



Social Workers  
Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

# code of conduct

for social workers

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## **Preamble**

This Code of Conduct covers the minimum professional standards of behaviour, integrity and conduct that apply to registered social workers and that should apply generally in the social work profession. The Social Workers Registration Board issues this code in accordance with section 105 of the Social Workers Registration Act, 2003.

Under the Code, social workers are expected to:


- ***Uphold high standards of personal conduct and act with integrity***
- ***Provide services at a competent level of professional practice***
- ***Respect and uphold the civil, legal and human rights of clients***

These minimum standards operate in a broader context that includes:

- ***Other relevant legislation***
- ***The Treaty of Waitangi***
- ***International standards and conventions including the International Federation of Social Workers Code of Ethics***
- ***The Code of Ethics which includes the Bicultural Code of Practice published by the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers***
- ***The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights***
- ***Other professional and employer codes of ethics practice and conduct.***

The Social Workers Registration Board recognises that no code can prescribe, in detail, every behaviour expected of a professional social worker. In addition to interpreting the Code in the wider context noted above, this Code must be interpreted taking account of the balance of responsibilities between employers and their professional staff. The Code must also be interpreted in the context of an individual circumstance. 'Client' may refer to an individual adult or child, a family, whanau or aiga, a group, an organisation or part of an organisation.

This Code of Conduct and guidelines may be updated by the Board from time to time.



Robyn Corrigan  
Chairperson  
Social Workers Registration Board  
20 May 2005

# **The Code of Conduct for Social Work Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand**

*As issued by the Social Workers Registration Board, in accordance with section 105 of the Social Workers Registration Act, 2003.*

## **1. To uphold high standards of personal conduct and act with integrity a social worker is expected to:**

- refrain from any professional or personal behaviour that puts at risk the individual's, and/or the profession's reputation and compromises the social worker's ability to work with the client in a fully professional and caring manner,
- not exploit their relationship with clients for personal or professional gain,
- provide the client with honest and factual information about the social worker's professional qualifications and experience,
- provide the client with details of the extent and nature of the services to be provided by the social worker and their agency and give details of the client's rights and opportunities as well as any obligations and risks associated with the provision of services,
- not enter into a sexual relationship with a client. This applies to a client's family or relatives, or a former client, when there is a risk the relationship will adversely affect the service provided to the client and/or the social worker's ability to fulfil his or her professional obligations,
- not become party to any conduct, as a supervisor or educator, with supervisees or social work students that could compromise the supervisee's or student's professional role with any client,
- not in any way harass a client, nor encourage or condone any form of harassment by others towards any client or colleague,
- act to redress harassment against a client or colleague in circumstances when this becomes known,
- facilitate an alternative means of providing the client with high quality service, should the situation arise where the social worker, by virtue of physical, emotional or mental impairment or limitation be unable to provide an appropriate level of service,
- discuss potential or actual conflicts of interest (both personal and professional) with the client and attempt to resolve them expeditiously. The social worker should bring any potential or actual conflicts of interest to their supervisor's or employer's attention. Unless a resolution is possible, the relationship with the client should be terminated with an appropriate referral being made,

- advise a client who is dissatisfied with the level, nature and/or quality of the service being provided, of the procedures for laying a complaint against the social worker or employing organisation,
- respond to complaints in a professional manner and implement changes to practice as necessary to address any issues raised in complaints.

**2. To provide services at a competent level of professional practice**  
*a social worker is expected to:*

**a. Competence**

- provide services to clients at a professional and competent level of practice,
- ensure that their skills and knowledge are relevant to any service to be provided,
- only practice within the boundaries set by their skills experience and competence (except as is necessary, under appropriate supervision, to extend the social worker's skills and professional development, provided client safety is not compromised),
- facilitate the involvement of other providers and professionals where it is in the interests of the client,
- have the necessary skills, experience and competence for the intended activity if engaged in teaching or research,
- when involved in a teaching context, ensure that students of social work gain an understanding of the relationship of this Code of Conduct to their present or future social work practice,
- discharge statutory functions according to the law and, insofar as it is possible, meet their obligations to their client within the context of those functions,
- provide services in an ethical and professional manner and to support and facilitate fair access to those services and resources that are required to improve the client's well-being,
- understand, as far as practicable, and act to support the client's cultural identity and integrity, recognising the significance of cultural identification and beliefs. If the social worker is unable to interrelate with the client in this manner the social worker should facilitate a referral to an appropriate person or service,
- consider and incorporate into the services provided to an individual client, any requirements associated with the provision of a culturally suitable service,
- ensure that the client is able to understand the language being used by the social worker. If language comprehension is limited the social worker should use a competent interpreter.

