

Knowledge and skills statement for Social Workers in Adult Services



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West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership



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The role of social workers working with adults

- The Care Act 2014 puts the principle of individual wellbeing and professional practice of the individual social worker at the heart of adult social care and signals a move away from care management as the overriding approach to working with adults.
- Social workers need to apply a wide range of knowledge and skills to understand and build relationships, and work directly with individuals, their families and carers to enable and empower them to achieve best outcomes. This should include undertaking assessments, planning care and support and making the best use of available resources to enable people to have better lives. Social workers should enable people to experience personalised, integrated care and support them to maintain their independence and wellbeing, cope with change, attain the outcomes they want and need, understand and manage risk, and participate in the life of their communities.
- Social work should focus on the links between the individual, their health and well-being and their need for relationships and connection with their families, community and wider society. Social workers in adult social care must understand and be able to explain the role of social work as part of the system of health and welfare support to individuals and families.
- They must understand the impact of poverty, inequality and diversity on social and economic opportunities and how these relate to people's health and wellbeing as well as the functioning of their families, particularly in connection with child protection, adult safeguarding and also empowering individuals who may lack mental capacity.



Person-centered practice

- Social workers should enable people to access the advice, support and services to which they are entitled. They should coordinate and facilitate a wide range of practical and emotional support, and discharge legal duties to complement people's own resources and networks, so that all individuals (no matter their background, health status or mental capacity), carers and families can exercise choice and control, (supporting individuals to make their own decisions, especially where they may lack capacity) and meet their needs and aspirations in personalised, creative and often novel ways.
- They should work co-productively and innovatively with people, local communities, other professionals, agencies and services to promote self-determination, community capacity, personal and family reliance, cohesion, earlier intervention and active citizenship. Social workers should also engage with and enable access to advocacy for people who may require help to secure the support and care they need due to physical or mental ill-health, sensory or communication impairment, learning disability, mental incapacity, frailty or a combination of these conditions and their physical, psychological and social consequences.



Safeguarding

- Social workers must be able to recognise the risk indicators of different forms of abuse and neglect and their impact on individuals, their families or their support networks and should prioritise the protection of children and adults in vulnerable situations whenever necessary. This includes working with those who self-neglect.
- Social workers who work with adults must take an outcomes-focused, person-centered approach to safeguarding practice, recognising that people are experts in their own lives and working alongside them to identify person centered solutions to risk and harm. In situations where there is abuse or neglect or clear risk of those, social workers must work in a way that enhances involvement, choice and control as part of improving quality of life, wellbeing and safety.

Social workers should take the lead in managing positive interventions that prevent deterioration in health and wellbeing; safeguard people (who may or may not be socially excluded) at risk of abuse or neglect, or who are subject to discrimination, and to take necessary action where someone poses a risk to themselves, their children or other people. Social workers who work with adults must be able to recognise and take appropriate action where they come across situations where a child or young person may be at risk.

- Social workers should understand and apply in practice personalised approaches to safeguarding adults that maximise the adult's opportunity to determine and realise their desired outcomes and to safeguard themselves effectively, with support where necessary.



Mental capacity

- Social workers must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and Code of Practice and be able to apply these in practice. They should always begin from the presumption that individuals have capacity to make the decision in question.
- Social workers should understand how to make a capacity assessment, the decision and time specific nature of capacity and hence the need to reassess capacity appropriately. They should know when and how to refer to a Best Interest Assessor.
- Social workers must understand their responsibilities for people who are assessed as lacking capacity at a particular time and must ensure that they are supported to be involved in decisions about themselves and their care as far as is possible. Where they are unable to be involved in the decision-making process decisions should be taken in their best interests following consultation with all appropriate parties, including families and carers. Social workers must seek to ensure that an individual's care plan is the least restrictive possible to achieve the intended outcomes.



