



Ontario College of  
Social Workers and  
Social Service Workers

# CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Third Edition – 2023

# CODE OF ETHICS

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers regulates two professions: social workers and social service workers. The following sets out the Code of Ethics for [registrants](#) of the College:

- 1) A College registrant maintains the [best interest](#) of the [client](#) as the primary professional obligation;
- 2) A College registrant shows respect for the intrinsic worth of the clients they serve;
- 3) A College registrant carries out their professional duties and obligations with integrity and objectivity;
- 4) A College registrant continually maintains and enhances their professional [competence](#);
- 5) A College registrant does not exploit the relationship with a client for their own personal benefit, gain or gratification;
- 6) A College registrant maintains [confidentiality](#) in all client interactions;
- 7) A College registrant who engages in another profession, occupation, affiliation or calling must not allow outside interests to affect their relationship with clients;
- 8) A College registrant does not provide services in a manner that diminishes the public's trust or discredits the professions;
- 9) A College registrant advocates for workplace conditions and policies that are consistent with this Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers;
- 10) A College registrant takes an anti-racist and anti-oppressive stance in their work, and commits to fostering diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in all aspects of their practice;
- 11) A College registrant advocates for [social justice](#), the overall benefit of society, the environment and the global community.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Standards of Practice set out minimum standards of professional and ethical conduct required of registrants of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the College), in accordance with the College's mandate to protect the public from unprofessional, incompetent, and unfit practitioners<sup>1</sup>. The Standards of Practice, which have been approved by the College Council and implemented by bylaw, provide a means to guide College registrants, assess their behaviour, and adjudicate issues of professional practice.

The Standards of Practice apply to the breadth and scope of social work and social service work practice; they are to be applied by College registrants in their practice using their professional judgment in conjunction with any applicable legislation. Within the scope of practice for each profession, there may be variations in approaches and College registrants may modify their [interventions](#) in response to the demands of a particular situation so long as the Standards of Practice are met.

### MEANING OF CLIENT

The term "client" refers to any recipient of social work or social service work services. In differentiating between a [client](#) and a [client system](#), a registrant could ask the question: "To whom do I have an obligation in respect to the services I am providing?" A client could be an individual, couple, family, group, supervisee, student, research participant, organization or community that seeks and/or is the recipient of professional services. The College registrant's employer is not a client, except in circumstances where the College registrant has been contracted by the employer as a consultant.

### TYPES OF PRACTICE

College registrants provide a wide range of services that encompass direct and indirect practice and clinical and non-clinical interventions. Direct practice refers to professional activities on behalf of clients in which goals are reached through personal contact and immediate influence with those seeking services. Indirect practice refers to professional activities that do not involve immediate or personal contact with the client being served.<sup>2</sup>

For social workers, clinical practice refers to the professional application of social work theory and methods to the treatment and prevention of [psychosocial](#) disorder, disability or impairment, including but not limited to emotional and mental disorders.<sup>3</sup>

For social service workers, clinical practice refers to the professional application of social service work theory and methods to the treatment and prevention of social disorder, disability or impairment, including but not limited to emotional or mental disorders.

## EXPLANATORY NOTE (CON'T)

It is important to note that the contexts of practice may overlap. For example, a College registrant may provide counselling (direct-clinical), information and referral (indirect-clinical) to the same client. A College registrant may provide social support to clients in a social-recreational group (direct-non-clinical) or may administer a human service program (indirect-non-clinical).

The Standards of Practice contain eight Principles, each of which contains detailed Interpretations which provide further guidance to College registrants. All of the Standards of Practice apply to direct, indirect, clinical and non-clinical practice, unless otherwise stated. While a College registrant may find a specific Principle most relevant to their particular practice situation, the Standards of Practice should be considered and applied as a whole by registrants, in conjunction with the statutory requirements of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998*, S.O. 1998, c. 31, and regulations.

If at any time a registrant is unclear about their professional obligations or the requirements of the Standards of Practice, College registrants are encouraged to contact the College for guidance.

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998.*

<sup>2</sup> *From the Social Work Dictionary 6th edition by Robert L. Barker, NASW Press*

<sup>3</sup> *From the Social Work Dictionary 6th edition by Robert L. Barker, NASW Press*

# SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL WORK

Most social workers obtain a degree from an accredited professional program within the university system. As per the Canadian Association for Social Work Education standards of accreditation, a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree is a four year program and students are required to complete a minimum of 700 practicum hours. A Master of Social Work (MSW) degree is a graduate degree of a further one to two years, with a minimum of 450 practicum hours in one year degree programs plus an additional 450 practicum hours and/or a thesis in two year degree programs.

Workplace settings for social workers may include but are not limited to:

- Hospitals
- Social service agencies
- Schools
- Palliative care settings
- Colleges and universities
- Private practice

The scope of practice of the profession of **social work** means the [assessment](#), [diagnosis](#), treatment and evaluation of individual, interpersonal and societal problems using social work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities to enhance psychosocial and social functioning and/or reduce systemic barriers and promote equity, inclusion and belonging. This includes:

SW1 – Assessing, diagnosing, treating and evaluating services within a relationship between a social worker and a client;

SW2 – Supervising and/or consulting with a social worker, social work student or other supervisee;

SW3 – Providing social support to individuals and/or groups including relationship building, life skills instruction, employment and tangible support (such as food and financial assistance), and information and referral services;

SW4 – Educating social work and social service work students and other professionals and [paraprofessionals](#);

SW5 – Developing, promoting, managing, administering, delivering and evaluating human service programs, which may be done in collaboration with other professionals;

SW6 – Organizing and/or mobilizing community members and/or other professionals in the promotion of social change and/or in the elimination of structural and systemic racism and oppression in the context of direct client care;

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL WORK (CON'T)

SW7 – Providing contractual [consultation](#) services to social workers, social service workers, other professionals, organizations and/or communities as they relate to direct/indirect, clinical/non-clinical care or services;

SW8 – Developing, promoting, implementing and evaluating social policies;

SW9 – Conducting research related to the practice of social work, as defined in paragraphs (1) to (8) above; and

SW10 – Any other activities approved by the College.

If College registrants are unclear about whether specific activities fall within the scope of practice of **social work** and their professional obligations in that regard, College registrants should consult with the College's Professional Practice Department.

When the certificate of registration of a social worker is suspended, they shall not engage in the practice of social work, including but not limited to the activities listed above. Engaging in the practice of social work while the certificate is suspended constitutes an act of professional misconduct. College registrants who are suspended are still subject to the jurisdiction of the College.

College registrants who have an inactive or retired certificate of registration also shall not engage in the practice of social work, including but not limited to the activities listed above.

The Standards of Practice apply to the professions of social work and social service work. The Principles and Interpretations set out in the Standards of Practice are to be applied in the context of the scope of practice of each profession.

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL SERVICE WORK

The formal training for a social service worker is an approved diploma from a two-year program (or accelerated equivalent) offered at an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT); students will spend approximately 500 - 700 hours in field placement throughout their program, or have a combination of academic qualifications and experience that is substantially equivalent to a social service worker diploma.

Workplace settings for social service workers may include but are not limited to:

- Group homes and settlement agencies
- Income support programs
- Crisis centres
- Community resource centres
- Housing support programs

The scope of practice of the profession of **social service work** means the [assessment](#), treatment, and evaluation of individual, interpersonal and societal problems using social service work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities to enhance social functioning and/or to reduce systemic barriers and promote equity, inclusion and belonging. This includes:

SSW1 – Assessing, treating and evaluating services within a relationship between a social service worker and a client;

SSW2 – Supervising and/or consulting with a social service worker or social service work student or other supervisee;

SSW3 – Providing social support to individuals and/or groups including relationship-building, life skills instruction, employment and tangible support (including food and financial assistance), and information and referral services;

SSW4 – Educating social service work students and other professionals and [paraprofessionals](#);

SSW5 – Developing, promoting, managing, administrating, delivering and evaluating human service programs, which may be done in collaboration with other professionals;

SSW6 – Organizing and/or mobilizing community members and/or other professionals in the promotion of social change and/or in the elimination of structural and systemic racism and oppression in the context of direct client care;

SSW7 – Providing contractual [consultation](#) services to social service workers, other professionals, organizations and/or communities as they relate to direct/indirect, clinical/non-clinical care or services;



## **SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL SERVICE WORK (CON'T)**

SSW8 – Developing, promoting, implementing and evaluating social policies;

SSW9 – Conducting research related to the practice of social service work, as defined in paragraphs (1) to (8) above; and

SSW10 – Any other activities approved by the College.

If College registrants are unclear about whether specific activities fall within the scope of practice of social service work and their professional obligations in that regard, College registrants should consult with the College's Professional Practice Department.

When the certificate of registration of a social service worker is suspended, they shall not engage in the practice of social service work, including but not limited to the activities listed above. Engaging in the practice of social service work while the certificate is suspended constitutes an act of professional misconduct.

