

## **Newly Qualified Social Workers Standards – early implementation**

### **Background**

The NQSW Standards reflect the core characteristics of social work practice expected to develop within this early career stage. They relate to the consolidation and further development of the knowledge, skills, values, and ethical practice accessed during social work education.

The development of the NQSW Standards has been informed by existing frameworks used to support continuous professional learning including [Continuous Learning Framework \(CLF\)](#), [Step into Leadership](#) and the [Scottish Social Services Council \(SSSC\) Codes of Practice](#). They build on the [Standards in Social Work Education \(SISWE\)](#) and are underpinned by the same ethical principles (Appendix 1).

The NQSW Standards are common to all social work practice and are intended to be used within legislative and policy contexts including Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC), integrated health and social care for adults, community justice, The Promise, and the Review of Adult Social Care.

They are an integral part of the NQSW Supported Year which is being implemented on a small scale with ten identified employers from October 2021. Scottish Government will determine the status of the NQSW Supported Year and further implementation in 2022.

### **The NQSW Standards**

The transition from student to employment as an NQSW involves supporting the NQSW to be able to act effectively in demanding circumstances and often complex settings. It also involves supporting the NQSW to understand the unique contribution of social work, the power and authority afforded to the protected title and responding to ethical dilemmas that arise.

The NQSW Standards outline the foundation of professional social work practice at this early career stage. They describe the professional knowledge, skills, values and competence required for the role and the skills a NQSWs will continue to develop during the NQSW year and as registered social workers.

The NQSW Standards are interconnected; they are intended to be considered holistically and reflect the complexity of social work practice. NQSWs will work together with their supervisor to demonstrate their individual development across the standards.

Fundamental to the planning is an appreciation of [how social workers learn in the workplace](#) and the importance of workplace learning opportunities rather than a reliance on formal training courses.

This document sets out each standard, followed by a description of what this means at the NQSW stage and ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate this standard through their practice.

Further detail on the application of the NQSW Standards as part of the NQSW Supported Year approach has been developed in conjunction with the areas involved in the early implementation of the NQSW Supported Year.


This will add to the useful resources and [templates](#) already published on the [NQSW website](#).

### **Using the NQSW Standards - general principles**

- Each standard is aligned to core characteristics relevant to all social work practice, regardless of setting.
- The Standards should be considered holistically and provide a basis for professional development discussions and planning.
- All supervisors are encouraged to become familiar with the Standards and encourage NQSWs to consolidate and develop their practice across the Standards.
- Under each standard are examples of ways in which a NQSW demonstrates the Standards through their practice. This is not intended as an exhaustive list of indicators that must be evidenced.
- It is important to help the NQSW identify their areas of strength, consolidation, or development across the Standards.
- There is flexibility in how the NQSW evidences the Standards, fundamental to this is an appreciation of [how social workers learn in the workplace](#) and the importance of workplace learning opportunities rather than a reliance on formal training courses.
- Learning from the early implementation areas will help to shape the final version of the Standards.


**NQSW STANDARDS**

	<p><b>Ethics, values and rights-based practice</b> – develop an understanding of and apply ethical principles and values to all aspects of professional practice. Recognise sources of social inequality and take action to protect and advocate for human rights and social justice.</p>
	<p><b>Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice</b> – demonstrate knowledge and skills to support effective communication, collaboration and relationship-based practice in a range of settings. Actively involve and support the involvement of people receiving services, their families and carers to plan, implement and evaluate interventions.</p>
	<p><b>Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making</b> - develop competence and confidence in applying critical thinking, analysis, research, and best practice to inform professional judgement and decision making in all areas of practice including assessment and review.</p>
	<p><b>Promoting wellbeing, support and protection</b> – demonstrate and apply understanding of responsibility to actively promote the wellbeing, support and protection of children and adults at risk of harm, regardless of setting or context.</p>
	<p><b>Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts</b> - develop competence and confidence in managing complexity, risk, and uncertainty in professional decision making.</p>
	<p><b>Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice</b> - demonstrate commitment to continuous professional learning and inquiry which supports evidence informed practice and a wider culture of learning.</p>
	<p><b>Self-awareness and reflexivity</b> – recognise the impact of the demands of professional social work practice on self and others and develop the use of reflexivity to contribute to personal wellbeing and effective and sustainable practice.</p>
	<p><b>Professional leadership</b> - develop personal and professional authority as a social worker including when working collaboratively across agency and professional boundaries.</p>

