Contents

List of Figures and Tables viii
About the Authors and Contributors x
Acknowledgements xiv
Online Resources xv

Introduction 1

Part I  Core Skills 9

1 Person-Centred Communication 11
   Dawn Whitaker

2 Active Listening Skills 22
   Michaela Rogers

3 Communicating with Children 32
   Donna Peach

4 Emotionally Intelligent Social Work 42
   Donna Peach

5 Developing Empathic Skills 52
   Donna Peach

6 Reflection and Reflexivity 63
   Michaela Rogers

7 Understanding Values, Ethics and Human Rights 73
   Dawn Whitaker

8 Valuing Difference and Diversity 84
   Michaela Rogers

9 Resilience and Self-Care 95
   Ciárán Murphy

10 Time Management 107
    Ciárán Murphy
Part II  Skills and Knowledge for Assessment and Interventions 119

11 Assessment Skills
   Michaela Rogers 121

12 Interviewing Skills
   Michaela Rogers 133

13 A Positive Approach to Safeguarding: Risk in Humane Social Work
   Donna Peach 143

14 Working with Service Users and Carers
   David Edmondson 152

15 Building Resilience in Others
   Michaela Rogers 167

16 Conflict Management and Resolution
   David Edmondson and Charlotte Ashworth 175

17 Research-Informed Practice
   Donna Peach 186

18 Writing Skills for Practice
   Michaela Rogers 194

19 Inter-Professional Practice and Working Together
   David Edmondson and Charlotte Ashworth 203

20 Maximising Supervision
   Michaela Rogers 212

21 Review and Evaluation
   David Edmondson 221

22 Court Skills
   Dawn Whitaker 230

Part III  Key Social Work Theories and Methods 241

23 Strengths-Based and Solution-Focused Approaches
   Michaela Rogers 243

24 Systems Theory and an Ecological Approach
   Michaela Rogers and Jennifer Cooper 251

25 Narrative Social Work
   Jennifer Cooper 259

26 Task-Centred Social Work Practice
   David Edmondson 269
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27 Person-Centred Social Work</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dawn Whitaker</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Group Work</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Michaela Rogers</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Attachment Theory: Examining Maternal Sensitivity Scales</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Donna Peach</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Grief and Loss</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Julie Lawrence</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Crisis Intervention</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Donna Peach</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 The Social Models of Disability and Distress</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dawn Whitaker</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 Social Work Activism</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Donna Peach</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References 348
Index 362
Resilience and Self-Care
Ciarán Murphy

Links to the Professionals Capabilities Framework

- Professionalism  - Critical reflection and analysis

Links to the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Child and Family Practitioners

- The role of supervision  - Organisational context

Links to the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Workers in Adult Services

- Supervision, critical reflection and analysis  - Organisational context

Key messages

- A commitment to developing resilience and promoting self-care will benefit you, your employer and your service users.
- ‘Resilience’ is not just a notion that is important to consider in working with service users, but is also important for you to develop as a practitioner.
- Building professional resilience allows us to overcome the challenges of practice and enjoy a long and satisfying career in social work.
INTRODUCTION

Through the course of your social work education, you will have had many opportunities to reflect on the challenges that accompany a career in social work. This will not just pertain to those encountered during the normal working day (e.g. high caseloads, limited time availability and the spectre of ‘agile working’), but also the challenges that encroach into our personal lives (e.g. the need to work over contracted hours or to take administrative work home, and the worry about a case that can interrupt a family dinner or disturb an otherwise restful night’s sleep).

Indeed, in the author’s role as a practising social worker and then as a social work tutor, a recurring question posed by social work students (and indeed, some practising social workers) is how they can manage and overcome these challenges, so that they can enjoy a long and satisfying career in practice. The answer given is that practitioners should try to worry less about the features of practice which they cannot control (for example, high caseloads and limited time availability), and concentrate on developing strategies for managing themselves as practitioners.

Consider this comment from an experienced social worker:

New social workers often ask me my secret … I mean, I have more than 10 years of practice experience working on various child protection teams, and I have never taken a day off (holidays aside). I tell them that my secret is that I know how to look after myself … and because of that, I have developed a resilience for those times when things can be really challenging at work.

These sentiments form the basis of this chapter – that is, how you as a practitioner can develop strategies for self-care and build professional resilience.

Reflective activity

Before we begin our discussion on your management of self, think about the challenges that you are worried about encountering/are encountering in your practice. How do these resonate with those identified in the introduction? What strategies do you already have for managing these challenges?

