

### Making a difference



#### **Recognition for Social Work is especially meaningful during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Social Workers Union would like to extend our thanks

and appreciation to all social workers that are working during this pandemic. You all make tremendous contributions, and the help social workers are giving during this crisis is essential.

How quickly the world of social work has rapidly shifted attention from March 2020 with the *World Social Work Day* celebrations for *Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships* to the rightful focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, with social workers recognised as key professionals and an essential frontline service in the UK.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, we are certainly in need of all the essential services and the hard work that each and every key worker is doing, with the importance of human relationships vital to this. However, despite being an essential service, social workers are once more not always getting the recognition that we deserve for our interventions when compared to some of the other key worker groups. Similarly, we have seen some real safety

issues and workplace practice concerns highlighted from social workers, which have seen a worryingly steep rise in referrals to our Advice and Representation service. While those who work in the sector are passionate about the changes their practice has made to individual and family lives on a daily basis during this pandemic, politicians and the general media rarely see, or speak, about those positive contributions.

Social workers continue to use all their learned specialist skills, knowledge and intervention methods to support the public and other professionals in this difficult period when the safety of social workers should be paramount. Yet, as we have so often seen, social workers are last in line for Public Protection Equipment (PPE), for extra resources and for media recognition. They are also missing from the countless social media memes and colourful messages that promote 'clap for carers' and supporting access to specialist 'shopping slots' for frontline staff. Similarly, we are already seeing the promotion for wage raises to social care support staff, nurses and other frontline professionals, but not for social workers.

Amongst all this, the gratitude that social workers have seen from the public and the wider social work community is a constant reminder to us that we are making a difference and using our specialist skills effectively, and in an extremely adaptable way. A busy social worker might not realise the difference that that they are making while

in the stressful throes of limited PPE and too few resources that have become all too common during the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are.

Trade unions, Professional Associations and employers, working together, can make a significant difference to ensure that the effects of the outbreak are minimised. Likewise, if the workforce is upskilled on how to limit transmission, protected and equipped appropriately, then there is no unnecessary panic generated. However, as we have seen this has a limited affect when the PPE resources are just not available, for whatever reason. The constant Governmental communications to protect key workers and the most at risk in our communities have been undermined by the unhelpful position of 'not being able to magic up PPE resources' constantly being made.

From the onset, I have been challenging employers and the Government over inadequate employment advice, failure to provide enough PPE, and the urgent need to safeguard the specialist social work role in multi-disciplinary teams. This can only have a difference where there has been the availability of suitable PPE equipment and resources. This has been totally unacceptable but hard to challenge significantly when there has appeared to be a national shortage of PPE, but we all in social work need to continue to push this health and safety issue on behalf of social workers. Daily, the lack of access to PPE has triggered 'widespread anxiety' among social workers with some workplace practices and general workplace guidance on PPE being totally unacceptable; I could fill up the publication with examples of this. Some social workers have bravely been refusing to undertake tasks that they are assessing as unsafe. Employers must be aware of their specific obligations to social workers regarding unsafe work refusal and ensure that such refusals are appropriately handled in full compliance with occupational Health & Safety legislation. I have been busy writing to Local Authorities emphasising this. The present problem though is that the

Employment Rights Act 1996, is not equipped for the scale of the crisis at hand.

Although normal practices may not be feasible, we know from regular contact with our members that social workers are trying to practice and adapt according to ethical and social work values, despite major challenges. I applaud this for it is still important to act sensibly, professionally and make a difference.

After the pandemic and the subsequent crisis, society will not be the same as before. As a profession comprising of over 100,000 UK registered social workers consisting of highly skilled professionals, the social work voice will continue to serve the at risk, as before, during, and beyond this crisis. While austerity and cuts in staffing levels and support services make it hard for social workers to do what they know to be best, such tough realities only make the present COVID-19 achievements of resilient social workers all the more extraordinary.

Our social work members continue to be supported by the skilled Advice and Representation team and I worry about social workers who do not have this skilled protection. Never before have social workers really needed the support of a union and a professional association who are dedicated and knowledgeable about social work.

