

The Code of Professional Ethics of the Social Workers in Israel (2018)



[Emblem: Union of Social Workers in Israel]

The Association for the Advancement of Social Work
Founded by the Union of Social Workers

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The Code of Professional Ethics of the Social Workers in Israel

| Forward |

A code of ethics is essential for every profession; how much more so in a profession that seeks to help people within a relationship that is based on a need they have due to something they lack or due to a vulnerability, and where the State and its institutions have appointed a professional to help them. The status of the social worker as an intermediary between the authorities or employer and the person receiving assistance is liable to raise conflicts around the question of who I represent and to whom do I give my loyalty.

The dilemmas are magnified in the event that our actions or the approaches required and the intervention are not aligned with our role as defined and enshrined in the law (The Social Workers Law, 1996): promoting the well-being of the individual and of society in Israel, including protecting human dignity and the principle of equality (Section 1.1 of the Law).

These conflicts are exacerbated and come into sharp focus in our occupation, especially due to budgetary constraints that don't enable decent service to be provided; they are further compounded by the decisions of the powers that be, which are liable to compromise the self-determination of individuals and communities and to create inequality; when the management approach creates a paradox between laws, such as the Social Workers Law, which defines roles exclusively in the realm of the social worker while those who manage the services are not necessarily social workers; and when those operating the services demand greater effectiveness and increased efficiency even though the recording and reporting techniques consume valuable time which could and should be devoted to the relationship with people.

Personal and community empowerment and helping to achieve well-being are at the heart of our profession. A code of ethics helps us to act in accordance with these principles and provides every social worker with guidelines on how to proceed in problematic situations.

That said, the profession is changing and advancing, and our society and its structures, such as the family unit, are changing, while perceptions about them and about the essence of the services, their role and attitudes to the rights of the individual, are evolving and impacting the forms of intervention in the profession, the rights conferred on the individual, and the obligation of the authorities to facilitate and provide appropriate services. It is therefore vital to continue learning from social workers on the ground about the problems, dilemmas, and difficulties they encounter in their work, and by querying them and investigating optimal options - to update the code of ethics on a regular basis and to adapt it to the spirit of the times.

In its 2013-2018 tenure, the Union's Ethics Committee, led by social worker Micha Haran, took up the challenge to update the Code originally drawn up in 1994 and last revised in June 2007, and to adapt it to our times. The committee members faced many difficult questions and dilemmas, arising from socio-political changes in Israel and the use of social media in our everyday lives, whose influences may be welcome in some instances, such as the extensive knowledge placed at the disposal of the individual and no longer the sole prerogative of a competent professional, or detrimental in others, such as absence of privacy, exposure of the individual - even of the social worker, and imparting of a sense of power that is not necessarily to positive effect, and that could turn into a liability in relations between the social worker and the client.

The committee members studied the problems and pondered the issues in a gradual and cautious process, paying attention to the fine details; they also set

aside time to studying the codes of ethics of social workers in other countries, and did so with humility based on the realization that we need to make changes and evolve all the time, and out of respect for the social work profession and for ourselves as competent professionals, and especially, with reverence and respect towards our clients.

I am proud to present you with the revised Code of Ethics, which must be a constant companion to every social worker in the regular course of their work.

I invite every one of you to mull over the issues with the committee members when you are perplexed about an ethical-moral problem (and such mulling over should take place), because it is from you that we learn, and it is in this way that our profession develops.

I wish to express my gratitude to social worker Micha Haran, and to all the members of the Committee.

A job well done.

Social worker Tzafra Dweck

Chair, Union of Social Workers 2013-2018

| Preface |

Greetings to all the Social Workers in Israel

We are pleased and excited to present the Code of Professional Ethics of the Social Workers in Israel, updated to 2018. Work on the revision of the Code began several years ago and took a great deal of time.

All the members of the Ethics Committee contributed to the revision of the Code, and four members in particular, worked extensively on it: social workers Batya Pinhasi, Drora Navon, Nahum Michaeli and the undersigned, social worker Micha Haran.

The changes introduced in the present Code of Ethics reflect the spirit of the times, recent changes and transformations that have taken place in welfare generally, and in the social work profession specifically, and are based on the experience accumulated by the Ethics Committee of the Union of Social Workers in Israel over the years.

The committee members examined and compared the structure of the previous version of the Code and its provisions with the Statement of Ethical Principles of the International Federation of Social Workers, the revised Codes of Ethics of social workers in the United States, the UK, and several other countries, and with the revised Code of Professional Ethics of the psychologists in Israel (2017).