College registrants who have an inactive or retired certificate of registration also shall not engage in the practice of social service work, including but not limited to the activities listed above.

The Standards of Practice apply to the professions of social work and social service work. The Principles and Interpretations set out in the Standards of Practice are to be applied in the context of the scope of practice of each profession.

## PRINCIPLE I: RELATIONSHIP WITH CLIENTS

The social work relationship and the social service work relationship, as components of professional service, are each a mutual endeavour between active participants in providing and using professional expertise. Clients and College registrants jointly address relevant social, organizational, and/or personal issues of concern to clients. The foundation of this professional orientation is the belief that clients have the right and capacity to determine and achieve their goals and objectives. The social work relationship and the social service work relationship are each grounded in, and draw upon, theories of the social sciences and social work or social service work practice.

### INTERPRETATION

College registrants work with [clients](#) and [client systems](#) which include individuals, couples, families, groups, communities, organizations and government. The following fundamental practice principles arise from basic professional values, and College registrants shall adhere to these principles in their relationships with clients:

- 1.1 College registrants and clients shall participate together in setting and evaluating goals. A purpose for the relationship between College registrants and clients is identified.
- 1.2 Goals for relationships between College registrants and clients shall include enhancing clients' functioning and strengthening their capacity to adapt and make changes.
- 1.3 College registrants shall observe, clarify and inquire about information presented to them by clients.
- 1.4 College registrants shall respect and facilitate [self-determination](#) in a number of ways, including acting as resources for clients and encouraging them to decide which problems to address and how to address them.
- 1.5 College registrants shall be aware that limitations to self-determination may arise from agency mandate or function, or under the law (including under legislation, or an order of a court or tribunal).
- 1.6 College registrants shall respect each client's uniqueness and [intersectionality](#), and how personal and systemic factors shape perceptions and worldviews.
- 1.7 College registrants shall be aware of and reflect upon their values, attitudes, assumptions and biases and how these impact their professional relationships with clients.
- 1.8 College registrants shall distinguish their own needs and interests from those of their clients to ensure that, within professional relationships, clients' needs and interests remain paramount.
- 1.9 College registrants employed by organizations shall consider the purpose, mandate and function of those organizations and how these impact upon and limit professional relationships with clients.

## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY

College registrants shall maintain competence and integrity in their practice and adhere to the standards in the *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*.

### INTERPRETATION

#### 2.1 Competence

College registrants shall commit to ongoing professional development and to maintaining competence in their practice.

- 2.1.1 College registrants shall be responsible for being aware of the extent and parameters of their competence and their professional scope of practice and limit their practice accordingly.
- 2.1.2 A scope of practice differs from a College registrant's job description. An employer is not obliged to allow a College registrant to perform all of the activities described in the College's scope of practice statement. Additionally, an employer may require a social worker or social service worker to perform activities that are not described in their scope of practice; this is permitted provided that the College registrant is competent and practicing in accordance with all relevant legislation.
- 2.1.3 When a client's needs fall outside the College registrant's usual area of practice, the College registrant shall inform the client of the option to be referred to another professional. However, if the client wishes to continue the professional relationship with the College registrant and have the College registrant provide the service, the College registrant may do so provided that:
  - (i) the College registrant ensures they are competent to provide services by seeking additional [supervision](#), [consultation](#) and/or education and
  - (ii) the services are not beyond the College registrant's professional scope of practice as a social worker or social service worker.

Recommendations for particular services, referrals to other professionals or a continuation of the professional relationship shall be guided by the client's interests as well as the College registrant's judgment and knowledge.

- 2.1.4 College registrants shall be familiar with emerging social work or social service work knowledge and practice relevant to their areas of professional practice.
- 2.1.5 College registrants shall demonstrate their commitment to ongoing professional development by engaging in continuing education and by complying with the Continuing Competence Program.
- 2.1.6 College registrants shall be knowledgeable about the policies, legislation, programs and issues related to the communities, institutions and services in their areas of practice.

## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY (CONT)

2.1.7 College registrants shall ensure that any professional recommendations or opinions they provide are supported by [evidence](#) and a credible body of professional social work or social service work knowledge.

Evidence can include information gathered from:

- direct observation;
- clinical sessions;
- professional meetings;
- Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing;
- collateral sources;
- documents and correspondence;
- clinical tools (e.g. diagnostic assessment measures, rating scales);
- research;
- training and continuing education;
- supervision; and/or
- journals/literature.

2.1.8 College registrants shall engage in the ongoing process of self-reflection and evaluation of their practice and shall seek [supervision](#) and [consultation](#) when appropriate.

### 2.2 Integrity

College registrants shall recognize that they are in a position of power and responsibility to all clients and that they are responsible for ensuring that clients are protected from the abuse of such power during and after the provision of professional services.

2.2.1 College registrants shall establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries for the protection of clients in all aspects of professional relationships. Boundary violations include sexual misconduct (see [Principle VIII: Sexual Misconduct](#)) and other misuse and abuse of the registrants power. Non-sexual boundary violations may include emotional, physical, social and financial violations. College registrants shall not engage in situations in which College registrants ought reasonably to have known that the client would be at risk in any way. College registrants shall not have professional relationships or provide services to clients while the College registrant is in a [conflict of interest](#). College registrants shall achieve this by:

- (i) evaluating professional relationships and other situations involving clients or former clients for potential conflicts of interest and seeking consultation to assist in identifying and dealing with such potential conflicts of interest;

## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY (CONT)

- (ii) avoiding conflicts of interest and/or [dual relationships](#) with clients or former clients, or with students, employees and supervisees, that could impair the College registrants' professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation or harm to clients; and
- (iii) declaring a conflict of interest should it arise and taking appropriate steps to address it and eliminate the conflict.

- 2.2.2 A College registrant is in a "conflict of interest" when they have a personal, financial or professional interest or obligation that may influence how they carry out their professional responsibilities. A conflict of interest may be **actual** or **perceived**, the latter meaning that a reasonable person, informed of all the circumstances, would have significant concerns about the College registrants' ability to be objective. A mere possibility or suspicion of influence does not in itself create a conflict of interest.
- 2.2.3 A dual relationship exists when, in addition to the professional relationship, the College registrant has a past, present, or subsequent familial, social, financial, supervisory or other relationship with the client. A dual relationship does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest, but when present, it creates the strong possibility that an actual or perceived conflict of interest will arise.

While dual relationships should be avoided wherever possible, there may be some circumstances where the registrant has an ethical obligation to provide professional services, including when:

- i) there is no other professional available to provide the services;
- ii) the College registrant possesses unique attributes or specialized skills, and/or services are required and are not otherwise available; or
- iii) the client is at risk of harm without the College registrant's professional services.

In all such instances, the College registrant shall seek supervision and document their decision; documentation should include how they used their professional judgment in developing their plan to maintain boundaries and ensure that the client understands the parameters of the professional relationship. This includes engaging in discussions with clients regarding the management of contacts outside the professional context.

- 2.2.4 College registrants shall not have sexual relations with clients (See [Principle VIII: Sexual Misconduct](#)).
- 2.2.5 College registrants shall not provide social work or social service work services to individuals with whom they are having sexual relations (including but not limited to someone with whom the registrant is in a sexual and/or spousal and/or romantic relationship.)
- 2.2.6 College registrants shall not use information obtained during a professional relationship, and do not

## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY (CONT)

use their professional position of authority, to coerce, improperly influence, harass, abuse or exploit a client, former client, student, trainee, employee, colleague or research subject.

- 2.2.7 College registrants shall not solicit or use information from clients to acquire, either directly or indirectly, advantage or material benefits.
- 2.2.8 When a complaint investigation is underway or a matter has been referred to the [Discipline Committee](#) or the [Fitness to Practise Committee](#), College registrants shall co-operate fully with all policies and procedures of the [Complaints](#), Discipline and Fitness to Practise Committees, and conduct themselves in a manner which demonstrates respect for both the complainant and the College.
- 2.2.9 College registrants shall recognize that they are in a position of influence with respect to witnesses and/or complainants in complaint, discipline and fitness to practise proceedings and shall not interfere with witnesses and/or complainants.
- 2.2.10 College registrants shall not engage in the practice of social work or social service work,
- i) while under the influence of any substance, or
  - ii) while suffering from illness, condition or disorder, which the registrant knows or ought reasonably to know impairs the registrants ability to practise.
- 2.2.11 College registrants shall not misrepresent professional qualifications, education, experience or affiliation. (See also [Principle VI: Fees](#) and [Principle VII: Advertising and Communications](#).)
- 2.2.12 College registrants shall avoid conduct in their social work or social service work practice which could reasonably be perceived as reflecting negatively on the professions of social work or social service work.
- 2.2.13 College registrants shall conduct themselves professionally, behaving at all times with civility, respect and fairness toward others, while respecting diversity of opinion and differences in perspective.
- 2.2.14 College registrants shall promote equity, inclusion and belonging in their work with clients and shall advocate for social change that challenges systemic oppression and seeks to eliminate implicit bias. College registrants shall approach all aspects of their work with humility (including [cultural humility](#)) and recognize how privilege and power imbalances affect policies and practice and impact clients.
- 2.2.15 College registrants educate themselves on the role that the social work and social service work professions have played in perpetuating harm against Indigenous peoples, and demonstrate their understanding that Indigenous clients and Indigenous College registrants did not contribute to the damaging effects of colonization.

## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY (CONT)

- 2.2.16 College registrants shall strive to enhance the capacity of clients to address their own needs. College registrants shall assist clients to access necessary information, services and resources wherever possible, and shall promote and facilitate client participation in decision-making.
- 2.2.17 Where the client is competent and able to give instruction, [advocacy](#) shall be at the direction of the client.
- 2.2.18 If there is a conflict between the College's Standards of Practice and a College registrant's work environment, the College registrant's obligation is to the *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*.
- 2.2.19 College registrants shall promote workplace conditions and policies that are consistent with the *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* and use professional judgment in determining how to do so. Advocacy may include documenting and discussing concerns with a supervisor or manager, or other key person in the organization.

## PRINCIPLE III: RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS

College registrants shall ensure that professional services are provided responsibly to those persons, groups, communities or organizations seeking their assistance.

### INTERPRETATION

- 3.1 College registrants shall not discriminate against anyone, including but not limited to on the basis of citizenship, race, place of origin, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, ancestry, creed, sex (including pregnancy), family status, marital status, genetic characteristics, religion, worldview, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, class, social-economic status or ability.
- 3.2 College registrants shall adhere to the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Canada Human Rights Act*, and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, where applicable, in the provision of services.
- 3.3 College registrants shall obtain informed consent from clients, where needed, before providing social work or social service work services, including but not limited to, by:
- providing accurate and complete information about the services available;
  - explaining the advantages and disadvantages of receiving/not receiving services;
  - describing the expectations and limitations of service;
  - explaining clients' rights with respect to capacity, privacy and confidentiality;
  - clarifying registrants' mandatory reporting obligations and other limits to confidentiality ([for more information see Principle V: Confidentiality, interpretation 5.1.3](#)); and
  - providing information in a way that is appropriate for the client's cognitive ability.
- 3.4 College registrants shall deliver client services and respond to client queries, concerns, and/or complaints in a timely and reasonable manner.
- 3.5 College registrants shall not solicit their employers' clients for private practice, whether their employer is an individual or an organization (including an organization with whom the registrant has an independent service contract). However, College registrants may accept referrals from their employers.
- 3.6 In circumstances where a client makes an unsolicited request to follow a College registrant from an organization to their private practice, the College registrant shall ensure that doing so would not create a [conflict of interest](#). College registrants shall not accept such a request unless they are the most appropriate person to deliver the services and the client would not be better served by another professional.
- 3.7 College registrants shall assist potential clients to obtain other services if College registrants are unable to provide the requested professional help.



## PRINCIPLE III: RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS (CONT)

- 3.8 College registrants shall not offer a service and/or product that the registrant knows or ought reasonably to know is not likely to benefit the client and/or that is not relevant to the client's needs.
- 3.9 College registrants shall provide only those services and/or products that are relevant to the client's needs and shall provide them in a manner that conforms to College standards.
- 3.10 College registrants shall terminate professional services to clients when the contract for service ends and/or services are no longer required or requested. It is professional misconduct to discontinue professional services that are needed except when one or more of the following exist:
- i) the client requests the discontinuation;
  - ii) the client withdraws from the service;
  - iii) the services provided no longer benefit the client;
  - iv) continuing service would require the registrant to contravene ethical and/or legal requirements;
  - v) the provision of services to the client has created a situation where the College registrant's values, ethics and/or boundaries have been violated to the extent that the College registrant is unable to provide appropriate professional services;
  - vi) the client has repeatedly, and without adequate explanation, cancelled or changed appointment or meeting times to the extent that the College registrant and/or the organization experiences or believes that financial hardship and/or service disruption will occur;
  - vii) the client is unable or unwilling to reimburse the College registrant or the College registrant's employer for services rendered, when such reimbursement has been previously agreed to by the client and is both appropriate and required as a condition of providing services (see [Principle VI: Fees](#)); or
  - viii) continuing to provide the services would place the College registrant at serious risk of harm.
- In the circumstances described in subparagraphs i-vii, the College registrant shall make reasonable efforts to hold a termination session with the client and shall provide an explanation for discontinuing the services.
- 3.11 College registrants who terminate professional services to clients make reasonable efforts to arrange alternative or replacement services; and/or give the client a reasonable opportunity to arrange alternative or replacement services.

## PRINCIPLE III: RESPONSIBILITY TO CLIENTS (CONT)

- 3.12 College registrants who anticipate the termination or interruption of service to clients shall ensure that clients are notified promptly and that arrangements are made for the termination, transfer, referral, or continuation of service in accordance with clients' needs and preferences.
- 3.13 In a situation where a College registrant has a personal relationship with a former client, the registrant shall assume full responsibility for demonstrating that the former client has not been exploited, coerced or manipulated, either intentionally or unintentionally, in the context of that personal relationship. College registrants shall not engage in personal relationships with former clients when the relationship would create a conflict of interest or where the relationship is otherwise prohibited.
- 3.14 Where appropriate, College registrants shall advocate for and/or with clients and shall ensure that clients are kept informed about actions taken and their outcome. College registrants adhere to [Principle V: Confidentiality](#) when providing advocacy services.

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD

The creation and maintenance of records is an essential component of ethical and professional practice. The process of preparing and organizing material for the record facilitates the understanding of the [client](#) and [client system](#) and allows for the planning of appropriate interventions. The purpose of the social work and social service work record is to:

- document services in a recognizable form;
- ensure the continuity and quality of service;
- establish accountability for and evidence of the services rendered;
- enable the evaluation of service quality; and
- provide information to be used for research and education.

College registrants shall ensure that records are current, accurate, contain relevant information about clients and are managed in a manner that protects client privacy and in accordance with any applicable privacy and other legislation.

### INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 Record Content and Format

- 4.1.1 College registrants shall record information in a manner that conforms with accepted service or intervention standards and protocols within the profession, is relevant to the services provided, and is in a format that facilitates the monitoring and evaluation of the effects of the service/intervention. College registrants include all required information in the record ([see footnote 1 for a list](#)).
- 4.1.2 Social work and social service work records shall include progress notes and reports and, depending on whether the practice context is direct/clinical or indirect/non-clinical, may include any or all of the following:
- checklists;
  - correspondence;
  - minutes;
  - client reflections, journals, art, and/or homework (direct/clinical settings);
  - appointment records; and/or
  - audio and/or video recordings.

The tools or data used by the College registrant in developing a professional opinion may be included in the record. Such tools or data may include rough or draft notes, messages, test results, sociograms and/or [genograms](#). If placed in the record, these tools cannot be removed and shall be managed in the same way as other documents in the record, in accordance with privacy legislation; if not placed in the record, they shall be appropriately destroyed.

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

- 4.1.3 College registrants shall keep accurate records. An accurate record shall:
- i) clearly document the client's situation as they (or the client system) have described it;
  - ii) contain only information that is useful to the understanding of the situation and the desired outcome;
  - iii) report impartially and objectively the factors relevant to the client's situation, and make a clear distinction between the College registrant's observations and opinions and the information reported by the client;
  - iv) be easy to understand, avoiding vague, unclear or obscure language and/or symbols;
  - v) clearly identify corrections;
  - vi) be free of bias, prejudice and/or discriminatory remarks;
  - vii) identify sources of data; and
  - viii) indicate the identity of the service provider.
- 4.1.4 College registrants shall not make a statement in the record, or in reports based on the record, or issue or sign a certificate, report or other documents in the course of practising either profession that the College registrant knows or ought reasonably to know is false, misleading, inaccurate or otherwise unprofessional.
- 4.1.5 College registrants shall keep systematic, dated, and legible records for each client or client system served.
- 4.1.6 College registrants shall ensure the record reflects the service provided and the identity, designation and/or title of the service provider.

Social service work registrants shall use:

- the designation "[RSSW](#)"; and/or
- the title "Social Service Worker"; or
- the title "Registered Social Service Worker".

Social work registrants shall use:

- the designation "[RSW](#)"; and/or
- the title "Social Worker"; or
- the title "Registered Social Worker".

[Principle VII](#): Advertising and Communications describes the requirements for College registrants holding an earned doctorate in social work who wish to use the title "doctor".

