



Getting Ready for Direct Practice in Social Work

Peter Scourfield

 SAGE

 LearningMatters



Learning Matters
An imprint of SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Kate Keers
Production controller: Chris Marke
Project management: Deer Park Productions,
Tavistock, Devon
Marketing manager: Camille Richmond
Cover design: Wendy Scott
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed in the UK

© 2017 Peter Scourfield

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017935032

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-8933-7 (pbk)

ISBN 978-1-4739-8932-0 (hbk)

At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

1: Professionalism



Achieving a Social Work Degree

This chapter will help you develop skills in the following domain of the Professional Capabilities Framework:

Professionalism: *Identify and behave as a professional social worker committed to professional development.*

The Professional Capability Framework states about this domain that:

Social workers are members of an internationally recognised profession, a title protected in UK law. Social workers demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning, with support through supervision. As representatives of the social work profession they safeguard its reputation and are accountable to the professional regulator. (BASW, Professional Capability Framework – Readiness for Practice Capabilities)

This domain statement goes on to say that, at the point of going out on their first practice placement, social work students need to be able to:

- Describe the role of the social worker
- Describe the mutual roles and responsibilities in supervision
- Describe the importance of professional behaviour
- Describe the importance of personal and professional boundaries
- Demonstrate ability to learn, using a range of approaches
- Describe the importance of emotional resilience in social work

Introduction

As we saw in the Introduction, there are nine ‘domains’ in the Professional Capabilities Framework, all of which link and overlap with each other and all of which students must be able to evidence at different levels throughout their course. The first domain is ‘Professionalism’ which, in many ways, can also be seen as the overarching theme of the whole PCF and that will be the focus of this chapter.

This chapter begins with some initial exploration of what professionalism means in the context of social work. From there, it will provide opportunities for you to think about and demonstrate what each of those requirements means in practice. Following the various activities in this chapter you will also be signposted to further reading which will help further develop your understanding of each concept or theme and help you make links between the domains.

Lastly, it is important to emphasise that the ARDP assessment is not an academic or ‘theory’ exercise where your knowledge is assessed in an essay or some other written assignment. What will decide whether you are ready to go into direct practice will be your ability to ‘be’ professional and to act and behave in acceptably professional ways. However, before we engage with each of the specific requirements of the Domain Descriptors, we start off by considering the bigger picture – what does professionalism in social work mean and what does it actually look like?

Exploring professionalism

Social work in the UK has only relatively recently been regarded as a ‘profession’, at least in comparison to more established professions such as doctors and lawyers. ‘Social worker’ only became a protected occupational title in 2005. Interestingly, there are still some today that don’t accept that social work either can be or should be professional in the same way as other more established occupations (Lymbery, 2005; Parker and Doel, 2013). Therefore, deciding what constitutes being ‘professional’ in social work terms is not always a straightforward exercise. It is something that requires a degree of thought. For example, if by saying that you are a ‘professional’ means that you think that you are a ‘law unto yourself’ in how you act or that your professional knowledge means that you are an ‘expert’ on other people’s lives, then you are going to run into problems. For Davies and Jones (2016), ‘professionalism’ in the context of social work is ‘not an easy subject’ and ‘is best understood through participation in active experiential learning’ (p. 2). This is a useful starting point because it underlines that professionalism is not just something that you learn about, or that you instantly ‘possess’ on passing your course; it is something you have to work at constantly in order to bring it to life in your practice and make it meaningful.

Activity 1.1

Nowadays it is accepted that being ‘professional’ and demonstrating professionalism lies at the core of being an effective social worker. However, we need to think about what this actually means, what it requires from the worker and what it looks like to others. Consider these questions:

1. What are the benefits from social work being a profession? Are there any downsides to social work being a profession? Give reasons.
2. How do social workers demonstrate their professionalism in practice?

Share your thoughts with a colleague.

In answer to the first question, on the benefit side, you might have said that social work being a profession helps the public have confidence that it is a regulated activity and that social workers need to maintain certain standards of professional behaviour. For social workers themselves it helps to have clearly defined codes of ethics and other frameworks for practice. Looked at in a different light, you might have said that being a professional comes with certain responsibilities which, if not discharged properly, can lead to a social worker being disciplined or even deregistered. This view acknowledges that professional social workers are, therefore, accountable to a range of bodies: their employers, their profession, their regulatory body, the HCPC and, most importantly, to the public. On the downside, you might have thought that professionalising social workers enhances their status but also their power and that could lead to an unwanted ‘us and them’ divide opening up between social workers and those with whom they work. There are many faces of professionalism and what this means in practice will need to be thought about and debated throughout your course.