Several general changes were made to the Code's structure, and the following topics, among others, were added: private practice, remote care via electronic media, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence, informed consent, conduct in emergency situations, and romantic relations and/or sexual relations with clients or with clients' significant others.

In the next stage, the draft Code was transferred to the members of the Council of Social Work in Israel, to academics, to members of the Union's institutions, to

the members of the Ethics Committee of the Union of Social Workers in Israel, and to the Committee's legal advisor. Following much arduous work, the above revised version was agreed upon, and written in the plural "social workers," but naturally, applies to both genders.

It is my happy duty to express my gratitude and appreciation to all those who contributed to the final formulation of the Code of Professional Ethics of the Social Workers in Israel 2018!

The Ethics Committee of the Union of Social Workers in Israel, which imparts the principles for the appropriate professional conduct of social workers, serves as a forum for addressing ethical dilemmas of all the social workers, and this discourse helps to maintain the quality of our work and our professional integrity.

According to Professor Asa Kasher, we need to remember that the law is the baseline and ethics is the moral bar expected of us all, a bar that we will always strive to raise.

Sincerely yours

Social worker Micha Haran

Chair, Ethics Committee of the Union of Social Workers in Israel

| Introduction |

The focus on the social wellbeing of the individual, family and community has always been a seminal principle in the profession of social work. The profession essentially directs attention to environmental forces that create, contribute to and address life's problems and quality of life. Social workers need to be aware of the impact of nature and the environment on people's well-being.

The main calling of the social work profession is to promote people's well-being, quality of life, social justice and equality, and to provide assistance in exercising social rights and finding professional solutions to human needs, while paying special attention to the situation of disadvantaged persons/ persons facing discrimination and those living in poverty and exclusion and getting them to participate and empowering them.

The recognition that all people are vulnerable drives social workers to be there for others. Ethical practices prioritize the other over the "me." The aspiration is to treat others as we would want them to treat us. Introspection about the reciprocal influences of the personal and the professional needs to form the cornerstone of everyday ethical practices.

The essence of the calling of social work profession is entrenched in a set of core values that form the basis of the principles specific to social work: human dignity and liberty, social justice, integrity, professionalism, and emphasis on interpersonal relations in interactions with clients and a service orientation.

| The aims of the Code of Ethics |

The Code of Professional Ethics of the Union of Social Workers in Israel contains a set of guiding principles that reflect the professional values and define the criteria for examining the actions of social workers and their accountability in their work. These guiding principles form the basis for the principles of the ethical behavior of social workers, specifying what constitutes the appropriate professional conduct required of them.

The Code of Ethics has several aims:

1. To identify the core values that the calling of social work is based on.
2. To present the broad spectrum of ethical principles reflected in the profession's core values, which will serve as a guide to the professional work undertaken in social work.
3. To help social workers identify extraneous considerations when their professional commitments clash or when ethical uncertainties arise.
4. To serve as a control tool that competent professionals can examine their professional conduct against.
5. To serve as an aid for the general public to understand the boundaries of responsibility of social workers in their professional work.

The professional work of social workers must be guided both by their body of professional knowledge and by the set of values and principles embodied by the profession. Social workers must be well versed in and abide strictly by these values and principles and apply them in exercising judgment in instances in which they need to examine the ethical weight of different alternatives.

The Code of Ethics does not decide in instances of clashing values or moral differences between social workers. In such cases, social workers will exercise judgment taking ethical values into consideration, and will examine the risk, damage, and consequences of the professional decision. Note that even when we know or decide what should or could be done, and we operate on the basis of professional and ethical judgments, moral

dilemmas can still arise. Such dilemmas form an integral part of the social work profession and necessitate the continued evolution of professional thinking and tools for ethical, professional decisions.

To this end, it is incumbent upon social workers to continue to deepen and integrate their knowledge of ethical values and principles in their professional work through vocational training, staff meetings, consultation, continuing education courses and advanced studies.

| Ethical values and principles |

The ethical values and principles described below reflect the ideals that social workers should aspire to:

➤ **Human dignity and liberty**

Social workers will be respectful towards their clients

Social workers will treat every person regardless of race, religion, or nationality, with respect, with sensitivity, taking account of individual differences and religious, cultural, ethnic, national, gender and sectorial diversity. They will strive to ensure their clients' independence, self-determination, rights, and responsibilities. Social workers will work to broaden the range of possibilities for promoting the self-realization of their customers and will act in a manner that protects their clients' privacy and confidentiality, and at the same time, ensures controlled accessibility to records.

