

Unit 6

Understand the role of the social care worker

This unit will introduce you to the knowledge and skills needed to understand working relationships in social care settings. It will also look at the importance of working in ways that are agreed between you and your social care employer and of working in partnership with others in the social care sector.

Effective and appropriate relationships are central to the role of social care workers. As a social care worker you will need to become skilled at forming and maintaining work relationships with a variety of other people, including individuals, their family members, colleagues and other health and social care professionals. Effective social care workers do not confuse working relationships with friendships or other types of relationship that they have.



On completion of this unit you should:

- understand working relationships in social care settings
- understand the importance of working in ways that are agreed with your employer
- understand the importance of working in partnership with others

6.1 Understanding working relationships in social care settings

Social care workers are employed in a variety of different settings. In every social care setting the ability to form and maintain effective working relationships with clients, their carers, families and partners, as well as with colleagues, managers and other care providers, is central to everyday work activities.

You will need to use your relationship-building skills to provide support and assistance to others and to work co-operatively and effectively with a range of other people. At first glance this might just seem like common sense. However, it requires skill and will improve as you develop your knowledge and experience of social care practice.

Different types of relationships

Experienced and skilled social care workers understand that they have several different types of relationship with others. These include:

- family relationships with parents, brothers, sisters and other relatives
- friendships
- close, personal, romantic and intimate relationships
- working relationships.

Each type of relationship serves a different purpose and meets different needs, both for you and for the other people involved. The expectations, rules and relationship boundaries that apply to your friendships are not the same as those that apply to your work relationships. The distinction between work-based and other personal relationships is particularly important in social care work.



There are approximately 1.5 million social care workers in the UK workforce. This number is expected to grow significantly over the next 15 years.



What different kinds of relationships do you have in your life? Which ones are most important to you? Which ones have most influence on your life?

Tip



You might provide informal care to friends or family throughout your life. Examples of this can be useful to prospective employers – remember to make a note of examples of this kind of care to provide in an interview situation.

Understanding personal relationships

The personal relationships of social care workers are likely to include relationships with others who are family members, friends or a partner with whom you have a close personal, romantic or intimate relationship. Each of these relationships can be classed as a non-work relationship, although they are also different from each other.

Family relationships

Family relationships tend to be based on a deep emotional bond that gives a person a lasting sense of belonging and security. In fact, a baby's first relationship with his or her parents or main care giver is called the **attachment relationship**. It is through this relationship that people learn to feel loved and secure. An effective attachment relationship is necessary for a person to develop a sense of emotional security and confidence.

Attachment relationship A relationship that is based on strong emotional bonds.

Socialisation The way in which a person learns about the world around them, and the values and expectations of the society they live in.

Key Terms

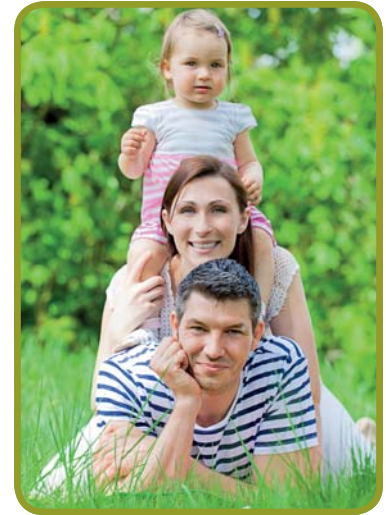


People aged between 35 and 54 spend most days or every day with their family. People aged between 16 and 24 spend the least time with family members.
(Office for National Statistics, 2011).

It is through family relationships that people tend to learn about attitudes and values, develop communication and social skills and work out how to provide care and support for others. This is known as **socialisation**. Family relationships also tend to have a strong influence on a person's self-esteem and self-concept (how they feel about themselves).



A person's early relationships in childhood are thought to provide a model (or 'blueprint') for the relationships they have later in their life. Why might it be important for social care workers to understand this?



