



# AN ETHICAL GUIDE FOR SOCIAL PROFESSIONALS

(not only) in crisis situations

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## An Ethical Guide for Social Professionals

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on personal, social and societal life worldwide. The virus threatens the physical health, social contacts and financial and economic security of many. The pandemic has led to polarisation in society, to an increase in social inequality, to a threat to democratic rights and to international tensions.

Social work has not been left unaffected either. Social professionals and social service organisations are under pressure and the quality and quantity of services are under threat. In the social domain, we see great resilience and inventiveness in response to these challenges, but also ethical distress. [International research](#) among more than 600 social professionals from over 50 countries has shown that they struggle with many ethical challenges. They are confronted with guidelines that are not always well suited to the specific context in which they work. For example, social contact guidelines impede the establishment and maintenance of confidential and empathic relationships, the assessment of problematic situations and the provision of tailored services. Professionals are more often forced to prioritise the needs and requirements of service users, because of the limited possibilities for service provision. They also experience tensions between their own interests and those of their loved ones on the one hand and the interests of service users on the other, for example in relation to health risks. Professionals report a wide range of mostly negative emotions, such as fear, disappointment, helplessness, sadness, anger, shame and guilt. There is physical, emotional and moral stress and exhaustion.

We can learn from this that ethical alertness is particularly necessary in a time of crisis, both with a view to the quality of service provision and to the general well-being of social professionals. Based on research conducted by the Centre for Social Innovation of HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht Netherlands and financed by ZonMw, a concise ethical manual was developed for social professionals in crisis situations. It contains a series of questions for reflection that can be used to make the most important ethical challenges explicit and to take action. The guide is also suitable for carrying out a brief ethical review, as it were, individually or collectively, in the hectic day-to-day work. The background to this guide is described in [the accompanying research report](#), which unfortunately is only available in Dutch.

Step 1: Please respond to the next statements

Statements

	I completely disagree	I largely disagree	I neither disagree nor agree	I largely agree	I completely agree
<b>Wellbeing</b>					
[1] My workload is all right	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] I am able to relax	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] My life is in balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Working activities</b>					
[1] Everybody is being served	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] My work meets the highest standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] The service users are satisfied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Working conditions</b>					
[1] Necessary means are at my disposal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] Guidelines support my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] Cooperation is effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Professional ethics</b>					
[1] I treat everybody with care and respect	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] I work on the basis of privacy and confidentiality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] I make a positive contribution to society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Ethics support</b>					
[1] I regularly consult ethical guidelines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] I discuss ethical challenges with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] My organisation supports me in ethical challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Self-esteem</b>					
[1] I am well looked after, also by myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[2] I experience recognition and appreciation for my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[3] I can face myself in the mirror	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Step 2: Please decide what your priority is right now

What theme or issue stands out for you right now? What should be given priority? Why?

## Step 3: Please determine the level of the issue

What is the appropriate level of the issue? Why?

- **Individual level:** the issue only concerns me in my professional practice.
- **Team level:** several colleagues are struggling with the same issue.
- **Organisational level:** the issue relates to the functioning of my organisation.
- **Societal level:** the issue is wider than the organisation.

## Step 4: Please determine your approach

[1] What should be improved at what level?

[3] Whom do you need to do this?

[2] What are you going to do about it?

[4] How do you get into action as quickly as possible?