



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Code of Conduct in Practice

Guidance for social workers

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Introduction

If someone makes a complaint about you to the Social Workers Registration Board, this guidance provides information on how to navigate the process. The social worker profession is upheld by a fair and transparent regulatory process which supports the practice and protects the public.

Open engagement with the Social Workers Registration Board when a complaint is made ensures your professional perspective will be considered. During the complaint process, it is recommended that social workers seek professional and personal support.

Complaints about a social worker

Social Workers Registration Board can only consider complaints within its jurisdiction. Complaints that fall within its jurisdiction are referred to a Professional Standards Committee. Serious concerns may be referred to the Professional Conduct Committee for a formal investigation.

The most serious complaints are referred on to the Social Workers Disciplinary Tribunal.

Examples of a complaint could be a:

- co-worker reporting negative comments made by a social worker on social media
- students reporting inappropriate behaviour during placements
- client reporting their social worker ignored a serious safety concern
- client reporting unauthorised sharing of private information
- employer reporting misuse of the organisation's credit card.

In some cases, complaints involving disabled people or involving health concerns, may be subject to dual jurisdiction with the Health and Disability Commissioner.

What happens when a complaint is made

If a complaint is made about you, the Social Workers Registration Board will inform you. Here are the recommended next steps:

- inform your employer and supervisor
- seek legal advice, contact professional bodies ([Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers](#)) or union representatives for support and process guidance
- If you need additional support, reach out to your Employer Assistance Programme, whānau, friends, or get private counselling
- cooperate with any investigation or review process
- discuss the complaint with your supervisor
- consider professional development or cultural guidance you can undertake to address the complaint.

Code of Conduct

The Social Workers Code of Conduct sets out the minimum professional standards for registered social workers. Social workers use the code as guidance when responding to a complaint. Examples of this in practice include:

Principle 6: Strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of clients

- Standard 6.9 take complaints seriously and respond to them in an appropriate, professional, and constructive way.

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

- Standard 9.6 work cooperatively with, and be honest, open, and constructive in your dealings with managers, employers, the Social Workers Registration Board, and other authorities.
- Standard 9.7 cooperate fully with any formal inquiries or investigations of any kind.

Social Workers Registration Board provides templates for preliminary responses and reflections that you can complete for the Professional Standards Committee.

Reflections

Questions to reflect on in a supervision session:

- What factors may have contributed to the complaint?
- Has harm occurred, and how can it be remedied?
- How can I use this experience for personal and professional growth?
- What personal and professional development can I put in place which will allow my employer, Social Workers Registration Board and the public to maintain confidence in my practice?
- What professional and personal support could help me address the context of the complaint e.g. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) counselling, supervision or whānau support?

Formal investigations

If a complaint is referred to the Professional Conduct Committee, it will be formally investigated. As part of the investigation, the Conduct Committee requests documentation and information related to the complaint. The Conduct Committee then determines disciplinary action.

If a case is referred to the Social Workers Disciplinary Tribunal a hearing will be scheduled. The tribunal panel will then make a decision on the case, examples of these include, cancelling or suspending a social worker's registration, imposing fines, competence reviews or recommending specific training (Section 71, Social Workers Registration Act 2003).

Seeking independent advice

The guidance in this document is not legal advice. Social Workers Registration Board cannot provide legal advice to anyone in respect of their individual circumstances. You are encouraged to seek independent legal advice to ensure you understand your rights and obligations in the complaints process.

Related links

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Concerns and complaints](#)

[Health social workers](#)

[ANZASW Ngā Tikanga Matatika: Code of Ethics](#)