**SWU Members - If you are unsure of any of your employment rights or want to talk through any specific advice in relation to Coronavirus, or any other employment issue that you may wish to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact the SWU Advice and Representation Team or call us on 0121 622 8413.**

<https://www.basw.co.uk/supporting-members-professional-advice-and-guidance-during-covid-19>

**John McGowan**  
**General Secretary**  
j.mcgowan@swu-union.org.uk

# SWU LEGAL SERVICES



**As a SWU member you have access to the expert legal team at Morrish Solicitors.**

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## Advice & Representation Team Tips for Working from Home

*by the A&R Team - Social Workers Union*

All across the United Kingdom, people are working now in a way that they have never had to work before. IT personnel across all four nations are working long hours to make sure that we all have access and abilities to work from our homes. For many years, social work employers have been providing us with laptops and remote dongles and access codes so that we can be flexible in how we work. Unfortunately, when people started being flexible, managers became nervous and called us back into our offices where there were 8 desks for every 10 people. Because of this the 'working from home culture' that many social workers were being encouraged toward never manifested.

Fast forward several years and a tiny, microscopic organism has knocked us on our ears and forced us to reconsider that 'working from home culture.' We are now being forced into it. Because of this, we at the A&R Service have been hearing various stories from social workers across the country both good and bad about working from home. Some people are struggling with the isolation. There is a commonly held belief from workers and managers that you must actually be in a room with each other in order to offer the type of support that social workers need. Well, we are here to tell you that this is absolutely not true! That is why we, at the A&R Service have decided to write this article so that you can get tips from us about some of the best ways to work from home and also get the type of support, guidance, humour and supervision that you need and deserve as a social worker. Because we at the A&R Service all work from home. We have always been a remotely based team, so, we have had years of practice at finding ways to stay in touch and keep up morale.

As a team, some of the ways that we have found over the years of keeping in touch remotely have been telephone, Skype and, more recently Microsoft Teams and What's App. The Skype (and other video mediums) allow you to actually see your colleagues as though you are actually in a face to face meeting. In the past, we have also used phone conferencing to stay in touch. We now have our supervision, case study meetings, team meetings and even meetings with other partners in BASW and SWU via these mediums.

These are some of the ways we keep in touch as a team and we find it extremely important to stay in touch at least weekly. However, knowing that it can also be difficult to work from home and stay motivated, some of us have put together our own tips and challenges we face so that you may benefit. As always, however, if you find yourself in a situation that requires advice about your circumstances, please phone our A&R Service as we remain here to help throughout this crisis and always! Our personal stories and tips are below:

### Christina Ramage

The current circumstances mean a changing landscape almost hourly for some of us. Working from home has its challenges, it has perks (regular top of tea and having your own choice of music on in the background). Since I have joined the team here at BASW/ SWU I have found some key factors that really enable you when you work in isolation. The contact with other team members is vital, it keeps the sense of support alive and well and it also places much more value on the communication with your colleagues.

The discipline of working from home is one that I find works well for me, I have a defined space, an office of sorts that gives me that sense of purpose which really does help to turn the work brain on in the mornings. Keeping focus is something that you learn to do when you work from home for long periods, it does take some time to make the switch however once you do I think you will find the issue is more about switching the focus off and not going into your laptop after 5pm! This is where the main challenge can arise ...so remember because you work from home it does not mean that it is your home life! Enjoy the benefits of being able to be autonomous and have your workspace adorned with your own personal photos/music/pets, use regular contact with colleagues to keep the sense of team, keep a sense of humour particularly when dealing with people remotely as sometimes messages or emails do not convey a lighter note to the conversation! Mostly, I would say if you need to reach out to colleagues, do it, we are not working alone, we are working together albeit in our homes!

## Jeff Lewis

I find that listening to music in the background between telephone calls is very helpful to me personally when I'm working at home. Other than making telephone calls, or Skype meetings, I always have music in background. Not for everyone, but good for me.

I also find working in a room with a window, bringing in plenty of light is important. I'm lucky to be able to work from a conservatory. I also try and get up and stretch my legs regularly and have a break from the computer. It's also very important to keep the Outlook diary up to date, which ensures I remain organised and on top of things.

I try and remind myself to give individual colleagues a ring occasionally as well, because it's good to have a chat personally at times, not just in team meetings.

## Laura Sheridan - The Parent's Perspective

There are clear bonuses to home working. On a general basis, there are far less distractions in than there are in a busy office, meaning that I am far more productive as I am able to focus on the task in hand.