<p>Standard 1</p> 	<p><b>Ethics, values and rights-based practice</b> – develop an understanding of and apply ethical principles and values to all aspects of professional practice. Recognise sources of social inequity and take action to protect and advocate for human rights and social justice.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Newly qualified social workers will continue to develop a strong ethical base that emphasises the importance of building a positive, professional relationship with people receiving services and their families, as well as with professional colleagues. At the newly qualified stage, they will begin to show an understanding of how to actively promote and defend human rights and begin to champion issues of social justice within the context of their work setting. The NQSW will develop their critical reflection skills to recognise and put aside any personal prejudices they may have, to work within guiding ethical principles and demonstrate professional practice.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understand and apply ethical principles and the <a href="#">SSSC Codes of Practice</a> in all aspects of my own practice and behaviour.</li> <li>understand and manage the complex balance of rights, responsibility, autonomy, freedom, and choice, with risk, wellbeing and protection.</li> <li>challenge and work to reduce social injustice through knowledge and analysis of the impact of social and structural factors on the lives of people – such as poverty, racism, poor housing, social exclusion, intersectional discrimination and disadvantage.</li> <li>promote and apply non-discriminatory, anti-oppressive practice by recognising and reflecting on peoples’ values and beliefs, diverse backgrounds, cultural characteristics, language requirements, needs and preferences and adjusting my practice as required.</li> <li>develop and apply the skill of advocating with or on behalf of people.</li> <li>value and demonstrate a range of skills and qualities which recognise and promote strengths, hope, self-determination and a rights-based approach.</li> <li>develop an understanding of and confidence in explaining my professional power and authority; my role in supporting peoples’ wellbeing, safety and protection.</li> </ul>


	<p>demonstrate good practice in recording and sharing sensitive and confidential information when there is a clear rationale to do so.</p> <p>actively engage with tools, resources and supports that encourage self-awareness and critical reflection on how my own experience, personal values and biases impact my practice.</p>
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<p>Standard 2</p> 	<p><b>Communication, engagement and relationship-based professional practice</b> – demonstrate knowledge and skills to support effective communication, collaboration and relationship-based practice in a range of settings. Actively involve and support the involvement of people receiving services and carers to plan, implement and evaluate interventions.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Newly qualified social workers will further develop and demonstrate their verbal, written and digital communication and engagement skills in a range of formal and informal settings including the legislative context of their work setting. They will begin to draw together theoretical knowledge and research to communicate effectively and confidently to a wide range of people, for different purposes and at different levels. As the NQSW progresses through the supported year their experience of communicating, collaborating and engaging in highly charged, complex or challenging situations will grow. NQSWs will reflect on and become more aware of power differentials, their professional authority, the use of self and relationship-based practice in developing and sustaining a relationship in changing and challenging situations and circumstances.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>value and work to build respectful, human relationships that acknowledge diversity and are culturally responsive.</li> <li>demonstrate ethical practice, professionalism, professional integrity and emotional intelligence in the management of my relationships with others.</li> <li>develop the skills to manage professional relationships, boundaries and endings with professional integrity, compassion and respect.</li> <li>recognise the importance of understanding a person’s communication and engagement preferences, and use my understanding of theory, technology and practice to inform and adapt my approach to meet their needs and abilities.</li> <li>use a range of skills and strategies to engage, communicate and build effective, empathetic relationships with people receiving services and carers, colleagues and other professionals in a range of settings and circumstances.</li> <li>value and take account of the expertise of people receiving services and their carers, and other professionals involved in their lives.</li> </ul>

