

AASW Child Protection Capability Statement

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AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

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Core Capability Statement

Social workers draw on a broad range of theories, knowledge, research, skills and the Code of Ethics to ensure comprehensive and holistic analysis of a person's experience. Social workers' assessments range from targeted and brief specific-needs analyses through to comprehensive holistic psychosocial and risk assessments of the full range of social and psychological needs, strengths, and stressors. These assessments inform person-centred, holistic, collaborative case planning and service delivery to address the social and emotional issues that impact on children, young people, family and the community's safety, health, development and wellbeing.

Preamble

The Australian Association of Social Workers is the body mandated by members, higher education providers (HEP) and the broader professional community, to set and maintain standards of professional conduct for social workers in Australia. The AASW Accredited Child Protection Capability Statement 2020 articulates the capabilities required for specialised child protection social work practice.

These capabilities apply to social workers who work in the field of child protection and are to be read in conjunction with the [AASW Code of Ethics 2010](#) and the [AASW Practice Standards 2013](#). The Code of Ethics identifies the values and moral principles that underpin social work practice and outline the required level of attainment for ethical social work conduct and accountability. All AASW members are required to comply with this Code and it informs all AASW documents and policies. The Practice Standards 2013 outline the requirements for effective, professional and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. They provide essential guidance to the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards.

This capability statement provides detail on the capabilities that need elaboration in the child protection social work context. Unlike the Practice Standards 2013, which apply to social workers at any point in their professional lives, the applicability of some elements of the child protection capability framework will depend upon the social worker's experience, practice setting and role.

This capability statement does not include all entry-level skills as this is an assumed foundation for a social worker seeking accreditation as a child protection social worker.

Capability 1: Engagement

Demonstrates the ability and practices to build productive, effective and ethical relationships in the context of working with vulnerable children and families, communities, other professionals and key stakeholders.

1a Knowledge Indicators

Demonstrated understanding of effective engagement practices with children, their families, communities, other professionals and key stakeholders to increase child safety and wellbeing. Key knowledge areas include:

- Sound understanding of the history of child protection practice including the ongoing impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma experienced by families and children due to past child welfare practices and the role of social work throughout
- Sound understanding of the significance and impact of patriarchy, colonisation and other oppressive practices perpetrated at a systemic level
- Sound understanding of the crucial role of parents, caregivers and their natural support networks in keeping children safe, the importance of establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with families and the importance of children's cultural connections and sense of belonging
- Sound understanding of the importance of valuing the parents, caregivers and local communities of shared interest knowledge and strategies to keep children safe and enable children to thrive
- Sound understanding of key theories and approaches including anti-oppressive theory, feminism, critical theory, strengths, resilience, ecological/systems theories, trauma, anti-racist and other relevant psychological theories, including development and attachment
- Sound and critical understanding of theories of child neglect and abuse
- Sound understanding of the research and principles of family-led decision-making and family inclusive practice
- Sound understanding of the importance of articulating own practice framework and the influence of how personal and social values, beliefs and culture can have on practice
- Sound understanding of the complexity of child abuse and neglect and supporting children, families and their communities in the context of multiple social and political disadvantages.

1b Skill Indicators

- Demonstrated ability to engage effectively with children, families and other stakeholders to build strong relationships based on collaboration
- Demonstrated ability to critically conceptualise and analyse complex information
- Demonstrated ability to think critically and model reflective practice

- Demonstrated ability to promote family-led decision-making through empowering children, their families and communities. Model and promote effective relationships across multidisciplinary teams, prioritise tasks and meet deadlines
- Demonstrated assessment, analytical and intervention skills in working collaboratively and inclusively with vulnerable children, their families and communities
- Proven ability to articulate in writing, analysis of information and rationales for decision-making
- Sound capacity to provide written information in plain language that all stakeholders can readily understand
- Proven capabilities to negotiate, mediate, diffuse anger and resolve conflict
- Demonstrate a child-first approach that prioritises hearing the voice of the child and family preservation, allowing children to remain safely in their communities
- Accurately represents the child's needs and wishes in a way that empowers the family and other stakeholders to meet their needs
- Ability to create opportunities to elicit the voices of children and young people about decisions affecting their lives
- Demonstrates culturally sensitive, curious, and safe practice.

Capability 2: Application of theory and research to inform practice

Ability to conduct effective holistic assessment of children and families, applying a range of theories and approaches, including ability to identify next steps to best support children and families.

