



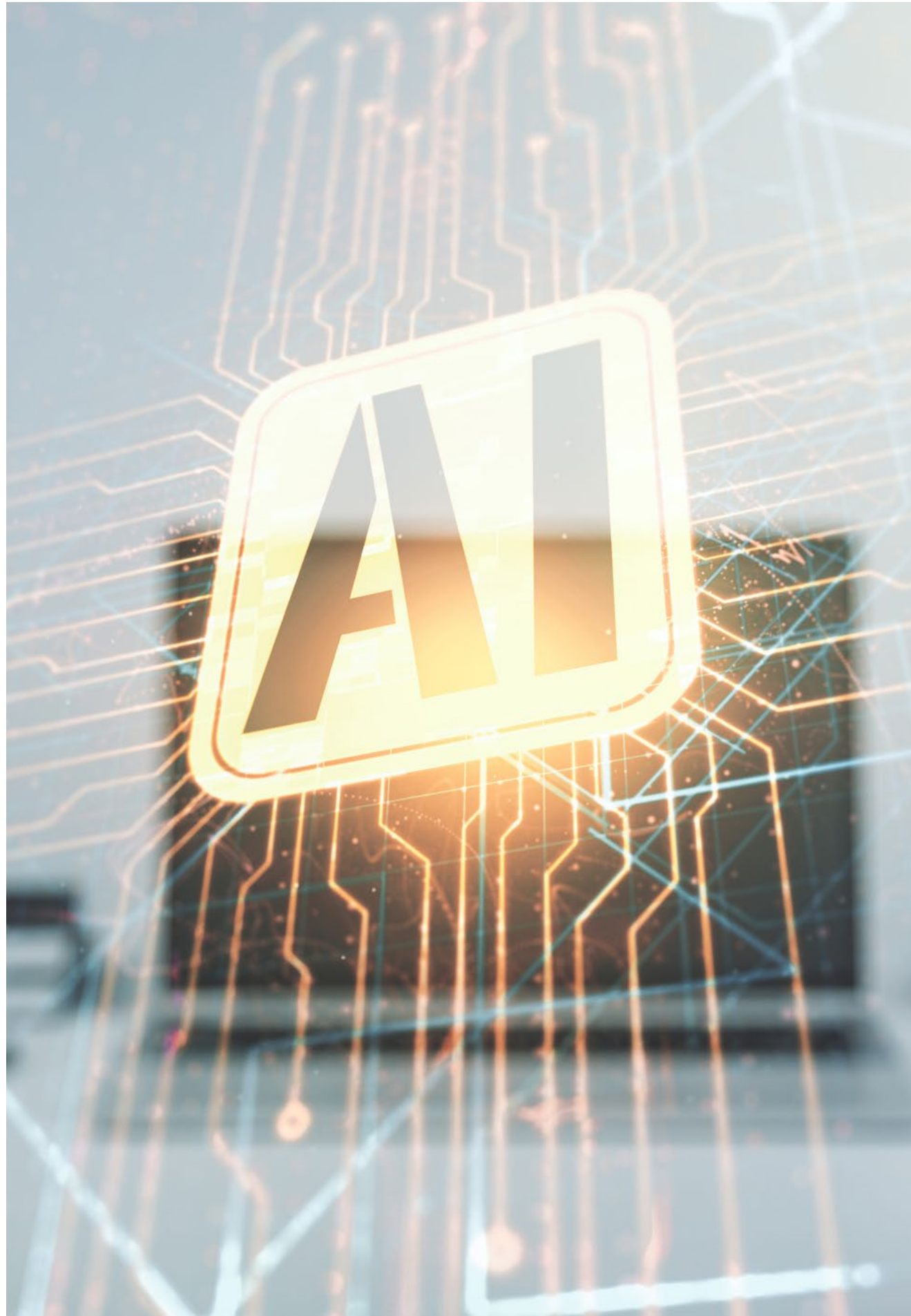
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WORKING WITH OPENAI: A Guide for Social Workers

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May 2025



OVERVIEW

This guide introduces the responsible use of OpenAI in social work practice. In what follows, we explain some frequently used terms, provide some insights into what it can and can't do, offer advice for effective, ethical and responsible use of OpenAI in the workplace and provide working examples of it in action.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

Artificial Intelligence is an umbrella term for a range of technologies or systems that can perform tasks that ordinarily require human intelligence. It emulates how humans think, communicate, learn and solve problems and it is trained to do that using algorithms (a set of rules to be followed to solve a problem or complete a task) and data.

There are different types of AI. **Narrow AI** is designed for a specific task e.g. voice assistant or chatbot – like Siri or Alexa. **Generative AI**, sometimes called GenAI is a type of AI that can create new content e.g. like text or images. It is often based on what is called 'deep learning' in so far as it is trained or programmed on large data sets. ChatGPT is one example of a GenAI tool.

