



DEVELOPING TOGETHER

SOCIAL WORK TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

What are values and how do they guide our practice?

Students can struggle to articulate what values are and how they might guide or underpin practice. It can also be tricky to identify the differences between values, morals, ethics and rights. In order to demonstrate commitment to '**social justice**' and how we uphold an individual's '**human rights**' students need to understand and articulate what 'values' are in the first place.

Oppression may be experienced as a result of factors such as 'race, colour, sex, age, class, disability, sexual orientation, poverty, religion, offending, drug user status, etc.

Social work is "an ethical, value-based profession which is under threat from cuts in public services, growing inequality and increasing structural discrimination" (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). Students need to have a clear understanding of where inequalities exist, who experiences discrimination and manage conflicting values and competing rights in situations, all towards adopting an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory approach to practice.

Higham (2006) provides a breakdown of the different dimensions of values:

1. **Values for working with individuals** (p. 115) focus 'on the relationship between the social worker and the individual'
2. **Structural values** recognise the existence of societal discrimination and the need for social workers to 'respond with ... policies and practices to redress power imbalances' (p. 131)
3. **Emancipatory values** reinforce the expectation that social workers will work alongside service users to 'confront injustices that individual values cannot address satisfactorily' (p. 136).

As social workers, we need to incorporate these **three dimensions of values** alongside **reflective practice**.

Siobhan Maclean illustrates how our social work 'value base' is developed from Biestek's (1961) seven principles i.e. those that underpin a positive relationship between social worker and service user / client. These are:

1. **Individualisation:** the service user being treated as an individual.

2. **Purposeful expression of feelings:** the service user having the opportunity to express feelings.
3. **Controlled emotional involvement:** the service user should have a sympathetic response from an interested professional who adopts a certain level of emotional involvement.
4. **Acceptance:** the service user should be seen as a person of worth.
5. **Non judgemental attitude:** the service user should not be judged by the worker.
6. **Self determination:** the service user should make choices and decisions.
7. **Confidentiality**

Within discussion / supervision, think of the child / family / adult you are working with and consider the following:

What types of discrimination do you think the adult / children / teenager / parent might have faced / are facing?

What elements of the adult / children / teenager / parent's situation could lead to judgemental views from others?

How could you uphold each of the seven principles whilst working with the service user?

How could any personal and / or social work values influence the process of assessment? e.g. access to an assessment.

How could any personal and / or social work values affect the development of a support plan? e.g. access to appropriate support.

How can you demonstrate the seven principles i.e. social work values when meeting with service users and other professionals together e.g. in a Core Group, a TAC review, a placement review?

What tensions associated with professional power could there be? e.g. conflicting needs and rights between children and parents.

How might you address the social and personal disadvantages that the service users face? e.g. structural inequalities i.e. poverty and unemployment?

Ferguson, I. & Woodward, R. (2009) *Radical Social Work in Practice: Making a Difference*, Policy Press, Bristol.

Higham, P. (2006) *Social Work: Introducing Professional Practice*, Sage, London.

Maclean, S & Caffrey, B (2014) *Developing a Practice Learning Curriculum: A Guide for Practice Educators*, Kirwin Maclean Associates