



MSW-007
CASE WORK AND
COUNSELLING: WORKING
WITH INDIVIDUALS

Block

4

INTERVIEWING AND RECORDING

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This block on “Interviewing and Recording” is the fourth block of the course “Case Work and Counselling: Working with Individuals”. It has four units.

The first unit is on “Interviewing in Social Case Work.” In this unit you will learn about the concept and definition of interviewing in social case work, its purpose, process and the strengths and weaknesses associated with it.

In second unit on “Interviewing and Communication”, you will gain some ideas about the meaning and characteristics of communication, basic skills required for effective communication and the importance of communication in social case work interviews.

The third unit on “Interviewing-Skills and Techniques” will give you an insight into the various types of skills and techniques required for interviewing. You will also come to know about the things that you should do and things which you should avoid during an interview.

The fourth unit is on “Recording and Documentation in Social Case Work”. In this unit you will know the details of recording process. An elaborate discussion is presented on the purpose and functions of case recording and documentation, content and forms of case records, process involved in recording and some guidelines for effective case recording.

After going through this block you will have a comprehensive understanding of interviewing, communication and recording in social case work practice.

UNIT 1 INTERVIEWING IN SOCIAL CASE WORK

Contents

**Manju Kumar*

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Comprehend the concept of interviewing;
- Identify special character of a social case work interview;
- Understand its purpose, structure and process; and
- Move towards becoming more skilful and effective interviewer.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Many people in many different professions conduct interviews. Social workers are only one such group. But for social workers, interviewing is a preeminently important activity. In fact, carrying out most of their responsibilities depend on interviewing. Social work interviews differ from those of other professional groups in some crucial ways, reflecting what is unique about social work.

It is well known that although social work involves a great deal more than interviewing, social case worker spends more time in interviewing than in any other single activity. It is the most important, most frequently employed, social work skill. Kadushin and Kadushin (1997, p.3) describe the interview as “the most pervasive basic social work skill,” as a “fundamental social work activity,” and as “a primary social work tool-in-trade.” The interview, according to them, is the tool which social workers use to work with their client. The interview is the primary instrument they use to obtain an understanding of clients and their situation and for helping clients deal with their problems.

It is, therefore, very important that one gains an understanding of the characteristics of a social case work interview, its specific purposes and processes.

1.2 INTERVIEWING – CONCEPT AND DEFINITION

Interviewing serves a variety of purposes and enters into many social situations. It is as old as the human race and as extensive as the leading professions of the day. The priest, the journalist, the detective, the physician, the lawyer, the anthropologist, the salesman, the employment manager, the psychiatrist, the Psychoanalyst, the research worker, and the social worker regularly use the interview in daily practice. Therefore, no single, formal, inclusive definition of interviewing is feasible. Before one speaks of the specific features of interviews conducted by social case workers, it will be worthwhile to describe the characteristics of interview utilized by professionals in different human service disciplines.

Webster defines the interview as “a mutual view or sight; a meeting face to face; usually a formal meeting for consultation; for a conference; for eliciting information by questioning; an interview is a visit for the purpose of obtaining particulars respecting a person or his opinions” and attitudes. Such synonyms as

“meeting,” “conference,” “consultation,” “questioning,” “visit,” “conversation,” “discussion” are useful in indicating the scope of the interview. From a common sense point of view *interviewing seems to be a specialized form of conversation*, by means of which we exchange experiences, reveal our attitudes, and express our views. “An interview is a systematic method by which one person enters more or less imaginatively into the inner life of another, who is often a comparative stranger to him”. (Young 1935, p.4)

Interview and conversation

Ordinary conversation is generally informal, more or less spontaneous, and its subject matter is often of a general nature. When conversation is purposive and deliberate, and when at least one of the participants seeks to explore the mind of the other, the parties to the conversation pass from the status of mere talker and listener to the status of interviewer and interviewee. The tendency is for interviewing to assume the form of questions and answers; the interviewer supplying the form and the interviewee the content.

An interview can simply be defined as a conversation with a deliberate purpose, a purpose mutually accepted by the participants. An interview (professional interview) resembles a conversation in many ways:

- Both involve verbal and non-verbal communication between people during which ideas, attitudes and feelings are exchanged;
- Both are usually face-to-face interactions, aside from the telephone interview or conversation;
- As in a conversation, participants in the interview reciprocally influence each other;
- A good interview, like a good conversation, gives pleasure to both participants.

Given below are the crucial features which distinguish a professional interview from a conversation:

- 1) The interaction in the interview is designed to achieve a consciously selected purpose.

From this critical feature of the interview flows a series of consequences for the way in which participants relate to each other in the interview as distinguished from a conversation and for the way the interaction is structured.

Since the interview has a definite purpose its content is not selected because it is interesting; it is chosen, rather, to facilitate achievement of the purpose. The content reflects unity of purpose; there is a progression towards achievement and thematic continuity over a period of time.

- 2) The purpose of the interview is unidirectional – two people are working on the problem of one.
- 3) There is a differential allocation of tasks between the interview participants. The interviewer alone has the responsibility for directing the interaction between the two participants within the interview so that it moves towards the designated goal.
- 4) Unlike conversation, the actions of the interviewer should be planned, deliberate, and consciously selected to foster the purpose of the interview. This is part of the role behaviour prescribed for the interviewer and the interviewee.
- 5) That one participant is interviewer and another interviewee implies a non-reciprocal relationship which is demonstrated by the following situations:
 - a) In an interview, one person asks questions and another answers them.
 - b) This relationship is the result of the fact that someone has to take the lead role, that one person does know how to conduct an interview and has more expert knowledge of the subject matter.
 - c) This nonreciprocal relationship also derives from the fact that the structure of the encounter is designed to serve principally the interests of the client. A good conversation is more or less balanced between the two participants. Interviewing, on the other hand, is highly imbalanced. The person interviewing suspends his needs and desires in order to help the other person. The profession of the interviewer entails an obligation to perform clearly defined services for the client.
 - d) The interviewer acts in a manner that encourages the interviewee to reveal a great deal about himself while he himself reveals little.
 - e) No one is obliged to initiate a conversation. The interviewer, however, is obliged to initiate and maintain the contact until the purpose is achieved or until it is clear that the purpose cannot be achieved. The commitment on the part of the interviewer to participation is recognizably more intense.
- 6) The interview, unlike a conversation, is usually a formally arranged meeting. A definite time, place, and duration are established for the interview,
- 7) Because an interview has a purpose other than amusement, unpleasant facts and feelings are not avoided. In normal conversation, at least in the early stages of friendship, much effort is put into ‘getting on with each other’—in other words, avoiding areas of disagreement, ignoring personality flaws, avoiding challenging the other person, and so on. In an interview, though

initially effort is made to establish positive relationship, the main aim is to effect change which often involves bringing out and dealing with interviewee's negative feelings and experiences; and challenging and confronting him.

- 8) Further, much conversation between friends is for the purpose of bonding and individual pleasure. On the other hand, the outcome of deliberations in an interview may have profound consequences for the rest of interviewee's life.

In a nutshell, the professional interview differs from a conversation in that it involves interpersonal interaction for a conscious, mutually accepted purpose. Following from this premise, the interview, as contrasted with a conversation, involves a more formal structure, a clearly defined allocation of roles, and a different set of norms regulating the process of interaction.

