence related to the subject of the consultation.

(c) When consulting with colleagues about clients, social workers should disclose the least amount of information to achieve the purpose of the consultation.

2.06 Referral for Services

(a) Social workers should refer clients to other professionals when other professionals' specialized knowledge or expertise is needed to serve clients fully, or when social workers believe they are not being effective or making reasonable progress with clients and additional service is required.

(b) Social workers who refer clients to other professionals should take appropriate steps to

facilitate an orderly transfer of responsibility. Social workers who refer clients to other professionals should disclose, with clients' consent, all pertinent information to the new service providers.

(c) Social workers are prohibited from giving or receiving payment for a referral when no professional service is provided by the referring social worker.

2.07 Sexual Relationships

(a) Social workers who function as supervisors or educators should not engage in sexual activities or contact with current supervisees, students, trainees, or other colleagues over whom they exercise professional authority.

(b) Social workers should avoid engaging in sexual relationships with colleagues where there is potential for a conflict of interest. Social workers who become involved in, or anticipate becoming involved in, a sexual relationship with a colleague have a duty to transfer professional responsibilities, when necessary, in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

2.08 Sexual Harassment

Social workers should not engage in any sexual harassment of supervisees, students, trainees, or colleagues. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwelcome or offensive.

2.09 Addressing Impairment

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's impairment which is due to personal problems, psychosocial distress, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties, and which interferes with practice effectiveness, should consult with that colleague and assist the colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague's impairment interferes with practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the impairment should take action through appropriate channels established by employing agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

2.10 Addressing Incompetence

(a) Social workers who have direct knowledge of a social work colleague's incompetence should consult with that colleague in taking remedial action.

(b) Social workers who believe that a social work colleague's incompetence interferes with

practice effectiveness and that the colleague has not taken adequate steps to address the incompetence should take action through appropriate channels established by employing agencies, NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, and other professional organizations.

2.11 Reporting Unethical Conduct

(a) Social workers should cooperate in the implementation of this Code and abide by any disciplinary rulings based on it. They should also take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues.

(b) Social workers should be knowledgeable about established policies and procedures for handling concerns about colleagues' unethical behavior. Social workers should be familiar with national, state, and local procedures for handling ethics complaints. These include policies and procedures created by NASW, licensing and regulatory bodies, employing agencies, and other professional organizations.

(c) Social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should take action through appropriate channels. Social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek resolution by discussing their concerns with the colleague if such discussion is likely to be productive and does not violate any individual's right to confidentiality. If social workers' discussion with a colleague, or other informal attempts to address the concern, fail to resolve the problem, social workers should take action through formal channels (such as contacting a state licensing board or regulatory body, NASW committee on inquiry, or other professional ethics committees).

(d) Social workers should defend and assist colleagues who are unjustly charged with unethical conduct.

3. Social Worker's Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings

- # 3.01 Supervision
- # 3.02 Education and Training
- # 3.03 Performance Evaluation
- # 3.04 Records
- # 3.05 Billing
- # 3.06 Client Transfer
- # 3.07 Administration
- # 3.08 Providing for Continuing Education
- # 3.09 Commitments to Employers
- # 3.10 Labor-Management Disputes

3.01 Supervision

(a) Social workers should obtain supervision, when appropriate or required, in order to carry

out their professional responsibilities. Social workers should be familiar with professional standards concerning the extent to which supervision is appropriate or required.

(b) Social workers who provide supervision should have the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise appropriately and effectively.

(c) Social workers who provide supervision should do so only within their areas of knowledge and competence.

(d) Social workers who provide supervision should do so based on the most current information and knowledge related to supervision available in the profession.

(e) Social workers should provide supervision in a manner consistent with prevailing standards in the profession. Supervisors should be familiar with professional standards related to the format, content, frequency, duration and documentation of supervision.

(f) Social workers who provide supervision must exercise appropriate oversight and review of the scope and competence of supervisees' performance.

(g) Social workers who provide supervision should evaluate supervisees' performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.

(h) Social workers who provide supervision should discuss with supervisees the goals, objectives, and requirements of supervision and the mutual obligations of supervisor and supervisees (for example, tasks, assignments, scheduling, formal disclosure of information about the supervisees' performance, fees).

(i) Social workers should not engage in any dual or multiple relationships with supervisees in which there is a risk of exploitation of or potential harm to the supervisee. Social workers who provide supervision are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

3.02 Education and Training

(a) Social workers who function as educators, field instructors for students, or trainers should provide instruction only within their areas of knowledge and competence.