However, working from home has become rather different for me over recent weeks. I now have a house with two school aged children in it all day and a husband who is also working from home full time. The situation is therefore not that of my usual home working situation and I am sure that there are many social workers in the same boat! Trying to negotiate working space for all and supervise 'home schooling' whilst getting on with the day job is a major challenge! I recently spoke to a member who was trying to negotiate caring for two pre-school aged children whilst working from home - I can only imagine how difficult this must be!

There is no advice I can give to parents working from home to make this situation easy. In my experience, you just have to try and make it as workable as you can. There are a few things I have learned:

- Keep your line manager informed about your situation and the particular struggles you are facing. Effective communication is vital in these circumstances and gives your employer the opportunity to be as flexible and supportive as possible.
- Don't beat yourself up about work tasks taking longer than usual or tasks being completed at a time that they wouldn't normally be completed. It may be that the assessment or report you need to type up has to be completed after the children's bedtime if you have had to focus on keeping them occupied in the day!
- 'PE with Joe' on You Tube helps to keep the kids busy for the first 30 minutes of the day! There are other celebrities and organisations doing all sorts of things on Facebook and YouTube - utilise these, as they are really helpful to keep the children engaged.

- There are only so many pictures you can get your children to draw / paint.
- It turns out that typing silly words into google translate and getting google to say them in English and whatever language they have selected is an activity that children love and this can keep them entertained for hours!
- Try not to stress about keeping the children doing schoolwork all day - as long as they keep up with some work, they will be fine. It is perfectly OK for the children to play - they learn through doing this anyway and they need some down time.
- Your house WILL be a untidy. It is inevitable and unavoidable. Just go with it.

This is an incredibly stressful time for everyone. Trying to balance home working and young children is not easy. On top of this, social work is a very stressful job on a general basis and is particularly stressful in the current climate. Everyone is worried about the safety and welfare of themselves and their loved ones - this includes the children, who are having to adapt to a very different way of living. They are going to have meltdowns. You are going to have meltdowns. You are all human. Trying to keep communicating and taking time out to have quality down time and fun family activities is really important. Get out some board games, watch a family film, join in with some of the kids exercise classes on You Tube and if you have the space, kick a football around the garden. And fit in work around this - it is not going to be easy, but it is a situation that lots of people are in at the minute. You are not alone!

## Lisa Fitzpatrick

Whilst we recognise how fortunate we are to be able to stay working at home, given the pressures on front line key workers. There are still additional pressures and transitions that people will face, and also depending on their own circumstances and living spaces.

Social workers have been telling me over the last few days how they are finding staying/ working at home. One social worker told me “she misses her team and the interaction she gets from going into the office”. Another told me she is finding it hard separating work and home, as she feels its harder for her to maintain separation/boundaries due to levels of stress coming into the home, as well as the other personal issues she has to manage eg caring for teenagers at home.

In “normal times” I work from home but also go out and about a lot in representation work - I cover the whole of London and parts of the South East so a wide area to see and travel across. This makes things feel varied and balanced between being out and in. I am proud to be an and Advice and Representation Officer and to meet the social work staff across this region. Like others I miss the variation this brings as well as the exercise and connection with the outside world.

As for Staying (and working ) at Home - it is clearly a challenge to our usual lives and for all of us. It is also a challenge to our mental health and physical health.

NHS Every Mind Matters says *“The coronavirus outbreak means that life is changing for all of us for a while. It may cause you to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, bored, lonely or frustrated. It’s important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently. Remember, this situation is temporary and, for most of us, these difficult feelings will pass.”* This is pertinent to social work staff who are also working with service users and carers who are also feeling more stressed and anxious than usual times.

At these times, it will be even more important to look after yourselves. There is some great advice around on websites, eg Mind - keep to your usual routines and find ways to spend time, and find ways to relax and be creative. It is important however as part of caring for ourselves to “not underestimate the cognitive and emotional load that this pandemic brings, or the impact it will have on your productivity, at least in the short term. Difficulty concentrating, low

motivation and a state of distraction are to be expected. Adaptation will take time. Go easy on yourself. As we settle into this new rhythm of remote work and isolation, we need to be realistic in the goals we set, both for ourselves and others in our charge.”  
([www.nature.com/articles](http://www.nature.com/articles))

For myself, and as a sufferer of arthritis I have been keen to keep up exercise so that my condition does not worsen, I have resorted to online classes and moving furniture around to attempt a half moon pose .