Special Features of a Social Case Work Interview

Professionals within the human service family conduct interviews in vastly different ways. While, the social case work interview retains all the main features of the professional interview that we have mentioned above, consideration of the social work goals, the assumptions about the client population, the varying emphases on the content and the process of the interview bring out its special characteristics. A recapitulate is made of some of the important and relevant dimensions of social case work which place it apart from other human service professions.

- 1) Each client is unique; so the interview process cannot be standardized beyond a point. Social case work emphasizes individualized problem definition and helping process.
- 2) Each client has skills and strengths; they are, therefore, collaborators in the helping process occurring in the interview rather than being just the informants, or recipients of expert help.
- 3) That worker and clients are equal except in those small areas of lives of the latter which are problematic dilutes in a big way the non-reciprocal role relationship mentioned above. It is believed that the clients have rich lives, only small parts of which are causing concern or difficulties.
- 4) Each client shares with the Interviewer the responsibility for success of the interview. However, the greater part of this responsibility is that of the interviewer because he has greater familiarity with the situation, greater power in it and more appropriate training in how to perform in it.
- 5) The case worker has generally no set interview schedule (questions) and he attempts to keep his control of the interview at the lowest possible level. Some case work interviews, however, do require the worker to cover some uniform content, for example, an adoptive interview typically requires coverage of motivation, reaction to infertility, marital interaction, child preference and experience with children.
- 6) The social case work interview generally takes place with troubled people or people in trouble. What is discussed is private and highly emotional. Interviews are, thus, characterized by a great concern with personal interaction; with considerable emphasis on feelings and attitudes and with relatively less concern for objective factual data.
- 7) Unlike other professions, social case work focuses on the 'whole' person. *Person-in-environment* perspective leads to worker getting concerned with

a wide segment of the client's life. The more the worker explores the clients' personal world with him, the greater the likelihood of affective interaction and of emotional involvement. Social case work interviews tend to be more diffused than those conducted in other professions.

Compared with many other kinds of interviews the social case work interview is apt to be diffused, un-standardized, non-scheduled, interviewee-controlled, focused on affective material, and concerned with interpersonal interaction of participants. The social case work interviewer has rather a difficult assignment. Much of what he generally has to do in the interview cannot be determined in advance. The content, the sequence in which it is introduced, how it is introduced; the interpersonal context in which it is explored – all these matters are the responsibility of the worker and must be a response to the situation as it develops. (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997)

To sum up, in social case work interview, the effort of the worker is –

- a) to maximize clients' participation;
- b) to encourage the development of the interview so that it follows the clients' preferences;
- c) to maximize individualization of content, which means that the worker has to use considerable discretion in determining the direction and content of the interview; and
- d) to minimize standardization, to respond to the interview situations as they emerge out of interpersonal interactions so that the worker's responses are spontaneous rather than prepared.

Components of Social Case Work Interview

All interviews, whether conducted by social case workers or any other professional, have certain common components which are as follows:

- Purpose: an object to be attained, end or aim to be kept in view
- Structure: form, arrangement of parts
- The dynamic processes inherent in the interaction of individuals: a series of actions, motions or operations definitely conducting to an end
- Technical procedures, attitudes and predisposing elements. Procedure- a manner or method of proceeding; order or system of conducting; and Technique- expert method of execution. (Fenlason 1962, p.128)

While we discuss the first three components here, the component of technique and procedure will be covered in a later unit.

1.3 PURPOSE OF SOCIAL CASE WORK INTERVIEW

Purpose according to objectives of social case work

Interviewing objectives are many and varied. The purposes of the social case work interview follow from the objectives and functions of social case work. They vary widely according to the kind of problem presented and the nature of the client. Broadly speaking, the purposes of the interviews may be:

Interviewing and Recording

- To explore client's mind or sentiments;
- To obtain information in regard to specific situations or attitudes;
- To establish eligibility;
- To impart information (e.g. on health, available resources for training or shelter);
- To motivate to action;
- To give advice and support;
- To build self-confidence and raise self-esteem;
- To evaluate and interpret information with the client;
- To bring about change in feelings or perspective;
- To influence conduct; and
- To influence social environment of the client.

There may be a general purpose for the entire interview with more specific minor objectives, which may be modified during the course of the interview.

Purpose according to the process of social case work

According to Kadushin and Kadushin (1997) the general purposes of most social case work interviews can be described as: informational (to make a social study), diagnostic (to arrive at an appraisal), and therapeutic (to effect change). These three categories align closely to three major phases of the process of social case work. While interviewing is used right from the social study and intake stages through to case closure, interviews at each phase of the process focus on a specific purpose. However, these are not absolute categories. They serve rather an analytical purpose. *The same interview can, and often does serve more than one purpose.* The child welfare worker's main objective in an adoption application interview may be to obtain necessary information for reaching a reliable decision about child's adoption. The interview may also serve a therapeutic purpose to help the applicants adjust to the idea of adoption as a way of completing a family.

A) **Informational or social study interviews:** The purpose of informational interviews is to obtain a focused account of an individual in terms of social functioning. Social study interview is a selective gathering of life history material related to client's social functioning. Knowledge about the client, his situation, his strengths and limitations, resources and social networks is a necessary prerequisite to an empathic understanding of the client in his social environment. And empathic understanding is a prerequisite for effective intervention to bring about change. Information on what is the exact nature of difficulty or concern; for whom it is a problem (for example, whether the teacher, parent or the child perceives a situation as causing concern); when the difficulties began; what has made things better or worse (efforts made by the clients in dealing with the situation before seeking interview); and how other people in the client's social milieu perceive the situation can go a long way in achieving reliable assessment, that is definition of the situation, and effective intervention.

In a series of contacts (interviews) with the client such information gathering is cumulative; in every interview some new, previously unshared information is obtained. Early interviews are likely to be devoted more exclusively and explicitly to obtaining information. In later interviews, obtaining social study information is typically incidental to the achievement of some other purpose. (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997)

- B) **Diagnostic- decision-making interviews:** These interviews are geared towards appraisal and determination of eligibility for a service. They are conducted so as to permit the worker to assess some particular characteristics of the interviewee, to define and redefine the purpose of the social case work process. The appraisal interviews have to obtain selective information needed to make some necessary decision. The decision in itself involves a diagnostic process in the mind of the worker- a process of applying theoretical generalization to the data obtained and organizing and interpreting the data for valid inferences, for example, arriving at a decision that a child is indulging in “attention-seeking” behaviour (classifying the reported behaviour); or a teenage girl is not responding to medical treatment “to avoid getting married” (arriving at a cause-effect linkage). These inferences, though tentative, enable the worker to decide whether the agency (and the worker) can do anything to help the client or a referral is indicated.

The aim is primarily to discover the needs, resources and possibilities of each case. Diagnostic interview involves” the attempt to make as exact a definition as possible of the situation and personality of a human being in some social need, i.e., in relation to the other human beings upon whom he in anyway depends and who depend on him and in relation also to the social situation of his community”

“What”, “when”, “where”, and “how much” are important parts of the interview.

- C) **Therapeutic interviews:** The purpose of the therapeutic interviews is to bring change in the client, in his social situation, or in both. Such interviews involve the use of special remedial measures to effect change in feelings, attitudes and behaviour on the part of the client in response to the social situation. They can also involve efforts to change the social situation so as to reduce social pressures impinging on the client. Therapeutic interviews are highly individualized and idiosyncratic. The interview might itself be the instrument through which change is effected. The purpose of such interviews is helping and healing through communication in a therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, the worker may do no more than present the facts in a more objective light, thus enabling the client to see himself, his assets and liabilities, his sources of strength, and his opportunities more clearly than he could see them unaided. The client (the interviewee) then is the person with and for whom the change in feeling, attitude and behaviour is attempted. All problems may not be settled in the interview but to be successful, it should lead to some plan of action.