By taking some time to think about these questions, and by jotting down some answers, it will provide some context and help you get the most from the discussion that follows.

NOTIONS OF ‘PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE’

Elsewhere in this book it is noted that a clear and simple definition of ‘resilience’ remains somewhat elusive. However, we have asserted that resilience can:
Resilience and Self-Care

- help individuals cope with, and adapt to adversity;
- be transformative and build inner strengths;
- help us overcome challenges in the present and the future;
- involve the navigation of internal and external resources to sustain and enhance wellbeing.

Whilst we have previously discussed how children can build resilience, we are equally concerned with how you as a professional practitioner can develop your own resilience, so that you can manage and overcome the challenges that you may well encounter in practice.

In this sense, we conceive ‘professional resilience’ as the worker’s commitment to achieve a balance between occupational stressors and life challenges, while fostering professional values and career sustainability (Fink-Samnick, 2009). It is certainly a key concept for the ‘helping’ professionals who face highly challenging and complex situations on a daily basis (Grant and Kinman, 2012b), and moreover, it is essential for social workers if they are going to manage the demands of contemporary practice whilst avoiding burnout (Munro, 2011).

Research has shown that resilient professionals hold a number of particular qualities, including:

- a positive self-concept and a strong sense of identity;
- self-awareness and emotional literacy;
- critical thinking skills;
- the ability to set limits;
- well-developed social skills and social confidence to develop effective relationships;
- flexibility and adaptability, drawing on a wide range of coping strategies and creative problem-solving skills;
- the ability to identify and draw on internal and external resources;
- successful adaptation to change;
- persistence in the face of challenges, setbacks and adversity;
- a sense of purpose and the ability to derive a sense of meaning from difficulties and challenges; and
- the ability to learn from experience. (Grant and Kinman, 2012a)

Reflective activity

Which of these qualities do you think that you have? Would others agree with your assessment? Would they add or subtract other qualities from this list?

We know that resilience develops during times of stress, which can help us to understand why some social workers thrive in the face of particular challenges experienced at work. Rather than burnout, these practitioners develop strategies to overcome those current, but also future challenges more effectively.
As Grant and Kinman (2012a: 2) assert:

It is not that resilient social workers lead a charmed existence. They face the same problems that other people encounter, but confront setbacks and persevere in the face of difficulties rather than giving in.

We should not conceive resilience as a personality trait ingrained in some but not others. Resilience emerges from the experience of, and successful adaptation to, ordinary life events.

Indeed, Masten (2009) argues that resilience does not require extraordinary resources in most cases. Instead, it is the result of that which she describes as ‘ordinary magic’ (p. 30): it results from a multiplicity of adaptive human systems which have evolved over thousands of years, and align in certain ways and certain points to promote resilience in individuals.

Thus, the implication – and good news for social workers – is that resilience is a quality and a process that can be enhanced and developed (Kinman and Grant, 2011; Masten, 2009).

For the remainder of this chapter, we will further consider some of the underlying competencies which have been associated with professional resilience, so as to set out how you can develop these, before also identifying some of the specific strategies which may assist you in this quest.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Emotional literacy (referred to elsewhere as ‘emotional intelligence’) has interpersonal (social intelligence) as well as intrapersonal (self-awareness) elements (Grant and Kinman, 2012a). We might conceive interpersonal emotional literacy as that which helps us to relate effectively to others; whereas, intrapersonal literacy encompasses:

- the degree of attention we devote to our feelings;
- the clarity of these experiences; and
- our beliefs about repairing negative mood states or prolonging positive ones. (Grant and Kinman, 2012a)

In their research, Kinman and Grant (2011) found that social workers who

- are more adept at perceiving, appraising and expressing emotion;
- are able to understand, analyse and utilise emotional knowledge; and
- can regulate their emotions effectively …

… are not only more resilient to workplace stress and challenge, but are also more psychologically and physically healthy. Conversely, social workers whose emotional literacy skills are underdeveloped may:
have problems developing ‘appropriate’ empathy (see Chapter 5 ‘Developing Empathic Skills’);

- escalate conflict by reciprocating in kind when faced with hostility and lack of cooperation;

- allow emotions to unconsciously influence decision-making; and

- attempt to ‘repair’ negative mood states by engaging in negative health behaviours (for example, comfort eating or excessive alcohol consumption). (Grant and Kinman, 2012b)

The implication is that to build professional resilience, we must develop both inter- and intrapersonal emotional literacy. Whilst the former is the focus of another chapter in this book, with the latter, this might entail taking time to reflect on our emotions during the working day, asking questions like:

- What are the negative emotions that I encounter?
- When and why do these occur?
- How do I overcome these emotions?

