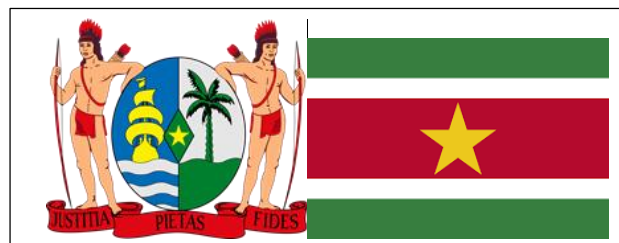


Code of Ethics

PROFESSIONAL CODE FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL





Preface

We present to you the first edition of the professional code for social workers in Suriname. This document was developed because until now there were no clear guidelines that social work professionals could use to carry out social work.

The Association of Social Workers has set itself the goal of making all that is necessary available to enable SOCIAL WORKERS in Suriname to present themselves as respected professionals. This document is produced as part of the formulated strategic plan 2017 - 2020.

The professional code reflects the principles, values and norms associated with the profession. It also provides guidance on how to act when faced with ethical dilemmas at work.

As a social worker, you are expected to use the code when reviewing your actions and those of your colleagues.

On behalf of the other members of the board, I would like to take the liberty of thanking each and every one who in whatever form offered their support in the realization of this product.

I also express the hope that the professional code will serve as a tightening of the profession in order to elevate it to the true profession that it is.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Plet - Burleson Norville BA.

Chairperson Association of Social Workers in Suriname

Paramaribo, 15 November 2020



Reading Guide

The structure of the professional code has been kept very simple. The intention is that the reader can look up information quickly and efficiently.

The code consists of two parts:

1. The client in relation to the client and client systems
2. The social worker in relation to the profession and professional colleagues

In the first section, topics such as transparency, privacy, termination of employment, cultural awareness, etc. are discussed. The second section elaborates on the guidelines for social workers in relation to the profession and professional colleagues.

The Code also provides the reader with information on ethical dilemmas and the core values used. It also highlights acting in ethical dilemmas.

The annex contains the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

For whom is the professional code intended?

The professional code is in principle intended for every SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONER. As social workers are active in different fields and have different competences and tasks, some items may not apply to all professional colleagues.

Furthermore, the professional code is intended for citizens to test the services of the professional.



CODE OF ETHICS

A code of ethics or professional code, provides general guidelines and a description of the principles, norms and values that according to the Association of Social Workers in Suriname [VSWS] must be observed within social work.

Furthermore, the professional code also provides guidelines for acting in problem situations. Based on the professional code, social workers adhere to fundamental human and children's rights, as described in international treaties, i.e.:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights [10.12.1949 U.V.R.M.];
2. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child [04.12.1975];
3. Other Conventions regarding civil and political rights and the elimination of discrimination in the broadest sense of the word.

The importance of the professional code

The professional code offers a coherent set of principles and rules with regard to the exercise of the profession as a social worker. The professional code is a guideline for acting as the social worker. It does not describe in detail how to act, but gives guidelines and starting points for the social worker to act professionally in the practice of the profession. The social worker can then make responsible decisions and substantiate how she/he came to the decision.

Furthermore, the Code summarizes the general ethical principles, which reflect the core values of the profession and establishes a set of specific ethical standards to be used as a guide for social work.

Finally, the professional code is there to help social workers make appropriate decisions when professional obligations conflict and/or ethical dilemmas arise.



Responsibility

The VSWS has taken as a starting point to use the basic components to stimulate the professionalism of the professionals:

1. **Positional component:** Professionals try to strengthen the position of their profession.
2. **Content component:** Professionals develop their knowledge and learn new methods.
3. **Autonomy component:** Professionals pursue a work situation in which they can make their own decisions.

The **autonomy component** gives the social worker independence and room to act. Social workers allow themselves to be sharpened by colleagues and professional organizations, in order to guarantee a high quality service that can be tested.

Professional autonomy therefore also requires the willingness to bear responsibility for acting professionally (anonymized) towards citizens/clients, professional colleagues, employer or commissioner and the society. A professional code gives clients, citizens, employers and commissioners clarity about what they can expect from (the conduct of) social workers. (Buitink & Steenmeijer, 2018)

The core values of social work

“Social work is a practice-oriented profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change, social cohesion and the emancipation and independence of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to social work. Strengthened by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and relevant local knowledge, social work stimulates people and institutions to face life's challenges and improve the well-being of individuals and the society.”