Interviews may have a therapeutic purpose but the person for whom the therapeutic change is sought may not be present. These include interviews with persons important in the client’s life where the social worker acts as a broker or advocate

on behalf of the client. The purpose of the interview then is to change the balance of forces in the social environment in the client favour.

The purpose of the interview may be informing him about the data that have been obtained from other sources, for providing information, to answer questions that the client has raised or of passing on some decision that have been made about him by a person in a position of authority. The worker may also inform the client about such matters as his performance in certain tests and their interpretation and to determine with the client as to exactly what specific behaviour needs changing. (Kadushin & Kadushin, 1997)

While interviewing is used right from the social study and intake stages through to case closure, interviews at each phase of the process focus on a specific purpose. However, these are not absolute categories. They serve rather an analytical purpose. *The same interview can, and often does serve more than one purpose.* The child welfare worker's main objective in an adoption application interview may be to obtain necessary information for reaching a reliable decision about child's adoption. The interview may also serve a therapeutic purpose to help the applicants adjust to the idea of adoption as a way of completing a family.

Besides, while therapeutic interviews occur sequentially later in social case work process, the interviews conducted for informational and diagnostic purposes may also serve therapeutic purposes. These interviews give a chance to the client to talk about himself, his past, his wishes and fears, his hopes and aspirations. The process of talking things over brings new clarity of thought, relief from tension and a new objectivity – that may in itself bring about the necessary change. The interviews may provide the clients with cathartic opportunities to ventilate their suppressed feelings.

Clients from certain segments of society (e.g. elderly persons, women in oppressive relationships or exploited workers) may find the interviews therapeutic because they perceive the worker as a 'companion', someone to tell their story to, and someone who will listen to their story.

A widow, with two teenaged children, visited the agency and asked pointedly to be put in touch with a person who had lot of time and patience to listen to her. True to her demand, she initially dominated the interviews, talking for long periods. It became apparent that she had suppressed herself throughout her married life and never expressed her own needs and desires to her husband.

The initial interviews aim to instruct the interviewee about the procedures for obtaining assistance, to motivate him to participate and take responsibility for change, and to help and develop confidence often prove therapeutic. Interview sessions give women (with marital problems) introspective opportunities to examine and enhance their knowledge of themselves and their marriages.

Further, the specific purpose of initial interviews may be *to establish the very purpose* of the entire social case work process. Putting the client at ease and to win his trust may not be independent entities but these are correlative with the purpose of the whole of the helping process.

Following is an illustrative list of types of interviews based on the purposes of interviews:

- Introductory interview
- Fact-finding interviews - to enable the client to air his/her problems; to discover the causes of the problem / dissatisfaction; and to establish the facts of the problem situation.
- The interview for empathetic understanding
- Informative interviews – to give, review and clarify information
- The interpretative or educational interview
- Skill / capacity building interviews
- The supportive interview
- Diagnostic decision-making interviews
- The evaluative or value-setting interview
- Therapeutic interviews
- Motivational interviewing - to direct persuasion for facilitating behaviour change; to promote client motivation and reduce motivational conflicts; and to increase skills and reduce barriers to change.
- Brief interviews
- Terminating interviews, and so on.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Space is given below for your answers.

1) Explain the term 'interviewing'. How is interviewing different from conversation?

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2) Describe special features of social case work interviews.

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3) Describe different components of a social case work interview.

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4) Discuss briefly the purpose of interviews conducted at different stages of social case work process.

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1.4 STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW

Differences in primary purposes of interview are reflected in the ways they are structured and conducted. Structure is the element of the interview, which gives it, form and, in some instances, content. Structure has variously been described as ‘an arrangement of elements or parts of a whole’; ‘a systematic arrangement of composite parts’; ‘an assembly or formation of parts of a complex entity in a particular manner or pattern’; and ‘an organization of constituents of an entity in a systematic framework or sequence’. Different models have been formulated to explain some of the ways the interviews are structured to achieve their purposes.

Various outlines, bearing directly on purpose and objectives have been developed for planned structuring of the interview. These outlines are helpful in conducting different types of interviews for specific use such as the determination of eligibility (scrutiny of adoptive parents, conditions for a child being received in care), the developmental history of a child, or history of onset and development of the difficulty under study.

Linear Model

The basic elements of structure are- a beginning, middle, and an ending. Porter Lee has listed four structural elements of the interview: 1) the start, 2) crises in the trend of discussion, 3) psychological moments, and 4) conclusion. The continuum (beginning, middle, and ending) is affected by the critical incidents in each phase. Critical incidents are characterized by crises and turning points which lead to a forward or backward movement - toward or from the objective of the interview. The critical moments, which arise in interview, may come about because of certain characteristics of interviewee behaviour and response and of interviewer activity peculiar to each other. Following are some of the ways in which these may occur in the interview:

- Through a stimulus response of feeling and attitude in the interviewee himself as he reacts to the purpose of the interview and the circumstances which brought him to it, the setting of the interview, the memories and associations which the discussion evokes in the interview, his feelings and attitudes towards the interviewer’s personality and the interviewer’s responses;
- Through responses of feelings and attitudes in the interviewer;
- Through responses evoked by circumstances for which the interviewer and the interviewee have little or no control.

In a psychiatric clinic of a general hospital for women, the case work trainee (MSW Previous student) Ritu was conducting an interview with a young girl

Nita, aged 16 years, undergoing treatment for hysteria and vomittings. She was assigned the task of clarifying the psychiatrist's diagnosis of Nita's problem and seeking her co-operation in the treatment process. Nita resented the 'doctor's' view that she herself was responsible for her problem and it devolved on her to get well. Despite having established rapport with Nita in earlier meetings the latter did not seem to hear Ritu's explanations and responded in monosyllables. Ritu was practically at a stand still. Just then, some of the clinic staff wanted to shift some benches from the corner of the verandah where the interview was being conducted. Getting up from their seats, Ritu invited Nita to accompany her to the adjoining kiosk and have a drink. The interview was resumed, though in a more informal manner and in a non-clinical setting. Nita opened up visibly and enquired Ritu why 'doctor' said that she could cure herself. Not only Ritu was able to hold Nita's attention but was successful in obtaining so far undisclosed facts which could have been responsible for her problem, thereby, making more reliable assessment possible. Ritu concluded the session by fixing up a home visit to carry the interaction forward.

The shifting of the venue of the interview, though unplanned, proved to be a turning point and propelled the interview forward.

The **start** involves an obligation on the part of the worker to make the purpose of the interview clear to the client at the earliest possible moment and where necessary to explain the function of the agency he represents briefly and in terms that can be readily understood. The commonly accepted principle as a guide in beginning an interview is- begin where the client is. The worker, therefore, finds out about the client and the matter of concern as reported. Though this information may be in rudimentary form, it forms the basis for some preliminary planning of the session.

Even if the previous interview had been conducted effectively, the worker has to again tune in to the client's response pattern and mind set. The worker, therefore, has to be sensitive to the changing emotional climate. Life does not remain static in between the sessions. Both worker and the client have life experiences which may influence their responses and mental framework and, consequently, the interactional processes in the ensuing interview. The beginning of each interview may involve recapitulating the point where the last session ended; enquiring generally about what may have transpired during the interval, noticing any non-verbal cues which seem significant and renewing the statement of purpose for the current session. It is helping the client to *rejoin* in the process of interview.