What is OpenAI?

OpenAI is a company, but it is often used as shorthand for 'Open-foundation AI' that the public can download and use without direct control from the developer. ChatGPT is a product developed and owned by OpenAI but OpenAI is much wider in scope in terms of research and development.

Examples of Open AI Platforms

Various OpenAI platforms frequently used include Google's [Gemini](#) and [OpenAI's ChatGPT](#) which are great for creative content, research and understanding complex concepts. . In addition, Microsoft 365 Copilot in Microsoft teams can, among other things, facilitate project management, helping by recording meetings, taking notes and creating tasks lists based on conversations conducted in your Teams calls. 'Elicit' can support research tasks like literature reviews and summarising papers. Other potentially useful platforms include [MidJourney](#) which supports image generation; [DeepL Translator](#) which supports language translation; and [OtterAI](#) and [Whisper](#) which perform tasks like transcription and speech to text.

There are also some Chatbots [defined as a computer programme designed to simulate conversation over the internet] and 'Apps' that can provide services such as mental health support or interventions however some of these require a subscription. An example of a free Mental health and wellbeing app is [Wysa](#) but there are a range of applications available. AI is also increasingly used in clinical practice for referral, diagnosis and treatment

What AI Can and Can't Do in a Social Work Context

It can efficiently analyse and synthesise data: Where a Google Search will generate a range of relevant websites in response to your search, you can ask ChatGPT or [Microsoft Copilot](#) a question – voice or text – and it will rapidly synthesise large volumes of information from the web to provide you with an answer (see the examples below). This can help you to make better, evidence informed decisions.

It can enhance your efficiency helping you with administrative and research tasks, for example, it can increase productivity and reduce risk of errors. OpenAI tools can help with administrative efficiency and save you time e.g. help with initial research on topics as long as sources are checked; summarise text; help you to re-word or explain something in a different way; help write emails; create materials e.g. intervention tools, summarise policies and research and help you prepare for meetings by generating questions or checklists.

It is always on hand when you need it. This includes the wellbeing support apps, for example, that could potentially not only be of benefit to you, but to the people you work with.

It cannot engage in ethical reasoning but it can and should be used ethically.

We need to consider how the use of rapidly advancing AI fits with our social work standards and ethics of care. **Applying the BASW Code of ethics** can support the use of AI to align with social work's core commitments to social justice, empowerment, and ethical practice. There are two main areas in which we think this applies:

- Integrity, Honesty and Trust**

AI cannot replace relationship-based, person-centred practice because it cannot apply cultural sensitivity nor exercise empathy for example. Even a bespoke model can only provide information it has been trained or programmed on so any existing biases or errors will be reflected in the information it provides. That means the outputs generated may reinforce existing biases which could lead to discriminatory practices if unscrutinised. Therefore, social workers must remain critical, informed, and responsible in its use.

AI cannot 'think' it can only report what it has learnt. So, for example, if two people ask ChatGPT, or Microsoft Copilot, for example, the same question, the platform may generate different answers based on previous inquiry where different data in response to the question posed may be available for the tool to draw on. Never take AI generated information at face value – AI cannot replace critical thinking.

AI can make things up e.g. fabricate information reflecting limitations in each model's training. These are called hallucinations. So, for example, if you asked ChatGPT, ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot, for example, to summarise an area of practice and give references, the information provided may sound plausible but the references it provides could be fabricated.

Always verify any information you get from OpenAI especially if it is important. You cannot use OpenAI for anything where there may be adverse consequences if incorrect information is given e.g. risk decision-making, legal decisions.

- Respect for the Inherent Worth and Dignity of All People**

Only use AI platforms in social work practice that are approved by your agency with strong data privacy controls for such data purposes. It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with information governance, confidentiality and privacy regulations and data protection. You should consult your organisation's policy if they have one or consult relevant people within your organisation.

If you are using a recognised, protected or secure AI agency-approved platform or tool, **clients should be informed if AI is being used in their case** and be given the opportunity to opt out where appropriate consent, thereby respecting their autonomy and dignity.

Where OpenAI tools are used in the production of any outputs, it is critical to **be honest, accountable and transparent and acknowledge their use**, when it has been used as a functional tool to assist in the creation of the output, whether drafting ideas, planning or structuring written materials. This is not necessary if you only use OpenAI to familiarise yourself with a topic or read an AI-generated summary of information or use it to help you with sentence or paragraph composition. This means you will need to ensure you understand how it works and be able to challenge its outputs when necessary and in so doing make considered professional judgements

OpenAI cannot be used for 'case work'. OpenAI is not designed for social work use precisely because these platforms are not secure systems. Using these for practice would violate data protection and GDPR guidelines and legislation. This means that you cannot enter any confidential or sensitive information into public/OpenAI tools. That includes case notes, even if names and dates are removed.