For the second question, you might have said that professional social workers need to be competent in what they do and that they need to have the appropriate knowledge, values and skills in order to do their jobs properly. This might include being knowledgeable about relevant legislation, policy and theories, being mindful of treating people with respect, being aware of the need for confidentiality and to maintain appropriate boundaries and also how to communicate with a diverse range of people. By now, you should be aware that all of these qualities – and more – are set out in the nine domains of the PCF. Therefore, one of the hallmarks of being a professional social worker is the ability to understand and integrate all of the PCF into their practice. A social worker’s professionalism needs to be evident in their everyday interactions with the people with whom they come into contact: service users, carers, colleagues, managers, other professionals and the public at large.

What does professionalism require and what does it look like to service users?

Perhaps a useful starting point is to consider what expectations service users have of social workers. In 1981, Davies wrote that:

Client-perspective studies have greatly helped in the task of defining professionalism in social work. It is clear that the true professional is not someone who is cool, detached, career-minded or disinterested, but is the worker who can display friendliness (not necessarily friendship in the conventional sense), understanding, and a warmth of manner which convinces the client of his active interest in and concern for the client's plight. And clients are remarkably sophisticated in being able to recognise that such professionalism is part and parcel of the social worker's formal occupation. 'With lawyers it's mainly a professional job for them, they don't take a personal interest in it. They wouldn't show any feelings and not really any interest. The social worker didn't behave as though it was job, even though it was.' (p. 20)

This is as true today as it was in 1981. Many studies have backed this up when they have asked people who use services what they expect from social workers. For example, when Peter Beresford and his colleagues launched 'The Standards We Expect' initiative (Harding and Beresford, 1996), their research indicated strongly that what service users and carers expected and wanted from social workers included qualities like treating people with courtesy, honesty and being reliable. Also highlighted as essential were being a good communicator, being up to date with knowledge about local services and possessing basic practical skills. All of these 'standards' of professionalism might seem 'obvious' and something that should be taken for granted but they are the very bedrock of professionalism in social work.

Activity 1.2

Harding and Beresford (1996) found that service users and carers expected that, as a minimum, social workers should possess certain qualities. These included the following key areas:

- to be able to listen and communicate well;
- to be able to counsel and understand people's complex emotions;
- to be knowledgeable about local services, national resources and social security entitlements;
- to be able to negotiate with rather than impose on others;
- to have basic practical skills;
- to have a realistic sense of judgement about risk;

- to be able to treat people as individuals;
- to respect others where respect means taking people's views seriously and recognising their right to be heard;
- to maintain confidentiality and privacy;
- to be able to treat people with courtesy and empathy;
- to be honest;
- to be reliable and to ensure that there is continuity of service;
- to be able to put their 'pet theories' to one side and not impose them on people or look for 'hidden' meanings that are not always there.

Task

1. Put yourself in the position of a service user and /or carer. Look through the list. Why do you think that each point is regarded as so important? Explain how you would feel if a social worker did *not* have that skill or quality in their dealings with you and your family?
2. Now put yourself in the position of a social worker. On a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 = that you do not have the ability at all and 10 = that you are completely proficient, how would you rate yourself? At this stage in your career, it might well be that some of these points prompt further questions, for example because you not fully understand what is required. If so, explain what they are. Think about what you need to do to develop this particular aspect of professionalism.

Summary

'Professionalism' in social work is a complex concept in terms of what it requires from the practitioners. It involves bringing together and demonstrating a wide range of knowledge, values and skills with diverse groups of people in diverse settings. To develop your understanding further, the texts listed below contain useful sections and chapters on this important topic.

Specific further reading

Harrison, K and Ruch, G (2007) 'Social work and the use of self', in M Lymbery and K Postle (eds), *Social Work: A Companion to Learning*. London: Sage, Chapter 5, pp. 40–9.

Horner, N (2012) *What Is Social Work?*, 4th edition. London: Learning Matters.

Oko, J (2012) *Understanding and Using Theory in Social Work*, 2nd edition. London: Learning Matters, Chapters 1 and 3.