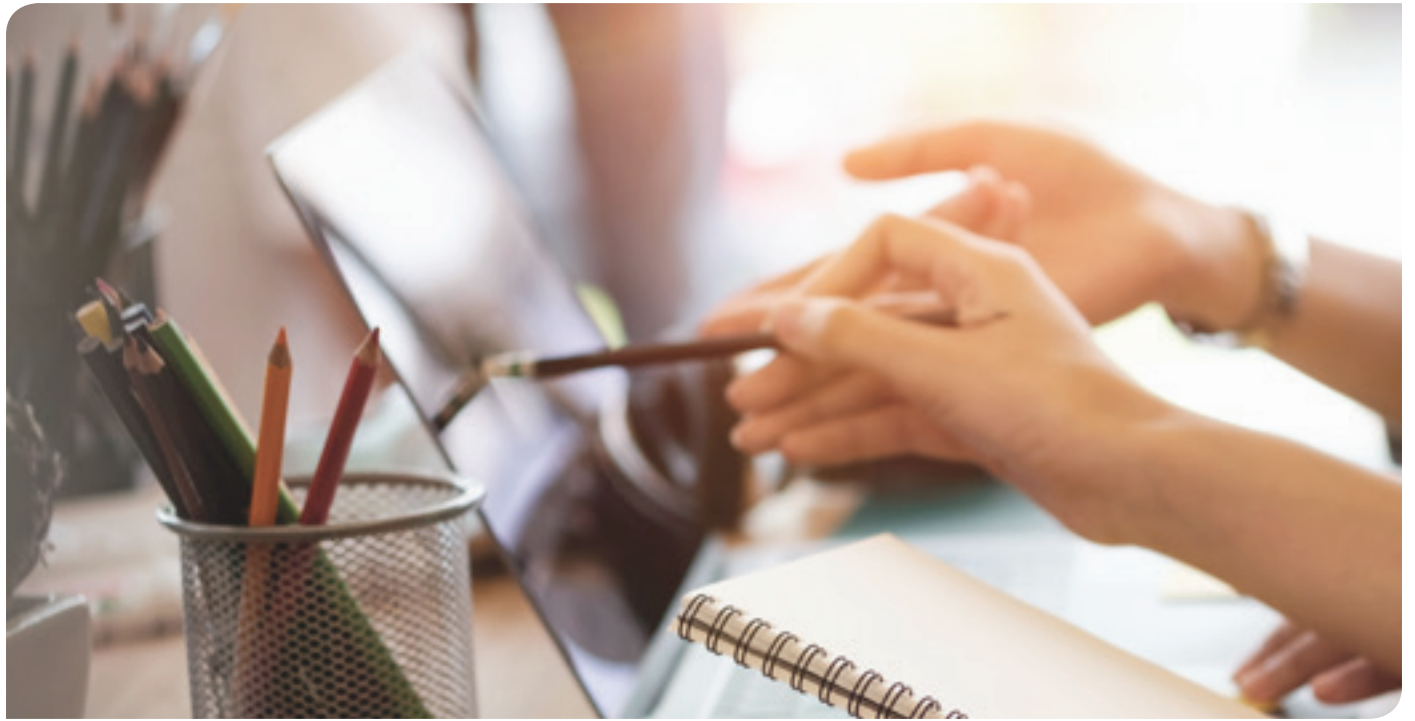
Mental capacity

- Social workers have a key leadership role in modelling to other professionals the proper application of the MCA. Key to this is the understanding that the MCA exists to empower those who lack capacity as much as it exists to protect them. Social workers must model and lead a change of approach, away from that where the default setting is “safety first”, towards a person-centered culture where individual choice is encouraged and where the right of all individuals to express their own lifestyle choices is recognised and valued.
- In working with those where there is no concern over capacity, social workers should take all practicable steps to empower people to make their own decisions, recognising that people are experts in their own lives and working alongside them to identify person-centered solutions to risk and harm, recognising the individual’s right to make “unwise” decisions.