**b. Professional Development**

- seek and engage in supervision in professional practice on an ongoing and regular basis,
- utilise specialist or specific supervision whenever necessary as determined on a case-by-case basis,
- ensure that their practice skills and knowledge are improved and updated through continuous professional development and advancement,
- be prepared to cooperate with colleagues to explore and endeavour to resolve professional concerns,
- remain open to constructive and informed collegial comment on professional matters and any private matter that impacts on or has the ability to impact on the social worker's service to a client or clients,
- when in supervisory or management roles, counsel, mentor, support and encourage staff in a manner that encourages constructive personal and professional development, utilises high standards of management behaviour and contributes to greater client satisfaction and well-being,

**c. Balance of responsibilities between Employers and Social Workers**

- maintain and, if necessary and appropriate, critically review and contribute to the strengthening of their employer's structures, practice standards, policies, quality management practices and service improvements that impact upon the provision of social work services to clients,
- maintain accurate and impartial records covering interactions with a client, and to manage those records based on a sound understanding of how relevant legislation governs the collection of information, access to information held, and the disclosure of records in a social work context,
- endeavour to have a conflict resolved in a way that maintains the quality and integrity of the service provided to clients when a conflict arises between the social worker and their employer relating to standards of social work practice,

**d. Other Social Workers' Practice, whether registered or non-registered**

- if confronted by a colleague's professional negligence, unethical behaviour or misconduct or behaviour that impacts negatively on their social work practice or the profession, the social worker should address the matter through established organisational or legal channels. Serious negligence, unethical behaviour or misconduct by a Registered Social Worker should always be brought to the attention of the Social Workers Registration Board,
- alert the Registrar of the Social Workers Registration Board upon becoming aware of an individual incorrectly purporting to be a Registered Social Worker,
- take appropriate action upon becoming aware of an individual incorrectly purporting to hold social work qualifications or to have secured the right to practice in any area that requires an authority to practice.

**3. To respect and uphold the civil, legal and human rights of clients  
*a social worker is expected to:***

- respect the worth and dignity of clients and not associate with any form of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of age, beliefs, culture, gender, marital status, family status, intellectual, psychological and physical abilities, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and social and economic status of clients,
- uphold and promote the civil and legal rights of the client where possible,

**a. Self Determination**

- support and facilitate self-determination of clients. If the client's circumstances limit the possibility of self-determination the social worker must, where possible, protect the client's rights and welfare in any dealings with others who have a legal responsibility for the client,
- avoid compulsion unless there is a clear professional or legal justification for such a course of action,

**b. Right to privacy**

- respect the client's right to privacy and the confidentiality of any information provided in the course of the professional relationship,
- inform the client of the extent to which any other professionals or employees will be able to access client records,
- inform the client about the extent of confidentiality and the uses to which the information held by the social worker may be put, if, for compelling legal, ethical, or safety imperatives, any disclosure of information is required,

**c. Confidentiality and the Use of information**

- disclose information in order to protect the safety of a client or other person where legal or ethical requirements and/or exceptional circumstances occur. Whenever possible a social worker is expected to advise a client of such a circumstance,
- act without reference to a client or other person only when a legal requirement obligates the social worker.

**d. Informed consent**

- recognise client's rights provided under the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights to make informed choices and give informed consent, including the clients' rights and provider obligations in relation to persons of diminished competence
- obtain the informed consent of the client to any public disclosure for teaching, research or professional reasons, of information that may identify the client,
- ensure that, if the client is unable to give informed consent because of an inability to comprehend the full ramifications of providing consent, the social worker must confirm that consent has been obtained from a person legally empowered to provide authority (where such a person exists),

**e. Termination of Relationship**

- act to protect the interests and needs of the client by facilitating a referral to an appropriate person or service if the social worker is obliged to terminate the relationship with the client for professional or personal reasons,
- not undermine or damage the reputation and character of a social worker replaced because of professional circumstances.

**f. Research**

- obtain approval from an appropriate ethics body before undertaking a research project,
- incorporate the ethical values inherent in this Code of Conduct in methodologies employed by the social worker in teaching or research,
- obtain the informed consent of research participants and ensure that the welfare and safety of research participants is protected,
- protect the identity of research participants unless informed consent is gained to allow publication of identity where such publication would not infringe on the rights of any other person,
- record and report research results fairly and objectively.