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

- 4.1.7 College registrants shall document their own actions and shall not sign records or reports authored by any other person, except in accordance with Interpretation 4.1.8 or 4.1.9 .
- 4.1.8 A College registrant may sign a record or report authored by another person, but only where the College registrant co-signs that record or report, together with the author, in one of the following situations:
- (i) in the College registrant's capacity as a supervisor of the author of the record or report; or
  - (ii) in the College registrant's capacity as an authorized signing officer of a [professional corporation](#), where the author of the record or report is an employee, shareholder, officer or director of that professional corporation; or
  - (iii) in the College registrant's capacity as a member of a multi-disciplinary team that participated in providing the observations and recommendations contained in the record or report, where the author of the record or report is also a member of that multi-disciplinary team.
- 4.1.9 A College registrant may sign a record or report authored by another person where the author is unable to sign the record or report due to illness, disability, absence or other good cause, but only if the content of the record or report is within the College registrant's scope of practice, and:
- i) the author expressly authorizes the College registrant, either verbally or in writing, to sign the record or report on the author's behalf; or, if such authorization is not reasonably available, the registrant takes steps to ensure the currency and accuracy of the information and recommendations contained in the record or report; and
  - ii) the College registrant clearly indicates the capacity in which they are signing the record or report.
- 4.1.10 In situations in which the College registrant signs the record or report with the author's authorization, they are simply signing on behalf of the author and not endorsing the currency and accuracy of the information and recommendations in the record or report. In such cases, the College registrant shall sign the author's name (in quotation marks), followed by the registrant's name, and indicate that they are signing the record or report on behalf of the author, as follows:
- [“author's name”] by [College registrant's name], on behalf of [author's name].

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

- 4.1.11 Where authorization is not reasonably available and the College registrant has taken steps to ensure the currency and accuracy of the information and recommendations contained in the record or report, the College registrant shall sign their own name to the record or report. In so doing, the College registrant is endorsing the currency and accuracy of the information and recommendations in the record or report, and the College registrant shall not sign the record if they cannot make that endorsement. When signing the report, the College registrant shall clearly state that they are not the author but endorse the information and recommendations in the record or report.
- 4.1.12 College registrants shall record information when the event occurs or as soon as reasonably possible thereafter.
- 4.1.13 College registrants may use a [documentation by exception](#) system but shall only do so where the total record captures the minimum content as set out in [Footnote 1](#).

### 4.2 Record Maintenance

- 4.2.1 College registrants shall comply with the requirements regarding record retention, storage, preservation and security set out in any applicable privacy and other legislation.
- 4.2.2 College registrants shall ensure that each client record is stored and preserved in a secure location for at least ten years from the date of the last entry or, if the client was less than eighteen years of age at the date of the last entry, at least ten years from the day the client became or would have become eighteen. When considering storing records for a longer period, College registrants shall abide by the following principles:
- i) Where required by law or by an employer's policy, College registrants shall store and preserve records for a longer period of time.
  - ii) College registrants shall store a client record for a longer period only if, based on a reasonable judgment, such longer retention period may be necessary because there is a reasonable possibility that future access to the record may be needed (such as, but not limited to, in cases involving minors, sexual abuse and/or current or future litigation).
- 4.2.3 College registrants employed by an organization shall acquire and maintain a thorough understanding of the organization's policies regarding the retention, storage, preservation and security of records, and abide by those policies
- 4.2.4 Self-employed College registrants and College registrants who are responsible for records maintenance and retention at their organization (see [Principle V: Confidentiality, Interpretation 5.1.8 for more information](#)) shall establish or confirm that there are clear policies related to record retention, storage, preservation and security.

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

4.2.5 College registrants shall dispose of records only after the time frames described in Interpretation 4.2.2 have elapsed. College registrants shall dispose of the contents of records in a way that ensures that the confidentiality of the information is not compromised.

4.2.6 College registrants shall take necessary steps to protect the confidentiality and security of all communications and hard copy and electronic records.

All client records shall be stored in an area that is inaccessible to persons who have no legitimate interest in the records. Hard copies shall be secured by lock and key and electronic records shall be password protected.

4.2.7 An electronic system containing social work and social service work records shall:

- require a private access code or password;
- maintain an audit trail that:
  - i) records the date and time of each entry of information for each client;
  - ii) indicates any changes to the recorded information; and
  - iii) preserves the original content of the recorded information when changed or updated;
- allows for the recovery of files, or otherwise provides reasonable protection against loss of, damage to, and inaccessibility of information; and
- provides for a paper printout of the record.

4.2.8 Self-employed College registrants and College registrants who are responsible for complying with privacy legislation (see [Principle V: Confidentiality, Interpretation 5.1.8 for more information](#)), who [cease practice](#) shall either:

- (i) maintain their client records in accordance with Interpretation 4.2.2 ; or
- (ii) make arrangements to transfer the records to another College registrant or other regulated professional.

4.2.9 If a College registrant who ceases practice makes arrangements to transfer their records to another College registrant or other regulated professional, the College registrant shall:

- i) ensure that the other College registrant or regulated professional first agrees in writing to comply with Principle IV and the Interpretations set out in Principle IV;
- ii) make reasonable efforts to give notice to their clients of the future location of their records, unless they are required, under any applicable privacy or other legislation, to obtain their clients'

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

consent to such transfer, in which case they shall obtain their clients' consent; and

iii) ensure that they meet all requirements regarding the transfer of records set out in any applicable privacy and other legislation.

4.2.10 If a College registrant transfers their clients to another College registrant or regulated professional, or if the client requests a transfer to another service provider, the College registrant shall ensure that they meet all requirements regarding the transfer of records set out in any applicable privacy and other legislation.

### **4.3 Access and Correction of a Record**

4.3.1 College registrants shall comply with the requirements regarding access to and correction of [client information](#) including personal information in a record as set out in applicable privacy and other legislation.

4.3.2 College registrants employed by an organization shall acquire, maintain an understanding of, abide by, and inform clients and/or their authorized representative about the organization's policies regarding access to and correction of information in a record.

4.3.3 Self-employed College registrants and College registrants who are responsible for complying with privacy legislation ([See Principle V: Confidentiality, Interpretation 5.1.8](#)) shall establish and communicate to their clients clear policies regarding access to and correction of information in a record.

4.3.4 College registrants shall provide the client or the client's authorized representative with access to the client record in accordance with any applicable privacy and other legislation, unless this is prohibited by law or the College registrant is otherwise permitted to refuse access.

4.3.5 College registrants shall refer to and follow relevant legislation when determining whether a person is a client's authorized representative.

4.3.6 College registrants shall provide clients or their authorized representatives with reasonable access to the client's record or such part or parts of the record as is reasonable in the circumstances. Clients and/or their representatives have the right to receive an appropriate explanation from the College registrant about the information in the client record, unless otherwise prohibited by law.

4.3.7 Where College registrants are prohibited by law from providing access to information in a record or otherwise permitted to refuse access to information in a record, they shall comply with the



## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

requirements regarding a refusal to provide access set out in applicable privacy and other legislation.

- 4.3.8 Where College registrants refuse access to the record, they shall inform the client of the reason for refusal and the recourse available to the client if they disagree.
- 4.3.9 When the record includes information that pertains to more than one client and providing access to a record could therefore mean disclosing information about another person, College registrants shall provide access to information that pertains only to the individual who has requested access unless the other person(s) has consented to the disclosure of information about themselves.
- 4.3.10 College registrants shall preserve the integrity of client records. If a client disagrees with the accuracy or completeness of information in a record and wishes the record amended, College registrants shall comply with the requirements of any applicable privacy and other legislation with respect to the correction of the record.
- 4.3.11 If a client disagrees with the accuracy or completeness of a record and wishes the record amended, College registrants may incorporate into the record a signed statement or an electronic entry authorized by the client specifying the disagreement and the client's correction. College registrants shall not obliterate any incorrect information in the record.

### **4.4 Disclosure of Information from a Record**

- 4.4.1 College registrants shall inform clients early in their relationship of any limits of client confidentiality, including with respect to the client record. When clients or their authorized representatives provide consent to disclose their information to third parties, College registrants shall document this and disclose information from the record within a reasonable time. Consent shall be documented and must identify:
- (i) the information that is to be disclosed, for example a partial record, the entire record, or a summary of the registrant's contact with the client;
  - (ii) the party or parties to whom the information is to be disclosed; and
  - (iii) any limits to the consent.
- 4.4.2 If, in the registrant's professional judgment, disclosure of information from the record to a third party could result in harm to the client, College registrants shall make a reasonable effort to inform the client of the possible consequences and seek to clarify the client's consent to such disclosure. Registrants may disclose information from the record to third parties without the client's consent only if disclosure is required or allowed by law. (See also [Principle V: Confidentiality, Interpretation 5.2.4](#))
- 4.4.3 When College registrants receive a request from a third party to disclose information from a record

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

that pertains to more than one client (for example a couple, family, group, community agency, government department, or other organization/business) College registrants shall obtain consent to the disclosure of information from all the clients before information from such record is disclosed to the third party.