	<p>advance my ability to communicate and explain clear professional reasoning, judgements and decisions in routine, complex and challenging situations including professional decision-making forums and legal hearings.</p> <p>value and promote the importance of sharing knowledge of research and best practice with people receiving services, their carers and others.</p> <p>develop confidence in identifying, collaborating and negotiating with others the need for statutory and procedural intervention, using professional authority as required.</p> <p>identify and analyse the supports and barriers to effective collaboration and participation in planning interventions and apply this knowledge to the process.</p> <p>develop and use skills and techniques to elicit views, manage change, resistance, conflict and crisis.</p> <p>value and apply the process of reviewing and evaluating interventions and outcomes with people receiving services and carers and other professionals to inform practice.</p> <p>collaborate with colleagues and a range of organisations to identify, assess, plan and deliver personalised services and outcomes-based approaches to improve situations and outcomes.</p>
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<p>Standard 3</p> 	<p><b>Critical thinking, professional judgement and decision making</b> - develop competence and confidence in applying critical thinking, analysis, research and best practice to inform professional judgement and decision making in all areas of practice including assessment and review.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Newly qualified social workers will develop their skills to critically reflect on their practice and analyse information to inform professional judgements, recommendations and decisions in a range of settings including the legislative context of their work setting. Their ability to provide a clear rationale verbally or in writing will play a key role in promoting self-determination, positive changes, support and protection. The NQSW will develop confidence and competence in gathering evidence, drawing on research and best practice to analyse and justify decisions. They will develop confidence in communicating their professional judgement and decisions to a variety of audiences including individuals, families, managers, other professionals and in legal hearings. They will use supports such as supervision to make careful and complex decisions such as how and when there may be the need to intervene or to support or facilitate change or transition. They will also develop the confidence to challenge decisions of their own organisation and other professionals if they believe that the needs of people receiving services are not being appropriately met.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>value working effectively in partnership with people receiving services and others to identify needs and risks, recognising the impact of social contexts and social injustice.</li> <li>develop skills to gather and critically analyse multiple sources of knowledge and concern to inform professional decision making, incorporating and evaluating existing and new information.</li> <li>access, understand and critically evaluate research findings and literature relevant to promote, inform and implement best practice in assessment and decision making.</li> <li>competently use assessment frameworks, processes and relevant legislation to assess and evaluate needs, assets, strengths and risks to agree a course of action to achieve positive outcomes.</li> <li>develop confidence in exercising professional judgement based on a critical analysis of all aspects of a situation and keep complete, clear, accurate and timely records of actions, decisions and outcomes.</li> </ul>




	<p>identify and value the need for consultation and supervision to support complex decision-making processes.</p> <p>demonstrate ability to make authoritative and informed judgements where early intervention can prevent escalation of problems.</p> <p>develop confidence in identifying, collaborating and negotiating with others the need for statutory and procedural intervention.</p> <p>present, verbally and in writing, clear evidence informed assessment of needs, support requirements and risks, to individuals, families and other professionals.</p> <p>develop confidence to use judgement and knowledge to challenge systemic and management decisions of organisations including my own, if I believe that needs are not being appropriately met.</p>
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<p>Standard 4</p> 	<p><b>Promoting wellbeing, support and protection –</b> demonstrate and apply understanding of responsibility to actively promote the wellbeing, support and protection of children and adults at risk of harm, regardless of setting or context.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Social workers must be aware of their responsibility to promote the wellbeing, support and protection of children and adults at risk of harm or abuse irrespective of role, setting and situation. At the NQSW level, social workers will be supported to progressively undertake work alongside more experienced colleagues in complex situations, plan and manage the delivery of care, safeguard the wellbeing of adults and children across the spectrum of protection areas and exercise statutory functions that the protected title allows. In doing this they will apply the principles of social justice and human rights and confidently and effectively learn how to challenge decisions, actions or behaviours that are not in the best interests of people receiving services or which lead to or increase harm. They will also begin to develop an understanding of the broader impact of the wellbeing, support and protection issues on others and act accordingly.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identify and take positive action, appropriate to own role, to promote the wellbeing, support and protection of vulnerable children and adults, regardless of the practice setting and context.</li> <li>develop knowledge of and apply theory and research about the importance of wellbeing and the nature of harm, neglect and risk across the lifespan.</li> <li>develop and apply knowledge about the processes, procedures, law and policy underpinning support and protection interventions and the role of self and others.</li> <li>develop knowledge and confidence to effectively apply the risk assessment and management procedures of own organisation.</li> <li>identify and take prompt action to deal with behaviour or situations that present a risk to people and reduce or contain the level of risk.</li> <li>contribute to the development, monitoring and implementation of a plan to protect people and appropriately respond to changing circumstances.</li> </ul>