Please note this is not me ...

I haven't quite got to this one yet but I am aspiring ...\*\*\*\*note to self may not achieve this one due to arthritic knee, don't be hard on myself try an easier one....



## Lyse Hurd

I never thought I would be someone suited to working from home. I thought I would lack motivation and self-discipline. How wrong I was! There are times when I feel lazier than others, however, my work ethic that I've always placed on myself takes over when I am

feeling lazy. What I value when working from home is that we, as a team keep in touch at least weekly and I have a group of colleagues who are always happy to take calls from me if I need a listening ear, for whatever reason. I do recommend that you find a comfortable place to work - not what others would consider comfortable, but what you consider comfortable. It may sound trivial, but I always make sure that I have plenty of tea, water and other favourite beverages throughout the day. Sometimes it helps to just get up and make a cup of tea when your brain loses its focus.

We all have limits as to how much we can accomplish in certain periods of time. Working from home makes it easier to identify your own timescales because there are usually no other distractions. I try to make sure that I have as few distractions as possible if I'm working on something intense. On the top right-hand corner of all of your computer applications is a little 'X'. Click on that 'X' for any applications that may distract you from writing that statement or reading that report. Turn off your emails! It helps! Believe me.

These are a few of my tips for keeping myself motivated and enthusiastic when I work from home, but I think the most important thing I rely on is good quality supervision, both ad hoc and planned. This should not go by the wayside if you are working from home. In fact, it is even more important. My other main thing that keeps me going is the great sense of humour of my colleagues. Please try not to lose that during these tough times. Social workers are great at finding humour in tough times, so don't forget how important that is!

If you have employment concerns you can contact SWU online or by calling 0121 622 8413.

See SWU's Health and Safety during COVID-19 position statement here :  
<https://www.basw.co.uk/swu-health-and-safety-during-covid-19-position-statement>

# Discovering different ways of offering support



Like the many millions of key workers, from shop staff and delivery drivers to residential care and hospital teams, social workers are still out there, on the front-line, full time.

As an already resilient and resourceful profession, we are

having to discover different ways of working with each other and with our service users. Exploring different forms of communication (out of necessity more than desire) has led us to the “virtual meeting” often dictated by the limitations of Skype or Zoom.

Whilst the restrictions of this are plenty, it does enable us to attend and contribute to professional meetings that we might otherwise have had to miss, but a growing ‘pet hate’ is the new anecdote... “the pandemic proves how easy it is to work from home”. As a social worker who still works in community mental health advocacy, distance or virtual work with service users is far from easy. Barriers to financial independence and the restrictions of poverty mean many service users have no internet access, no laptop, and no credit on their phone. Uncertainty and isolation are exacerbated by such circumstances and as social workers we must turn to our ever-present resourcefulness to discover different ways of offering support.

We were once famously told “there is no such thing as society”, but the pandemic has confirmed that this is far from true. Community networks and support services are emerging and developing daily, and examples in my own area are pubs and cafes offering free shopping and delivery services, free meals, and shopping vouchers. Linking service users with community support is an essential element of social work, as is offering guidance and support in obtaining Universal Credit and debt advice.

I’m all too familiar with the issues concerning lack of adequate PPE following the positive Covid-19 diagnosis of my own daughter, a care worker with the elderly. Fortunately, she is recovering well, but I’m angry at how she, her colleagues, and the elderly residents they care for, have been put in such extreme risk. Trade Union membership has never been more relevant and necessary, and as a union, SWU prioritises the health and wellbeing of all our members. We urge you to contact our Advice & Representation Team (0121 622 8413) if you have any concerns about your own safety and working conditions.

*In solidarity,*

**Carol Reid**  
**National Organiser & Union Contact**  
**Scheme Manager**  
**[carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:carol.reid@swu-union.org.uk)**

## Social Media

If you have not done so then please follow us on Facebook and Twitter - we are planning to post and tweet regular updates about the work and developments of the Social Workers Union.