Parker, J and Bradley, G (2014) *Social Work Practice*, 4th edition. London: Learning Matters, Chapter 1, pp. 1–18.

Wilson, K, Ruch, G, Lymbery, M and Cooper, A (2011) *Social Work: An Introduction to Contemporary Practice*. Harlow: Longman Pearson, Chapter 4, pp. 61–86.

Demonstrating Domain 1 descriptors

Earlier, it was explained that at the Readiness for Direct Practice level, certain specific capabilities were required for each domain. We now take each of these in turn for further consideration.

Describe the role of the social worker

The first thing to say about this task is that it has been recognised for a long time that social workers actually play many different roles often depending on the setting or context in which they work (Barclay, 1982; Horner, 2012; Dunk-West, 2013). As a consequence, it is not easy to find descriptions that can be expressed in just one or two concise sentences.

Social work textbooks often refer to the definition provided by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) which states that:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (IFSW website)

This is fine as a broad, aspirational statement but is probably too abstract and too generalised to meet the requirements at the Readiness for Direct Practice stage. We need to be able to talk in terms that capture the role in ways that can be easily related to social work as it is currently practised in the UK.

Activity 1.3

Look at the following short videos about social work in different settings and identify a few (no more than four or five) broad activities that might best describe what the different social workers are saying that they do as part of their role.

1. Real social work: making the difference in West Sussex (Part One) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFA4stZRB8A>

2. Real social work: making the difference in West Sussex (Part Two) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp3bxRAxnKA>
3. Real social work: making the difference in West Sussex (Part Three) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NiDbcZPAd0

The different practitioners talk about various activities with different types of adult service user. However, your list might have included the following broad activities:

- promoting well-being and welfare;
- supporting people to get back to 'normality' or independent living;
- empowering people to take control of their own circumstances;
- advocating for people;
- assessing care and support needs;
- assessing risk;
- safeguarding people from harm;
- providing 'tailored' and personalised support and care for individuals.

For a more in-depth look at a different area of social work try a *Day in the Life of a Social Worker* at: <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind/social-care/social-work/try-day-the-life-social-worker>.

Did you notice any additional roles that you could add to the list?

Follow-up activity

Imagine a reporter from a local TV or radio station came to talk to you about your role as a social worker in an adult services team. Write a short script that you would use in order to explain what it consisted of.

Take turns to listen to each other's scripts. Give each other feedback on how convincing or accurate it sounds in the light of what you heard from the social workers in the video clips.

Summary

When asked about the role of the social worker, it would be reasonable to explain that the role is complex and can change depending on the exact setting. However, in general terms, we have seen that important aspects of the role usually include:

(Continued)

(Continued)

- promoting the well-being and welfare of individuals and their families;
- supporting people to live independently;
- advocacy;
- empowering people to take control of their own circumstances;
- assessing the care and support needs of individuals and their carers;
- providing 'tailored' and personalised support and care for individuals;
- assessing risk;
- safeguarding people from harm.

Specific further reading

BASW (2012) *The Code of Ethics for Social Work*. Birmingham: BASW.

Horner, N (2012) *What Is Social Work?*, 4th edition. London: Learning Matters.

Sheldon, B and MacDonald, G (2009) *A Textbook of Social Work*. London: Routledge.

Wilson, K, Ruch, G, Lymbery, M and Cooper, A (2011) *Social Work: An Introduction to Contemporary Practice*. Harlow: Longman Pearson.

Describe the mutual roles and responsibilities in supervision

In his report into the death of Victoria Climbié, Lord Laming said:

Supervision is the cornerstone of good social work practice and should be seen to operate effectively at all levels of the organisation. (Laming, 2003, p. 12)

Consequently, we can see that supervision plays a very important role in ensuring that social work takes place effectively. The question is what does it actually involve? The following contribution from Beckett (2006) provides a good starting point:

Put at its simplest, social work supervision consists of a period of time in which a social worker, or sometimes a group of social workers, discuss their work with someone else. Typically in social work this is with the social worker's immediate line manager. (Beckett, 2006, p. 194)

Therefore, essentially, it is a discussion about the work usually, but not always, with a line manager. However, for supervision to be effective, all parties need to be aware of their roles and responsibilities. In terms of the *supervisor's* role and responsibilities, Morrison (1993) says there are four key functions of supervision. These are:

- responsibility for managing the supervisee's work;
- providing emotional and practical support;
- helping the supervisee's professional development;
- acting as a channel of communication between frontline staff and middle and senior management.