(b) Social workers who function as educators, field instructors for student, or trainers should provide instruction based on the most current information and knowledge available in the profession.

(c) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for students should evaluate students' performance in a manner that is fair and respectful.

(d) Social workers who function as educators, field instructors, or trainers should provide accurate and complete descriptions of the content, goals, and requirements of the educational offerings or training services they provide.

(e) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for student should ensure that clients are routinely informed when services are being provided by students.

(f) Social workers who function as educators or field instructors for students should not engage in any dual or multiple relationships with students in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the student. Social work educators and field instructors are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.

3.03 Performance Evaluation

(a) Social workers who have the responsibility for evaluating the performance of others should fulfill such responsibility in a fair and considerate manner, and on the basis of clearly stated criteria.

(b) Social workers who evaluate the performance of employees, supervisees, or students should share evaluations with them in a timely manner.

3.04 Records

(a) Social workers should ensure that documentation in records is accurate and reflective of the services provided.

(b) Social workers should include sufficient documentation in records to facilitate the delivery of services and to ensure continuity of services provided to clients in the future.

(c) Social workers' documentation should protect clients' privacy to the extent that is possible and appropriate.

(d) Social workers should store records following the termination of service to ensure reasonable future access. Records should be maintained for the number of years required by the state statutes or relevant contracts.

3.05 Billing

Social workers should establish and maintain billing practices that accurately reflect the nature and extent of services provided, and specifically by whom the service was provided in the

practice setting.

3.06 Client Transfer

(a) When an individual who is receiving services from another agency or colleague contracts a social workers for services, the social worker should carefully consider the client's needs before agreeing to provide services. In order to minimize possible confusion and conflict, social workers should discuss with potential clients the nature of their current relationship with other service providers and the implications, including possible benefits or risks, of entering into a relationship with a new service provider.

(b) If a new client has been served by another agency or colleague, social workers should discuss whether consultation with the previous service provider is in the client's interest.

3.07 Administration

(a) Social workers who are administrators should seek to ensure that adequate agency or organizational resources are available to meet client's needs. When necessary, social work administrators should advocate within and outside of their agencies for adequate resources to meet client's needs.

(b) Social workers should advocate for processes of resource allocation that are open and fair. When not all client's needs can be met, an allocation process should be developed that is non-discriminatory and based on appropriate and consistently applied principles.

(c) Social work administrators should seek to ensure that the working environment for which they are responsible is consistent with an encourages compliance with the NASW Code of Ethics. Social work administrators should take steps to address any conditions in their organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with the Code of Ethics.

3.08 Providing for Continuing Education

Social work administrators and supervisors should provide or arrange for continuing education and training for all staff for whom they are responsible. Continuing education and training should address current knowledge and emerging developments related to social work practice and ethics.

3.09 Commitments to Employers

(a) Social workers generally should adhere to commitments made to employers and employing organizations.

(b) Social workers should work to improve employing agencies' policies and procedures, and

the efficiency and effectiveness of their services.

(c) Social workers should ensure that employers are aware of social workers' ethical obligations as set forth in the NASW Code of Ethics and their implications for social worker practice.

(d) Social workers should not allow an employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders to interfere with their ethical practice of social work. Social workers should take appropriate action to ensure that their employing organization's practices are consistent with the NASW Code of Ethics.

(e) Social workers should accept employment or arrange student field placements only in organizations where fair personnel practices are exercised.

(f) Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate discrimination in the employing organization's work assignments and in its employment policies and practices.

(g) Social workers should be diligent stewards of the resources of their employing organizations, wisely conserving funds where appropriate and never misappropriating funds for unintended purposes.

3.10 Labor-Management Disputes

(a) Social workers may engage in organized action, including the formation of and participation in labor unions, to improve services to clients and working conditions.

(b) The actions of social workers who are involved in labor-management disputes, job actions, or labor strikes should be guided by the professional's values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. Reasonable differences of opinion exist among social workers concerning their primary obligation as professionals during an actual or threatened labor strike or job action. Social workers should carefully examine relevant issues and their possible impact on clients before deciding on a course of action.

4. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals

- # 4.01 Competence
- # 4.02 Acknowledging Credit
- # 4.03 Discrimination
- # 4.04 Private Conduct
- # 4.05 Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception
- # 4.06 Misrepresentation
- # 4.07 Solicitations
- # 4.08 Impairment

4.01 Competence

(a) Social workers should accept responsibility or employment only on the basis of existing competence or the intention to acquire the necessary competence.