The middle phase of an interview is in motion when the client and the worker's discussion progressively centres on the main purpose for which the encounter has been conducted. Critical moments and the psychological blocks within the client or the worker arise in the middle phase, which impact the smooth flow of the session.

The **ending** of an interview may be established by the expiry of a predetermined period of time or when the client and the worker decide that the purpose of the interview has been achieved. The ending may come about abruptly because of the acting-out resistance by the client. The closure of the interview may involve final reinforcement, recapitulation and review of the content and process of the interview including final feedback from client (final summaries from worker and final questions from the client), scheduling of the next encounter, practical arrangements

like contacting some one, writing letters or some task to be undertaken till the next interview, any plans for follow up or any onward referral.

This model facilitates planning for the forthcoming session, divide the time slot according to the elements of the interview structure. For example, Stanton suggests that 95 per cent of the one-hour interview may be spent for the middle phase, the rest time to be spent in the beginning and the closing phases.

The three stages in the continuum may be analysed in the linear mode but the tasks accomplished at one stage may have to be undertaken at other stages too. For example, putting the client at ease is a task to be taken up at the beginning of the interview but it may become necessary at a later stage if the client shows that the communications during the interview have set in motion disturbing feelings and thoughts. Or the interview may plunge directly into dealing with the main issue under focus and later relationship issues may have to be taken up. Again, review and recapitulation or summarizing (expected to be done at the end) may be resorted to in between the middle phase because of a long-winded and complicated content emerging during the encounter.

Circular Model

Another exposition of the structure of the interview is in Bogardus' theory of the **circular** response. The theory is that each participant in turn furnishes the stimulus on which the next response is based. Each response brings the interview to the next step and provides the stimulus for the next step. Each response becomes a new stimulus until the circle ends by the accomplishment or failure of the purpose of the interview. The case work interview is in reality an interplay of dynamic personalities who constantly act and react to each other's questions and answers, to each other's gestures, facial expressions, manners and even dress. The interviewee (the client), therefore, is as apt to influence the interviewer (the worker) and guide the course and outcome of the interview as vice versa.

Furthermore, the thoughts and feelings which prevailed at the outset of such an interaction may be so completely changed in their course that new and unforeseen moods and mental content may come to dominate the situation; that is, the interview conforms to the **circular response pattern**. Interviewer and interviewee generally stimulate each other in new ways as the interview proceeds step by step. (Young, 1935) In other words, there is stimulus and response, with every response becoming a stimulus for another response. (See diagram given below)

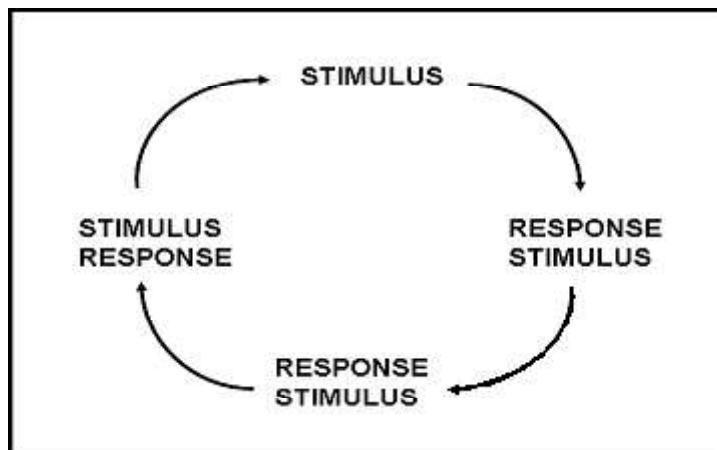


Figure 1
Interview Structure - Circular Model

Spiral Model

Spiral model takes the circular model further. After each round of stimulus and response the worker and the client occupy a more advanced position of knowledge about each other and about the social situation under consideration than they did at the beginning of said round of interaction. After each stimulus – response step a new level of relationship is attained by the worker and the client jointly. Spiral model also helps in evaluation of the interview – whether the interview has moved towards its objective. **Circular model** emphasizes that the question of the interviewer serves as a stimulus to the interviewee’s answer which, in turn, becomes a stimulus to the interviewer’s response (whether another question, a comment, or non-verbal expression). **The spiral model** highlights the fact that each set of stimulus-response takes the interview to a new level. The position where the interview ends should be away from the starting point, or else it will mean that nothing useful has been accomplished. (see fig. 2a)

Unlike the linear model, the circular and spiral models of interview structure bring out the reciprocal role relationship between the two participants in social case work interview. The worker is not only a questioner and the client ‘a well’ from where he has to lift out answers. When the circular or spiral concept does away with the somewhat formal question-answer type of interview, it gives the worker the new role of being “on his toes” every minute of the interview.

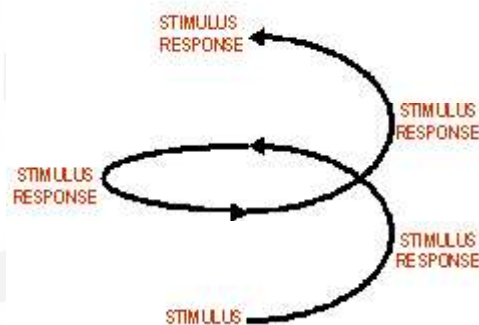


Figure 2a
Interview Structure – Spiral Model

He secures his clues as the interview moves along. He picks up new threads of thought and experience at every stimulus-response step. (Young, p.23)

We have mentioned at the beginning of this unit that social case work interviews tend largely to be spontaneous, loosely structured and individualised. However, the extent to which the worker may want to structure the interview will depend upon the purpose, the type of interview, and any time restrictions. We give below a brief description of characteristics of interviews with different level of structuring:

- **Non - Structured Interviews:** the interviewer allows the client steer the interview. There is no prearranged schedule or framing of questions – simply thinking of the purpose and making a mental note of a few possible areas or topics which need to be covered. This, however, does not justify poorly planned and badly conducted interviews.

- Moderately – Structured Interviews: These involve planning and framing the major questions worker wants answered and perhaps some possible follow up questions to probe deeper, if necessary
- Structured / Highly - Structured Interviews: The interviewer dominates and controls the interview. All (or most) questions are arranged and scheduled in advance. This strategy may be beneficial in fact-finding interviews.
- Highly – Structured / Standardized Interview: Questions are close-ended – the interviewee to choose from only given response choices.

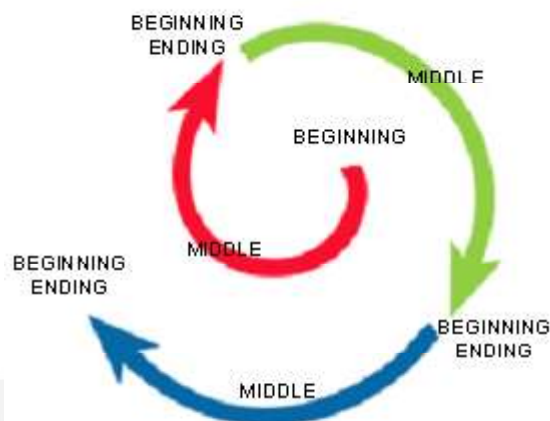


Figure 2b
Interview Structure – Spiral & Linear Models Combined

As mentioned above, the series of interviews required in the entire social case work process may reflect a mix of different levels of structuring, depending upon the stage of the social case work process, specific purpose of the interview and the capacity of the client. The diagram above shows the spiral model based on stimulus-response pattern combined with the linear model which focuses on the beginning, middle and ending phases of an interview.