Definition of Social Work by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW)



Our core values are the ethical compass for social work and provide the foundation from which the work is done. Those values form the framework within which social workers carry out their work in all safety.

The core values are the reflection of social work. Together with the basic principles resulting thereof, these values should be in balance, taking into account the complexity of the human perception.

Core values

1. Respect
2. Social justice
3. Discretion
4. Integrity
5. Responsibility
6. Innovation
7. Engagement



Dealing with ethical dilemmas

Professional ethics includes all the written and unwritten rules which the professional must comply with in the exercise of his or her profession. It provides guidelines for the expertise and gives structure to the mutual relationship between professionals and clients.

Ethical dilemmas occur in many practical situations. And when the social worker is indeed confronted with moral dilemmas in his/her work, this requires professional considerations and often also work and/or team consultations.

How to act in case of ethical dilemmas?

The social worker bears the responsibility for carrying out the work as expertly as possible. There are also standards on this subject in the professional code. The professional code does not give concrete advice, but is a practical guide in this respect. The decision is made by the social worker him/herself, as much as possible in coordination with colleagues or the designated supervisor.

If the social worker finds him/herself in an ethical dilemma, he/she will examine which themes clash with each other [e.g. parenthood, puberty, patient autonomy, etc.]. Taking into account the core values, a choice is made between action alternative A or B.

Example:

- *Cultural perception of the client clashes with the treatment plan of the physician.*
- *The social worker can be involved to such an extent that it conflicts with the professional distance or tension between support and correction.*
- *Disciplinary measures of parents do not comply with the rules within the methods of punishment and rewarding in parenting.*
- *A supportive attitude clashes with the desired self-sufficiency of the citizen.*



Ethical code of the client and the client system

Engagement with clients

1. The fundamental responsibility of social workers is to promote the well-being of clients or [his/her] client system(s).

Autonomy

1. Social workers respect and promote the rights of clients to self-determination [autonomy] and self-sufficiency. In this context, the social worker will present all available possibilities and solution models for the realization of the goal agreed for the counseling.
2. Social workers should inform clients about the:
 - provided service;
 - manner of the service provision;
 - and the partners [organizations] they are working with.

Transparency

1. Social workers should use clear and understandable language to inform clients about:
 - The purpose of the service provision;
 - The risks associated with the service provision;
 - The limitations of the service provision;
 - The relevant costs and or alternatives;
 - The right of the client or the client system to refuse approval for the counseling; and
 - The duration of the treatment.

With regard to services within the forced framework [penal institutions], the social worker will have to provide information about the nature and scope of the services and about the extent to which clients have the right to refuse services.

2. Social workers should give clients the opportunity to ask questions



3. Social workers should provide clients with the opportunity to discuss cases concerning treatment or counseling.
4. In cases of illiterate clients or clients who have difficulty understanding the language of communication, the social worker should use all available resources to promote the clients' understanding and insight.

This can be done by providing detailed explanations to clients or where possible by consulting a qualified interpreter or translator.

Competency of the social worker

1. Social workers only offer services in which they are competent. This falls within the limits of their education, training, certification, knowledge or other relevant professional experience.
2. When there are no existing protocols in a new area within the work field, the social worker will discuss the steps to be taken with the employer or supervisor. The agreed protocol or working procedure is then laid down.

In order to guarantee the quality of service, periodic supervision is required.

Cultural awareness and social cultural diversity

1. Social workers understand culture and cultural influences in relation to human behavior and society.
2. Social workers have knowledge of the special characteristics that exist in '*all*¹' cultures and as such they shall acknowledge and tolerate and/or accept them
3. Social workers have knowledge of the various cultures in the country and take them into account when performing their service

¹ As known in Suriname



Conflicts of interest

1. Social workers should avoid conflicts, which form an obstacle to the exercise of professional attitude, and should strive for impartial judgment in conflict situations.
2. Social workers inform clients in a timely manner when an actual or potential conflict of interest arises. In this case, she/he will take steps to solve the problem.

In some cases, protecting the interests of the client or the client system may require a termination of the professional relationship with a proper referral.

3. Social workers should not take personal advantage of a professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political or business interests.
4. Social workers should not enter into double or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the [former] client.