(b) Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine, and keep current with, emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review emerging professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.

(c) Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics.

4.02 Acknowledging Credit

(a) Social workers should take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed and to which they have contributed.

(b) Social workers should honestly acknowledge the contributions made by others.

4.03 Discrimination

Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical disability.

4.04 Private Conduct

Social workers should not permit their private conduct to interfere with their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

4.05 Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception

Social workers should not participate in, condone, or be associated with dishonesty, fraud, or deception.

4.06 Misrepresentation

(a) Social workers should make clear distinctions between statements made and actions

engaged in as a private individual and as a representative of the social work profession, a professional social work organization, or of the social worker's employing agency.

(b) Social workers who speak on behalf of professional social work organizations should accurately represent the official position of the organization.

(c) Social workers should ensure that representations to clients, agencies, and the public of professional qualifications, credentials, education, competence, affiliations, services provided, or results to be achieved are accurate. Social workers should claim only those professional credentials they actually possess and take steps to correct any inaccuracies or misrepresentations of their credentials by others.

4.07 Solicitations

(a) Social workers should not engage in uninvited solicitation of potential clients who, because of their circumstances, are vulnerable to undue influence, manipulation or coercion.

(b) Social workers should not engage in solicitation of testimonial endorsements (including solicitation of consent to use a client's prior statement as a testimonial endorsement) from current clients or other persons who, because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence.

4.08 Impairment

(a) Social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or jeopardize the best interests of those for whom they have a professional responsibility.

(b) Social workers whose personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties interfere with their professional judgment and performance should immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.

5. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession

5.01 Integrity of the Profession

5.02 Evaluation and Research

5.01 Integrity of the Profession

(a) Social workers should work toward the maintenance and promotion of high standards of

practice.

(b) Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. Social workers should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession.

(c) Social workers should contribute time and professional expertise to activities that promote respect for the value, integrity, and competence of the social work profession. These activities may include teaching, research, consultations, service, legislative testimony, presentations in the community and participation in the professional organizations.

(d) Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research, and ethics. Social workers should seek to contribute to the profession's literature and to share their knowledge at professional meetings and conferences.

(e) Social workers should act to prevent the unauthorized and unqualified practice of social work.

5.02 Evaluation and Research

(a) Social workers should monitor and evaluate policies, the implementation of programs, and practice interventions.

(b) Social workers should promote and facilitate evaluation and research in order to contribute to the development of knowledge generally.

(c) Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully utilize evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice.

(d) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should consider carefully possible consequences and follow guidelines developed for the protection of evaluation and research participants. Appropriate institutional review boards should be consulted.

(e) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should obtain voluntary and written informed consent from participants, when appropriate, without any implied deprivation or penalty for refusal to participate, and with due regard for participants' privacy and dignity.

(f) Social workers engaged in empirically-based evaluation of practice should obtain clients' informed consent, when appropriate.

(g) Social workers should inform participants of their rights to withdraw from evaluation at any time.

(h) Social workers should ensure that participants in evaluation and research have access to appropriate supportive services.

(i) Social workers engaged in evaluation or research should protect participants from unwarranted physical or mental distress, harm, danger, or deprivation.

(j) Social workers engaged in the evaluation of services should discuss obtained information only for professional purposes and only with persons directly and professionally concerned with this information.

(k) Social workers who report evaluation and research results should protect participants' confidentiality by omitting identifying information unless proper consent has been obtained authorizing disclosure.

(l) Social workers should inform participants in evaluation and research of any limits of confidentiality.

(m) Social workers should report evaluation and research findings accurately.

(n) Social workers should educate themselves, their students, and colleagues about responsible research practices.

6. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society.

- # [6.01](#) General Welfare
- # [6.02](#) Public Participation
- # [6.03](#) Public Emergencies
- # [6.04](#) Social and Political Action

6.01 General Welfare

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people and their communities. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs, and promote social economic, political and cultural functions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

6.02 Public Participation

Social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.

6.03 Public Emergencies

Social workers should provide appropriate professional services in public emergencies, to the greatest extent possible.

6.04 Social and Political Action

(a) Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all persons have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities that they require in order to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice, and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

(b) Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited persons and groups.

(c) Social workers should promote conditions that encourage respect for the diversity of cultures and social diversity within the United States and globally. Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of, and confirm equity and social justice for, all people.

(d) Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination, exploitation, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, or any other preference, personal characteristic, or status.