	<p>value working collaboratively with others to respond to, assess, analyse and manage risk of harm and abuse and support the development of care/support planning to promote wellbeing and protection.</p> <p>identify and use appropriate tools, in conjunction with an individual, their family and other professionals promoting early intervention where appropriate.</p> <p>exercise professional judgement and analysis of evidence-informed practice in supporting positive risk taking while managing risk to individuals and the wider public.</p> <p>use established processes to confidently and effectively challenge decisions, actions or behaviours that are not in the best interests of people receiving services or which lead to or increase harm.</p>
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<p>Standard 5</p> 	<p><b>Working with complexity in unpredictable and ambiguous contexts</b> - Develop competence and confidence in managing complexity, risk, and uncertainty in professional decision making.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>NQSWs enter professional practice in a range of different settings including multidisciplinary teams and integrated services. NQSWs will begin to develop an understanding of their professional identity and how to demonstrate their professional influence within various roles and professional groups. They will be supported to gain knowledge and experience of how to become proactive in responding to the challenges and opportunities that come from evolving social policy and organisational contexts. They will become increasingly competent and confident in their role and manage professional challenges, power dynamics and differences in relation to practice. The NQSW will use supervision appropriately to develop an understanding of working with complexity in unpredictable, unanticipated, and ambiguous contexts. They will develop skills to balance the requirements of their role and any statutory functions, with an enabling approach to practice with individuals and communities.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate the applied knowledge, skills and theories required for effective social work practice.</li> <li>draw on the concepts of strength, resilience, vulnerability, risk and resistance to understand forms of harm and apply to practice.</li> <li>demonstrate advancing professional confidence, competence and autonomy in managing complex situations within social work practice.</li> <li>recognise the limits of own role, accountability and authority and seek supervision, guidance and support when required.</li> <li>uphold and demonstrate the distinctive role, responsibilities and contribution of social work in partnership working.</li> <li>manage sensitive and confidential information ethically according to agency and legal requirements.</li> <li>demonstrate professionalism, professional integrity, self-leadership and emotional intelligence in the</li> </ul>