Early family relationships have a lasting impact on your life

Friendships

The bonds of friendship are different from the bonds people form through family relationships. They tend to be based on liking another person who you connect with and who has similar attitudes, values and interests to your own.

Friends may feel they have a strong emotional connection to each other. But it is always possible to choose who you spend your time with and change your friends if they don't meet your needs or are no longer fun to be with. Family relationships, on the other hand, are more permanent, less voluntary and more deeply rooted. Ultimately a friendship should help to boost your self-esteem and confidence and contribute positively to the way you feel about yourself as a person.

Friendships play an important part in a person's social and emotional development. They provide you with your first relationships outside the family and require you to give as well as receive social and emotional support. Throughout your life, friends help to shape who you are, what you feel and how you relate to others: they affect your personality, social skills and emotional development.

Friendships support you, make you feel that you are liked and wanted and help to provide a feeling of belonging. Friendships are based on emotional bonds but are better thought of as relationships that connect everyone to a social group.



According to data collected by the Office for National Statistics in 2011, 68 per cent of people aged 16–24 spend most days or every day with friends.

Close personal, romantic and intimate relationships

People usually become interested in close personal, romantic and intimate relationships in their early teens. As teenagers or adolescents, individuals can fall in and out of love quickly. Becoming romantically involved with another person can feel exciting and helps to make you feel good about yourself. Being rejected, or not having your feelings returned, can be painful, but it is a good way to learn more about yourself and what you are looking for in a relationship.

Close personal, romantic and intimate relationships tend to be more emotionally intense and physically intimate than friendships. The emotional and physical boundaries of these relationships are significantly different from those of other friendships and family relationships. These relationships tend to require a greater degree of personal trust and emotional commitment than friendships or work-based relationships.

Tip

Prospective employers will always want to know 'why' you wish to join their organisation, and why you want the role you have applied for. You should think about and discuss your motives for applying for a job with your friends and family prior to the interview process.

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Case study

In Practice

Bina is a 22-year-old social care worker, employed by a local authority. She currently supports older people living in the community but is a bit bored with her job. She has recently told a colleague that 'it's all old ladies, mashed food and lost handbags'. Bina is keen to apply for a support worker post at a local night shelter for homeless people. She told her colleague, 'At least the users are more my age and some of the *Big Issue* blokes are quite ... well ... quite nice, aren't they!'

1. What do you think about Bina's motives for applying for the post she is interested in?
2. What might you say to Bina about relationship boundaries as a way of reminding her of the social care worker role?

Working relationships

Working relationships are different from the different kinds of personal relationships. The main difference is that they are not personal: they are all about working together with others to achieve tasks or goals in an organisation. Most working relationships are between people at different levels and have clear boundaries and dividing lines. The boundaries between different workers are set out in each person's job description and in the arrangements for line managements (who reports to who). This means that workers have different levels of power, authority and responsibility in working relationships. For example, as a social care worker you may have working relationships with:

- your employer, supervisor and manager
- your colleagues or co-workers
- other members of a social care team
- workers from different professional backgrounds
- the partner and family of the individual receiving care, assistance or support.

Effective working relationships are usually based on clear communication, trust and respect between the people involved. Some of the qualities of working relationships are shown in the diagram below.



Elements of good working relationships



Just over nine out of ten (91 per cent) UK workers reported that they were satisfied with their working relationships. This is slightly higher than the 87 per cent satisfaction rating of workers in the rest of Europe.

Tip

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You will often have more of these qualities than you may realise. Remember to sell yourself to your employer at interview – these skills are just as important as other practical skills that you may have.

What would you do?

If you were at an interview for a social care worker job, which of the qualities or skills listed in the diagram opposite could you say you currently have or are able to contribute to teamwork situations?

Formal relationship

A relationship that is based on agreed, formal rules between employers and employees and with colleagues in a workplace.