Social workers can then use forums like peer and manager supervision to discuss their emotions, identifying triggers, and strategies for overcoming negative emotions.

**Activity: Emotional literacy self-assessment**

Before continuing with the rest of the chapter, you may wish to take Louise Grant’s Emotional Literacy Quiz (NB Grant uses the term ‘resilience’ rather than ‘literacy’, but her meaning is the same), which is available via the following link:

www.ccinform.co.uk/learning-tools/quiz-how-emotionally-resilient-are-you/

NB you will need a ‘Community Care Inform’ account to access the quiz, but most social work employers and higher education providers offer free access to this.

**REFLECTIVE THINKING**

We know that personal reflection on practice experience is important for professional development (see Chapter 6 ‘Reflection and Reflexivity’). Indeed, it can be used to enhance the service that we provide, whilst shaping our future approach to service users and their individual needs. The importance of reflective thinking lies in our ability to identify and learn from ourselves and our experiences of practice: for example, what we do well; what we do not do so well; what we can draw from our experiences of particular contexts to inform our future behaviour and choices.
Importantly though, reflective thinking also enables us to explore the dynamics of rational and irrational thoughts, emotions, doubts, assumptions and beliefs and the ways in which they impact on us as practitioners (Grant and Kinman, 2012a).

Kinman and Grant’s (2010) research found this to be an important self-protective mechanism for social workers, building resilience through:

- Self-reflection (‘Why do I do what I do, and how does this affect me?’).
- Empathetic reflection (‘Am I able to understand other people’s positions?’).
- Reflective communication (‘Am I open to discussion and challenge about my opinions?’). (Grant and Kinman, 2012a)

Indeed, this links to the previous section on emotional literacy, as it is only by being aware of our irrational thoughts, emotions, doubts, assumptions and beliefs that we are able to challenge and develop strategies to overcome them. The implication again is that social workers who engage in regular reflective thinking are better able to develop professional resilience.

**Reflective activity**

How often do you reflect on your emotions at work? Can you find time to do this more often? What might you learn from such reflections?

**PREPARING FOR CHALLENGING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS**

We have already discussed how social workers require not only good communication skills, but also a level of comfort and confidence in social interactions, and an ability to be assertive and to challenge others when appropriate and necessary. Despite an emphasis on these elements appearing throughout documents such as the PCF and KSS, research indicates that they are often not a source of focus in social work education (Murphy, 2019).

Grant and Kinman (2012a) theorise that this might be explained by a general misconception that those who wish to train as social workers will have some innate ability in these areas. However, their research (Kinman and Grant, 2010) indicates that, actually, there is considerable variation in levels of social confidence amongst qualifying social workers – highlighting that some may require additional support to enhance this area of their practice.

**Reflective activity**

How comfortable are you in social interactions, especially those where you might have to be assertive and/or challenge, or perhaps those in which you are required to deliver bad news? Is this an area of your practice that you would like to develop?
Whilst there are various life coaching and training courses available which are designed to enhance our confidence and communication skills in interpersonal situations, one simple method – favoured by many social workers – is to engage in some form of preparation before an anticipated event. This might involve writing down, practising or even ‘acting out’ what you would say in a given scenario. It can be helpful in identifying, what would otherwise be, unforeseen difficulties. It can also help you refine the phrasing of the message(s) that you wish to deliver, and plan and prepare for a range of possible responses from a third party.

Consider this commentary from another experienced social worker:

Something what has really benefitted me in practice is how I prepare for various social interactions. This usually involves me thinking about how an event might unfold, what I would want to say, and how I might respond to what others say. … This has helped me in my personal life too, where in attending various medical appointments, I am much better at communicating with doctors and consultants ... being clear and concise but also assertive about my needs and those of my family.

---

Reflective activity

Preparing for a difficult social interaction

Think about a social interaction in your personal or professional life that you are worried about – for example, communicating to a medical professional some intimate health detail or telling a parent that you will seek the removal of their children.

Reflect on what exactly it is about this scenario that you are worried about, and think about how you might prepare yourself. Some questions for you to consider include:

- What are the important issues that I would want to communicate?
- How will I communicate them?
- What other issues might arise?
- What might the other party say?
- How will I respond?

