Addressing values in the abstract may be quite different from applying them in a real-life situation. Values are problematic because they change over time and from one place to another.

**Social work values**

The place of values in social work:
- Values clarification is an important aspect of social work practice.
- Social workers must be concerned with his or her own values, and control for inappropriate intrusion into practice situations. This is known as **value suspension**.

Values held by social workers:
- Commitment to the primary importance of the individual in society
- Commitment to social change to meet socially recognised needs
- Commitment to social justice and the economic, physical and mental well-being
- Respect and appreciation for individual and group differences
- Commitment to developing service user’s ability to help themselves
- Willingness to transmit knowledge and skills to others
- Respect for confidentiality of relationships with service users.
- Willingness to keep personal feelings and needs separate from professional relationships
- Willingness to persist in efforts on behalf of clients despite frustrations
- Commitment to a high standard of personal and professional conduct.

**Personal and professional values**

- Personal values – unique to the individual, derive from upbringing, educational, cultural and religious influences. Life experiences and significant life events.
- Professional values – shared within a profession and set out in its literature. Social work values include ‘traditional’ values as well as more ‘emancipatory’ values.

When personal and professional values conflict:
- Social work can bring us into contact with people whose actions we may find repugnant or immoral
- But we are not there to make judgements about them as a person
- We need to be aware of our values and their potential to influence our practice.

Ethical problems often arise because social workers:
- work with conflicting interests and competing rights
- have a role to support, protect and empower people, as well as having statutory duties and other obligations that may be coercive and restrict people’s freedoms.
- are constrained by the availability of resources and institutional policies in society.

**Traditional and emancipatory values**

- Traditional social work values (Biestek 1961 and Timms 1983)
- **Individualisation**: recognition of each client as a unique individual
- **Purposeful expression of feeling**: recognition of clients rights to express feelings
- **Controlled emotional involvement**: workers sensitivity to clients feelings, meaning of those feelings and appropriate response.
- **Acceptance**: the worker perceives and deals with the service user as he/she really is, including his/her strengths and weaknesses, positive and negative feelings, constructive and destructive attitudes and behaviours (does not mean approval).
- **Non-judgemental attitude**: social work does not include assigning guilt or innocence. If the client fears blame and judgement, she will not talk about her/himself. Blame and praise are examples of