Key Term

Employer/employee relationships

You have a **formal relationship** with your employer. This means that the relationship is based on agreed rules and expectations about how both sides should work together. In particular, an employer has the power to manage the work-related activities of their employees. In turn, employees are expected to understand, accept and carry out the agreed ways of working in their workplace.

Your manager or supervisor is the person who represents the interests of your employer. Your employment contract, as well as the policies and procedures of your workplace, should clearly set out the expectations, rules and boundaries of your relationships with your employer, manager and supervisors.



In a workplace employment relations survey (ONS, 2011), 60 per cent of employees rated their relations with management as 'good' or 'very good'.

Relationships with co-workers (colleagues)

As a social care worker, you will need to form good relationships with your co-workers (or colleagues), as you are likely to work in a care team or multi-agency partnership. Trust, support and co-operating with your co-workers are important aspects of teamwork situations. In social care settings, teams can change quite quickly, as people leave or join, so it is also important to be adaptable, accepting and supportive of co-workers in order to maintain high standards of care provision for individuals.

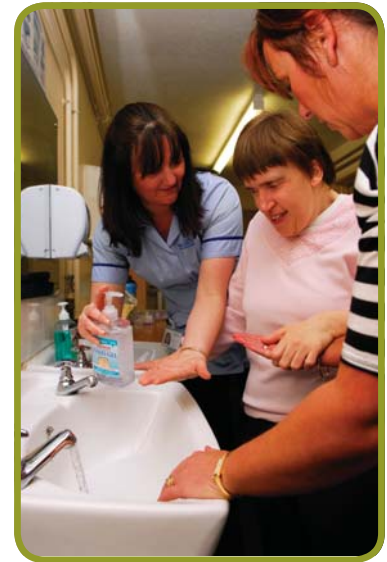
Being liked, supported and valued by your colleagues will have a positive effect on you. A lack of respectful, effective or co-operative relationships with co-workers can cause major problems within a social care team and must always be avoided or addressed quickly when it occurs. Effective teamwork tends to be based on:

- clear communication between team members and knowing how you can communicate best with others
- understanding and being open to the contributions made by other team members
- valuing and being open to the differences of others
- carrying out your work effectively so that you 'play your part' in the overall team effort.

Relationships between co-workers should be supportive. The best way to make this happen is to look out for others and notice when they are:

- feeling stressed or worried by work or personal problems
- performing their work effectively
- under pressure and having difficulty coping with their workload.

Effective social care teams are made up of co-workers who are supportive of each other. This means sharing information, showing new or less experienced colleagues how to do things and helping out when your co-workers are under pressure or need help. If you help others, they are more likely to help you too – this is mutual support!



Mutual support helps everyone to do a better job



Who are the most supportive people in your workplace? Think about why these people are more supportive than others. Why do you think they act in this supportive way?

Professional relationships with others

Social care workers have contact with a range of other people in the workplace who are not their manager, supervisor or co-workers. These include people who provide specialist care (for example, nurses, psychologists, speech and language therapists or doctors) or support (for example, teachers, legal advocates or housing staff) for individuals. A social care worker may also have contact with the families of the individuals they work with.

You must manage each of these relationships in a professional way, so that others are confident in your ability to work within the agreed guidelines of your role and to focus on the needs, wishes and preferences of the individuals you provide care or support for.

The qualities needed for effective teamwork always apply to these working relationships. You should always focus on the care-giving goals and the agreed boundaries and limitations of your work role when responding to or providing assistance for other care professionals and the relatives of those receiving care and support.

6.2 Working in ways agreed with your employer

The working relationships that you have with others in your social care setting are strongly influenced by your job or work role. This will be defined by your job description, which explains:

- the responsibilities of your job
- who will supervise you and who you report to (line management)
- the nature of the setting where you work
- any other supervisory responsibilities or managerial aspects of your work role.

Adhering to the scope of the job role

Your job description forms part of your contract of employment. When you sign this contract you accept:

- the responsibilities that go with your work role
- that you will work in ways that have been agreed with your employer
- that you will abide by the laws, codes of practice and regulations that apply to social care settings.