In this way, you can practise preparing for a situation that you are apprehensive about and identify some strategies that might prove beneficial.

Oftentimes, social workers prepare for a particular interpersonal event by practising or role-playing with a colleague or manager (for example, during supervision). This can help ready them for unfamiliar or potentially difficult situations (for example, emotionally challenging conversations with service users or giving oral evidence in court).
This might be something that you wish to incorporate into your own practice, as whilst role-playing may cause some anxiety or embarrassment, the process of acting out a potentially difficult scenario in a safe environment with a familiar person can avoid a level of stress that might be otherwise encountered without adequate preparation. (It can also provide important information about how other people may respond to you and the strategies that may be most – and least – productive – Grant and Kinman, 2012a.)

Indeed, building in regular opportunities to prepare for interactions that we are worried about can enhance our feelings of self-confidence and our communication skills. Then, by successfully overcoming specific challenges or complex scenarios, we take away a knowledge of ourselves, and a confidence in our ability to overcome difficult professional situations – further informing our sense of professional resilience.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS**

Social support refers to positive psychosocial interactions with others with whom there is mutual trust and concern (Grant and Kinman, 2012a). Research tells us that people with a supportive social network tend to be more physically and psychologically healthy, and are more resilient as they are better able to manage times of stress – including workplace-induced stress (Kinman and Grant, 2010).

We can receive social support from many different sources including family, friends, colleagues and even pets. We can also receive support from our membership in associations (including recreational associations like gyms and tennis clubs, as well as professional associations and unions, for example, BASW and the Social Workers Union) or community groups (for example, church groups).

---

**Reflective activity**

What sources of social support do you have? How might this support help you deal with stressful times at work?

---

Social support can be more than providing a listening and empathetic ear, it can also include informational support (e.g. advice and feedback) and practical support (e.g. helping with physical tasks and offering monetary help).

As a social worker your relationships with friends and family will prove an important resource. You may choose to talk directly to them about any challenges/difficulties at work. Equally, you may see these relationships as a sanctuary from the workplace, and seek relief by choosing not to talk to them about any workplace issues. Ultimately, you will decide how to utilise this resource to best suit your needs. However, if you
do choose to talk directly to family and friends about work, you should be mindful of the professional expectations placed on social workers pertaining to service users (and indeed, colleagues) and issues of confidentiality. Therefore, in talking to friends and family you may wish to reflect on:

- what you are able to say about others;
- what you should not say, so as to avoid breaching confidentiality;
- who you believe to be trustworthy as opposed to those who might repeat what you say to others.

It is also important for social workers to foster mutually supportive relationships from their wider personal and professional networks (Grant and Kinman, 2012b). This might entail a social group at your local gym; a running group hosted by your local church; or a five-aside football team organised by a colleague – here too it is also important to be mindful of issues of confidentiality. Equally, the group does not have to entail physical activity, but might constitute a reading group or a regular meet at the local pub after work on a Friday.

Visit the website to watch a video of current social workers discussing their social networks and the different ways that they choose to ‘let off steam’ (https://study.sagepub.com/rogers2e). Note how the social support networks mentioned consistute a mixture of personal and professional networks.

Ultimately, resilient social workers develop different social support networks away from work (the favourite of the author: a Friday night pizza group!). However, they also tend to have productive relationships with colleagues, especially those who understand the demands of being a social worker, and the value of the work that they do.

It is not unusual, therefore, to develop close relationships with your fellow social workers and colleagues that you see on a daily basis and with whom you share an office space. A supportive office environment to which you can return after a stressful visit or meeting, and a group that is willing to listen and provide a compassionate ear as you vent your frustrations, is worth its weight in gold. (This is also a reason why the authors do not favour the contemporary model of ‘agile working’ enforced by an increasing number of employers.) Whilst you will be/are surely very busy, it can be healthy to make the most of this resource, contributing to, and receiving from, a support network of fellow social workers/colleagues.

Finally, a point of emphasis is that a key skill of a resilient social worker is knowing what type of support they need at the time, and where it can best be found (Grant and Kinman, 2012b). Be wary of seeking support from areas of your network who might not be able to offer the type of support you need, as doing so could have a detrimental impact on your relationship with them. (For example, you would be ill advised to complain to a family support worker about how little social workers are paid; equally, there is little point in seeking advice on the intricacies of social work legislation from a family pet!)
TIPS FOR PROMOTING SELF-CARE AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

It is true that developing your professional resilience can take effort, but it is a necessary step in ensuring a long and satisfying career in practice. It involves:

- protecting your own physical and psychological health;
- managing stress effectively;
- maintaining your emotional equilibrium;
- fostering supportive relationships at home and work; and
- maintaining boundaries between home and work life.