- 4.4.4 When College registrants receive a request from a client to disclose information from a record that pertains to more than one client, College registrants shall provide access to information that pertains only to the client who has requested access (see Interpretation 4.3.9) and, before disclosing information that pertains to any other client, obtain consent to the disclosure from each of them.
- 4.4.5 College registrants who are served with a [formal notice](#) or [subpoena](#) to produce client records before a court and who are of the opinion that disclosure would be detrimental to the client, should themselves, or through legal counsel, advocate for non-disclosure to the court. If the College registrant is unsuccessful in their advocacy, the records must be disclosed as requested in the formal notice or subpoena.
- 4.4.6 College registrants shall comply with the requirements regarding the use or disclosure of information for research or educational purposes set out in any applicable privacy and other legislation.
- 4.4.7 College registrants may permit client records to be used for the purpose of research or education, but shall first ensure that any [identifying information](#) has been removed and clients' anonymity is protected. (See also [Principle V: Confidentiality, Interpretation 5.1.11](#))
- 4.4.8 A College registrant or other regulated professional to whom another College registrant's client records have been transferred, shall comply with the aforementioned interpretations regarding access and disclosure with respect to the transferred records.

## PRINCIPLE IV: THE SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORK RECORD (CON'T)

### FOOTNOTES

1. Information in the social work and social service work record with respect to each client includes the following:
  - (i) Identifying information regarding the recipient of services (individual, family, couple, group, agency, organization, community);  
Depending on the nature of the services provided, identifying information may include:
    - a) name, address, telephone number of each client(s);
    - b) date of birth of each client(s);
    - c) where available, name, address, and telephone number of a person(s) to be contacted in case of emergency;
    - d) name, address, telephone number(s) of the main contact person or position, if different from; and
    - e) sponsors, funders, accountability.
  - (ii) The date, initiator, purpose of the social work or social service work referral, where relevant, and, if significant, the setting of the first professional encounter with the client;
  - (iii) Where applicable, the key elements of the contract or working agreement, namely: client, contracted services, provider of services, fee, reimbursement schedule, and time period for completion of services;
  - (iv) The time period of involvement if not specified in (c);
  - (v) The date of completion/termination, where relevant, and if significantly different from (c), an explanation for the difference;
  - (vi) Particulars of the social work or social service work process, as applicable:
    - a) the history obtained by the registrant;
    - b) assessment, diagnosis, formulation and plan;
    - c) treatment and other interventions, e.g. facilitation, advocacy, transfer of skills, development of action plans;
    - d) outcome or results and evaluation;
    - e) referrals made by the registrant;
    - f) recommendations; and
    - g) other services, e.g. verbal and/or written reports/briefs/analyses, research studies and/or their individual components, presentations/speeches/lectures, management related services, stakeholder consultations and professional opinions
  - (vii) Consents, releases or authorizations pertaining to the intervention or the communication of information about the client;
  - (viii) Fees and charges administered, if any.

## PRINCIPLE V: CONFIDENTIALITY

College registrants shall hold all client information in strict confidence and comply with any applicable privacy and other legislation. College registrants shall disclose such information only with client consent or when required or allowed by law.

### INTERPRETATION

#### 5.1 Policy and Processes

- 5.1.1 College registrants shall comply with any applicable privacy and other legislation.
- 5.1.2 College registrants shall obtain consent to the collection, use or disclosure of client information including personal information, unless otherwise permitted or required by law. 'Personal information' means information about an identifiable individual and includes (but is not limited to) personal health information.
- 5.1.3 College registrants shall inform clients early in their relationship of the limits of confidentiality of information. Limits to confidentiality may include registrants being required to share information with:
- supervisors;
  - interprofessional teams;
  - administrative staff;
  - students and volunteers;
  - appropriate accreditation bodies; and
  - Children's Aid Societies, the College, law enforcement organizations and/or other organizations, as required by law.

College registrants shall respect their clients' right to withhold or withdraw consent to, or place conditions on, the disclosure of their information (subject to when such disclosure is required by law).

- 5.1.4 College registrants shall anticipate circumstances in which there may be limits to confidentiality, and discuss these limits with the team, group or community.
- 5.1.5 College registrants shall be aware of the distinction between [consultation](#) and [supervision](#) as it pertains to sharing client information. In consultation, clients are not identified.
- 5.1.6 College registrants employed by an organization shall acquire and maintain a thorough understanding of the organization's policies and practices relating to the management of client information, including:

## PRINCIPLE V: CONFIDENTIALITY (CONT)

- (i) when, how and the purposes for which the organization routinely collects, uses, modifies, discloses, retains or disposes of information;
- (ii) the administrative, technical and physical safeguards and practices that the organization maintains with respect to the information;
- (iii) how an individual may obtain access to or request correction of a record of information about the individual; and
- (iv) how to make a complaint about the organization's compliance with its policies and practices.

- 5.1.7 Self-employed College registrants and College registrants who are responsible for complying with privacy legislation shall establish clear policies and practices relating to the management of client information, including the matters identified in 5.1.6 (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) above, and make information about these policies and practices readily available in accordance with any applicable privacy and other legislation.
- 5.1.8 College registrants who are responsible for complying with privacy legislation shall include those who are considered to be "health care practitioners" (within the meaning of the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*) and employed or retained by persons who are not "health information custodians" (within the meaning of the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004*). Examples include social workers or social service workers who provide healthcare as part of their duties and are employed by:
- Children's Aid Societies;
  - providers of supportive housing; and
  - government bodies that provide services in correctional facilities or youth justice facilities.
- 5.1.9 When College registrants are employed by an agency or organization whose policies and practices conflict with College standards of confidentiality, College standards shall take precedence and registrants shall comply with the College standards.
- 5.1.10 College registrants shall obtain clients' consent before photographing, audio or video recording or permitting third-party observation of clients' activities. Exceptions (which may include activities undertaken during child abuse investigations, for example) may be allowed under the law or by order of the court.

## PRINCIPLE V: CONFIDENTIALITY (CONT)

- 5.1.11 College registrants shall comply with the requirements regarding the use or disclosure of information for research or educational purposes set out in any applicable privacy and other legislation. Where case scenarios are presented for research, educational or publication purposes, client confidentiality shall be ensured through the alteration and/or disguise of identifying information. (See also [Interpretation 4.4.7.](#))
- 5.1.12 College registrants in indirect, non-clinical practice shall distinguish between public and private information related to their clients. Public information is any information about clients and/or their activities that is readily available to the general public and the disclosure of which would not harm the client and does not include personal information about an individual. Public information related to clients may be disclosed where it is appropriate to do so, provided that such disclosure is permitted by law and compliant with College standards.
- 5.1.13 When working with community groups, government agencies and other organizations that are clients, College registrants shall keep confidential any sensitive information about the client group, agency or organization, including human resources, financial, managerial, strategic and/or politically sensitive material, the disclosure of which could harm the client.

### 5.2 Disclosure of client information

- 5.2.1 College registrants shall obtain client consent prior to each disclosure of information, where consent is required. Clients may sign consent forms or provide verbal consent; College registrants shall document that consent was obtained.
- 5.2.2 When consent to the disclosure of information is required, College registrants shall make reasonable efforts to inform clients of the parameters of information to be disclosed, advise clients of the possible consequences of such disclosure, and inform clients of the following:
- who is requesting the information (name, title, employer and address);
  - why the information is desired;
  - how the receiving party plans to use the information;
  - if the receiving party may pass the information on to a third party without the client's consent;
  - exactly what information is to be disclosed;
  - the repercussions of giving or refusing to give consent;
  - the expiration date of the consent if applicable; and
  - how to revoke their consent.

## PRINCIPLE V: CONFIDENTIALITY (CONT)

- 5.2.3 College registrants shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that the information disclosed is pertinent and relevant to the professional service for which clients have contracted. College registrants shall take reasonable steps to ensure that the information disclosed is as accurate, complete and up-to-date as is necessary for the purposes of the disclosure, and shall clearly set out the limitations, if any, on the accuracy, completeness or up-to-date character of the information.
- 5.2.4 When disclosure is required or allowed by law or by order of a court, College registrants shall not divulge more information than is required or allowed.
- 5.2.5 A College registrant, or the [professional corporation](#) through which they are practising, may disclose information to the College without client consent when required in relation to a review, investigation or proceeding under the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998*. College registrants and/or professional corporations shall not divulge more information than is reasonably required.
- 5.2.6 College registrants wishing to use collection agencies or legal proceedings to collect unpaid fees shall disclose, in the context of legal proceedings, only the client's name, the contract for service, statements of accounts and any records related to billing. In these circumstances, College registrants shall not divulge more information than is reasonably required. ([See also Interpretation 6.1](#))
- 5.2.7 College registrants in indirect, non-clinical practice shall obtain the client's consent before:
- publishing reports about their work with the client;
  - referring to their work with the client in their advertising;
  - speaking with media, funders, potential funders and/or other individuals/groups about the organization, agency or community; and
  - bringing guests, observers, or media to meetings involving the client.

### 5.3 Electronic Practice

- 5.3.1 College registrants using online platforms and providing virtual services shall:
- explain to clients the limits of confidentiality (including any particular limits associated with online platforms and/or virtual practice) prior to or during the first online meeting and document this conversation;
  - ensure that the collection, use and storage of client information complies with applicable privacy legislation; and
  - ensure that client information is stored in a jurisdiction where the privacy laws are consistent with Ontario laws or, where applicable, Canadian federal laws.