SWU Updates: <http://swu-updates.org.uk/>

### Monthly ebulletins

Monthly ebulletins are emailed to all SWU members. If you are not receiving this then please check what email address we have. The ebulletins are also published on the web site.

### SWU can be found on the following:

Twitter: SWU\_UK

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/](http://www.facebook.com/socialworkersunionuk/)

Internet: [www.swu-union.org.uk](http://www.swu-union.org.uk)

# President's Message



This is a terrible disaster for many people. People have lost friends and family to the deadly Covid-19 virus. People have lost jobs, incomes and businesses. Self-isolation can cause loneliness for people on their own, and inevitably there will be an increase in mental

health problems. Sadly not all homes are happy places and domestic abuse will increase as people spend more time in each others company. There is probably no time when social workers are more needed. I would like to give tribute to our members who are using their skills and compassion to help the most vulnerable in society at this incredibly difficult time for everyone. You are providing an essential key service to individuals and society. You are the heroes, along with our colleagues in health and social care.

I was interested to note that the Queen in her address to the Nation gave tribute to "social care staff and social workers". There is quite rightly a great deal of emphasis on social care at the moment. Many of us take the view that this is partially the result of previous governments not giving it the support, recognition and funding it requires. However it is essential the government takes full recognition of the very important and essential work undertaken by social workers, their often poor working conditions, lack of support and supervision in many instances, an over reliance on agency staff and many unfilled vacancies in an already overstretched service long before the problems related to Covid-19 emerged.

Both SWU and our brilliant Advice and Representation Service remain open, albeit adjusted as a result of the necessary government restrictions in place. All the conferences, events and face to face meetings that I was due to attend have been cancelled. I am in regular contact by phone and email with John McGowan, our General Secretary, and Gerry Madden, our Honorary Treasurer. Under normal conditions the SWU Executive

meet face to face on regular occasions to conduct the business of the Union. Obviously this is no longer possible in present circumstances. However on May 5<sup>th</sup> the SWU Executive will have a teleconference which I will chair.

On a personal level I have been staying at home since March 18<sup>th</sup> with my two "indoor only" cats. They are pedigree Turkish Van cats which are a rare, ancient and very beautiful breed of cat which originated in the mountains of Lake Van in the remote far east of Turkey near the border with Armenia. I am going to have a party next Saturday and



I am thinking of inviting the two cats. They could have some Dreamies Cat Treats and I could have some ginger beer and peanuts. Some of you may remember the Famous Five books by Enid Blyton. The children were often having "lashings of ginger beer".

Nothing to do with Social Work or Covid-19, I was sorry to hear about the death at 90 of one my childhood heroes. Stirling Moss was one of the greatest motor racing drivers of all time.

Please take care and look after yourselves. Congratulations for the very valuable work that you are doing during this pandemic. We all look forward the time when it is all over and we can get back to normal. Like many people I had booked a summer holiday. It now seems highly likely this will not go ahead.

Membership of SWU is now over 13,000 and growing. I do not think there is a time when Trade Union membership was more important. These are very uncertain times and it is difficult to see what the future will bring. Sometimes I think I have accidentally landed in the middle of some dystopian movie. Once again thank you for all you are doing. Keep safe and well. My very best wishes to you all.

**James Birchall**  
**President SWU**

# SWU 2020 Annual Conference and General Meeting

**Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

The 2020 Annual General Meeting of the Social Workers Union will be held at  
The Mechanics Centre, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1 6DD

The timetable is as follows:

31 <sup>st</sup> July 2020	Deadline for receipt of motions
4 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	Notice of any proposed amendment to rules given in writing to members
18 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	Deadline for amendments to motions

Motions must be signed by 10 members and submitted to the Executive Committee by the above date.

Amendments to motions must also be signed by 10 members.

**Please visit [www.swu-union.org.uk](http://www.swu-union.org.uk) to register your attendance.  
Entry to this event is FREE for SWU members.**

We are always willing to assist union members with the drafting of motions.  
Please send an email to [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk) for such assistance.

