

Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers

Preamble

The primary intention of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environments that make, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. "Client" is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to culture and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation-administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to empower the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individual needs and social problems.

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

- service
- social justice
- dignity and worth of the person
- importance of human relationships
- integrity
- competence

This compilation of core values reflects what is unique to the social work profession. Core values, and the principles that flow from them, must be believed within the context and complexity of the human experience.

Purpose of the NASW 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 is essential to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in which they work, or the populations they serve.

The *NASW Code of Ethics* serves six purposes:

1. The Code identifies core values on which social workers' conduct is based.
2. 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.
3. The Code is designed to help social workers readily assess considerations after professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise.
4. The Code provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable.
5. The Code articulates practitioners' role in the field in social work's mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards.
6. 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 procedures to adjudicate ethics complaints filed against its members.¹ In adjudicating its *Code*, social workers are required to cooperate fully in implementation, participate in *NASW* adjudication proceedings, and abide by any *NASW* disciplinary rulings or sanctions based on it.