(Morrison (1993), cited in Knott and Scragg, 2016, p. 123)

That said, in order for the supervisor to perform their role properly, the *supervisee* needs to:

- take responsibility for their own work;
- be prepared to share their thoughts and feelings about their work and any impact it might be having;
- take responsibility for their own professional development;
- identify any gaps in skills and knowledge and training needs;

An important aspect of supervision is that both parties prepare for supervision by deciding what they want to discuss and why. This requires the ability to be reflective (see Chapter 6). However, it also requires both parties to be open, truthful, trusting and mutually respectful. Careful thought needs to be given to what precisely is wanted from any particular supervision session. However, Beckett (2006) highlights an important issue with supervision arrangements that involve social workers and their managers. He points out that:

It has some advantages but also a number of disadvantages, in that the line manager has two distinct roles in a supervision session, and these roles can clash, just as a social worker's different roles in work with service users can clash. (Beckett, 2006, p. 194)

Think about

Beckett raises an important point about the potentially clashing roles of the supervisor if they occupy a managerial position. What do you think the basis of that clash might be?

You might have made the point that while a manager should have the emotional well-being and the professional development of those they supervise uppermost in their mind, they will also have pressures on them to meet organisational targets, e.g. to meet certain deadlines and to get through a certain volume of work. The purposes of supervision are to ensure both the

quality of work carried out and the well-being of the practitioner. However, pressures to get through a large quantity of work can easily compromise the quality of a social worker's work and impact negatively on their well-being. This is an important reason why both parties need to be clear about what their roles and responsibilities are in supervision. Another point you might have raised is that workers usually feel the need to show their managers that they are competent and capable of doing their job. This might make it difficult to 'own up' to their manager about areas of the job which they are unsure about or anxious about doing. They might fear that if they reveal too many of what might be perceived as their 'shortcomings' they will be judged negatively and even, in extreme circumstances, disciplined.

Case study/Role-play

Kirsty is a newly qualified social worker in a team for older people. She has an active caseload of twenty. Her time is mainly divided between assessing people for support packages and investigating adult safeguarding referrals. Kirsty struggles to get everything done in the hours she has, which is causing her some stress. Since she started, Kirsty has never been confident with working with cases of dementia which involve assessing mental capacity. When talking to a colleague, she discovered that she has made some mistakes in some of her assessments. Kirsty decided not to pass this onto her manager for fear of looking foolish and incompetent. However, now Kirsty is struggling with what to do in a case where she suspects that the son of a 92-year-old woman seems to be financially abusing his mother. The son is a solicitor and has already made Kirsty feel 'deskilled' and a bit silly in pointing out to her aspects of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 about which she was ignorant. In the circumstances, her inclination is to decide that there is insufficient evidence to refer the case on to a safeguarding meeting. She is aware that that is an unsatisfactory course of action but her main concern is to persuade her manager that the case can be closed at this stage.

Janine, Kirsty's manager, has often asked Kirsty how she is coping and Kirsty has always indicated that things are going satisfactorily. By the time they are next due to meet for supervision, Janine has learned that one of the team has gone off long-term sick. She wants to speak to Kirsty about taking on four new cases, three of which involve dementia and mental capacity decisions. This is her main concern as she mentally prepares for the supervision session.

Preparation for role play

In terms of roles and responsibilities, what do you think would be a professional approach for Kirsty to take in the supervision session? Give reasons.

What do you think would be a professional approach for Janine to take? Give reasons.



Role play

In pairs, one person plays Kirsty and the other Janine.

Firstly, both parties need to prepare for the supervision session by clarifying what they both need and want to get out of the session. Remember what was said earlier about being professional means social workers are accountable to their organisation, profession and, most importantly, service users. Also, remember what was said about the role of social work. What are you going to put forward as your agenda? Also, write down what your hopes and fears are about how the session will go? How can you address all of them professionally?

Secondly, armed with your plan, role-play the first five minutes.

Finally, discuss what would be an appropriate outcome for all parties. Record this in an action plan.

This activity should have highlighted that, whatever the organisational or personal context in which it takes place, supervision must focus primarily on the quality of work with service users and that, in order to do this, the practitioner must be suitably knowledgeable and skilled, but also confident, well supported and have the time and space to perform their role properly.