## **PRINCIPLE V: CONFIDENTIALITY (CON'T)**

- 5.3.2 When communicating virtually, College registrants shall maintain client confidentiality and ensure client safety by:
- verifying the client's identity when it would be possible for another person to pose as the client;
  - establishing a plan (such as a discrete phrase or sign) so that clients can convey that they are not alone and/or are not safe; and
  - developing a safety plan with the client, which includes asking them for the contact information for, and permission to contact, another person in the event of an emergency or service interruption.
- 5.3.3 When using electronic communication to send client information, College registrants shall mark it confidential when possible, and shall ensure that it has been received by the intended recipients.

Electronic communication refers to texting, email, video chat platforms, social media platforms, websites, faxes or other types of online communication.



## PRINCIPLE VI: FEES

When setting or administering contracts for services, College registrants shall inform clients fully about fees, charges and collection procedures.

### INTERPRETATION

- 6.1 College registrants shall not charge or accept payment for any fees unless the basis for those fees was fully disclosed to the client before the College registrant began providing the services to which the fees relate. When establishing service contracts with clients, College registrants shall:
- Explain in advance or at the beginning of service the basis for all charges, giving a reasonable estimate of projected fees, and [disbursements](#), pointing out any uncertainties involved so that clients may make informed decisions with respect to using the registrant's services. Factors which may influence the amount charged include:
    - the time and effort spent;
    - the complexity of the issues; and
    - the skills and expertise required.
  - Ensure that they do not charge fees that are [excessive](#) in relation to the services performed.
  - Discuss and renegotiate the service contract with clients when changes in the fees are anticipated.
  - Ensure that contracts for service clearly describe billing procedures, reasonable penalties for missed and cancelled appointments or late payment of fees, the use of collection agencies or legal proceedings to collect unpaid fees and third-party fee payments. ([See also Interpretation 5.2.6](#))
- 6.2 College registrants may reduce, waive or delay collecting fees in situations where clients are facing financial hardship, or they may refer clients to appropriate alternative agencies so that clients are not deprived of social work or social service work services.
- 6.3 College registrants may provide services without remuneration, so long as these services adhere to College standards and do not constitute a conflict of interest.
- 6.4 College registrants may accept culturally relevant recognition for services, as long as those services adhere to College standards and do not put the registrant in a conflict of interest.
- 6.5 College registrants may ask a client to notify them immediately if circumstances arise that may interfere with the client's ability to continue with the normal payment of fees.
- 6.6 College registrants shall not accept or give commissions, rebates, fees, other benefits or anything of value for receiving or making a referral of a client to or from another person.

## PRINCIPLE VII: ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Advertising and other communications are intended to inform and educate the public about available social work and social service work services. College registrants shall ensure that all their advertising and communications are compatible with the standards and ethics of the social work and social service work professions.

### 7.1 Advertising and Communications

- 7.1.1 Registrants may advertise their services through public statements, announcements, digital or print media, social media, or promotional activities provided that the advertising or communications:
- are not false or misleading, and that any factual information is verifiable;
  - do not disclose confidential information;
  - do not bring the professions or College into disrepute;
  - do not compare services with other College registrants;
  - do not display any affiliation with an organization or association in a manner that falsely implies that organization's sponsorship or certification;
  - do not claim uniqueness or special advantage unsupported by professional or scientific evidence; and
  - are in good taste.
- 7.1.2 College registrants shall not solicit clients for endorsements, reviews or testimonials or ask clients to "like" or "share" their online accounts or platforms. ([See also Interpretation 2.2.1](#))
- 7.1.3 College registrants may disclose their fees in advertising. If fees are advertised, College registrants shall also include information about the circumstances in which additional fees may be charged for the services advertised.
- 7.1.4 College registrants shall only represent themselves as having expertise in certain areas of practice if they can provide evidence to the satisfaction of the College of specialized training, extensive experience and/or education.
- 7.1.5 College registrants shall not make false, misleading or exaggerated claims of [efficacy](#) regarding past or anticipated achievements with respect to clients, scholarly pursuits or contributions to society.
- 7.1.6 College registrants shall correct, whenever possible, false, misleading or inaccurate information, or representations made by others concerning their qualifications or services.
- 7.1.7 College registrants shall not solicit prospective clients in ways that are misleading, that disadvantage fellow registrants, or that discredit the professions of social work or social service work.

## **PRINCIPLE VII: ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS (CONT)**

7.1.8 College registrants shall describe their education, training, experience, areas of competence, professional affiliations and services honestly and accurately.

### **7.2 Titles and Designations**

7.2.1 College registrants shall use one or more of the following designations, titles, abbreviations or French equivalents on business cards, letterhead stationery, forms, professional websites and social media profiles, business telephone listings, digital or print directories, signs and identification of business premises, and/or other communications with clients and/or the public:

Social work registrants:

- "social worker"; or
- "registered social worker"; or
- "RSW".

Social service work registrants:

- "social service worker"; or
- "registered social service worker"; or
- "RSSW".

These titles and/or designations are required to immediately follow the College registrant's name as it appears on the Register. College registrants' highest academic degree or diploma (when listed) should precede their designation and/or title. College registrants may use their Indigenous names in addition to their name as it appears on the Register. College registrants may choose to include an optional one-line description of their area of limited practice or areas of focus following their name, designation and/or title.

7.2.2 A College registrant who holds an inactive certificate of registration shall not engage in the practice of social work or social service work in Ontario.

Social work registrants who hold an inactive certificate of registration shall identify themselves in one of the following ways:

- social worker (inactive); or
- registered social worker (inactive); or
- RSW (inactive).

## PRINCIPLE VII: ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS (CONT)

Social service work registrants who hold an inactive certificate of registration shall identify themselves in one of the following ways:

- social service worker (inactive); or
- registered social service worker (inactive); or
- RSSW (inactive).

- 7.2.3 College registrants who hold a retired certificate of registration shall not engage in the practice of social work or social service work in Ontario.

Social work registrants who hold a retired certificate of registration shall identify themselves in one of the following ways:

- social worker (retired); or
- registered social worker (retired); or
- RSW (retired).

Social service work registrants who hold a retired certificate of registration shall identify themselves in one of the following ways:

- social service worker (retired); or
- registered social service worker (retired); or
- RSSW (retired).

- 7.2.4 A College registrant who is authorized to perform the controlled act of psychotherapy may use the title “psychotherapist” after their full name, if they comply with the conditions set out in section 47.2 of the [Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998](#), as indicated below:

Social work registrants who are authorized to use the title “psychotherapist” may do so in one of the following ways:

- Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, RSW, Psychotherapist; or
- Social Worker, Psychotherapist; or
- Registered Social Worker, Psychotherapist.

Social service work registrants who are authorized to use the title “psychotherapist” may do so in one of the following ways:

- Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, RSSW, Psychotherapist; or
- Social Service Worker, Psychotherapist; or
- Registered Social Service Worker, Psychotherapist.

## PRINCIPLE VII: ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS (CONT)

7.2.5 Where a College registrant holds an earned doctorate in social work, as defined in Interpretation 7.2.7, they may use either, but not both, of the following:

- the degree in addition to the designation or title listed in Interpretation 7.2.1; or
- the title “Doctor” or “Dr.”, as a prefix, if it is followed by the registrant’s full name, and immediately followed by one of (i), (ii) or (iii), as follows:

(i) Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers together with RSW, in the case of a social worker, or RSSW, in the case of a social service worker,

(ii) social worker or registered social worker, or

(iii) social service worker or registered social service worker.

7.2.6 Where a College registrant does not hold an earned doctorate in social work, as defined in Interpretation 7.2.7, but does hold a doctoral degree in a field other than social work, they may:

- identify their doctoral degree, in addition to the designation and/or titles listed in Interpretation 7.2.1, in any advertising and/or communications that are listed in Interpretation 7.2.1;

or

- use the title “Doctor” or “Dr.”, as a prefix, in addition to the designation or title listed in Interpretation 7.2.1, except in relation to any advertising and/or communications with clients or to the public when providing or offering to provide health care in Ontario.

For greater clarity, College registrants who do not have a doctoral degree in social work, as defined in Interpretation 7.2.7, shall not use the title “Doctor” or “Dr” when practising the profession if the scope of services they provide or offer to provide to the public include the provision of health care. In this context, health care means to maintain or restore physical, mental, or emotional well-being.

7.2.7 “Earned doctorate” means a doctoral degree in social work that is:

- granted by a post-secondary educational institution authorized in Ontario to grant the degree under an Act of the Assembly, including a person that is authorized to grant the degree pursuant to the consent of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities under the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*; or
- granted by a post-secondary educational institution in a Canadian province or territory other than Ontario and that is considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree described in the first bullet or
- granted by a post-secondary educational institution located in a country other than Canada that is considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree described in the first bullet.

