

Social Media Use and Personal Beliefs

Does being registered mean I can't say what I think online?

Do I always have to agree with policies?

How can I advocate for service users?

Introduction

This guidance note provides advice about maintaining professional standards of integrity and conduct, in relation to expressing personal beliefs on social media.

Notifications

The SWRB receives notifications about the inappropriate use of social media by registered social workers. These may take the form of complaints or concerns raised by members of the public, people receiving social work services, employers, or colleagues.

Examples of inappropriate use includes social workers:

- using their own personal social media platforms to promote views which are against the law or against the mandates of their organisation, for example pro-conversion therapy and anti-vaccination messages
- promoting views that could be interpreted as discriminatory, such as racist or homophobic comments
- using social media to send direct messages or write posts which are threatening, harassing or bullying. This includes making disparaging remarks about their employers and colleagues.

The SWRB Code of Conduct

The Code sets out the minimum professional standards of integrity and conduct that apply to registered social workers. The following are relevant to social media use:

Principle 3: Respect the cultural needs and values of the client.

Respect the diversity between and within cultures. This includes diversity of ethnicity, disability, economic status, age, sexuality, gender, faith and beliefs.

Be aware of any personal or religious beliefs or moral positions you have. Make sure these do not override a client's right to self-determination or to receiving a quality social work service.

Principle 9: Maintain public trust and confidence in the social work profession.

Maintain a high standard of professional or personal behaviour. Avoid activities, work, or non-work that may in any way bring the social work profession into disrepute. These same standards of conduct are expected when using social media and electronic forms of communication.

Carefully consider what you post or write on social media, such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, Messenger, WhatsApp, and forums. Before posting anything, consider who might view it and how they might interpret it. Remember that anything posted online may be seen by a wider audience than originally intended, even if posted in a private group.

Principle 10: Keep accurate records and use technology effectively and safely.

Be aware of the dynamics, advantages and limitations of technology when interacting with people. -Consider the ways in which technology-based social work practice can be safely and appropriately conducted.

Consider all social media posts to be public and permanent. Once posted, they can remain traceable even if deleted later. Remember posts and messages can be screenshotted and information can quickly spread beyond personal control.

Anyone may search for information about you on the internet and your personal online profile may disclose considerable personal information about you and your whānau. You may unintentionally inform others of your political, religious, or moral beliefs, social activities and personal relationships.

Make sure privacy settings are at the appropriate level. If you see a colleague or another social worker putting themselves at risk on social media or behaving inappropriately, consider letting them know in a discreet way. Encourage them to withdraw the information. If this doesn't work, you may contact the SWRB. Never use social media as a way of disclosing the professional misconduct of others.

Reflections

You could reflect on the following questions in supervision:

How do we ensure that we don't put our own personal views before the best interests of the person we are working with?

How do we make sure our personal views don't override another's right to self-determination and to receiving a quality social work service?

How do we respect the cultural needs, values and diversity of those we are working with, even when they are different to our own values?

How are we mindful of how clients may interpret our personal views in the public arena? Will they perceive the difference between our professional and personal selves?

How do we maintain a high standard of professional and personal behaviour both during and outside work? How do we make sure we avoid activities that may bring the social work profession into disrepute?

How do we ensure that we carefully consider what we post or write on social media?

Summary

As a social worker, you are entitled to your own personal views and moral standpoints. However, if personal views are shared and promoted through social media they are no longer personal and have the potential to be captured permanently by others. When using social media, be aware of the impact your actions may have on the reputation of the social work profession and on your work as an advocate for service users. Consider whether your online activity could prevent safe professional practice and may subsequently be in breach of the SWRB Code of Conduct.

Related advice

Social Workers Registration Board Ngā Ture Whanonga/ Code of Conduct - <https://swrb.govt.nz/practice/code-of-conduct/>

2021 SWRB Guidance for social workers on social media and Covid-19 vaccination messages - <https://swrb.govt.nz/guidance-for-social-workers-on-social-media-and-covid-19-vaccination/>

2022 Social media: Keeping others safe and upholding mana - <https://swrb.govt.nz/social-media-keeping-others-safe-and-upholding-mana/>

2019 ANZASW Code of Ethics - <https://www.anzasw.nz/code-of-ethics/>



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