Grant and Kinman (2012a: 8) draw from their research (Kinman and Grant, 2010) to offer 'top tips' to pre- and post-qualifying social workers, aimed at promoting self-care and building professional resilience.

Build a network of support
Resilient people tend to have strong social networks – family, friends and colleagues are great sources of support.

Manage time effectively
You should always use your diary effectively (Chapter 10 ‘Time Management’ may help with this). Also, attempt to schedule work tasks to ensure that you aren't left feeling rushed or emotionally exhausted and build in adequate breaks. Ensure that you give yourself time to process your emotional reactions to one case before moving onto the next.

Develop achievable goals and take action to achieve them
Setting goals encourages a focus on the future rather than dwelling on past problems and present difficulties. Ensure that goals are achievable, and accept that setbacks are inevitable.

Be aware of your emotions
Regularly reflect on your workplace emotions. This allows valuable insight into why you feel as you do and helps to identify patterns in behaviour and reactions, ensuring that you can identify and challenge negative emotions and thoughts as they occur.

Prepare for, and make the most of, supervision
Supervision offers a forum in which to discuss stressors relating to your practice. Use it as an opportunity for critical reflection, self-evaluation and problem-solving, listening to (if not also accepting) the advice of the supervisor.
Prioritise work-life balance and maintain firm boundaries

It is crucial to establish firm boundaries between your working life and non-working life. This includes not working at a time where you need to be relaxing/recuperating (see Chapter 10 ‘Time Management’). If you find that you spend your personal time worrying about work, then set some time aside each day for worry, putting worries to the back of your mind the rest of the time (visualisation might help here). Remember that excessive worry causes stress and can mean suffering twice – firstly, whilst you are worrying, and secondly, when the event that you are worried about comes to pass (which it might not!).

Further, ensure that whenever possible you go home (or at least leave work) when you had planned to. Consider again the aforementioned experienced social worker:

Another tip I give is to always go home at 5 o’clock, even if you have outstanding tasks – they will still be there tomorrow. For me, I am very strict – I work between 8.30 a.m. and 5 p.m. It’s an important rule that I set myself. My manager approves, because she knows that by enforcing this rule, I stay well, and she can be sure therefore that I will be in again tomorrow!

Make time for relaxation

It is important to know your limits (which is why a work–life balance is crucial). By not giving some priority to your own needs and feelings, you risk burnout. Try to incorporate into your weekly routine opportunities for relaxation. These might be hobbies or pastimes (painting, reading, exercise, etc.). They might be also social activities (pizza Friday!). They may be things that you can do at work to keep you calm (for example, breathing exercises).

It is also beneficial to book regular breaks from work (irrespective of whether you go away during these periods), and as you become an experienced practitioner, you will realise how often you require a scheduled break.

Reflect on experiences and adapt when necessary

Resilient practitioners learn lessons from setbacks and problems. You can reflect on how you have previously overcome adversity and employ similar strategies when problems arise at work.

Reframe stressful events as temporary and as learning opportunities

Resilient practitioners tend to frame stressful events as temporary and manageable, and as opportunities for learning and development. Do not get bogged down by problems at work, but stay focused on your reasons for becoming a social worker.

Be kind to yourself

Do not be overly critical of yourself – social work is a demanding and difficult job. Stay focused on doing your best and looking after yourself. Schedule regular treats, breaks and
social interactions. Go home and relax. Give yourself permission to switch off, remembering that the social worker who is thinking about work even when at home is more likely to burn out.

**CONCLUSION**

We know that resilient social workers enjoy longer and more satisfying careers in practice; further, that resiliency can be developed. Through the course of this chapter, we have discussed different ways in which you can build your professional resilience and care for yourself as a practitioner.

Whilst this involves some time and commitment, the benefits are worthwhile. Whether you are at the beginning of your social work career or partway through it, there is always time to improve self-care and think about how you can develop your resilience. We hope that the suggestions in this chapter may help.

**Having read this chapter, you should be able to:**

- Better understand the different features of professional resilience and how these can be developed;
- Reflect on your own strategies for self-care and how these might be improved/developed; and in doing so, also improve/develop your own professional resilience.

**RECOMMENDED READING**