In cases where double or multiple relationships are unavoidable, social workers must take steps to protect clients and are responsible for establishing clear, deliberate and culturally sensitive boundaries.

5. When social workers provide services to two or more persons who have a relationship with each other (e.g. married couples, family members), social workers should clarify which individuals are considered clients and what the nature of the professional agreement is in relation to the different actors within the service provision.
6. Social workers should be aware that placing personal information on professional websites or other [social] media can lead to boundary confusion.
7. Social workers should avoid communication systems (such as social network sites, online chat, e-mail, text messages, telephone and video) based on personal or non-work related goals from their profession.
8. Social workers should be aware that their involvement with groups on social media [e.g. FACEBOOK] based on race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, mental or physical ability, religion, immigration status and other personal preferences, may affect their ability to work effectively with/for certain clients



Privacy and confidentiality

1. Social workers must respect the client's right to privacy.
2. Social workers must also protect their own right to privacy.
3. Social workers may not request private information from or about clients who are not in the counseling process, except for urgent professional reasons that support/need/are essential to/for the service. Once personal information is shared, the standards of confidentiality apply
4. Social workers are not allowed to provide confidential information to third parties, unless clients have given their consent to do so.
5. Social workers are not allowed to publish/release confidential information. If required, they will do so after obtaining consent from the client or a person legally authorized to give consent on behalf of a client.
6. Social workers should properly store, where possible encrypt, the confidentiality of all information obtained in the context of professional services
7. The general expectation is that social workers handle the information entrusted to them confidentially.

However, in cases of serious, predictable and imminent harm to a client or others, the social worker can share the information with partners who can act in the client's best interest.

In all cases, social workers must maintain discretion and disclose or reveal as little information as possible. Only information that is directly relevant to the purpose of reporting should be disclosed.



8. Social workers inform their clients about the reporting of confidential information to third parties and the possible consequences. Preferably, before the notification takes place, regardless of the nature of the reason for reporting [based on a legal requirement or consent of the client].
9. When a social worker provides psychosocial support to families, couples or groups, she/he should agree with the parties concerned on each individual's right to confidentiality and the duty to maintain the confidentiality of information shared by others.
This agreement also includes the means of information exchange between the parties [by mail, telephone or in writing].
10. Social workers should inform clients who are involved in family, couples, marriage or group sessions about the services and the responsible organization
11. Social workers should develop policies and procedures regarding breaches of confidential information and should disclose these to clients.
12. It is strictly forbidden to post information obtained professionally on professional websites or other forms of social media.

Documentation and reporting

1. Social workers document the information about the services offered.
2. The documentation of social workers should protect the privacy of clients as much as possible and should only contain information that is directly relevant to the service provision.
3. Social workers try as much as possible to record the applied intervention method and the result thereof, both in writing and digitally.



Physical contact

1. Social workers avoid intimate physical contact. Especially if the client suffers psychological and/or emotional damage as a result of the contact (such as embracing or caressing clients).

Sexual harassment

1. Sexual harassment is not allowed. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances; sexual recruitment; requests for sexual favors; and other verbal, written, electronic or physical contact of a sexual nature.

Language use

1. Social workers shall, as much as possible, try to keep the use of language either written or oral, businesslike

Payment for services

1. When determining compensations, social workers must ensure that the compensations are reasonable and in proportion to the delivered services. The social worker can consult with the client about the payment, if the client indicates that his/her financial means are limited.
2. Social workers should be careful not to place themselves or the organization in a blackmailing position.
3. Arrangements to *exchange* services, create potential situations of conflict of interest, exploitation, blackmail and unclear boundaries in the relationship social workers/clients, are not allowed
4. Social workers may not request private compensation or any other form of compensation for the provision of services to clients who are entitled to such available services through the employer or the agency of the social worker.



Clients who have no decision-making power

1. Social workers enter into consultation with the legal representative [trustee] of the client who has no decision-making power.
2. If the social worker is recruited to act as a representative of the client who has no decision-making power, she/he shall at all times safeguard the interests and rights of the clients.