Motions must be submitted by email to [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk)

**Membership numbers must be stated and will be checked.**

**The Social Workers Union, Wellesley House  
37 Waterloo Road, Birmingham B2 5PP**

**[www.swu-union.org.uk](http://www.swu-union.org.uk)**

# Some practicable ideas to help Social Workers manage anxieties, worry and stress over this difficult period

## Managing stress and worries:

- Writing down our worries, fears and stressors can help to get them out of our head. We can then reflect on each one and set actions at an appropriate time to resolve them. Alternatively, some worries could be scrunched up and the paper your worry is written on thrown away - as if you are throwing that worry out of your mind. These tools can be very useful if you're having problems sleeping as thoughts go around your head.
- Don't fertilise your Coronavirus (or other) worries by seeking out news story after news story, and especially not on social media. Limit the time spent reading up what worries you and only get your information from reputable sources such as national news channels.
- When faced with challenging times, it is easy to focus on what we cannot do. Instead look positively and think about what we can do. That might be the things that are unaffected, the opportunities this situation can create... such as time to get those long-standing tasks done, or to look for benefits such as more time with the family.

## Worries can be placed in to one of two categories - hypothetical worries or practical worries.

- Hypothetical worries are ones that currently do not actually exist and at best only might happen. They are 'what ifs', not based in evidence and sometimes irrational.
- Practical worries are actual problems. They are specific, defined and often happening right now.
- We can use various techniques (discussed here) to try to limit our thoughts around hypothetical worries.
- To help be more action oriented around practical worries, try reframing how you feel about it like this:
- Instead of saying "I am worried about....." (this kind of thought just leaves us stuck with the worry), try; "If I care about....." This rephrasing can help to encourage positive actions because this is now not a worry but something you care about and is important to you.

## Stress can sometime leave us grounded and unable to think clearly, act rationally and resolve the problem. To help create a starting point to focus on dealing with the cause of the stress, think about how you can 'Remove - Reduce - Reconsider' the stressor.

- Remove - Can I take my exposure of the stressor completely away? If so... how? An example of this is removing yourself from an argument.
- Reduce - How can I break this problem down into smaller pieces or to limit my exposure to it? You can also reduce its effects by developing personal skills to better handle it when it comes up. Also, could anyone else take some of the load to lower how much you have to carry?
- Reconsider - This is when we work to change our mindset around the stressor.... to learn to accept things, to find ways to manage our stressful emotions and to have effective coping strategies that lower our stressful feelings.

**When you are frequently having stressful and worrying thoughts, consider what your actual level of practical engagement is in that thought or stressor. Ranking it from low to being highly engaged. Then consider what level of engagement you actually want/need.**

- Low engagement - this is when someone has no stress processing, a 'head in the sand' approach and avoidance of the issues.
- Medium engagement - Someone here is mostly ruminating thoughts around and around their head. Constantly thinking about it but never actually engaged enough to do something practical about it.
- Highly engaged - The person here has found ways to process their stress, either by dealing with the problem (root cause solving) or by positively managing their feelings and coping with it (emotions focused coping).

### **Creating a happier mindset:**

1. Looking at positive images can induce more happier thoughts. A photo of something, someone or somewhere that evokes happy memories, or even something outside of the window.
2. Do more of the things that make you feel happy and calm. That might be a hobby, reading or watching a film. Immersive TV and films can be very useful when we want to disengage ourselves from negative feelings.
3. Keep in contact with friends and family. Even if you don't feel like it, a phone or video call to someone special is very likely to lift yours (and their) mood.
4. Maybe now is a great time to write someone a letter. Everyone feels good after receiving a letter so hopefully they will do the same back to you.
5. Use social media carefully. Viewing what could be a fake view of the world is not good for how we feel about ourselves. When using social media ask yourself how happy this is making me actually feel. If the answer is less than 6/10 on a happiness scale, turn it off and do something else.
6. When we are feeling down, use sources of humour to perk us up. YouTube clips, podcasts, TV and box sets, films or books all offer great options to take our mind off things and have a laugh. Laughter is a proven stress reliever.
7. Keep active. Moving and exercising helps to 'burn up' stress chemicals and promotes 'happy' hormones. Whether this is a walk outside or home exercise. Check out various YouTube clips and free apps for home exercise ideas.
8. Music can be a powerful tool for improving our mood. Stick on something uplifting, create different play lists (a productivity one for your study time and relaxation for chilling out for example). Maybe even get up and have a dance!
9. Being in nature has proved psychological benefits so get outside, even if it is only in your garden. Take a mindful look at the plants, animals, trees and sky. Take in everything around you blocking out other thoughts... simply be in the moment with nature.