Social workers will be aware of their twofold responsibility, both towards their clients and towards society as a whole. They will strive to reconcile the interests of their clients that clash with the interests of society, in a manner that is responsible towards society and consistent with the profession's ethical values and principles.

➤ **Social justice**

Social workers will strive for social justice for the benefit of disadvantaged individuals and groups or who are discriminated against

The efforts of social workers to achieve social change will focus, in particular, on issues of poverty, discrimination and other forms of injustice and social inequality. They will strive to ensure accessibility of information, so that every person has access to information, to the services and resources that they need, to equal opportunity and to meaningful participation in the decision-making process. Social workers must act against policies that create or preserve discrimination in all its aspects and initiate and promote legislation in the spirit of human rights, equality, and betterment.

➤ Integrity

Social workers will behave in a manner that earns trust

Social workers will establish professional relationships with clients and colleagues that are based on trust and informed consent. They will always be cognizant of their professional calling and of its ethical values and principles. Social workers will act honestly and responsibly and will cultivate ethical methods in the organizations they are affiliated with. Furthermore, social workers will refrain from taking favors of any kind.

➤ Professionalism

Social workers will conduct themselves in accordance with their professional competencies and will develop and cultivate their professional expertise

Social workers will strive to consolidate, stay current with, and increase their professional knowledge and competencies and will apply them in practice. They will seek to contribute to the profession's knowledge base. Social workers will recognize the limits of their personal capabilities as well as the limits of their expertise, training, and skills. They will understand the significance of their work and take responsibility for the actions they have taken. Social workers will also have the capacity to conceptualize and validate the basis for their professional actions to themselves, to their colleagues, and to their clients, using knowledge acquired from relevant professional work.

Social workers will do all in their power to uphold the dignity of the profession, the dignity of the professional community, and to nurture solidarity within it.

➤ Partnering with clients

Social workers will work to establish a pact with their clients for the advancement of the service's recipients

Appreciating that interpersonal relationships are an important means for change, social workers will view the people they serve as active partners in assistance and will strive to implement such partnerships to advance professional goals. Social workers will seek to strengthen interpersonal relationships by making a special effort to nurture, rehabilitate, protect, and improve the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.

➤ **Service orientation**

One of the prime goals of social workers is to provide clients with service

The service provided by social workers will be given with courtesy, sensitivity, taking into account the culture and life ties of their clients, and will also be dispensed with professionalism and maximum efficiency, including collaboration with others in the profession and outside it. Social workers will draw on their knowledge, values, and competencies in order to help people in need of their services and in order to address social problems.

From ethical values and principles to deeds: Application of the principles of ethical behavior by social workers

| Chapter 1 |

Social workers' responsibilities towards their clients

A. The primary responsibility of social workers is towards their clients

1. Social workers will serve their clients with dedication, loyalty, and determination, applying their knowledge, skills, and professional competencies to the full.
2. Social workers will operate in their relationships with their clients without discriminating on the basis of race, skin color, religion, sex, gender, sector, occupation, sexual orientation, age, personal status, mental and/or intellectual and/or physical disability, faith or political views, national origin, socioeconomic standing, or any other form of discrimination, and shall not cooperate with such discrimination.
3. Social workers will only serve their clients within the context of a professional relationship that is based on informed consent. They will use clearly understandable language to inform clients of the aims of the service, the risks associated with the service, the constraints imposed on the service, as well as reasonable alternatives to the service, and the right of clients to refuse or to withdraw their consent.
4. Social workers will, in their relationships with their clients, act with mindfulness, sensitivity and cultural competence, and provide clients with culturally sensitive service dispensed with humility.
5. Social workers will refrain from exploiting relationships with their clients for their own personal gain.
6. Social workers will not withhold service from patients with contagious diseases and will take special care to protect their own health.
7. Social workers will cooperate with their clients in the intervention process to the fullest extent and will address the desires and wishes of their clients in order to

improve their standing, ability, powers and independence, while abiding by the principles and the professional body of knowledge.

8. Social workers will not enter into a romantic relationship and/or have sexual relations with their clients or with clients' significant others, under any circumstances whatsoever.
9. Social workers will refrain from treating clients who are family members or with whom they have other significant relationships.
10. Social workers will terminate the provision of service to their clients and their professional relationships with them based on professional principles and considerations.
11. Social workers providing services by remote means (computer, landline/ mobile phone, or any other electronic device), will inform the recipients of the service about the limitations associated with such services and the risks involved. In all events, all the rules of the law and all the principles of professional ethics will apply to such services.
12. Social workers will be mindful of complex situations in which various influences and pressures are liable to impair their professional judgment, and will be sure to make autonomous professional decisions, and to abide by the rule of law and professional ethics, and to consult and receive professional guidance.
13. Social workers who are members of a multi-disciplinary team will represent their clients according to the values of the social work profession.