There are other platforms beyond ChatGPT and other OpenAI platforms that are safe and more suited to the social work task. These include Co-Pilot and Magic Notes.

Magic Notes – A Example of AI in Social Work Practice.

Magic Notes is a secure, AI web-based platform, designed specifically to help social workers record conversations and instantly generate detailed case notes and assessments by recording and transcribing conversations, automatically detecting different speakers, while accommodating accents and background noise to ensure accurate documentation. AI-generated summaries are provided in custom formats, including action points, and notes can easily be copied into any case management system. The platform also includes: built-in translation for multiple languages; compatibility across devices and video conferencing platforms; secure data storage within the United Kingdom; customisable templates for various assessment types.

When you are engaging with OpenAI such as ChatGPT, you are likely to **start with an instruction or a question**. You will then prompt it to offer more or less information, provide the information in a different form and so on. This is called 'prompt engineering'. There are some good tips here but the more specific you can be the better the response will be. However, usually you will need to refine the output by posing further prompts.

Why don't you try it? It typically takes two seconds to generate this information!

WE EXPLICITLY DO NOT ENDORSE UNRESTRICTED USE OF ChatGPT IN FRONTLINE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE. THEY MUST NEVER BE USED TO PROCESS OR STORE PRIVATE OR CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION UNLESS FORMALLY APPROVED BY THE ORGANISATION.



Some Examples of what you can do with ChatGPT in Social Work Practice.

EXAMPLE 1: GENERATING INFORMATION (CHATGPT)

- Q. I am a social worker in Glasgow and my client needs help with housing. Who can help them?
- ChatGPT then provided a list of organisations including phone numbers and a summary of each service.
- Refining prompt: Which of these are open at the weekend?
- This requires ChatGPT to edit the information provided to those services available at the weekend.

EXAMPLE 2: SUMMARISING INFORMATION (CHATGPT)

- Q. Can you provide a summary with some examples and references of different styles of attachment between children and parents?
- ChatGPT said: Absolutely! Here's a clear and concise summary of different styles of attachment between children and parents, with examples and references:

Attachment Styles in Children
Attachment refers to the emotional bond between a child and their caregiver, which shapes the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) and Ainsworth's Strange Situation Study (1978) identified four main styles of attachment.
Secure Attachment
Description: Children feel safe, understood, and comforted by their caregiver. They trust that their needs will be met. Example: A securely attached child may cry when a parent leaves but is easily comforted upon their return. Caregiver traits: Responsive, emotionally available, consistent. Outcome: Higher self-esteem, better relationships, emotional regulation. Reference: Ainsworth et al., 1978
Insecure-Avoidant Attachment
Description: Children appear emotionally distant and avoid seeking comfort from caregivers. Example: A child doesn't show distress when a parent leaves and avoids them on return. Caregiver traits: Emotionally unavailable or rejecting. Outcome: May struggle with intimacy and trust in relationships. Reference: Main & Solomon, 1986
Insecure-Ambivalent (or Resistant) Attachment
Description: Children are anxious and clingy, unsure if their needs will be met. Example: A child becomes very upset when a parent leaves and is not easily comforted when they return, sometimes showing anger. Caregiver traits: Inconsistent responses, sometimes nurturing, sometimes neglectful. Outcome: Anxiety, dependency, difficulty managing emotions. Reference: Ainsworth et al., 1978
Disorganised Attachment
Description: Children display confused or contradictory behaviours, often linked to fear or trauma. Example: A child may approach a caregiver but then freeze, show fear, or avoid eye contact. Caregiver traits: Frightening, abusive, or severely neglectful. Outcome: High risk for behavioural and emotional difficulties, especially if unresolved. Reference: Main & Solomon, 1990
➤ ChatGPT then goes on to provide a summary table and reference list.

EXAMPLE 3: PRODUCING TEXT (CHATGPT)

Q. Can you help me write a referral email for a client I'm supporting to a substance use service?
My client has recently been released from prison and is currently using substances.

➤ **ChatGPT said:** Of course — here's a professional and compassionate referral email you could adapt for your client:

Subject: Referral to Substance Use Service – [Client's Initials]

Dear [Service Name/Worker's Name],

I hope this message finds you well.

I am writing to refer a client, [Client's First Name or Initials], who has recently been released from prison and is currently experiencing significant challenges related to substance use.

[He/She/They] are eager to access support and are open to engaging with your service. Given their recent release, they are in a vulnerable position and at increased risk of harm without appropriate intervention.