Follow-up activity

Read the following two articles from *Community Care* and identify at least three key points about supervision from each.

‘How supervision can help social care workers improve their practice’

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2013/02/18/how-supervision-can-help-care-workers-improve-their-practice/CC> (18 February 2013)

‘Why poor supervision is damaging social work’

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/blogs/social-work-blog/2012/11/why-poor-supervision-is-damagi/CC> (7 November 2012)

Now, imagine that you have been invited to an interview for a social work job. The invitation letter informs you that you will be required to do a five-minute presentation covering why supervision is important in social work and what you personally expect from the supervisory relationship. Using the activities that you have done so far, draft some notes that will form the basis for your presentation and share them with a partner for feedback.

Summary

We have seen the importance of supervision in social work. If supervision does not take place or either party does not approach it professionally, problems will occur for the practitioner, for the organisation and for service users. From a practitioner's perspective, describing the roles and responsibilities in supervision should include:

- taking responsibility for your own workload;
- reflecting on your practice;
- ensuring that you receive regular supervision;
- preparing for each supervision session so that both parties are clear what the issues are and why you want to discuss them;
- maintaining your well-being;
- thinking about professional development needs;
- being honest and truthful with yourself and with your supervisor.

Specific further reading

Davies, K and Jones, R (eds) (2016) *Skills for Social Work Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 145–8).

Knott, C and Scragg, T (2016) *Reflective Practice in Social Work*, 4th edition. London: Learning Matters, pp. 123–5.

McKitterick, B (2012) *Supervision*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

SCIE (2013) *Effective Supervision in a Variety of Settings*, SCIE Guide 50.

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide50/>

Describe the importance of professional behaviour

Earlier it was suggested that an important aspect of professional behaviour was the ability for social workers to work to the professional and ethical standards laid down by the professional and regulatory bodies. In this section we look at what this requires and why it is important.

Currently, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) is the official body that regulates the social work profession in England. It has produced both the *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers* (HCPC, 2012a) and *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (HCPC, 2016) and it is the body with which qualified social workers must register in order to practise.

BASW is the largest professional association for social work in the UK. As well as managing and delivering the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which, as we know, sets out the expectations of social workers at every stage in their professional career, BASW has also

produced its own Code of Ethics for Social Work for its members. If you do not already have a copy of this code it is worth obtaining one because it sets out the commonly agreed values and principles that underpin social work practice in the UK.

Therefore the HCPC Standards, the PCF and the BASW Code not only explain the role of social work but also provide important guidance on *how* the role should be carried out ethically and according to professional social work values. This is an area that will be covered in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3. However, at this point, an extract from an article can illustrate why it is important for social workers to practise professionally and what the consequences are when they do not.

Social worker struck off for having second job as home care worker

HCPC panel decided working both night and day put service users at risk.

A social worker has been struck off the register for moonlighting as a home care worker and lying to her employer about her second job. A Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) panel heard the social worker, who was contracted to work 37 hours for Luton council, had taken additional employment resulting in her working a total of 57 hours a week. This exposed her service users to potential harm, according to the panel.

(Adapted from *Community Care*, 6 October 2015)

Activity 1.4

Imagine you are a spokesperson for the HCPC giving a press conference. How would you explain to the conference why it was unprofessional for the social worker to act in this way on this occasion? As a follow-up, how would you explain to the public at large why it is important for social workers *generally* to act professionally? As part of your answer you should explain what the consequences of unprofessional behaviour can be both for the public and for social workers.

Summary

When describing the importance of professional behaviour, it is a good idea to demonstrate awareness of the professional and ethical frameworks that govern and guide social work practice. They are there to protect the public and practitioners by setting out clearly what is expected from the social work profession. Social workers who behave professionally, are practising:

(Continued)

(Continued)

- legally;
- ethically;
- accountably;
- in ways in which the public can have confidence;
- in ways that upholds service users' rights, protects their best interests and promotes their well-being.

When social workers do *not* practise in line with professional codes and standards they:

- place themselves and the public at risk of harm;
- erode confidence in the profession of social work;
- bring the profession of social work into disrepute;
- run the risk of being struck off the register.

Specific further reading

British Association of Social Work (BASW) (2012a) *The Code of Ethics for Social Work*. Birmingham: BASW.

British Association of Social Work (BASW) (2012b) *The Professional Capabilities Framework*. Birmingham: BASW.

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2012a) *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers*. London: HCPC.

Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2012b) *Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students*. London: HCPC.

Describe the importance of personal and professional boundaries

In 2011, with one in five social work misconduct cases concerning inappropriate relationships with service users, the General Social Care Council (the social work regulator at the time) produced specific guidance on professional boundaries for social workers. They began by defining a 'professional boundary' as

the 'boundary between what is acceptable and unacceptable for a professional both at work and outside work'. The emphasis here should be placed on the word 'professional': some behaviour will always be unacceptable whether or not an individual is a professional. Professional boundaries, though, concern behaviour that is acceptable or unacceptable in light of the fact that an individual is a professional. (GSCC, 2011, p. 7)

When you consider that much of social work is about trying to build relationships with and offering support to vulnerable people, it is perhaps not surprising that, at times, deciding what is appropriate or acceptable in this context is challenging. For example, what might be considered acceptable in our personal life might not be in our professional life. Sometimes where the line is drawn is clear but often there are 'grey areas'. Whatever, the situation it is down to social workers (often using supervision) to make sure that they are on the 'right' (i.e. professional) side of the boundary line. If they are not, this can confuse, harm and disempower people in vulnerable situations making their lives more difficult. However, from the social worker's point of view establishing good professional boundaries is also important in order to avoid unnecessary emotional stress and the possibility of being compromised.

Activity 1.5 (1)

Consider the following questions and share your answers with a colleague.

You are a male social worker visiting a teenage girl in her foster home. You notice that she has had her hair restyled. Do you compliment her on how nice it looks? (You might discuss whether the gender of the social worker and young person makes a difference?)

You are a female social worker who when visiting a mentally ill male client sees him break down in tears. Do you give him a hug?

You are with a couple who are having relationship difficulties and whose teenage son is in trouble. Do you say 'when my husband and I were on the rocks we found Relate was very useful'?

A single mother is desperate for money and her benefit is not due for two days. She asks you to lend her £10 to see her through and vows she will return it as soon as her benefit comes through. Do you lend her the money?

A learning disabled young man who lives in supported housing says he is lonely most weekends. Do you invite him round to your house for Sunday lunch?

The son of an elderly person with dementia whose case you are assessing is an electrician and you need some electrical work done. Do you give them your personal number to come round and give you a quote?

Activity 1.5 (2)

Now read these questions which the GSCC proposed practitioners should ask themselves as a way of clarifying boundaries issues:

(Continued)

(Continued)

1. Would you be comfortable discussing all of your actions, and the rationale for those actions, in a supervision session with your manager?
2. Would you be uncomfortable about a colleague or your manager observing your behaviour?
3. If challenged, could you give an explanation as to how your actions are grounded in social work values?

(GSCC, 2011, p. 7)

Have your views changed at all? Explain how and give reasons.

The fact is personal and professional values cannot always be easily separated and we will return to this important area in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3. However, for new practitioners the advice would always be to err on the safe side of any boundary question. Therefore, if it is any help knowing what the best course of action is, you could follow these guidelines from an experienced social care professional who stated:

- Don't compliment a client on their looks.
- Watch your physical boundaries: don't hug or touch a client in any way that could be misconstrued.
- Don't share personal information like money or relationship problems.
- Don't lend a client money or borrow from them.
- Don't see them outside of work time.
- Don't become overly familiar, for example taking a client to your house/flat.

Blair McPherson, 'Setting the boundaries in social work', *Guardian Social Care Network*, 2 December 2011, at <http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2011/dec/02/setting-boundaries-social-work>

Summary

In describing the importance of personal and professional boundaries, it is worth explaining that much of social work is about building relationships and reaching out to people and that, because of the nature of the work, there are bound to be times when boundary issues arise. It cannot be avoided. However, a distinction must be drawn

between what might be appropriate in our personal lives and what is acceptable in our professional lives. The main reasons for this are:

- The failure to maintain professional boundaries can confuse, harm and disempower people in vulnerable situations making their lives more difficult as a consequence.
- Establishing good professional boundaries is also important in order to avoid social workers experiencing unnecessary emotional stress and the possibility of being compromised.

Specific further reading

General Social Care Council (GSCC) (2011) *Professional Boundaries Guidance for social workers*. London: GSCC.

Oko, J. (2012) *Understanding and Using Theory in Social Work*, 2nd edition. London: Learning Matters, Chapter 3.