Tip

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Ensure that you ask questions about the job description at interview, so that you understand fully what you will be required to do on a day-to-day basis. Not only will this ensure that you make an informed decision about whether to take a job, but it demonstrates an interest in the position to your prospective employer.



Do you know what your job description says about your work role? When was the last time you actually looked at it? Have a look at it now and think about whether your job description actually describes what you do in your workplace.

Role boundaries, limitations and accountability

Your job description and contract of employment define the boundaries and limitations of your work role as well as your duties and responsibilities. When you sign your contract you are agreeing to work within the scope of your job role. This is important because your employer (and co-workers) will assume that you will make a professional commitment to do your job to the best of your ability and that you will not go beyond what is expected and what you have been trained to do.

You have a defined work role because your employer needs you to carry out particular work activities in your work setting, contributing, alongside colleagues, to the overall work goals of your social care organisation. Effective care provision depends on each person understanding their professional boundaries and working within their professional limitations.

Once you have completed your induction, your employer will hold you **accountable** for the effective performance of your work role. That means you will be expected to carry out your job description and to provide care and support of the expected standard for individuals. Sometimes your manager may need you to take on extra tasks, but you should always make sure that you are able, qualified and experienced to do the work.

Accountable

Answerable to someone or responsible for some action.

Key Term



How will your employer assess your work performance? Find out about the appraisal system used in your work setting and what you have to do to demonstrate that you are competent and performing to the expected standard.

Agreed ways of working

Your employer will have a range of written policies and procedures about how to provide support, assistance and care in different situations for the individuals who use your care setting or services. These should include clear guidelines on aspects such as the following:

- health and safety
- equal opportunities and inclusion
- confidentiality (keeping things private)
- data protection (keeping information secure)
- supervision
- waste management
- moving and handling
- managing medication
- security and safeguarding.



You should know where to find your organisation's policies and procedures, understand what they say and know how they affect your work role. Policies tend to give general guidance, while procedures give more specific instructions about what to do in defined situations. For example, the moving and handling policy may say 'No manual handling of individuals', whereas the moving and handling procedure should explain in more detail how to use lifting aids or equipment. Following the policies and procedures will ensure that you are working in the safest and most effective way.

Each setting has policies and procedures to follow

Case study**In Practice**

Eva is a 46-year-old woman with a long history of mental health problems. She lives alone, has no friends and only sees her brother and sister at Christmas when they visit her flat. Jonathan, a community social care worker, is Eva's new key worker. Officially he should make appointments to see her every fortnight or when she contacts him, but he has started to 'pop in' to see Eva most evenings on his way home from work. Eva likes his company but isn't confident enough to say that he shouldn't come so often.

1. Do you think that Jonathan is adhering to the scope of his job role?
2. Which activities described in the case study are likely to be outside his job description?
3. Explain why Jonathan's approach to supporting Eva may be seen as problematic and inappropriate by his supervisor or managers.



Do you know where to find the policies and procedures in your work setting? When was the last time you looked at them? Can you explain the day-to-day impact of different policies and procedures on your job role?

**Working in ways agreed by your employer – a leading housing organisation**

Each of our employees plays an important part in our organisation. The reason we work so well together is because everybody knows what is expected of them and follows these expectations. When people don't do what they have committed to do or they try to do too much, this always leads to problems. While we always look for helpful, committed employees, it is better to report something that you feel needs to be done rather than attempt to do something that you are not trained for or not expected to do.

@work



Multi-agency working is a good way of sharing both resources and expertise



What different kinds of partnerships are there in your day-to-day work? Think about all the other people you work with and the agencies or organisations who work with your employer's organisation or agency.

Multi-agency working An arrangement where workers from different agencies or organisations work together.

Multi-disciplinary working This is where different care professionals work together in the same team.