2a Knowledge Indicators

Demonstrated understanding and application of the theories and frameworks applied in the child protection context. Key knowledge areas include:

- Sound critical understanding of the body of research regarding children's and young people's developmental needs, transitional milestones and life cycle phases, recognising the impact of cultural diversity and context
- Sound critical understanding of the diverse range of parent–child attachments and other significant attachment that includes cultural connections
- Sound understanding of the protective effects of secure attachment relationships
- Sound understanding of holistic assessment frameworks in assessing protective and risk factors relating to child safety and wellbeing
- Sound understanding of trauma informed practice and family violence informed practice including the life-long impacts on children experiencing cumulative harm through adverse childhood experiences
- Sound understanding of strengths-based and outcome-focused approaches
- Sound understanding of the complexity and intersection of contributing factors, such as poverty, social disadvantage and exclusion, dominant discourses on the social constructions of mothering, parenting and child-rearing practices; the role of fathers; mental health; substance misuse; family violence; intergenerational trauma; disability; cultural background; and the impact on family functioning
- Sound understanding of the research and impact of cumulative harm on the wellbeing of a child or young person
- Sound understanding of local jurisdictions' child protection practice, legislation, policies and guidelines, and international, commonwealth and state instruments on the rights of the child
- Sound understanding of the power dynamics inherent in statutory child protection services and working in areas where families intersect with child protection services; and need for ethical and anti-oppressive practice.

2b Skill Indicators

- Demonstrated participative and inclusive decision-making and engagement that is based on transparency, including assisting families to understand their rights and supports available

- Model reflective and reflexive practice that allows heightened awareness of personal and professional values and assumptions that influence assessment and intervention in the lives of children and families
- Proven assessment and intervention skills that promote child safety and wellbeing and strengthen family functioning
- Demonstrated ability to critically incorporate theories, such as attachment, trauma, domestic and family violence informed practice, strengths, outcomes-focused and crisis intervention and advocacy into day-to-day practice
- Ability to formulate strategies collaboratively that address child protection concerns and support children, young people, families, and caregivers
- Ability to support families to collaboratively develop and work towards meaningful and manageable goals for change.

Capability 3: Culturally responsive practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities

Effectively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities.

3a Knowledge Indicators

Demonstrated understanding of the ongoing impacts of past policies and practices and the role of social workers in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how past and present policies and practices currently influence social workers' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Key knowledge areas include:

- Sound understanding that culture must be viewed as a strength and protective factor and the need for equity and inclusion to build mutually respectful relationships
- Strong understanding of the application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles, including the SNAICC core elements; Identification, Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection
- Sound understanding of the diversity of family structures, dynamics, systems and community networks. with particular attention to cultural variations in family and community relationships and child-care practices, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices
- Sound understanding of intergenerational and current trauma and trauma-informed practice
- Sound understanding of communication protocols when visiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and when engaging with Traditional Owners, Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Sound understanding of the importance of connection to family, language and culture for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Sound understanding of the history of child protection interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the role of the social work profession in the implementation of these policies.

3b Skill Indicators

- Consistently applies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles in accordance with the SNAICC core elements Identification, Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection in all decision-making
- Proven ability to effectively and respectfully engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities based on a sound understanding of past practices, current inequity facing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- Ability to engage in collaborative decision-making with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and their families, recognising the centrality of culture.

- Engages in active efforts to enable safety, connection and belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Demonstrated skills in maintaining respectful relationships that promote cultural connection, strengthen family functioning with a focus on increasing child safety and wellbeing
- Promotes trauma-aware and healing-informed support
- Seeks cultural advice and actively sources information to increase cultural congruence
- Demonstrates a child-first approach that prioritises family preservation and allows children to remain safely in their communities
- Plans engagement in a way that recognises the need to make children and families feel comfortable and culturally safe.

Capability 4: Legal, ethical and anti-oppressive recording of practice

Ability to demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and skills in ethical and appropriate documentation of case notes, assessments, and report writing that adheres to anti-oppressive and client-centred practice.

4a Knowledge Indicators

Demonstrated knowledge and application of relevant legislative, regulatory and ethical frameworks underpinning effective documentation and recordkeeping. Key knowledge areas include:

- High degree of knowledge and application of ethical and respectful documentation of case notes, assessments and report writing that recognises that these form the life story of the children and their families
- Sound knowledge of appropriate legislative and policy requirements regarding confidentiality, privacy and storage requirements
- Sound understanding of the importance of use of language and the power that this can have on influencing how a person is perceived, drawing on anti-oppressive and critical theories
- Sound understanding of the importance of articulating own practice framework and the influence personal values and beliefs and culture can have on how assessments, case notes etc. are constructed, as well as demonstrated commitment to supervision and critical self-reflection
- Sound understanding of the importance of drawing on relevant research and knowledge to inform assessments, which includes articulation of a robust assessment framework informed by social work values, theories and research.