Demonstrate ability to learn, using a range of approaches

Professionalism in social work requires that practitioners keep up to date and take responsibility for their own continuous professional development (CPD). This does not always mean that in order to do this, social workers always have to go on a course at a university or some other training facility, although that should be one approach they need to consider. There are many approaches to learning that can be used to keep up to date professionally.

Activity 1.6: Brainstorm

Quickly generate as many reasons as possible why social workers should maintain their learning, even once they have qualified.

You might have highlighted that legislation and policy change meaning that new ideas, new procedures and new approaches need to be learned. You also might have identified that researchers are always developing new ideas about what is effective in different areas of social work or what social workers need to be aware of when working within certain areas. For example, debates about how best to decide about mental capacity are continually evolving and it benefits everyone involved by keeping abreast of current thinking. You probably discussed that a failure to keep up to date with any of these developments not only compromises your ability to work professionally with service users but also means that your work might be harmful and could even leave you vulnerable to being struck off.

As discussed earlier it is not always possible, desirable or indeed necessary to sign up for a university course every time a new development comes along. This creates the challenge of how practitioners can maintain their 'up-to-dateness' in other ways. It is not simply a question of waiting for your employer to worry about this. It is the practitioner's professional responsibility to maintain their own learning.

Activity 1.7

CPD is a registration requirement by the HCPC as this video explains: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/registrants/cpd/>.

Claire is a social worker in a children and families team. Much of her role is about receiving referrals and carrying out safeguarding investigations. She has been qualified as a social worker for two years during which time her employer has sent her on a module on 'Assessing Risk in Child Protection' at a local university.

In small groups, discuss the range of knowledge and skills that Claire needs to continue do her job effectively and professionally. Apart from the university module, what other approaches could she take to make sure that she met HCPC requirements?

You might have come up with something like the following list:

1. Join BASW or SWAN – The Social Work Action Network <http://www.socialworkfuture.org/>.
2. Subscribe to or follow *Community Care* on Twitter for subject-specific articles, e.g. <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/children/> or <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/events-page/> for conferences and other training events.
3. Follow relevant people on Twitter such as Isabelle Trowler who is (the current) Chief Social Worker for England (Children & Families) or notable academics in the field such as Professor Harry Ferguson (Professor of Social Work at the University of Nottingham). This will help keep you up to date with debates and any new developments in policy.
4. Read textbooks or articles from relevant journals such as the *British Journal of Social Work*.
5. Organise and participate in in-house training or study groups.
6. Organise fact-finding visits to other facilities.
7. Participate in group supervisions and case discussions with colleagues.
8. Watch relevant programmes on TV, e.g. *Panorama*.

There is a range of activities that social workers can do to assist their learning. Some are more formal than others but all can help with keeping up to date and in tune with current thinking.

Extension activity: learning styles

Not only do social workers need to think critically about what knowledge and skills they need to develop, they also need to understand how they learn so that they can optimise their learning opportunities. There are different ideas about how people learn. For example, Honey and Mumford (1992) proposed that people can be put into learner categories such as activist, reflector, theorist or pragmatist. Fleming (2001) proposed 'VARK' which categorises learners into those who mainly rely on Visual, Auditory, Reading or Kinaesthetic means. There are many websites that have online tests that you can do to discover what your preferred learning style is. On a cautionary note, it is fair to say that no one 'theory' fully encompasses everybody's learning style. However, it is useful to get a better sense of what the different learning styles are and what style best suits you. The reason for this is that it can help you select learning activities that are the most effective for you and that fit into your work pattern.

Summary

- The nature of social work requires practitioners to keep up to date with changes in legislation and policy, new ideas and current ways of working.
- To undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a requirement of registration as a professional social worker.
- Social workers, through the use of supervision and other methods, need to identify their specific learning needs.
- There are many approaches to learning, some more formal and academic, others more informal and practical. These include formal courses, shadowing, reading, workshops, discussion groups and so on.
- Social workers need to reflect on how they learn best and ensure that they undertake appropriate opportunities to meet any learning needs they have identified.

Specific further reading

Fleming, ND (2006) *Teaching and Learning Styles: VARK Strategies*, 2nd edition. Christchurch, NZ: ND Fleming.

Honey, P and Mumford, A (1992) *The Manual of Learning Styles*, 3rd edition. Maidenhead: Peter Honey.