Termination of services

1. Social workers will make every effort to ensure the continuity of their services. If the services are interrupted due to factors such as the client's accessibility, transfer, illness, mental or physical ability or death, they will use all available resources to terminate the counseling in an appropriate manner.
2. Social workers terminate their services only in special cases². In these cases, all factors that could adversely affect the client will have to be considered. The social worker should make appropriate arrangements to continue the service when needed.
3. Social workers will, in situations where their own safety is endangered, immediately break off the service relationship after consultation with the organization where they are employed.
4. Social workers should terminate the service provision to clients and the professional relationship with them when such service and relationship is no longer necessary or no longer meets the client's needs and/or interests.

Social workers must ensure that clients who still need services are not abandoned.

² accessibility, transfer, illness, mental or physical ability or death of the client and suchlike



5. Social workers may not terminate the service provision to pursue a social, financial or sexual relationship with a client.
6. Social workers who anticipate the termination or interruption of services to clients should notify clients immediately and seek the transfer, referral or continuation of services related to the clients' needs and preferences.
7. Social workers who terminate their employment with the organization where they are employed must inform clients of the options available for the continuation of services and of the benefits and risks of the options.
8. Social workers should store data [data, records] after the termination of service provision to ensure progress of the services. Records must be retained for the number of years required by relevant laws.

Referral for services

1. Social workers should refer clients to other professionals when the specialized knowledge or expertise is needed to fully support clients.
2. When the social worker is of the opinion that the client does not respond sufficiently to the provided counseling or that the client does not make sufficient progress, she/he will, after consultation, ensure a timely referral of the client.
3. Social workers who refer clients to other professionals should provide an orderly and appropriate transfer of the treatment plan, progress and responsibility.
4. Social workers who refer clients to other professionals must, with the client's consent, disclose all relevant information to the new service providers.
5. It is forbidden to make a referral to a social worker who does not provide professional services.



Social provisions

1. Social workers should advocate living situations that are conducive to meeting the basic human needs [self-realization and self-development] and should encourage social, economic, political and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

Social and political action

1. Social workers advocate that all Surinamese have equal access to social and psychosocial services and opportunities they need to guarantee their livelihood and to fully develop themselves.
2. Social workers are aware of the impact of political involvement on a social economic level.



Ethical code of the profession and professional colleagues

Integrity

1. Social workers work to maintain and pursue norms and standards in the profession.
2. Social workers safeguard and promote the values, ethics, knowledge and mission of the profession.
3. Social workers protect the integrity of the profession and promote and safeguard this through:
 - a. research and data collection;
 - b. advocating for vulnerable groups and
 - c. critically following the developments in the profession.
4. Social workers should devote time and expertise to activities that promote the integrity and prestige of the profession

These activities can consist of organizing training courses, workshops etc., education, research, deliberations, services, presentations in the community and participation in professional organizations.

5. Social workers contribute to the knowledge base of social work by sharing their expert information with colleagues within their own field of work.
6. Social workers contribute to the enrichment of professional literature.
7. Social workers do not hesitate to share their knowledge and skills with their colleagues and others during professional meetings and conferences.
8. Social workers should prevent and intervene in unethical and dysfunctional practices within social work.



Evaluation of services

1. Social workers monitor the proper implementation of programs and effective intervention methods.
2. Social workers need to look critically at current information that is applicable to the performance of the work and keep track of this.
3. Social workers engaged in evaluation or research must adhere to the applicable ethical standards of (international) research.
4. When using digital technology to facilitate evaluation or research, social workers should ensure that participants provide written consent for the use of such technology.
5. Social workers assess whether the participants can use the technology and, if applicable, provide adequate alternatives to participate in the evaluation or research.

Respect

1. Social workers treat colleagues with respect and are transparent about their qualifications, views, responsibilities and obligations.
2. Social workers should avoid unfounded negative criticism from colleagues in oral, written and digital correspondence with clients or with other professionals.

Negative criticism could be: *humiliating remarks that refer to the level of competence of colleagues or individual characteristics such as race, ethnicity, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical ability.*

Confidentiality

1. Social workers handle sensitive information passed on based on a professional cooperation, in a confidential manner.
2. Social workers should ensure that colleagues understand the duty of social care regarding the safeguarding of confidentiality and that they respect any related exceptions.



Interdisciplinary cooperation

1. Social workers who are members of an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary team must actively participate and contribute to decision making, even more so when these decisions affect the well-being of clients. By making use of the perspectives, values and experiences from the profession of social work, the social worker will substantiate her/his contribution.