## PRINCIPLE VII: ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATIONS (CONT)

- 7.2.8 College registrants practising the profession of social work or social service work through a business, partnership or [professional corporation](#) shall use one of the following acceptable naming options, as applicable:
- i) a list of the names of the partners, with College registrants listed as indicated in Interpretation 7.2.1; or
  - ii) a partnership title containing:
    - a) the surnames or full names of two or more actual partners; or
    - b) where there are three or more actual partners, the surnames or full names may be used with the term “and Associate” or “and Associates” as appropriate; or
  - iii) a partnership title as above with an individual listing of the College registrants’ names and acceptable vocational designations (see Interpretation 7.2.1); or
  - iv) where an unincorporated business, the business name with an individual listing of the College registrants’ names and acceptable vocational designations (see Interpretation 7.2.1); or
  - v) where a professional corporation, the corporate name of the professional corporation; or
  - vi) where a professional corporation, the corporate name of the professional corporation with an individual listing of the names of the College registrants who are shareholders and acceptable title designations (see Interpretation 7.2.1); or
  - vii) where a professional corporation has a practice name other than its corporate name, the practice name together with the corporate name of the professional corporation; or
  - viii) where a professional corporation has a practice name other than its corporate name, the practice name together with the corporate name of the professional corporation and an individual listing of the names of the College registrants who are shareholders and acceptable vocational designations (see Interpretation 7.2.1).

## PRINCIPLE VIII: SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

The professional relationship has a powerful and pervasive influence on clients, which may endure long after the professional relationship has terminated. College registrants shall be aware of the potential for conflicts of interest and abuse of clients within the context of the professional relationship. Behaviour of a sexual nature between a College registrant and a client is harmful and is an abuse of power by the College registrant. College registrants shall not engage in behaviour of a sexual nature with clients. This prohibition applies at the time of referral, assessment, counselling, psychotherapy, and/or the delivery of any professional services.

### INTERPRETATION

- 8.1 College registrants shall be solely responsible for ensuring that sexual misconduct does not occur.
- 8.2 College registrants shall not have sexual intercourse and/or any other form of physical sexual relations with clients.

Physical sexual relations include, but are not limited to, kissing, touching of breasts, genitals, anus, or buttocks, genital contact, and/or masturbation of the registrant by, or in the presence of, the client or masturbation of the client by, or in the presence of, the registrant. In this context, presence includes in person, over the telephone, and/or by any electronic means.

- 8.3 College registrants shall not engage in touching of a sexual nature with clients.

Touching of a sexual nature includes but is not limited to, hugging, holding, patting, stroking, rubbing and any form of physical contact which is unnecessary to the helping process.

- 8.4 College registrants shall not engage in behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature towards the client, other than remarks or behaviour of a professional nature appropriate to the service provided.

Behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature include, but are not limited to, amorous, romantic, seductive, suggestive, and sexual behaviours or remarks. Behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature include, but are not limited to, the College registrant:

- expressing that they are “in love” with the client;
- making requests to date the client;
- giving gifts (other than giving or receiving culturally appropriate gifts of nominal value);
- unnecessarily arranging sessions in off-site locations and/or outside normal business hours;
- making unnecessary comments about the client’s body or clothing;
- requesting details about the client’s sexual history or sexual preferences that are not pertinent to the services that are being provided;
- initiating conversations about the registrant’s own sexual problems, preferences, activities, and/or fantasies; and/or
- displaying pornographic or other offensive material and/or making jokes or remarks that are sexually provocative, suggestive and/or demeaning.

## PRINCIPLE VIII: SEXUAL MISCONDUCT (CON'T)

- 8.5 If a College registrant develops sexual, romantic, or otherwise unprofessional feelings toward a client that could put the client at risk, the registrant shall seek consultation/supervision immediately and develop an appropriate plan.
- 8.6 If a client initiates behaviour of a sexual nature, the College registrant shall clearly state that this behaviour is inappropriate by virtue of the professional relationship and shall conduct themselves in a manner that discourages the behaviour and does not reciprocate.
- 8.7 If a client makes sexual overtures and/or behaves in a sexually provocative manner toward a College registrant and this cannot be appropriately and safely addressed in the context of the professional relationship, the College registrant shall terminate the relationship and take steps to assist the client in seeking alternate services.
- 8.8 College registrants shall not provide counselling or psychotherapy or other professional services to individuals with whom they have prior and/or existing relationship of a sexual nature.  
([See Principle II: Competence and Integrity, Interpretation 2.2.3](#))
- 8.9 Sexual intercourse, physical sexual relations and/or touching of a sexual nature between College registrants and clients to whom the registrants have provided [psychotherapy](#) and/or [counselling services](#), or with respect to whom the registrants have performed the [controlled act of psychotherapy](#), are prohibited at any time following termination of the professional relationship.
- 8.10 Sexual intercourse, physical sexual relations and/or touching of a sexual nature between College registrants and clients to whom the registrants have provided social work or social service work services, other than psychotherapy or counselling services and/or the performance of the controlled act of psychotherapy, are prohibited for a period of one (1) year following termination of the professional relationship and continue to be prohibited if, after one year, a non-professional relationship with the former client would give rise to a conflict of interest or otherwise contravene the Standards of Practice of the College.
- 8.11 College registrants shall not engage in a non-professional relationship (sexual, romantic, or otherwise) with a client's relative or other individuals with whom the client has a close personal relationship when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client or when such activities would compromise the appropriate professional boundaries between the College registrant and the client. ([See Principle II: Competence and Integrity, Interpretation 2.2.2](#)).



## GLOSSARY

**Advocacy** - 1. The act of directly representing or defending others. 2. Championing the rights of individuals, groups or communities through direct intervention or through empowerment. It is a basic obligation of the professions and its registrants.\*\*†

**Assessment** - The typically short-term process to determine the nature and progression of a presenting issue by identifying strengths and capacities in the client system and what can be changed to minimize or resolve it. The information gathered in an assessment is used to identify specific goals and appropriate interventions; re-assessment occurs throughout the College registrant's relationship with the client as part of the continuum of service delivery.

**Best interests** - The most advantageous outcome for a client at a point in time. College registrants must be aware that client circumstances are nuanced and can change quickly and often, and it is not possible to fully anticipate all outcomes of an intervention.

**Body of Knowledge** - Each of the phrases "body of professional social work knowledge" and "body of professional social service work knowledge" relates to both theoretical and practical understanding. A body of knowledge can be attained through education, clinical experience, consultation and supervision, professional development and a review of relevant research and literature. Professional social work knowledge and professional social service work knowledge draw upon the knowledge base of other professions including sociology, psychology, anthropology, medicine, law and economics as well as their own respective distinct bodies of knowledge.

**Cease practice** - When College registrants retire from the profession and are no longer practising social work or social service work. As used in the Standards of Practice, College registrants who are suspended are not considered to have ceased practice, even though they are not permitted to engage in activities falling within the scope of practice during the period of suspension.

**Client** - The individual, couple, family, group, supervisee, student, research participant, organization or community that seeks or is provided with either direct or indirect professional services, as detailed in the Scopes of Practice. When the College registrant is employed by an organization, the client is considered to be a client of both the College registrant and the organization. While College registrants have obligations to their employers (including confidentiality obligations), a College registrant's employer is not considered a client within the meaning of these Standards of Practice except when the College registrant has been contracted as a consultant.

**Client Information** - Information provided by a client that relates to others and/or the client themselves, as well as information about the client provided by others (for example, information concerning the client's mental or emotional health provided by other health professionals or contained in records from other sources).

**Client system** - Those in the client's environment who may influence client outcomes.

## GLOSSARY (CONT)

**Competence** - For social workers and social service workers it means: The ability to fulfill the requirements of professional practice. Competence includes possession of all relevant educational and experiential requirements, and the ability to carry out professional duties and achieve goals while adhering to the values and code of ethics of the professions. Competence for social workers and social service workers also includes, but is not limited to, having the capacity to understand and act reasonably. \*\* †

**Complaints Committee** - A statutory committee of the College, the mandate of which is to consider and investigate written complaints regarding the conduct or actions of College registrants of the College and to determine the appropriate action to be taken in respect of such complaints, in accordance with the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, including but not limited to issuing a caution or referral of the matter to the Discipline Committee or Fitness to Practise Committee.

**Confidentiality** - A principle of ethics according to which the College registrant may not disclose information about a client without the client's consent. This information includes, but is not limited to, the identity of the client, the content of overt verbalizations or other communications with the client, professional opinions about the client, and material from records relating to or supplied by the client.\*\*

**Conflict of Interest** - A College registrant is in a "conflict of interest" when they have a personal, financial or professional interest or obligation that may influence how they carry out their professional responsibilities. A conflict of interest may be **actual** or **perceived**, the latter meaning that a reasonable person, informed of all the circumstances, would have concerns that the interest or obligation may influence the registrant in the exercise of their professional responsibilities. A mere possibility or suspicion of influence does not in itself create a conflict of interest.