1.5 PROCESS OF AN INTERVIEW

Process is another important component of an interview. The word ‘process’ implies movement – from one point to another; a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead towards a particular result. In our context it connotes ‘a series of actions or operations conducing to an end’. In an interview, which is embedded in a social intercourse, the interaction between the two participants is dynamic in character, that is, there is continuous movement and change. However, the term ‘process’ denotes ‘forward movement’ –in other words, to move towards achieving desired results. A process in interviewing is the encompassing, descriptive word for movement in the interview.

As mentioned above, the interview process is sequential in nature, that is, it starts at a point (beginning) and moving through various events (both psychological, social and physical) reaches the end. The peculiar nature of the interview process is that there are two processes occurring at the same time. While interview is moving through its sequential phases, it is ‘one’ episode in the entire Social Case Work Process, which is in itself sequential in nature, like earth which, while going around the sun (orbit), rotates around its own axis. In other words, the objective (goal or end) of a particular interview’s process is a part of the over-all objective

/objectives of the complete helping process. Each interview in a sequence of a number of interviews achieves a limited purpose which cumulatively achieves the larger goal statement for the entire case work process. The onward movement of each interview (the process) contributes and/or reflects the onward movement of the helping process itself. *It is the responsibility of the worker to maintain the onward momentum in the interview.*

Some dimensions of interview are important interface of the interview process, like, a) adequate planning and preparation for the forthcoming interview session; b) selection of appropriate strategy based on initial understanding of the client, his background as well as the reported problem; c) positive relationship with the client; and d) the use of necessary skills, techniques and tools to propel the interview further.

A. Planning and Preparation

The interviewer goes into the interview with a number of ideas about what he hopes to achieve, thereby, providing direction and structure to the encounter. Making a brief note of these tentative suggestions about the interview process and outcome before the interview will help keep the structure, although need for flexibility in selecting and attempting to achieve these aims and objectives is important.

- Before the first encounter, the worker needs to get familiarized with the referral note, mentioning the reported problem; the source of the referral (e.g., parents, spouse, teacher or some one at the agency) and the expectations from the worker in terms of the purpose of the one session to be conducted or the case work process to be initiated. In case the interview is other than the first, the worker needs to recapitulate and review what had occurred during the previous session / sessions; what had been achieved or had been missed out; what had been planned for the forthcoming session. In either case, the worker goes to the interview with some plan for achieving specific objective.
- Worker needs to gather as much preliminary information about the client and his background – from the case records (if an old or ongoing client), from case files (inmate in a residential institution), any other kind of records like school attendance / performance records; and background information based on records or personal knowledge of the worker / agency. This helps the worker in achieving preparatory empathy in terms of culture, impact of the problem, e.g., an athlete losing a limb in an accident), implications of belonging to disadvantaged or oppressed social groups.
- The worker is required to keep in mind the likely bias in the records and keep an open mind to ascertain facts on his own. The information gathered is used by the worker as preparation for likely developments, as reference points, and as source of information about areas to be dealt with sensitivity and caution.
- In subsequent interviews, the worker has to be conscious of what might have happened in the worker's and the client's life since the last session and be prepared for emotional impact on the forthcoming interview session.
- For the first encounter the worker needs to carefully schedule the meeting. Depending on the residence of the client (the distance and transport facilities available) and/or the family responsibilities, the worker has to fix the meeting.

He has to consider about the kind of setting in which the interview will take place. He has to attempt to tailor the interview conditions so as to optimize the chance of a successful encounter with the client – to avoid noise, to ensure privacy, to consider physical surroundings, kind of chairs and seating arrangement. It is rare that the ideal conditions may be available. One can share these kinds of difficulties with the client. The setting is equally important in subsequent sessions. Any sudden change in the seating or physical surroundings may affect the client adversely.

- Worker has to decide the kind of records that need to be maintained – written or electronic; whether any note-taking during the session will be advisable. If the interview is expected to be dealing with emotionally charged content, it will be preferable not to take any notes during the interview. Filling up of forms about basic socio-economic data is generally acceptable to clients but it is always advisable to ensure that the client is feeling comfortable about it.
- Lastly, the worker needs to engage in self-exploration – in terms of personal biases or emotional responses to client information or awareness of professional expertise necessary for dealing with the task ahead. This is relevant both for the first encounter and later interviews. In the latter, any developments during the interview may give rise to emotionally-charged atmosphere which the worker finds difficult to handle. Consulting senior and experienced professionals and / or availing of supervisory inputs as well as drawing upon professional knowledge base may prove beneficial in such situations.

In short, the planning of an interview involves the following:- **why** this interview (purpose); **who** is the client (his likely reactions and does the client have the necessary capacity or power to make decisions that the worker expects from him); **where and when** (place, time, stage of the process); **what** (topics to be covered and type of questions to be asked); and **how** (decide the structure and content of the interview). How does the worker plan to accomplish the objective? Will he begin in a friendly manner or come straight to the point? Will he inform the client about the entire process or only the specific portion under focus in the current interview?

B. Professional Relationship in Social Case Work Interview

Professional relationship is one of the core conditions for success of an interview. It is the interactional context in which the social process of an interview takes place. A good and positive relationship increases the likelihood of client's self-disclosure and enhances the influence of the worker (interviewer). Therefore, having met the client and begun the interview, the worker faces the most important primary task: establishing a positive relationship with the client.

Unlike any social relationship, this relationship, termed 'professional relationship', is characterized by having a specific **purpose**; being **time bound** and **for the client**; and expecting objectivity on the part of the worker. Other core conditions of or attitudes associated with positive relationship are:

- Unconditional positive regard for the client,
- Acceptance of the client as he is,

- Empathy, warmth and genuineness,
- Caring
- Non-judgmental attitude
- Maintaining confidentiality

It is important for the interviewer (worker) to win the trust and confidence of the interviewee (client), to help the client feel comfortable during the interview, and to assure the client that the information shared during the interview will be kept confidential. The client should feel respected as a human being and not humiliated because he has sought professional help. Demonstrating respect for the interviewee's individuality helps to establish and maintain a positive relationship. The interviewer takes responsibility for providing the psychological atmosphere, in which a good relationship can be initiated and maintained. It is not enough that initial rapport has been established in the early interviews; maintaining positive relationship is necessary also for the later interviews to be effective.

1.6 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF INTERVIEWING

It was stated right in the beginning that interview is the most frequently used tool of social case work. It is so because it offers many advantages to the social case worker. But interviews are not unmixed blessings! There are certain limitations, certain contra-indications for its use. Knowing both sides of the coin will enable the worker to use the tools of the interview judiciously.

Strengths:

- 1) It is the most economical way to use the social case worker's time as it is generally held in the office.
- 2) It is easier to fix appointments with one client rather than with a group.
- 3) Interviews can be held in succession, thereby maintaining continuity in the helping process.
- 4) Those with deficient social skills and limited verbal skills, feel reticent in a group. For example, a children's group has little sympathy with an inadequate member.
- 5) Initially, while dealing with persons with disturbed behaviour it is best to meet the client in one-to-one situation to build the confidence and improve social skills and behaviour before they are asked to join a group.
- 6) Clients get whole attention of the case worker.
- 7) Establishment of worker - client relationship is one of the most important reasons for the individual interview.
- 8) Through the interview, the worker has access to the client's feelings and attitudes - the subjective meaning of the objective situation.
- 9) Observation in the interview presents the worker with a sample of client's behaviour, to be interpreted further.