B. Social workers will respect their clients' right to privacy and will keep strictly confidential information received during the professional intervention, as well as after the professional relationship with them has been terminated, and even after their clients are deceased

1. Social workers will disclose information about their clients only when the law or the professional circumstances oblige this, and only to the extent required for the purpose of the disclosure.
2. Social workers will notify their clients to the extent possible about the disclosure of the confidential information about them and about the possible implications of the

disclosure.

3. Social workers will notify their clients about the limits to confidentiality in a given situation, the purposes for which the information is required, and how that information will be used.
 4. Social workers will protect the confidentiality of their clients' written files/ electronic records or folders and any other sensitive information and will take the necessary steps to secure clients' files/ records, and to store them in a secure location, so that they are not available to persons not authorized to receive them.
 5. Social workers will take precautions to ensure and protect the privacy of the information pertaining to their clients transferred to other parties by means of electronic media and/or electronic device and/or other electronic equipment.
 6. Social workers will obtain the consent of clients to the publication of articles/ books documenting their professional work, including descriptions of cases, wiretaps, photographs, recordings, and observations, and must ensure that their clients understand the significance of their consent.
 7. Social workers will allow their clients, in accordance with the provisions of the law, controlled access to formal records in the professional work pertaining to them.
- C. Social workers will not accept clients for private treatment located at that time at the same service they are employed in and will not try to persuade or influence such clients to switch to private treatment.**
- D. Social workers in private practice will ensure that their fees are fair, reasonable and take their clients' means into consideration as far as possible.**
1. Social workers will inform clients of the expected costs of the treatment as a consequence of entering into the treatment arrangement.
 2. Social workers will not request and will not receive any consideration other than financial payment for their professional services.
 3. Social workers will not receive favors for referring clients to other services.

The behavior of social workers by virtue of their social role

A. Social workers will work to advance the wellbeing of society

1. Social workers will support policies and legislation designed to improve social conditions and advance social justice and will act to get them implemented.
2. Social workers will work to promote conditions that encourage respectful and equal treatment of the diverse cultures making up Israeli society.
3. Social workers will work to ensure that every person has access to the resources, services, and opportunities that they need.
4. Social workers will work to broaden the choices, the accessibility, and the opportunities of all people, with special reference to disadvantaged groups/ persons or who are discriminated against.
5. Social workers will provide, to the extent possible, appropriate professional services to the public in times of emergency and danger, while ensuring their personal safety.
6. Social workers will encourage the engagement of the public, including clients and their families, and citizens in general, in shaping the policy of the social institutions and application of their policy in practice, and in moves to change what needs to be changed in the policy.

The ethical responsibility of social workers as competent professionals

A. The vocation of the social work profession is to provide service, and in this spirit:

1. Social workers will be responsible for executing their professional work in the best possible manner, and to this end, will continue to acquire knowledge for their professional development.
2. Social workers will base their work on relevant up-to-date knowledge in social work.
3. Social workers will document their professional activities according to the principles of professional ethics and according to the procedures in their workplace.
4. Social workers will not take on professional responsibility for assignments for which they do not have the necessary knowledge and competencies.
5. Social workers will provide reliable and accurate information about their professional competencies, their area of specialization and expertise, and will refrain from supplying information that is liable to be misleading.
6. Social workers will contribute to consolidation of knowledge in the social work profession and will share knowledge with their colleagues originating from research and information gathered in the course of their work.
7. Social workers will consult with competent professionals within the profession and outside it, whenever such consultation shall be of benefit to the client, subject to the principles of confidentiality and informed consent.

B. Social workers engaging in research, writings and publications of a scientific-professional nature will be guided by the standard rules of academic research and by the principles of professional ethics

1. Social workers will examine the possible implications of their research on the subjects participating in the research and on other people.

2. Social workers will ensure that research participants give their written consent to their willing participation based on an understanding of it, without fearing that they will at a disadvantage or punished if they refuse to participate and/or cancel their participation. They also need to ensure that the privacy and dignity of the participants are taken into proper consideration.
3. Social workers will be mindful of any discomfort, distress, harm, risk or physical or mental deprivation that may be caused research participants, and will offer treatment, as necessary.
4. Social workers will keep information about the participants obtained in the research confidential.
5. Social workers will only take personal credit for the work that they did in the context of the research - professional writing, development of a unique treatment and training, and will give credit to others for their contribution to these activities.