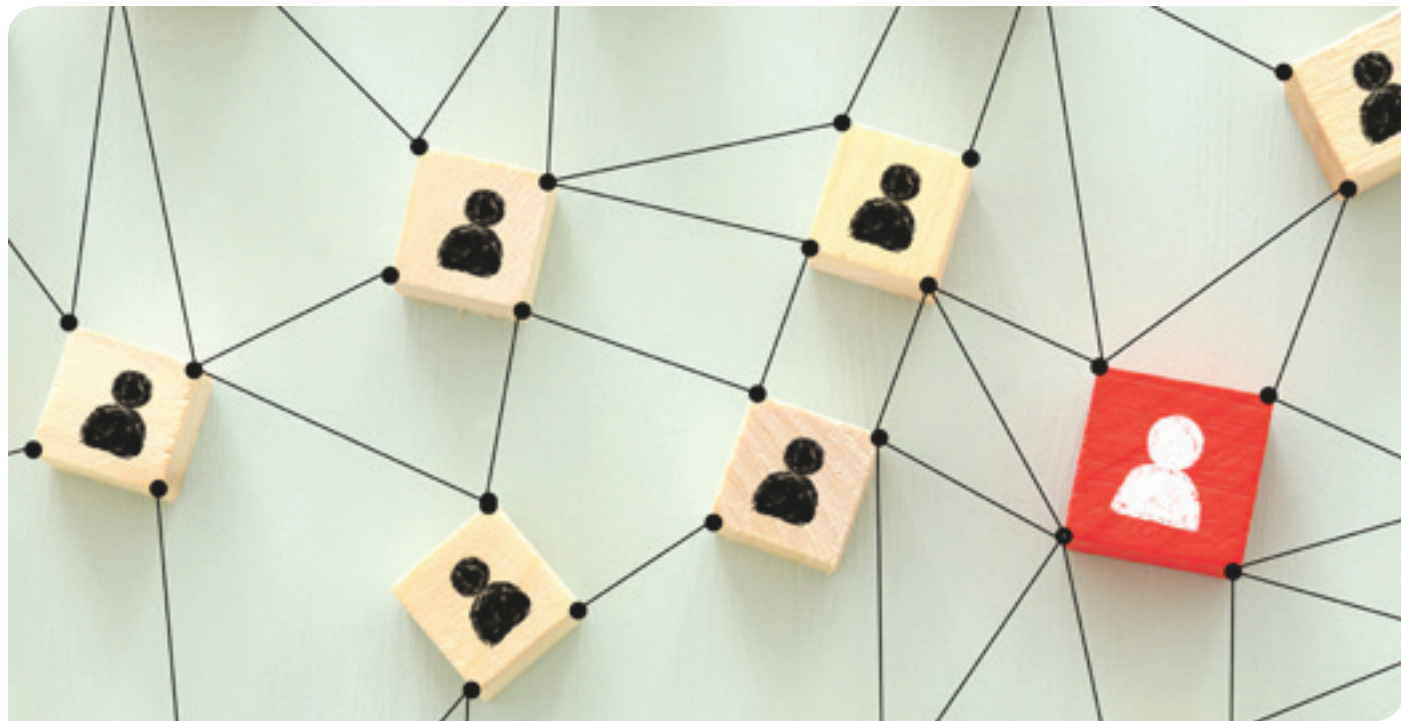
Effective assessments and outcome-based support planning

- In undertaking assessments, social workers must be able to recognise the expertise of the diverse people with whom they work and their carers and apply this to develop personalised assessment and care plans that enable the individual to determine and achieve the outcomes they want for themselves. The social worker must ensure the individual's views, wishes and feelings (including those who may lack mental capacity) are included as part of their full participation in decision making, balancing this with the wellbeing of their carers.
- Social workers should demonstrate a good understanding of personalisation, the social model of disability and of human development throughout life and demonstrate a holistic approach to the identification of needs, circumstances, rights, strengths and risks. In particular, social workers need to understand the impact of trauma, loss and abuse, physical disability, physical ill health, learning disability, mental ill health, mental capacity, substance misuse, domestic abuse, aging and end of life issues on physical, cognitive, emotional and social development both for the individual and for the functioning of the family.
- They should recognise the roles and needs of informal or family carers and use holistic, systemic approaches to supporting individuals and carers. They should develop and maintain knowledge and good partnerships with local community resources in order to work effectively with individuals in connecting them with appropriate resources and support.



Direct work with individuals and families

- Social workers need to be able to work directly with individuals and their families through the professional use of self, using interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence to create relationships based on openness, transparency and empathy. They should know how to build purposeful, effective relationships underpinned by reciprocity. They should be able to communicate clearly, sensitively and effectively, applying a range of best evidence-based methods of written, oral and non-verbal communication and adapt these methods to match the person's age, comprehension and culture.
- Social workers should be capable of communicating effectively with people with specific communication needs, including those with learning disabilities, dementia, people who lack mental capacity and people with sensory impairment. They should do this in ways that are engaging, respectful, motivating and effective, even when dealing with conflict - whether perceived or actual - anger and resistance to change.
- Social workers should have a high level of skill in applying evidence-based, effective social work approaches to help service users and families handle change, especially where individuals and families are in transition, including young people moving to adulthood, supporting them to move to different living arrangements and understanding the impact of loss and change.