	<p>management of conflict in relationships and in the decision-making process.</p> <p>consolidate and demonstrate appropriate use of professional authority, balancing authority and statutory functions with supporting and enabling others.</p> <p>critically reflect on my adherence to ethical principles and best practice when faced with ethical issues, dilemmas and conflicts.</p> <p>select, use and evaluate social work resources and interventions appropriate to peoples' identified needs and own context of practice.</p> <p>access, critically evaluate and confidently implement evidence-informed approaches and methods to analyse and manage complex and uncertain situations.</p>
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<p>Standard 6</p> 	<p><b>Use of knowledge, research and evidence in practice</b>          Demonstrate commitment to continuous professional learning and inquiry which supports evidence-informed practice and a wider culture of learning.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>NQSWs will recognise and value the opportunity to consolidate and continually develop and update the knowledge gained from education to ensure they achieve and maintain a level of practice and best possible outcomes for people who use services. They will have the opportunity to develop their skills to critically review and apply relevant knowledge from social work practice, professional and academic fields, legislative and policy frameworks and from the lived experience of people who use services. They will seek out opportunities to refresh their knowledge of theory, research and changes to policy and legislation and share this with others. NQSWs should expect and be provided with protected time to learn, professional supervision and relevant learning opportunities and to contribute to the wider culture of learning. They will understand how social workers learn in the workplace and value informal learning opportunities during their NQSW period and beyond.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>take responsibility for recognising gaps in own knowledge and skills and seeking ways of meeting professional developmental needs.</li> <li>engage in reflective dialogue and critical thinking to evaluate and enhance own development and support the development of others.</li> <li>proactively seek and integrate feedback from others on own practice to support development, including from people receiving services and their families and carers.</li> <li>consolidate knowledge about the social contexts in which people live and the impact of psychological, socio-economic, environmental and physiological factors on people’s lives.</li> <li>consolidate and further develop knowledge of the concepts of attachment, separation and loss, change, trauma and resilience and their impact on peoples’ lives.</li> <li>demonstrate and apply knowledge of current relevant law, policy and guidance to my practice, including understanding the supports, limitations and ethical challenges.</li> </ul>

	<p>demonstrate knowledge of and keep up to date with organisational and national policy and practice guidance, legislative changes, to ensure best practice.</p> <p>proactively seek, critically evaluate and apply a range of literature to inform own practice including factual knowledge, theoretical ideas and methodologies</p> <p>demonstrate research-mindedness using evidence informed approaches and methods to inform assessments, decision making, the management of complex issues and ethical challenges, and to continuously improve outcomes and professional practice.</p> <p>develop digital skills and capabilities for professional practice.</p>
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<p>Standard 7</p> 	<p><b>Self-awareness and reflexivity</b> – recognise the impact of the demands of professional social work practice on self and others and develop the use of reflexivity to contribute to personal wellbeing and effective and sustainable practice.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Self-awareness, reflection and reflexivity play an important role in social work practice. Social workers must be able to critically reflect on and take responsibility for their actions. At the NQSW stage, the worker should create and be provided with opportunities to practice these skills. The NQSW will demonstrate developing critical analysis and reflection skills, a growing awareness and examining their emotions, reactions and motives and the influence on their actions. They will begin to consciously challenge themselves and others, developing professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness of the internal and the external influences and challenges of practice. Engagement with professional supervision opportunities is central to professional practice and NQSWs should expect and be provided with support, supervision and time to undertake critical reflection and to enhance personal and professional wellbeing and resilience.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognise the value of work-life balance and personal well-being including their contribution to effective and sustainable practice.</li> <li>value and practice the use of reflexivity to identify, develop and apply strategies to promote my personal wellbeing. promote resilience and self-care and achieve a work life balance.</li> <li>understand the demands of professional practice and demonstrate how to recognise signs of vulnerability in myself, or colleagues and the action required to minimise risks to health.</li> <li>recognise the importance of self and effective use of self within relationships and social work practice.</li> <li>engage and relate effectively and ethically with people receiving services and other professionals, demonstrating professional integrity, empathy, and emotional intelligence.</li> <li>recognise organisational roles and responsibilities to support the workforce and manage the impact of demanding and complex workloads.</li> </ul>