Professional and ethical obligations of the interdisciplinary team as a whole and of its individual members must be clearly defined.

2. Social workers for whom a team decision raises ethical questions must resolve the conflict through appropriate channels [interview].

Conflicts

1. Social workers should not take advantage of a dispute between a colleague and an employer in order to obtain a position or otherwise promote the social workers' own interests.
2. Social workers may not use clients in disputes with colleagues.
3. Social workers avoid open and inappropriate discussions and/or other kinds of conflicts in the presence of clients.

Consultation and referral

1. Social workers should seek the advice and counsel of colleagues when information is in the client's best interest.
2. Social workers should try to keep up with the expertise and competencies of colleagues.
3. Social workers should consult as much as possible with colleagues who have demonstrated knowledge, expertise and competence on the subject of the consultation.



4. When requesting peer consultation, the social worker should try to handle the client's information discreetly.

Limitations and incompetence of colleagues

1. Social workers who have direct knowledge of a condition of a colleague that is due to personal problems, psychosocial strain, substance abuse or mental health problems and which disrupts the effectiveness of the practice should, if possible, consult with that colleague and assist the colleague to take corrective action.
2. Social workers who believe that a colleague's impairment disrupts the effectiveness of the service and that the colleague has not taken adequate measures to address the disruption should take action through appropriate channels identified by employers, VSW and regulatory agencies, and other professional organizations.

Unethical actions of colleagues

1. Social workers should take actions to discourage, prevent and correct unethical behavior of colleagues, including unethical behavior on social media.
2. Social workers must be aware of established policies and procedures for dealing with (concerns about) unethical conduct of colleagues.
3. Social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should seek solutions by discussing their concerns with the colleague.
4. If necessary, social workers who believe that a colleague has acted unethically should take action through the appropriate formal channels.
5. Social workers should defend and assist colleagues who are falsely accused of unethical behavior.

Sexual relations

1. Social workers who act as supervisors or who are in the educational field, avoid sexual [tinted] acts and/or will only make professional contact (including verbal, written, digital or physical contact) with pupils, students, trainees or other colleagues over whom they exercise professional authority.



2. Social workers who become involved or are involved in a sexual relationship with a co-worker have a duty to transfer professional responsibilities where necessary to avoid a conflict of interest.
3. Sexual harassment of supervisors, students, interns or colleagues is not allowed. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances; sexual recruitment; requests for sexual favors; and other verbal, written, digital or physical contact of a sexual nature.

Competence

1. Social workers should strive to become and remain competent.
Follow-up and further training are mandatory!
2. Social workers need to keep up to date with current information on the profession.
3. Social workers need to keep up-to-date on current information concerning current affairs in the country [political and social].
4. Social workers should routinely study professional and profession-oriented literature.
5. Social workers participate in educational activities in order to strengthen their own capacity.
6. Social workers base their services on **evidence and practiced based** knowledge, relevant for social and psychosocial services.
7. Social workers will work intensively on the general professional development.

Discrimination

1. Social workers shall not practice, condone, facilitate or encourage any form of discrimination [race, ethnicity, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political opinion, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability].

Private conduct

1. Social workers must be able to separate the professional from the personal.
2. Social workers will at all times present themselves as a professional.

Dishonesty, fraud and deception



1. Social workers shall not participate in or be associated with dishonest, fraudulent, deceptive acts or activities, or the justification thereof.

Limitations

1. Social workers must not allow their personal problems, psychosocial strain, legal problems, drug abuse, psychological or psychiatric problems to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or jeopardize the interests of clients for whom they have a professional responsibility.
2. Social workers whose personal problems, psychosocial pressures, legal problems, alcohol and drug abuse interfere with their professional judgment and performance, should seek immediate consultation and take appropriate remedial action by engaging professional help, adjusting workload, terminating services or taking other steps necessary to protect clients and others.

Misrepresentation of matters

1. Social workers should make a clear distinction between statements made and/or actions taken as an individual and as a representative of an institution, a professional social work organization or as an individual.
2. Social workers speaking on behalf of professional social work organizations should accurately reflect the official positions of the organizations.
3. Social workers ensure that their statements and reports to clients, agencies and the community are accounted for.
4. Social workers should only claim those relevant professional references and skills that they actually possess and ensure that any incorrect representation or misrepresentation of their data is corrected.