4b Skill Indicators

- Demonstrated ability to write clearly and accurately, reflecting impartiality, accuracy, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity and showing capacity to distinguish what is observed and described from opinion
- High level of familiarity and understanding of the implications of specific legal record keeping and information management requirements, at state, federal and organisational level, in relation to relevant practice context
- Demonstrated skill in the writing of contemporaneous case notes and reports to ensure currency and effective records of all interactions
- Demonstrated ability to seek credible evidence when undertaking assessments and be aware of subjective judgement and language or unsupported statements
- Demonstrate ability to write in a way that is understandable, accessible to the child or young person and family

- Demonstrated ability in management of information in terms of security, confidentiality and storage
- Demonstrated ability to record and maintain records recognising the possibility of information being subpoenaed or accessed through freedom of information
- Demonstrated understanding of the implications of appropriate, holistic and complete records to capture the lives of a child or young person or their family in a sensitive way, recognising that for children in care these provide their life story
- Demonstrated ability to share information and provide advice to others in accordance with legislative requirements and local policies and procedures.

Capability 5: Advocacy and practice improvement

Advocates for legislative policy and practice reform/improvement within the context and sphere of influence of their role.

5a Knowledge Indicators

Key knowledge areas include:

- Demonstrated knowledge of best practice in child protection and family support, drawing on national and international research and practice wisdom
- Sound understanding of the discourses that underpin higher level systemic factors and their influence on the service system and the consequences for the child or young person and their family
- Sound understanding of current evidence about best practice with children and families, and critical use of research to inform policy that promotes the wellbeing of children and young people
- Sound understanding of structural and multiple disadvantages including poverty and systemic disadvantage and its impacts on children, families and communities
- Sound understanding of the history and contemporary debates in social philosophy and policy relating to the wellbeing of children and families, including the history of child protection policy in Australia, and in particular, the history of child protection interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the role of the social work profession in the implementation of these policies
- Sound understanding of contemporary frameworks that enshrine the rights of children including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other conventions including relevant state-based human rights legislation.

5b Skill Indicators

- Identifies areas for service improvement including advocating within own service, sector and/or community to ensure effective practice in responding to child protection issues
- Engages in activities designed to increase awareness of issues regarding child abuse and neglect and family stressors within service organisations and the broader community
- Engages in networks, coalitions and collaborations focusing on culturally safe, inclusive and holistic policy and legislative reform, for example through AASW practice groups
- Identifies and promotes best practice through engagement with other professionals, families, children and young people, and services
- Actively engages in promoting an understanding of child abuse and neglect and importance of family support at every opportunity, including participating in events, such as Child Protection Week, sharing information among peers and networks

- Engages in identifying practice improvements, including systemic level gaps and as appropriate within sphere of influence, advocates for change at organisational and/or government level to work towards policy and practice reforms to more effectively respond to supporting and safeguarding children and their families
- Engages in identifying gaps to services across the different levels, prevention, early intervention and tertiary intervention and shares these within organisational and other network contexts
- Engages in ongoing professional development to remain current in emerging research and best practice, including any engagement of research.

Capability 6: Commitment to ongoing professional development, supervision and self care

Committed to ongoing professional development and supervision.

6a Knowledge Indicators

Key knowledge areas include:

- Sound understanding of concepts of vicarious trauma, stress and burnout and how these impact on the individual, the work environment, and stakeholders
- Sound knowledge of critical reflection practice, theories and approaches that underpin this and why these are important to effective practice and self-care
- Sound understanding of the importance of ongoing training and development to improve and enhance practice, acting as an important self-care strategy
- Sound understanding of the impact of systemic level issues that can influence stress, burnout and vicarious trauma on the individual, including concepts such as moral distress and unhelpful discourses that individualise how people cope and respond
- Sound understanding of child protection reforms including key national and international inquiries, and the importance of research on prevention and early intervention.

6b Skill Indicators

- Committed to actively seeking meaningful professional supervision to critically reflect on practice and self
- A commitment to practitioner's active participation in critically reflective practice
- Application of knowledge of findings from key inquiries and reforms
- Develop and maintain a network of internal and external colleagues with whom to seek and share advice, expertise and new developments in social work
- Take responsibility for seeking, planning and undertaking ongoing professional development using diverse platforms and opportunities within and outside organisation/work setting, drawing on emerging research and practice improvements
- Foster and maintain a work environment that promotes health, safety and wellbeing and self-care for self and others
- Foster and support an environment that promotes learning and practice development within the workplace, providing social work supervision and seeking supervision.

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