### **Keeping your mind occupied and productive:**

- As our normal routines are broken, now we need to establish new ones that keep us on track, productive and help us to manage the day. Think about scheduling in new activities to help keep a sense of normality within the household.

- Now might be a great opportunity to get some of those tasks you never seem to get around to doing ticked off. It will help to keep your mind occupied and create a sense of achievement.

- Free time on your hands? Well maybe now you could invest some time in something you have been eager to do for a while. Get that guitar out, start learning Spanish, clean up the bike.... Internet, apps, YouTube and online delivery companies can all help to get you started.
- Don't normally do much exercise each day? Well now as it is one of the only ways to get outside so why not use this time to be more active. Use online mapping tools to find new routes from your home, set yourself step challenges (and maybe include friends and family for some gentle competition), get involved with the kids online PE classes and use other now abundant and often free online home exercise resources to get started.
- As our access to the trappings of modern society has diminished, why not go old school and get out the playing cards or a board game (check online shops for inspiration). A family game together, or maybe even via video chat will offer laughter, socialising and distraction.

NHS Mental Health and Wellbeing: If you're feeling stressed, anxious or depressed, or just want to feel happier:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>

How to look after your mental health during the Coronavirus outbreak:

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus>

## SWU offering £500 in student essay competition

Four grants of £500 to the best arguments for how to build better relationships!

The Social Workers Union (SWU) have announced the theme for their annual World Social Work Day student essay competition.

The question posed is: **Working Better Together: How do we build stronger relationships between social workers and people using services?**

The question links with the BASW Future of Social Work e-book project with the winning SWU entries being part of the online BASW publication:

<https://www.basw.co.uk/call-essays-poems-and-visual-images-future-social-work>

The four most compelling arguments within the word limit of 750-1000 words will win a grant of £500 each.

The competition is open to university students only and all UK universities will be contact this week. A flyer with further details can be seen on the following page.

John McGowan, general secretary of SWU, said: "I am delighted that the interest in our assignment competition grows each year and the calibre of entries is strong. The relationship between social worker and the service user is a key element of the process of engaging and working together.

Connecting with and actively engaging service users will make them feel at ease when they link with services; so, what better theme to have for our future social workers."

# WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY ASSIGNMENT

Four grants of £500 are to be presented to winning Social Work Students undertaking an Undergraduate or Post Graduate Social Work Degree.

The criteria: a 750 - 1000 word assignment with the following title:

**“Working better together: How do we build stronger relationships between social workers and people using services?”**

All completed assignments will be judged by a Panel including representation from the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU), Jon Dudley, BASW Hon Officer and a marker from SWU Exec. All winners will be invited to the SWU AGM and Conference 2020 (Fri 25<sup>th</sup> Sept, Manchester).

**The closing date for the competition is Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020.**

The winning entries will be published in the BASW: The BASW Future of Social Work e-book project which is part of the Heritage 50 BASW project. Please forward your completed assignment before that date with a covering letter giving your Name, Address, University, Year of Study and Academic Tutor (if appropriate) to: [joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk](mailto:joanne.marciano@swu-union.org.uk)

The assignment should be typed, have your full name, the assignment question as the title, and must follow an academic process; such as word count and Harvard Referencing System.

Please note: By taking part you are agreeing to SWU using the assignment for future purposes such as newsletters or other forums. Only the winning assignments will be used. Winning assignments will be displayed at the forthcoming SWU AGM Conference. All winners will also be offered a delegate place at the conference with a contribution towards transport if necessary.



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**SWU** Social Workers Union

**WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY  
17TH MARCH 2020**

**#WSWD2020**



# Whistleblowing

The recent articles from SWU Advice and Representation have went down well with a number of emails asking for more. We are therefore delighted that SWU Trade Union Advice and Representation Officer Julie Long shares another piece of advice and this time on: Whistleblowing



There are two pieces of legislation that support whistle-blowers from detrimental treatment by their employer, namely the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and the Protected Disclosure Act 2012. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides protection to 'workers' making disclosures in the public interest and allows such individuals to claim compensation for victimisation following such disclosures. The Protected Disclosure Act 2012 encourages, and assists, people in making disclosures of improper conduct by public officers and public bodies, as well as any person who adversely effects the honest performance of a public officer or public body of their functions.