Key Terms

6.3 Working in partnership with others

How would you describe your role as a social care worker to someone you have just met? Would you say you 'work with' people or 'do things for' people? In the past, it used to be that you would 'do things for' people in care settings. Now you are expected to work in partnership with the people you support. There are many kinds of partnerships in the social care field, including with:

- co-workers (colleagues)
- practitioners/workers from other agencies
- individuals
- the families and friends of individuals.

Partnerships with individuals

A big part of your role as a social care worker is making sure that people have the support they need to get on with their daily lives. Your relationship with each individual should be based on the idea of partnership – working together in a constructive, helpful and equal way.

Your aim is to support individuals to make their own decisions, if possible, and to do as much as they can for themselves. An effective partnership should allow you to offer and provide more support when it is wanted and needed and less support when it isn't required or desired by the person you are working with.

Teamwork and partnerships

Effective partnership in social care is based on teamwork. Practitioners increasingly work in a range of different groups, known as integrated **multi-agency** and **multi-disciplinary** teams in health and social care settings. This mixed or 'integrated' way of working means that you get people with lots of different skills

and specialisms working together to provide high-quality care for individuals. Multi-agency working is a good way of sharing both resources and expertise – and it also saves time and money for service providers.

Tip

Remember that if you leave an organisation for a new job, your previous employers will be providing a reference for you. It is important to maintain good professional working relationships throughout your career. Also remember that you may find yourself working with – or for – former colleagues again in the future!

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Partnership working within multi-agency teams, and with co-workers or other professionals in a social care setting, requires a clear understanding of, and agreement on, issues such as:

- communication
- sharing information and confidentiality
- decision making procedures
- each practitioner's role and responsibilities
- how to resolve conflicts
- the goals or objectives of a care or support package.

Open communication between team members is vital for effective partnership working. For example, there should always be open and clear discussions about the needs of individual individuals and the shared goal that everyone is trying to achieve. After all, it makes sense to agree on things if you are working in close partnerships.

It is also important to have clear processes for decision making that everyone understands and complies with. If team members are regularly left out of the decision making process, they may come to feel rejected or demotivated. Even where it is the more senior people in an organisation or agency who make decisions, there should be a chance for everyone employed in a social care setting to put forward their opinion. This helps to build stronger feelings of teamworking.

find out!



Is your care setting a multi-disciplinary or multi-agency environment? Do you come into contact with practitioners with different training backgrounds and areas of expertise? To find out more about how you all work together, you could ask some of the people you work with about their own job roles and skills.

Case study

In Practice

Phil is 26 years old. He has Down's syndrome, depression and has recently been diagnosed with diabetes. Phil likes to be active and attends a local day centre run by a learning disabilities support group. He sees his GP once a fortnight and has a community support worker who meets him every week. Phil's GP has said he will arrange for a specialist nurse to help him to manage his diabetes.

1. Identify the different forms of care that Phil receives.
2. Which care practitioners could be considered members of Phil's 'care team'?
3. How might Phil benefit from a partnership approach to his care?



Read a care or support plan that has been written for an individual in your setting. Think about the different care workers involved in providing care, support or assistance for the person: how does this plan reflect the differing roles of different practitioners?

Resolving conflicts

When health and social care workers are working closely together in teamwork situations, there can be conflicts or tensions between different practitioners or agencies. Different approaches and views about priorities do occur in care teams. It is important to have clear procedures about how to resolve these situations so that individuals' interests are not affected. Showing respect to other health and social care workers and learning to understand their work roles, professional responsibilities and priorities helps to create and maintain good working relationships in care teams that use a partnership working approach.

Your questions answered

How should I deal with conflict at work?

If you find yourself involved in a dispute or conflict with another care worker, remember that this is about work – it's not a personal argument. You should always keep hold of your own professional standards, even if others are being unhelpful or difficult. Remember, even if you have a very different opinion from someone else, you should communicate clearly and remain polite. As a social care worker you should always:

- value the different skills, input and opinions of others
- acknowledge (or take on board) the efforts and contributions of other people.