- 10) The interview is one of the most flexible procedures for getting access to a wide variety of insights about the client in a social situation. Through words, the worker can experience with the client various situations in the past, present and future.
- 11) Interviews are not entirely dependent on verbal communication. Non-verbal communications form a significant part of the total interaction. Also the responsibility to maintain the flow of the interview is with the case worker. Interview then is particularly important for emotionally deprived and reticent clients.
- 12) Clients who are facing serious social difficulties desire privacy. Their self-expression is inhibited and they feel that they may lose self-esteem before others.
- 13) Hostility and negative feelings against authority figures in a group may lead to group hysteria because clients reinforce each other's fears.
14. If catharsis is indicated, the interview is important.

Weaknesses

- 1) Interviews depend primarily on verbal communication, which in case of some persons belonging to minority groups, disadvantaged or oppressed segments of client groups, becomes an inhibiting factor. Also, in such cases, the meaning of words as understood by the worker and client may differ considerably.
- 2) Interview results in isolating an individual in a controlled environment of a worker's room. The worker is limited in his perception of the client.
- 3) Corroboration of facts given by the client from family, friends neighbours becomes difficult.
- 4) The validity and reliability of this method depend on how well and skillfully the interview has been structured and who is conducting it.
- 5) The worker's bias is another limitation. Particular phenomena are interpreted according to their own understanding, belief and attitude.
- 6) Even if relating to the environment is not necessary, knowing or ascertaining whether the case work has been effective becomes very difficult.
- 7) Apart from the use of confrontation as a technique, shades of confrontation are inherent in one-to-one interview.
- 8) However, the worker may use some activity so as to release tension and reduce confrontation.
- 9) Silence in one-to-one situation is less comfortable, often embarrassing, especially with young shy children. Many interviewers also feel uncomfortable to handle silences which may occur in the interview.
- 10) Even maintaining an eye-contact, which an interviewer learns to do, may become threatening to the client.

The client (a young lady) blurted out during the interview that I should not look directly at her. In answer to my query the client replied that my full

attention as demonstrated by the eye contact made her feel that I could see deep inside her, even the things she did not want me to see! I learnt that even the way an eye contact is maintained made a difference to the client. As I had been able to establish good relationship, the client felt free to share her anxiety with me. I apologized, told her that my intention was only to attend to her recital and looked at her in a casual manner.

- 11) Strain of keeping up a conversation with a stranger of whom they are in awe can be a source of anxiety.
- 12) The power imbalance in the worker-client relationship tends to undermine the concept of client's collaboration and participation.
- 13) Client's sense of inadequacy tends the worker to encourage client's dependence on him – worker either takes upon himself the task of problem resolution ('the client is not capable or too slow') or loses respect for the client and become indifferent.

Many of the weaknesses mentioned above can be got over by appropriate strategies and skilled use of techniques. Empathic understanding of the client, his milieu and his concerns, honest self-awareness, constant effort at enhancing professional competence and judicious mix of verbal communication, use of diagrammatic tools (ecomaps, genograms, life road maps) and activity (art and craft, role play / role rehearsal, indoor game, autographical writing) can mitigate the likely negative impact of one-to-one situation. Complementing individual interviews with joint interviews (like husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and parent, doctor and patient); visiting home, school or hospital; visiting work place (with caution) and so on may be able to overcome some of limitations of the individual interviews.

The advantages, versatility, and flexibility of interviewing have made the interview a tool of choice for social work interaction with the client.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Space is given below for your answers.

- 1) Describe briefly the three models of interview structure. Explain any one model with example from your field work experience.

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- 2) What do you understand by the term interview process? Discuss in short different components of the interview process.

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3) List the strengths and weaknesses of an interview. How can a case worker overcome these weaknesses?

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

Social work interviews are concerned with social work content, are scheduled to achieve social work purposes, and take place in social work settings. The function and focus of the profession thus determine, in a general way, the distinctive contents of social case work interviews.

Social Case Work interviews, though expected to be planned, are not standardized and follow the idiosyncratic characteristics of the individual clients and their concerns. An Interview in a sequence of interviews has a specific objective or purpose, which forms a part of the overall objective or goal of the helping process. Purpose determines the structure, content and the process of the interview. The worker (interviewer) may have to mix different degrees of structuring – within the same interview or in different interviews held at different stages of the helping process. Process focuses on the interview’s movement on to the specified purpose. Planning and preparation for the interview (value of spontaneity and flexibility notwithstanding) and establishing and maintaining of positive relationship are crucial dimensions of the interview process.

Social case work interview involves primarily verbal exchange between the two participants. Traditionally the interview is held in the impersonal atmosphere of an agency office. Analysis and interpretation of the verbal exchange in this scenario is the primary source of gathering information, sometimes of highly intimate and emotional nature. The one-to-one situation has some inherent deterrents for some client groups.

However, the advantages of an interview as a tool for initiating and engaging the client in the helping process far outweigh the limitations of individual interview situation. Complementing verbal exchange with activities, joint or family group interviews, empathic understanding and skilled use of techniques can overcome negative connotations of an interview.

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UNIT 2 INTERVIEWING AND COMMUNICATION

Contents

**Manju Kumar*

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- 2.4 Basic Skills of Communication
- 2.5 Importance of Communication in Social Case Work interviews
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to;

- get familiar with the basic elements of communication process;
- know the features of effective communication; and importance of effective communication;
- know what are the barriers to effective communication process;
- learn about generic skills of communication; and
- recognize interviewing as a communication endeavour.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication involves “any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person’s needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states.” (de Valenzuela, 1992) According to Webster Dictionary, communication is “sending, giving, or exchanging information and ideas.” Communication is an activity, an everyday occurrence that happens naturally. Without communication we could not share our thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. In fact, communication is at the heart of being human.

Interviewing is a form of communication. It is a two-way communication process that allows for the interchange of ideas and information between the participants of the interview. Social case work interview like all interviews involves interaction between two or more people. While interaction is the medium through which the case worker tries to reach out to the client, communication is the method for doing so. Interpersonal communication occurs when we interact simultaneously with another person and attempt to mutually influence each other. In fact, interpersonal communication is the foundation of human interaction and inherent in the process of interviewing.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION

Understanding communication and the communication process better can help the social case workers become more effective and successful communicators. Communication skills are critical skills that social case workers need to understand and acquire. Skills which determine to a great extent the effectiveness of interpersonal communication or rather the entire social interactional process of social case work are grounded in in-depth knowledge and practice of communication and communication process.

Definition and Features of Communication

To view interviewing from a communication perspective, it is worthwhile to know and understand what communication is and what are its distinguishing features.

Defining Communication

Communication, according to various dictionaries, means any or all of the following: 'the act of transmitting', 'a giving or exchanging of information, signals or messages by talk, gestures, writing, etc.', 'the information, message, etc.', 'close, sympathetic relationship', and 'a system for sending and receiving messages'. The word "communicate" is derived from the word "common" - to share, exchange, send along, transmit, talk, gesture, write, put to use, relate.

Communication can be described simply as the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver in an understandable manner. Sender, receiver and a message are, therefore, three basic components of a communication event. . A more comprehensive statement includes the components of context and environment to the basic elements of sender, receiver, and message.

Communication is the process of using verbal and nonverbal cues to negotiate a mutually acceptable meaning between two or more people within a particular context and environment.