C. Social workers will adhere to appropriate standards of personal conduct

1. Social workers will not exploit professional relationships for their personal gain.
2. Social workers will be mindful of and take steps to minimize situations in which their personal behavior compromises fulfillment of their professional role or the profession's values and image.
3. Social workers will clearly distinguish between, and make the distinction clear at every opportunity between, their actions and statements as private individuals and their actions and statements in their professional capacity.
4. Social workers will not participate in acts that include dishonesty, fraud, or deception.

D. Social workers will protect the dignity and image of the social work profession

1. Social workers will do the best they can to give of their time and professional expertise to activities that help promote the image and skills of the profession.
2. Social workers will support any policy that advances the profession and its goals, its development and application of it.
3. Social workers will present reliable information only about the profession and those employed in it.
4. Social workers will take action against the unethical conduct of any colleague

in the profession and will take appropriate measures to deter colleagues from their unethical behavior, and if necessary, to expose and correct it.

E. Social workers in private practice will advertise their occupation and area of expertise within the confines of the law, without any misleading advertising, while upholding the dignity of the profession and of colleagues, and will refrain from causing any harm in public

1. Social workers will advertise the details of their education, expertise, and experience, presenting details that are backed up by valid documents and certificates, and will refrain from advertising that may deceive or mislead the public.
2. Social workers will advertise details about their success and/or any other data only if they are substantiated and will not advertise that treatment is guaranteed success.
3. In advertising their occupation, social workers will not use the image, name, aliases, pictures, or photographs of people currently being treated by them or who were treated by them in the past or have been treated by other therapists.
4. In advertising their occupation, social workers will not use the names, aliases, or pictures of famous people.
5. Social workers will not use advertising that contains a pornographic photograph, drawing or picture, or that displays private parts of the body.
6. Social workers will not hold lotteries and/or dispense prizes to encourage clients to come to them for treatment.

Relationships between colleagues, including students in social work receiving practical vocational training

- A. Social workers will treat their colleagues with respect, courtesy, fairness and in good faith**
1. Social workers will cooperate with their colleagues to promote professional issues.
 2. Social workers will treat any personal information that comes to their attention in professional contacts with colleagues with respect and professionalism.
 3. Social workers will treat the knowledge, expertise, competencies, opinions, findings, and viewpoints of their colleagues with respect. They must present them correctly and fairly.
 4. Social workers who replace a colleague or who are replaced by a colleague in their professional activities, will treat colleagues' clients in a professionally responsible manner.
 5. Social workers will cooperate with colleagues from other professions.
 6. Social workers will not take advantage of disputes between colleagues and employers to advance their own personal interests.
 7. Social workers who serve as employers, managers or trainers of colleagues need to establish a clear and explicit framework for the professional relationship between them.
 8. Social workers will not enter into a romantic relationship and/or have sexual relations with trainees or those under their professional and/or managerial authority.
 9. Social workers delivering training will be sure to have a training contract and will clarify the boundaries of confidentiality and responsibility in respect of those receiving treatment and other clients.
 10. Social workers who employ other staff members or assess their performance will fulfill this role impartially and using open criteria.
 11. Social workers who assess the work performance of a colleague will make sure that their remarks are open to the person being assessed. In this context they must also

allow for the expression of the self-assessment of the person being assessed.

12. If social workers have information about the failings/ deficiencies in the professional functioning of a work colleague that interferes with their professional functioning, they will help the colleague and will inform the relevant entities about that colleague's state.
13. When false accusations are made against colleagues about allegedly unethical behavior, social workers will offer them support and assistance so long as their culpability has not been established.

| Chapter 5 |

Relations between social workers and the service that employs them

- A. Social workers have an obligation towards their employers based on the profession's boundaries and the Code of Professional Ethics**
1. In their work, social workers will act with integrity, reliability, and loyalty, and will use the resources of the service that employs them efficiently and in an authorized manner.
 2. Social workers will work to improve the policy and work methods of the organization that employs them in order to increase the efficiency of the service.
 3. Social workers will strive to work only at a service whose work methods, policy and working conditions enable them to conduct themselves in accordance with the principles of professional ethics.
 4. Social workers will not place students undergoing vocational training in field jobs and will refrain from training them in a service where the principles of professional ethics are violated.
 5. Social workers will issue an alert about any instance in which the principles of professional ethics in the workplace are undermined and/or violated.

