



Changes to the NASW Code of Ethics (effective January 1, 2018)

1. **“Disability” to “Ability”** Several standards included the term “disability” among a list of diversity factors. In the new Code, the word “disability” is replaced with “ability,” a more inclusive and strength-based term.
2. **Preamble (Regarding Technology)** A new paragraph was added to the Preamble, identifying ways that technology may be used in practice and reminding SWs that similar ethical standards apply whether SWs are communicating in person or through technology.
3. **Informed Consent (1.03)** New 1.03(e), encourages SWs to discuss policies concerning use of technology in the provision of professional services. New 1.03(f), encourages SWs who plan to use technology in the provision of services to obtain client consent from the outset and asks SWs to assess each client’s capacity to provide informed consent and verify the identity and location of clients. New 1.03(g), alerts SWs to the need to assess clients’ ability to access and use technology, particularly for online and remote services. Section 1.03(h) updated “audiotaping and videotaping” to “audio or video recordings.” New 1.03(i), guides SWs to obtain client consent before conducting an electronic search on clients.
4. **Competence (1.04)** New 1.04(d), extends the concept of competence to include the ability to use technology in a competent manner. New 1.04(e), guides SWs using technology to ensure that they comply with the laws of both the jurisdiction where the social worker is regulated and located, as well as where the client is located.
5. **Cultural Competence and Social Diversity (1.05)** The heading for this section was changed to “Cultural Awareness and Social Diversity.” This term has been used to convey that SWs should be aware of the client’s culture, to understand how they may need to learn more about the client’s culture, and to ensure that their interventions should be adapted to the needs of the client. New 1.05(d), guides SWs to be aware of, assess, and respond to cultural, environmental, economic, ability, linguistic, and other diversity issues that may affect services using technology.
6. **Conflict of Interest (1.06)** New 1.06(e) discourages SWs from communicating with clients using technology for personal or non-work-related purposes. New 1.06(f) suggests that SWs should be aware that posting personal information on websites or other media could cause boundary confusion, inappropriate dual relationships, or harm to clients. New 1.06(g) suggests that SWs should be aware that clients may discover personal information about them based on their personal affiliations and use of social media. New 1.06(h) suggests that SWs should avoid engaging in personal relationships with clients on social networks or other electronic media.
7. **Privacy and Confidentiality (1.07)** Standard 1.07(a) was revised so SWs should not solicit information from/about clients except for “compelling professional reasons.” SSWAA proposed removing the term “identifiable person” in 1.07(c). An exception to confidentiality now arises when “disclosure of confidential information is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or others.” Standard 1.07(f) was altered so when SWs provide

counseling to families, couples, or groups, their agreement should include consideration of whether confidential information may be exchanged among clients or with others outside of the counseling sessions. Section 1.07(i) was revised so SWs should not discuss confidential information “electronically or in person,” unless confidentiality can be ensured. Standard 1.07(m) permits transmission of identifying information, but advises SWs to take reasonable steps to protect the confidentiality of electronic communications by using safeguards, such as encryption, firewalls, and passwords. New 1.07(n), advises SWs to develop and disclose policies and procedures for notifying clients of any breach of confidential information in a timely manner. New 1.07(o), advises SWs to inform clients of unauthorized access to the SW’s electronic communication or storage systems. New 1.07(p), advises SWs to inform clients about their policies on using electronic technology to gather information about clients. New 1.07(q) discourages SWs from gathering client information electronically unless there are compelling professional reasons, and with the client’s consent. New 1.07(r), states that SWs should avoid posting any identifying or confidential information about clients on websites or social media. Standard 1.07(s) revises “state statutes” to “applicable laws.”

8. **Sexual Relationships (1.09)** Standard 1.09 was revised to prohibit “inappropriate sexual communications,” in addition to sexual activities and contact with clients.
9. **Sexual Harassment (1.11)** Standard 1.11 was changed, adding “electronic” contact. This change clarifies that sexual harassment may include electronic contact of a sexual nature.
10. **Derogatory Language (1.12)** Standard 1.12 was modified, so that SWs should not use derogatory language whether the communication is written, verbal, or electronic.
11. **Interruption of Services (1.15)** Standard 1.15 was amended, adding “disruptions in electronic communication” as a possibility that SWs should be prepared to address.
12. **Sexual Relationships (2.06)** Standard 2.06(a) [fka 2.07(a)] was adjusted to clarify that prohibited types of sexual relationships include electronic contact.
13. **Sexual Harassment (2.08)** Standard 2.07 [fka 2.07(a)] was revised to clarify that prohibited types of sexual harassment include electronic contact.
14. **Unethical Conduct of Colleagues (2.10)** Standard 2.10(a) [fka 2.11(a)] was altered so that SWs need to take adequate measures to discourage, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues, “including unethical conduct using technology.”
15. **Supervision and Consultation (3.01)** Standard 3.01(a) was changed so that the norms apply “whether in-person or remotely.” Section 3.01(c) was modified to warn that dual relationships with supervisees may arise when “using social networking or other electronic media.”
16. **Education and Training (3.02)** Standard 3.02(d) was revised to warn that dual relationships with students may arise when “using social networking or other electronic media.”
17. **Client Records (3.04)** Standard 3.04(a) was amended to clarify that documentation may be in electronic form. Section 3.04(d) was changed to clarify that, in storing client records, social workers should consider all “relevant laws, agency policies, and relevant contracts.”
18. **Evaluation and Research (5.02)** New 5.02(f), advises SWs using technology to facilitate evaluation or research to obtain clients’ informed consent for the use of such technology and encourages them to assess clients’ ability to use the technology and offer reasonable alternatives.

Adapted from: Allan Barsky (2017)