The first rule in any situation where there is a conflict of opinion or approach is, of course, that everyone should stay calm and remain professional. The main skills and approaches needed for resolving workplace conflicts include:

- managing your own stress
- remaining calm when under pressure
- being aware of both your own and the other person's verbal and non-verbal communication in a stressful situation
- controlling your own emotions and behaviour
- avoiding threatening others, even when you feel frightened or very angry with them
- paying attention to the feelings being expressed (as well as the words spoken) by the other person
- being aware and respectful of social, cultural and value differences between you and the other person

What would you do?

How do you think you would respond if you ever became involved in a conflict or disagreement with a colleague in your work setting? How would you try to resolve it? Are there any support or advice services that you could use in this kind of situation?



If you need support, the first step is to talk to your manager

- developing a readiness to forgive and forget
- being specific and clear in the way you communicate
- having the ability to seek compromise
- trying not to exaggerate or over-generalise
- avoiding accusations
- listening to others in an active way.

Accessing support and advice

You may need support or advice about partnership working when it comes to:

- sharing information
- issues of confidentiality
- explanations of roles and responsibilities
- professional boundaries
- understanding agreed ways of working.

You can obtain advice and support on these subjects from different sources. The first step is to talk to your manager, supervisor or senior colleagues. Don't worry about asking others for help: your manager or senior colleagues will see this as a positive, professional step, not as a sign of weakness. When thinking about asking others for information or help in understanding an issue, remember to consider the needs of the people you care for.

You should also look at your organisation's policy documents. These provide written guidance and should give you lots of information on issues relating to partnership and teamworking. You can find support and advice from other places, including:

- mentoring organisations
- independent advisory organisations
- trade unions
- occupational health services (at your workplace).

Quick Quiz

- 1 Which of the following are an example of working relationships?
 - a. Sibling relationships
 - b. Friendships
 - c. Employer/employee relationships
 - d. Romantic relationships
- 2 How are working relationships different from personal relationships?
 - a. They involve intimate physical contact.
 - b. They are focused on a clear organisational task or goal.
 - c. They are always very short-term.
 - d. They are more emotionally intense.
- 3 Which of the following are an example of formal relationships?
 - a. Parent and child relationships
 - b. Attachment relationships
 - c. Relationships with co-workers/colleagues
 - d. Marital relationships
- 4 Working relationships with people employed by other care organisations occur in:
 - a. partnerships
 - b. multi-agency teams
 - c. multi-disciplinary teams
 - d. personal care work.
- 5 The agreed ways of working in a social care setting are outlined in the workplace:
 - a. policies
 - b. protocols
 - c. procedures
 - d. all of the above.
- 6 The scope of a social care worker's role should be outlined in the:
 - a. contract of employment
 - b. code of conduct
 - c. job description
 - d. code of practice.
- 7 Which of the following workplace policies would you consult to find out about agreed ways of working in relation to record keeping?
 - a. Health and safety policy
 - b. Data protection policy
 - c. Security and safeguarding policy
 - d. Equal opportunities and inclusion policy
- 8 Celia, an occupational therapist, Natasha, a social care worker, Davinder, a social worker, and Erin, a housing manager, all work in the same independent living support service. How would you describe their team?
 - a. A multi-agency team
 - b. A health and social care team
 - c. A partnership team
 - d. A multi-disciplinary team
- 9 What is the best response when there is a disagreement about the best approach to take to a care or support situation?
 - a. Argue forcefully to get your point across.
 - b. Listen, be respectful and seek compromise.
 - c. Make a formal written complaint that sets out your position clearly.
 - d. Avoid working with the other person to prevent conflict occurring again.
- 10 Which of the following sources of support and advice about partnership working issues or problems should be available to all social care workers?
 - a. A solicitor
 - b. An independent advocate
 - c. Their supervisor or line manager
 - d. A trade union representative