Supervision, critical reflection and analysis

- Social workers must have access to regular, good quality supervision and understand its importance in providing advice and support. They should know how and when to seek advice from a range of sources including named supervisors, senior social workers and other professionals. They should be able to make effective use of opportunities to discuss, reflect upon and test multiple hypotheses, the role of intuition and logic in decision making, the difference between opinion and fact, the role of evidence, how to address common bias in situations of uncertainty and the reasoning of any conclusions reached and recommendations made, particularly in relation to mental capacity, mental health and safeguarding situations.
- Social workers should have a critical understanding of the difference between theory, research, evidence and expertise and the role of professional judgement. They should use practice evidence and research to inform the complex judgements and decisions needed to support, empower and protect their service users. They should apply imagination, creativity and curiosity to working in partnership with individuals and their carers, acknowledging the centrality of people's own expertise about their experience and needs.



Organisational context

- Social workers working with adults should be able confidently to fulfil their statutory responsibilities, work within their organisation's remit and contribute to its development. They must understand and work effectively within financial and legal frameworks, obligations, structures and culture, in particular Human Rights and Equalities legislation, the Care Act, Mental Capacity Act, Mental Health Act and accompanying guidance and codes of practice.
- They must be able to operate successfully in their organisational context, demonstrating effective time management, caseload management and be capable of reconciling competing demands and embrace information, data and technology appropriate to their role. They should have access to regular quality supervision to support their professional resilience and emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Social workers should work effectively and confidently with fellow professionals in inter-agency, multi-disciplinary and inter-professional groups and demonstrate effective partnership working particularly in the context of health and social care integration and at the interface between health, children and adult social care and the third sector.



Professional ethics and leadership

- Social workers should be able to explain their role to stakeholders, particularly health and community partners, and challenge partners constructively to effect multi-agency working. They should contribute to developing awareness of personalisation and outcome-based approaches to improving people's lives. Social workers should be able to demonstrate the principles of social work through professional judgement, decision making and actions within a framework of professional accountability.
- They should be able to work collaboratively to manage effectively the sometimes competing interests of service users, their families and their carers ensuring that the needs of all parties are appropriately balanced, but that where children are involved, the children's interests are always paramount.

They should be able to acknowledge the inherent tensions where there is a dual role of care and control; be able to meet eligible needs within limited resources and manage the emotions and expectations of service users and carers. They should be able to identify potential deprivations of liberty and understand the process for assessing and authorising these in individuals' best interests.

- They should feedback the views and experiences of clients and their colleagues to contribute to the continued improvement of services, policies and procedures within the organisation. They must be able to recognise and address poor practice and systemic failings which put people at risk, whether in their own organisation or the organisations and institutions with which they are working, making appropriate use of whistle-blowing procedures.



Level of capability: social worker working in an adult setting at the end of their first year in employment

- By the end of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment social workers working in an adult setting should have consistently demonstrated proficiency in a wide range of tasks and roles. For example, they will be able to complete assessments of need independently, which start from a perspective of the service users' desired outcomes and have become more effective in their interventions; deal with more complex situations; develop respectful and situation appropriate professional relationships, thus building their own confidence; and earn the confidence and respect of others.
- They will have a good understanding of risk assessment and positive risk taking and be able to apply this to practice to ensure person centered planning approaches and individual rights are upheld. They will have developed confidence in working within multidisciplinary settings, understanding their roles and be able to maintain and express a clear social work perspective.



Level of capability: social worker working in an adult setting at the end of their first year in employment

- They will have experience and skills in relation to a particular setting and user group, be able to understand and work within the legal frameworks relevant to adult settings, in particular, the Mental Capacity Act, Mental Health Act and the Care Act, and fully operate within the organisational context, policies and procedures. They will be able to confidently undertake mental capacity assessments in routine situations; to identify and work proactively and in partnership around safeguarding issues and have demonstrated the ability to work effectively in more complex situations.
- They will seek support in supervision appropriately, whilst starting to exercise initiative and evaluate their own practice. For example, they should take responsibility for cases allocated to them, be proactive in identifying issues and recommending actions, but be aware of when to seek further advice and support in more complex situations. They will be able to reflect on their practice and continue to identify learning and development to further consolidate their knowledge and skills. They will have developed some resilience and leadership skills and be able to demonstrate sound professional judgment and will know how to argue for appropriate resource allocation to meet assessed needs.

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