**Consultation** - An interpersonal relationship between an individual or organization possessing special expertise and someone who needs that expertise to solve a specific problem. Consultation in the context of social work or social service work practice is a problem-solving process in which advice and other helping activity from the consultant is offered to an individual, group, organization, or community that is faced with a job-related problem. Unlike *supervision*, which is relatively continuous and encompasses many areas of concern, consultation occurs more on an ad hoc, or temporary basis, and has a specific goal and focus. Unlike the supervisor, the consultant has no special administrative authority over those to whom advice is given. \*\*†

**Counselling Services** - Counselling services are defined as services provided within the context of a professional relationship with the goal of assisting clients in addressing issues in their lives by such activities as helping clients to find solutions and make choices through exploration of options, identification of strengths and needs, locating information and providing resources, and promoting a variety of coping strategies, but do not include psychotherapy services or the controlled act of psychotherapy.

**Cultural Humility** - A process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience. \*\*\*\*\*

## GLOSSARY (CONT)

**Disbursements** - Money paid out by or on behalf of a client for charges or expenses (other than the College registrant's professional fees) relating to professional services provided by a College registrant to the client. Disbursements may include, but are not limited to, charges for courier services, photocopies, long distance telephone calls, etc.\*†

**Discipline Committee** - A statutory committee of the College, the mandate of which is to hear and determine allegations of professional misconduct or incompetence on the part of a member of the College directed or referred to it by the Complaints Committee, the Council, or the Executive Committee.

**Documentation by exception** - Recording only those behaviours which do not occur routinely. The College registrant records situations or behaviours that are out of keeping with the client's usual behaviour or circumstance.\*\*\*

**Dual Relationship** - In addition to the professional relationship, the College registrant has a past, present, or future familial, social, financial, supervisory or other relationship with the client. A dual relationship does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest, but when present, it creates the strong possibility that an actual or perceived conflict of interest will arise.

**Efficacy** - The capacity to help the client achieve, in a reasonable time period, the goals of a given intervention.\*\*†

**Evidence** - Refers to information tending to establish facts. For College registrants, evidence can include, but is not limited to: direct observation; information collected in clinical sessions; collateral information; information from documents and information gathered from the use of clinical tools (e.g. diagnostic assessment measures, rating scales).

**Excessive fees** - An amount that exceeds what is considered usual, reasonable and customary which may be determined by comparing other registrants' charges for similar services.

**Fitness to Practise Committee** - A statutory committee of the College, the mandate of which is to hold hearings which are generally closed to the public and to determine allegations of incapacity referred to it by the Complaints Committee, the Executive Committee or Council, in accordance with the legislation; to hold hearings to determine applications for reinstatement or to vary terms, conditions or limitations imposed as a result of a Fitness to Practise hearing.

**Formal Notice** - A written statement concerning a fact that is communicated to the affected person, giving that person an awareness of the fact.\*

## GLOSSARY (CONT)

**Genogram** - A diagram used to depict family relationships extended over three generations. The diagram traditionally used circles to represent women and squares for men, with horizontal lines indicating marriages; however, there are many modern variations. Vertical lines are drawn from the marriage lines to other circles and squares to depict the children. The diagram may contain other symbols or written explanations to indicate critical events, such as death, divorce, and remarriage, and to reveal recurrent patterns of behaviour.\*\*†

**Identifying information** - Information that identifies an individual or for which it is reasonably foreseeable in the circumstances that it could be utilized, either alone or in combination with other information, to identify an individual.

**Intersectionality** - The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw a professor at the UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School. \*\*\*\*\*†

**Intervention** - 1. Coming between groups of people, events, planning activities, or an individual's internal conflicts. 2. In social work, the term is analogous to the physician's term "treatment". Many social workers prefer using "intervention" because it includes "treatment" and also encompasses the other activities social work registrants use to solve or prevent problems or achieve goals for social betterment. These could include psychotherapy (including psychotherapy services and/or the controlled act of psychotherapy), advocacy, mediation, social planning, community organization, finding and developing resources.\*\*†

**Member** - Has the same meaning as "registrant". Throughout its website, documentation, and Standards of Practice (and other materials), the College uses the terms "member" and "registrant" interchangeably.

**Paraprofessional** - An individual with specialized knowledge and technical training who works closely with and is supervised by a professional.\*\* †

**Professional Corporation** - In relation to the practice of social work or social service work by one or more College registrants, "professional corporation" means a body corporate with share capital incorporated or continued under the *Business Corporations Act*, RSO 1990, c. B.16 for the purpose of practising social work or social service work, that holds a valid certificate of authorization issued under the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, S.O. 1998, c. 31.

**Psychosocial** - Of or involving the influence of social factors or human interactive behaviour, it recognizes the complex interdependence of individual psychology, cultural and social/interpersonal context.

**Psychotherapy services** - are defined as any form of treatment for psycho-social or emotional difficulties, behavioural maladaptations and/or other problems that are assumed to be of an emotional nature, in which a College registrant, establishes a professional relationship with a client for the purposes of promoting positive personal growth and development.

## GLOSSARY (CONT)

The **controlled act of psychotherapy** is defined in the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (the “RHPA”) as “Treating by means of psychotherapy technique, delivered through a therapeutic relationship, an individual’s serious disorder of thought, cognition, mood, emotional regulation, perception or memory that may seriously impair the individual’s judgment, insight, behaviour, communication or social functioning.” It should be noted that the definition of the controlled act of psychotherapy is different from the definition of psychotherapy services. While it is possible that not all psychotherapy would be found to fall under the definition of the controlled act, this cannot yet be determined with certainty, given that there is currently no guidance on that point from the courts or College Discipline Committees.

**Reasonable effort** – The approach expected of a College registrant in the same circumstances, practising in accordance with the standards of the profession, in order to provide timely, comprehensive and respectful care and services.

**RSSW** – Registered Social Service Worker. A registrant of the College who holds a certificate of registration for social service work.

**RSW** – Registered Social Worker. A registrant of the College who holds a certificate of registration for social work.

**Registrant** – Has the same meaning as “member”. Throughout its website, documentation, and Standards of Practice (and other materials), the College uses the terms “member” and “registrant” interchangeably. The term “registrant” refers and is equivalent to anyone captured by the term “member” as used in the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998*.

**Self-Determination** – An ethical principle that recognizes the rights and needs of clients to be free to make their own choices and decisions. Inherent in the principle is the requirement for the College registrant to help the client know what the resources and choices are and what the potential consequences of selecting any one of them may be. \*\*†

**Social Justice** – An ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits. Implicit in this concept is the notion that historical inequalities should be acknowledged and remedied through specific measures. A key social work and social service work value, social justice entails advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequities. \*\*†

**Social Work Diagnosis** – A social work diagnosis, also known as a biopsychosocial assessment, is a series of judgments based on social work knowledge and skills that considers the historical and systemic factors impacting clients and client systems. It is conducted through a trauma, anti-oppressive and culturally informed lens. This process:

## GLOSSARY (CONT)

- a) identifies the underlying causes of a client's situation and offers an in-depth assessment and analysis;
- b) supports the development of a treatment/intervention plan for which the social worker has assumed professional responsibility; and
- c) is based on the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

**Subpoena** - A legal document requiring a person to attend before a court or a tribunal, or at an out-of-court examination, to be examined as a witness in a legal proceeding.\*

**Supervision** - An administrative and educational process through which supervisees develop and refine their social work/social service work knowledge and skills, engage in critical self-reflection, improve their resilience, and ensure that they are able to provide quality care and services to their clients. Supervisors may assign cases, discuss assessment and intervention plans, and review ongoing contact with clients. Supervision may also assist the supervisee in gaining a better understanding of social work and/or social service work philosophies, agency policies, and community resources. Less experienced College registrants typically require more frequent and formal supervision, whereas those who are more experienced may seek supervision less frequently, engaging instead in case consultation, peer group interactions, or other professional development. Educational supervision is oriented toward professional concerns and specific cases whereas administrative supervision focuses on agency policy and public accountability. College registrants may be supervised by Indigenous Elders or registered professionals from outside the profession. Supervisors are providing direct social work/social work services and it is an act of professional misconduct to fail to provide adequate supervision. \*\*†

\* Black's Law Dictionary, Fifth Edition, Henry Campbell Black et al, 1979

\*\* The Social Work Dictionary, 6th Edition, Robert L. Barker, 2014

\*\*\* Client Rights in Psychotherapy and Counselling, A Handbook of Client Rights and Therapist Responsibility, Susan Beamish, Michelle Melanson and Marilyn Oladimeji, 1998

\*\*\*\* Ontario Association of Social Workers, Guidelines for Social Work Record-Keeping, 1999

\*\*\*\*\* The Strengths Perspective in Social Work, Dennis Saleebey, 1992

\*\*\*\*\* Oxford English Dictionary, December 2022

\*\*\*\*\* First Nations Health Authority, 2023

† Definition has been adapted from the original source.