Under the provisions of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (generally known as the 'Whistle-Blowers Act') protection is given to a worker who makes a protected disclosure to a specified individual. The primary aim of the Act is to encourage the resolution of concerns through proper work-place procedures. Many organisations have a whistleblowing policy, which tells you how to raise concerns. This policy can be obtained from your Human Resources department. The policy will usually give the name of a specific person who you can speak to with regards to the disclosure.

The policy is likely to state whether or not you are allowed to raise concerns anonymously. The organisation probably wouldn't refuse to investigate a complaint just because you wanted to remain anonymous. However, generally, it will be easier for them to investigate and deal with your concerns if you identify yourself. You can, though, ask for your identity to be kept confidential, however there may be limits on this. Any matter raised should be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially. The outcome of the investigation should then be reported back to you, even if no action is taken.

There are two types of whistleblowing, internal whistleblowing and external whistleblowing. Internal whistleblowing means that the whistle blower reports misconduct to another person within the organisation. An external whistle-blower is a person who reports an organisation's illegal, immoral, and/or illegitimate working practice to someone outside of the organisation.

A qualifying disclosure must be one of the six categories of subject matter specified in the Employment Rights Act 1999(see below). That is any disclosure of information which, in the reasonable belief of the worker making it, tends to fulfil one of the following criteria:

- (a) That a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed.
- (b) That a person has failed, is failing, or, is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which he is subject.
- (c) That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or, is likely to occur.
- (d) The health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or, is likely to occur.
- (e) That the environment has been, is being, or, is likely to be damaged.
- (f) That any of the above points are being deliberately concealed.

A qualifying disclosure will be a protected disclosure if it is made in one of the six ways set out in the act. The disclosure must be made through the appropriate channels. For instance, four of these categories are to be made to named individuals, while the further two categories are subject to more stringent conditions. Disclosure must be made to one of the following persons:

- In good faith to his employer
- While obtaining legal advice (e.g. to a solicitor)
- A disclosure made in good faith to a minister of the Crown.

Furthermore, the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order describes the individuals and (bodies) to which disclosure may be made. There are some thirty-eight bodies so prescribed, including various regulatory bodies and local authorities, for example. The matters that are the subject of a protected disclosure are usually matters in which there is a significant public interest. Workers making these types of disclosures are protected from victimisation if they are revealing information of the right type by making what is known as a 'qualifying disclosure'. Which means making the disclosure to the right person, in the right way thus making it a 'protected disclosure'. A disclosure will be protected if it is made in good faith, the worker reasonably believes that the information disclosed, and any allegation made in it, are substantially true. The disclosure must not be made for personal gain, the matter disclosed is of an exceptional serious nature, and in all the circumstances, it was reasonable for the worker to make the disclosure.

A worker does not need to prove the existence of any of the points outlined. The worker merely needs to show they had a reasonable belief that this was so. Nor does the worker have to prove that an offence has been committed. Clearly, however if a worker fails to show that they had a reasonable belief of wrongdoing as outlined above, it is likely that an Employment Tribunal would find that the worker did not have a reasonable belief.

A disclosure will not be protected if the worker commits an offence by making it. For example, in breach of the Official Secrets Act.

For a whistle-blower to obtain protection of the Act his motives for making the disclosure are also relevant. A worker who makes a protected disclosure has the right not to suffer a detriment. If he is an employee, he has the right not to be dismissed. If he is a worker, if dismissed, he will not be able to claim unfair dismissal but could successfully argue this amounts to a detriment and therefore claim compensation.

### **Who should you Report Whistleblowing to?**

If, you have concerns but you aren't sure how to raise them, or want advice about good practice you can call the NHS & Social Care Whistleblowing Helpline on 0800 724725. They can advise on the process but cannot deal with complaints directly.

If you are unsure of any of your employment rights or want to talk through any specific advice in relation to whistleblowing, or any other employment issue that you may wish to discuss, please do not hesitate to contact the Advice and Representation Team on 0121 622 8412.

**Julie Long**  
**SWU Trade Union Advice**  
**and Representation Officer**

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