Let us explain briefly different phrases used in this definition:

- Process: suggests that understandings constantly develop and change through one or more transactions.
- Verbal and nonverbal cues: given through language and voice, body, face, space, touch, use of time and space and other personal cues like dressing and appearance.
- Negotiate a mutually acceptable meaning: dialogue leads to an understanding that all participants in the communication situation can accept.
- A particular context: communication is defined in terms of particular circumstances and situations.
- Environment: refers to physical, social and emotional conditions within which the communication occurs. Environments can place expectation and constraints on communication.

Features of Communication

Different definitions bring out special features of communication, which are described below:

- Communication involves the ‘creation’, ‘transmission’, and ‘reception’ of ‘messages’.
- Communication always happens between or among **at least two** persons. Communication is social interaction where at least two interacting agents share a common set of signs.
- Communication involves active **interactions with the environment**- physical, biological and social.
- Communication **involves an exchange** - of electrical signals, of sounds, words and printed pages.
- Communication is a **process**. Communication is always in motion, moving forward and changing continuously.
- Communication is a **system**: its components are interdependent and interconnected in a way that any change in one component affects others.
- Communication is **complex**. No form of communication is simple. Because of the number of variables involved, even simple requests are extremely complex.
- Communication, especially interpersonal communication, is **inescapable**. We constantly communicate with those around us. The very attempt not to communicate communicates something.
- Communication is **irreversible**. One can’t really take back something once it has been said or conveyed.
- Communication seems so natural and one generally assumes that there is no need of working on it but it is not true. Most fights or arguments with spouses, children or friends are the result of ineffective communication. Communication is a **learned** skill.
- Communication **requires a vast repertoire of skills** in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating.
- Communication emphasizes **content** (the message) and **relationships** (relationship between the participants in the communication process).
- Communication is **governed by rules and principles**. Regulative rules specify when, where, with whom, and how one communicates.

The features mentioned above highlight the fact that communication is both a system and a process; is an inevitable but complicated part of one's existence; is a learned social skill; needs effort to be achieved; and is governed by specific rules and principles. Since it is irreversible, the content and the context of, and the means used to convey a message require particular care. Analysis of the components (interdependent parts of a system) in a dynamic process will lead to a greater understanding of communication and its place in interviewing.

The Communication Process

Communication is a creative and dynamic continuous process, rather than a discrete or isolated exchange of information. (Wikipedia)

Communication is the process of sharing thoughts, ideas, experiences and emotions with others, and having those thoughts, ideas, experiences and emotions understood.

In other words, it is a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding.

Elements of Communication Process

The communication process is a system that involves an interrelated, interdependent group of elements working together as a whole to achieve a desired outcome or goal. In other words, these components can be viewed as factors which influence the communication process and impact each other in a variety of ways. In a snapshot of a static instance of communication the following are the most important elements:

- A message: what needs to be communicated
- A messenger (also called sender or source): the person who has something to communicate
- A receiver (or destination): the person who receives the message
- Encoding: message formed with verbal and non-verbal signs
- Decoding: reconstruction of the message by the receiver
- Channel: the means of communication

Besides the basic elements listed above, another significant element is the meeting point for the sender and the receiver – the area where fields of experiences of the two participants in the communication event find some commonality. It is the mutual recognition of the purpose and context of communication, the actual environment where communication takes place and rapport that exists between the sender and the receiver.

A model (Fig.1) illustrates different components of the communication process.

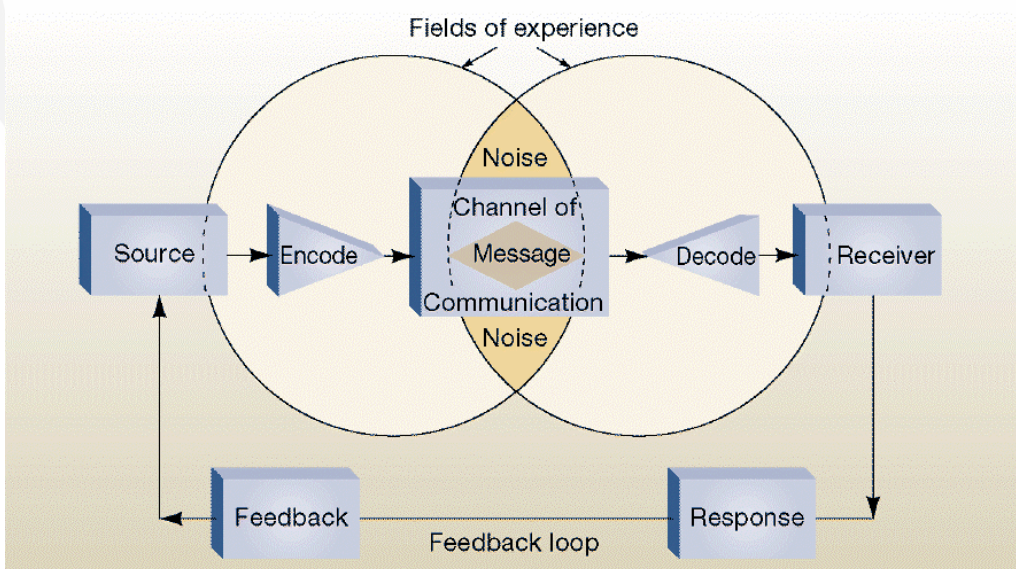


Fig.1: Basic Interactive Model

Source: <http://www.rocw.raifoundation.org/masscommunication/BAMC/CommunicationPrinciples/lecture-notes/Lesson-03.pdf>

The model given above brings out another significant element of the communication process, and that is the element described variously as **noises**, filters or interferences. Noise could be defined as unwanted signals that can disrupt message accuracy or anything that interferes with a message. Noise essentially is anything

that distorts a message by interfering with the communication process. Noise can take many forms, including a music playing in the background, another person trying to enter your conversation, and any other distractions that prevent the receiver from paying attention. Noise can occur during any stage of the process.

The Communication Chain or Sequence

The communication process constitutes of a chain or sequence of events which are explained below:

- The sender or the communicator has the *need to communicate* (that is objective, purpose or intent);
- The need is translated into a *message*. The sender will encode his message with words, behaviour and body language that he senses will help him to best communicate this message according to his intention (encoding);
- The message which involves decisions about content, structure, style and mode (oral, written and non-verbal) is *transmitted* through various channels like face-to-face interaction, telephone conversation or email;
- The receiver *gets and interprets* the message according to his personal, cultural or contextual background and language skills(decoding);
- The receiver *responds and reacts* to the message received and thus provides feedback to the sender. While giving feedback the receiver takes on the role of a communicator;
- The sender *receives feedback*. Feedback is a key component in the communication process because it allows the sender to evaluate the effectiveness of the message. Without feedback, the sender cannot confirm that the receiver has interpreted the message correctly, that is, as intended by him. Feedback ultimately provides an opportunity for the sender to take corrective action to clarify a misunderstood message, to adjust his message and send it again by varying the content, structure or the mode. Feedback plays an important role by indicating significant communication barriers: differences in background, different interpretations of words, and differing emotional reactions.