Lymbery, M and Postle, K (eds) (2007) *Social Work: A Companion to Learning*. London: Sage, Chapters 18 and 19.

Describe the importance of emotional resilience in social work

Resilience is a concept that describes people's ability to deal with stress, pressure and the demands made on them. (Howe, 2008, p. 106)

Emotional resilience is a complex topic. It is partly explained by genetics, partly by our upbringing and also by what events we have experienced and how we dealt with them. Most psychologists believe that, whatever their starting point, people can improve their resilience skills. This is particularly important in the context of social work.

Claudia Megele (2011a) offers the following tips for social workers to enhance their emotional resilience:

1. **Understand emotional states and their consequences.** Learn to recognise your emotions and their psychological and behavioural consequences.
2. **Self-regulation and change.** Developing emotional resilience is an experiential process which requires overcoming entrenched habits that are embedded deep in parts of the brain. Since emotional learning involves deeper parts of the brain, cognitive knowledge often does not suffice to modify our habits. For instance, knowing cigarettes damage one's health is usually not enough to stop the person from smoking.
3. **Express your emotions and recognise emotional toil.** Self-regulation helps you enhance your emotional resilience; however, continually suppressing your emotions and disregarding the emotional toil inherent in caring relationships can lead to long-term problems ranging from emotional bias, irritability and lack of sensitivity to psychological disorders. Therefore find the appropriate time, venue and avenue to express your emotions and let go of any negative feelings.
4. **Allocate a time and place for healing.** You are not immune from emotional toil. Allocate some time (perhaps 30 minutes) each week to your 'self' and healing. Do this at the same time and place each week.
5. **Positive regard and self-affirmation.** Positive self-affirmation enhances positive thinking and self-respect. Spend five minutes a day writing positive self-affirmations.
6. **Motivation and positive thinking.** Aspire to excellence in all that you do. Make sure you understand and can align your goals. Maintain a positive and optimistic attitude and disposition.

Case study

Joanne is on her final placement in a LAC (Looked after Children) team. In meetings with professionals she finds it very hard to hear about children that have experienced abuse or have witnessed domestic violence. This makes her very tearful and she has often had to leave meetings to regather herself emotionally. She also suffers the same reactions when reading case notes.

In pairs

Comment on Joanne's emotional resilience. Why might her emotional reactions cause problems in this line of work? What do you think the professional approach would be in such a situation?

You might have discussed that the subject matter appears too difficult for Joanne to currently cope with in a professional manner. It is distressing but social workers need to be able to put things in perspective and contain their emotions in the work environment as best they can. Joanne's reactions, while no doubt genuinely heart felt, are unsettling and disruptive and not conducive to proper information sharing and decision-making. Her emotional reactions could easily obscure the main goal of the work: promoting the best interest of the child. If she exhibited the same behaviour with service users it could well make them feel worse about their situation. In order to develop resilience in service users we need to be able to develop it in ourselves. Joanne needs to examine her reactions critically with her supervisor and work on containing and managing them using the methods highlighted by Megele. If that is not possible, Joanne should consider moving to a less personally upsetting area of social work.

Follow-up activity

Use the following link to gain a better insight into your emotional resilience. Reflect critically on what your strengths are in this area and what you need to work on:

<http://psychology.about.com/library/quiz/bl-resilienceb.htm>

Summary

- Emotional resilience is a complex topic but, at bottom, it is the ability to bounce back from adversity and not allow emotions overwhelm you.

(Continued)

(Continued)

- It is important in social work because often social workers are working with people whose behaviour or situation causes emotional stress and/or are very emotionally fragile themselves.
- Social workers cannot be properly effective if they are distracted or overwhelmed by strong emotions.
- Social workers who are emotionally resilient are much more effective in helping service users build their own emotional resilience,

Specific further reading

Cooper, F (2012) *Professional Boundaries in Social Work and Social Care: A Practical Guide to Understanding, Maintaining and Managing Your Professional Boundaries*. London: JKP.

Howe, D. (2008) *The Emotionally Intelligent Social Worker*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 106–9.

Howe, K and Gray, I (2013) *Effective Supervision in Social Work*. London: Learning Matters, pp. 59–60.

Lymbery, M and Postle, K (eds) (2007) *Social Work: A Companion to Learning*. London: Sage.

Megele, C (2011) 'How to . . . sustain emotional resilience', online at <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2011/02/02/how-to-sustain-emotional-resilience/>