	<p>develop and apply strategies to deal with professional concerns, conflict, challenges and change.</p> <p>seek and effectively use supervision, consultation and guidance to support critical reflection on practice, review development of skills and knowledge and evaluate professional development.</p> <p>demonstrate an awareness of own strengths, capabilities and personal and professional vulnerabilities and the contribution to and impact they have on own practice.</p> <p>develop and apply skills in workload management, identifying and prioritising work and meeting deadlines.</p>
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<p>Standard 8</p> 	<p><b>Professional leadership</b> - develop personal and professional authority as a social worker including when working collaboratively across agency and professional boundaries.</p>
<p>What this means for NQSWs</p>	<p>Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession which is protected in Scottish and UK law. Social workers should promote the profession and good practice, taking responsibility for the professional learning and development of self and others. The NQSW will demonstrate an understanding of their professional responsibilities as a registered worker. They will begin to develop their professional identity and understanding of their personal influence and self- leadership impacts on the profession. Their understanding will further develop by recognising that they are accountable to people receiving services, the public, employers and the SSSC.</p>
<p>Ways in which a NQSW may demonstrate the Standards through their practice.</p>	<p>I...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value, promote and articulate the social work role and how ethical social work practice can make a difference in peoples' lives.</li> <li>practice in a way which upholds the social work profession and promotes a positive social work identity.</li> <li>promote the leadership of people receiving services, listening to and valuing their lived experience, and supporting and enabling their participation.</li> <li>take initiative and use creative and innovative approaches to support individuals and families to achieve their goals.</li> <li>demonstrate leadership skills to motivate, influence and inspire others and improve outcomes.</li> <li>contribute constructively to team working and development</li> <li>demonstrate confidence in leading and contributing to professional and inter-professional meetings, facilitating effective collaboration and managing barriers and challenges.</li> <li>take an active role in professional meetings, networks and bodies to support own and others' learning and development.</li> </ul>

	understand my responsibility to seek, plan and undertake ongoing professional development.
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## Appendix 1 Ethical Principles

Ethical principles in social work apply from the beginning of qualifying training in a social worker's career, through the transition to the newly qualified practitioner and beyond. Social work emphasises the importance of building a positive, professional relationship with people receiving services as well as with professional colleagues. Negotiating ethical practice at every level within the complexity of social work tasks and therapeutic interventions must balance rights and self-determination against a duty of care and public protection.

In all these situations, social workers must recognise and put aside any personal prejudices they may have, and work within guiding ethical principles and accepted codes of professional conduct. Social workers must demonstrate ethical commitment within all aspects of professional practice. The ethical principles described in this document are consistent across the Standards in Social Work Education. They have been developed and agreed in partnership with academics, employers, other stakeholders and the SSSC following the most recent Review of Social Work Education.

These principles are also at the heart of the Health and Social Care Standards, which set out in detail what people who use services can expect. The SSSC Codes of Practice also sit alongside the ethical principles. The Codes set out the standards of professional conduct and practice that social workers must meet. Social workers must also be able to understand the implications of, and to work effectively and sensitively with, people whose cultures, beliefs or life experiences are different from their own.

The ethical principles say that social workers must:

<b>PRINCIPLE</b>	<b>THIS MEANS:</b>
<b>Social justice</b>	Embrace values such as the equal worth of all citizens and their right to meet their basic needs and have equal access to wealth, health, wellbeing, justice and opportunity. This involves commitment to the principles of social justice and taking responsibility for promoting it and challenging injustice.
<b>Respecting diversity</b>	Recognise and respect diversity, challenging negative discrimination on the basis of: age; gender or sex; gender identity; sexual orientation; religion; spiritual beliefs; culture; ethnicity; socio-economic status; ability; racial or other physical characteristics. This also involves treating the individual as a whole person within family, cultural, community, societal and political contexts.
<b>Human Rights and dignity</b>	Respect the inherent worth and dignity of all people and their rights as defined within the

	legislation. This also involves conveying empathy and compassion for people.
<b>Self-determination</b>	Facilitate peoples' right to self-determination, and respect peoples' rights to make their own choices and informed decisions, irrespective of their values and life choices, providing this does not threaten the rights and safety of others.
<b>Partnership, participation and co-production</b>	Promote the full involvement and participation of people receiving services, as far as they are able, in ways that address what matters to them and enables them to be empowered, unless it compromises the safety and wellbeing of self or others. This also involves identifying, developing and valuing the strengths and resources of people and communities.
<b>Honesty and integrity</b>	Appropriate use of self, maintaining personal and professional boundaries, honesty, responsible confidentiality management, and not abusing the trust of people receiving services. This also means taking responsibility for making ethical and evidence informed decisions and being accountable for actions.

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