Brief background:

Released from custody on [Date]

History of substance misuse (primarily [type, e.g., heroin/alcohol])

Currently without consistent support or structured recovery plan

Motivated to make changes but requires urgent engagement

Please let me know the next steps for assessment or if you require any further information. I'm happy to provide a completed referral form if needed.

Kind regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Role]

[Your Service/Team Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

EXAMPLE 4: EDITING VOCABULARY

Q. I'm supporting a young person who is 15. They have expressed to me that they don't understand the difference between the roles of myself (social worker), their lawyer and their advocacy worker. Can you help me develop an explanation that a young person would understand about these different roles?

➤ **ChatGPT said:** Absolutely — it's so important to explain roles in a way that feels clear and respectful to the young person's age and understanding. Here's a simple, youth-friendly explanation you could use when speaking with them:

WHO'S WHO AND WHAT THEY DO — EXPLAINED FOR YOU
<p>Your Lawyer</p> <p>Your lawyer is like your legal bodyguard.</p> <p>They help you with anything to do with the law — like court, your rights, or legal decisions. They work for you and will speak up in court to make sure your side of the story is heard. They won't share what you say to anyone else unless you agree or there's a serious risk of harm.</p>
<p>Your Advocate</p> <p>Your advocate is like your voice amplifier.</p> <p>If you're not feeling heard, they help you speak up — or they'll speak up for you if you want. They can help you understand what's going on and make sure adults are listening to what matters to you. They're on your side, especially when you're part of meetings or making big decisions.</p>
<p>Me – Your Social Worker</p> <p>I'm like your support planner.</p> <p>I make sure you're safe, looked after, and getting the help you need — whether that's at home, in school, or with your feelings. I talk with other adults involved (like teachers or carers) to build a plan that supports you. I also help explain what's happening and why, so you don't feel left out.</p> <p>HOW WE WORK TOGETHER</p> <p>You've got a team around you — and we're all here for different reasons, but we all care about you.</p> <p>You're at the centre of it all — and if you ever feel unsure, it's okay to ask questions anytime.</p>

Would you like this in a printable or visual format (like a little handout or infographic) to share with them?

EXAMPLE 5: GENERATING IDEAS

Q. One of my clients is visually impaired and does not use braille. I want to ensure they can have access to the reports about them. Do you have any ideas about how I could do this?

➤ **ChatGPT said:** Absolutely — it’s great that you’re thinking proactively about accessibility for your client. Since your client is visually impaired and **does not use Braille**, here are several **inclusive and practical options** to ensure they can access reports and information:

1. AUDIO FORMAT (RECORDED OR TEXT-TO-SPEECH)
Option A: Pre-recorded summaries – You or a colleague could record key points of the report in simple, accessible language.
Option B: Use screen reader-compatible documents – If your client uses a screen reader (like NVDA, JAWS, or VoiceOver), make sure the report is in a clean, text-based format (e.g., Word or accessible PDF)
2. VERBAL SUMMARY IN PERSON OR BY PHONE
Offer to go through the report verbally, either in a face-to-face meeting or over the phone.
You can prepare a simplified version or summary to keep the discussion clear and manageable.
3. DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY
If the client uses a smartphone or tablet, many devices have built-in screen reading or magnification tools (e.g., VoiceOver on iPhone, TalkBack on Android).
Share documents digitally via email or cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive) so they can use their preferred tech to access it.
4. EASY-READ OR PLAIN LANGUAGE FORMATS
Rewriting complex sections of the report in plain English, possibly with large font, clear headings, and minimal jargon, can help comprehension if they use magnification tools or listen with screen readers.
5. TEXT-TO-SPEECH TOOLS YOU COULD USE
NaturalReader, Microsoft Immersive Reader, or Speech Central can convert reports to speech.
You could even export Word documents to MP3 audio files using Microsoft Word’s Read Aloud feature.

BEST PRACTICE TIP:

Ask the client directly how they prefer to receive information. They may already have a method that works for them, and being person-centred is key.

SUMMING UP

Our aim for this How-To AI Guide for Social Work was to provide an introduction to key terms, to give examples of mainstream AI platforms and resources, and to provide advice on what OpenAI can and can’t do in terms of ethical social work practice, while providing an examples of how it can aid social work practice – highlighting a contemporary example in the form of ‘Magic Notes’.

There are numerous online resources available that can provide more detailed step-by-step guides in terms of using OpenAI effectively.

Here is one example to get you started!
<https://zapier.com/blog/how-to-use-chatgpt/>



AI is evolving rapidly. Stay informed, exercise critical thinking, and use tools like ChatGPT as a supplement—not a substitute—for professional expertise.



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