

# Pick your Battles

## Navigating Risk in Structural Social Work

Structural social workers in Atlantic Canada, with over 494 combined hours of practice experience, shared that passion alone isn't enough. You need to learn how to navigate risk to successfully embody structural social work in practice.

There are sometimes risks to going against the mainstream or “status quo” social work approaches. Sometimes there is the risk of feeling lonely in the workplace. Not everyone will like your structural approach. But you will find allies and like-minded individuals. You are never alone.

“So no one's going to listen to you if you're always yelling, so you pick the battles, you get some experience and then you speak from that place of experience... then your voice can be louder.”

Trust others are planting seeds of change and resistance too.

To successfully navigate risk, you have to pick your battles. This means, you can't champion every issue alone. Sometimes there might be concerns you need to let slide to be able to push other issues. Things to consider in choosing which battles to pick:

- The seriousness of the issue
- Who and how someone is being impacted by the issue
- Worker and client well-being

“I mean picking your battles for sure. People get fed up with you if everything is a cause. It's just learning when to speak up and when to maintain those relationships...it's a bit of a compromise that way.”

“Figuring out, where do I wanna fight the fight? What do I wanna let go? What feels important to me?”

“So to a new social worker, how do you decide, what is it for you that makes the difference between, I'm gonna speak up, I'm gonna take that risk. This is the hill to say something versus, I'm gonna that's not it.”

Sometimes structural social workers will encounter a “Hill to die on” = an issue that they cannot justify ignoring. This is usually due to a direct conflict between personal or social work values and what the workplace is asking for, or serious ethical concerns or injustices.