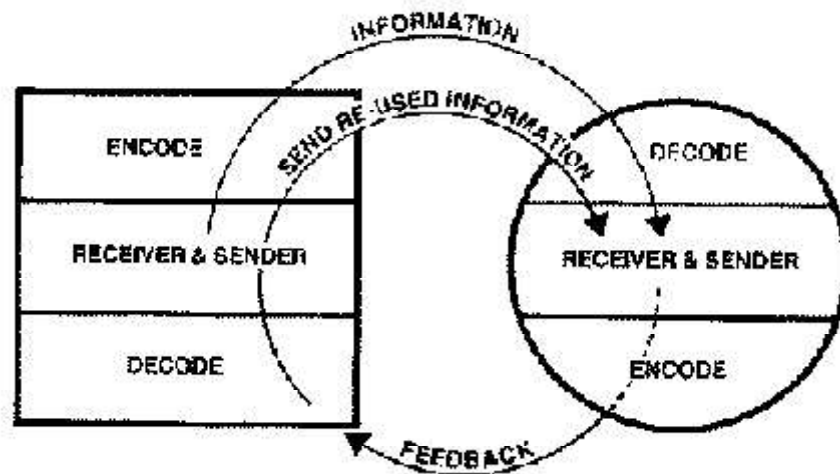


Fig. 2: Circular Model of Communication

- Irrespective of their subjective realities like attitudes, opinions, values and perceptions as well as fields of experience, the sender and receiver, *share a common space* - that is a positive relationship, context and social environment in which the process of communication takes place.
- The sender sends the corrected message or sends another making the *communication chain cyclic in nature*. (See fig.2. Please refer also to the cyclic and spiral models of structure of an interview in the previous unit.)

As the figure above shows the source has become listener, and listener has become the source. In a very real sense, one becomes listener and source simultaneously. As one delivers the message, one is tuned in to the listener's feedback, evaluating whether one's message has been received.

Levels of Communication

A social case worker needs to be aware of the levels of communication which are generally influenced by cultural traditions. Given below are different levels of communication which imply client's (receivers of messages) increasing personal involvement and intimacy with the worker.

- a) **Ritual:** at the most basic level, communication is in the form of ritual exchanges; for example, greetings, asking 'how are you?', 'fine thank you', talking about the bus journey or welfare of the family. The questions and answers are not to be taken literally unless accompanied with additional words or body language conveying the concern associated with the answer, which moves the conversation to the next level.
- b) **Facts and information:** Clients may feel hesitant in sharing some pieces of information; may be reluctant to display their ignorance; or may question the relevance of information being offered. Communication at this level, as compared to the ritualized communication, requires more skill on the part of the 'sender' or the worker to involve the client in useful or purposive interaction.
- c) **Thoughts and judgments:** Sharing opinions and views requires more courage and a sense of trust between the two participants in the communication event.
- d) **Feelings and emotions:** Message content that provokes or intends to elicit feelings or emotions involves a greater level of risk. Unless a very strong positive relationship, a sense of trust and confidence has been established, the client is unlikely to communicate inner feelings and emotionally charged reactions.
- e) **Peak experiences:** Significant experiences, high and low in personal life are the most risky kind of communications. The sender's negative feedback to the response received can break the communication chain. (Lindon and Lindon, 2000; MacLennan, 1996)

Types of Communication

Types of communication may be described along different dimensions:

- a) Verbal (oral or written), non-verbal (gestures, signs, symbols or tonal) or manual (e.g. sign language used by the deaf) communication. Silence may also serve as a form of communication.

- b) Intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and organizational communication
- c) One way (self-action), two-way (interaction) or transaction communication
- d) Communication in face-to-face interaction, telephone conversation, emails; or
- e) Communications through mass media like radio, TV, print media etc.
- f) Formal or informal communication
- g) Overt (open and visible) or covert (hidden, invisible) communication
- h) Intentional and unintentional communication

Here we will discuss communication carried out in face-to-face interaction, applying one-way, two-way or transaction approaches; and involving transmission of oral messages with both verbal and non-verbal elements.

Face-to-face communication offers maximum information because the worker has an opportunity of getting visual as well as auditory feedback to the messages sent to the client. Establishing a rapport, winning trust of the receiver (client) is relatively easier in face-to-face contact as compared to, say, on telephone (Helpline Service)

One-way communication by the sender (worker) tends to undermine the dignity or personhood of the receiver (client). The attitude of the communicator is message-oriented with very little thought of the listener. Conversations may become a series of two monologues. There is no way to know if the meaning is shared between the sender and the receiver. The sender may, even unknowingly, end up manipulating the receiver.

Continuous feedback makes the communication a **two-way process**, where both the participants are communicators and not just sender and receiver. Seeking feedback is critical for the sender so as to know whether the intended purpose of his communication has been achieved. In fact, silence or non-communication on the part of one also conveys something to the other person. Cyclic nature of the communication sequence brings out the importance of maintaining communication as a two-way process.

The two-way process demonstrates the other-centredness of the communicator because both the message and the other person are important for him. The bi-directionality of communication is a prerequisite in interpersonal communication which is inherent in a social case work interview.

Transaction focuses on meaning and sharing by accounting for all other factors in the communication process. It is concerned with the barriers that might affect the communication. Transaction is best described as effective communication. This is when the communication process is applied and carried out completely. The sender gives a message that is passed on to the receiver. In return, the receiver can give clear feedback that allows the sender to know whether or not the message was perceived as intended.

Verbal and non-verbal components of a message transmitted orally:

Oral communication refers to messages that are transmitted aloud. Generally they involve both verbal and nonverbal messages. Oral messages are continuous, with

words and sounds spoken in a connected way. Thus, when we talk, we generally do not focus on individual words or sounds.

Verbal, according to dictionary, means ‘consisting of words, expressed in words, oral or spoken, or written.’ Here we will limit our discussion only to oral or spoken messages.

To create some meaning out of the words we need to follow certain rules of particular language. There is a general belief that words have clear and specific meanings; this belief is misplaced. What a word really means for an individual depends on several factors including his knowledge in general, background, personal experiences and even the mood he is in. Each word triggers a large number of images in ones mind. A few of them are the same as or comparable to the images triggered in other’s minds; the rest are different. Take ‘death’ for example. For someone who hasn’t lost a loved one, ‘death’ is ‘cessation of life’, a process all living beings have to go through. For someone who has lost a loved one, or for someone who knows he is suffering from a terminal illness, or for someone who has been sentenced to death, it has vastly different meaning.

Nonverbal communication involves the use of symbols other than the written or spoken word, such as gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, use of space, touch and certain actions like sitting erect or slumped, sitting with hands folded on the chest, doodling or playing with the paper weight. Nonverbal symbols have socially shared meanings, for example, persons belonging to a particular social group or age-group may perceive the meaning of holding hands, patting, grieving or celebrating, and smiling or crying in the manner in which they learn through a complex process of socialization. Non-verbal symbols have no formal structure or rules of grammar although they are governed by socio - cultural and personal context of the persons engaged in the communication event.

To illustrate the above with one non-verbal element, silence can mean hostility, anger, depression; be soothing, showing an empathy; express concern and caring; provide time to organize one’s thoughts; defuse tensions; offer time for consideration of ideas or for interpretation; or provoke a response from the other person.

Words alone, in many cases, are not adequate to express our feelings and reactions. When someone remarks that he does not know how to express himself in words, it can be concluded that his feelings are too intense and complex to be expressed in words. Non-verbal messages express feelings more accurately than the spoken or written language. Non-verbal signals constitute hidden messages; they offer cues, which convey the meaning of the message.

Most of our communication depends on a **combination of verbal and non-verbal** symbols. Nonverbal messages usually complement verbal messages. At other times, nonverbal symbols completely replace verbal messages. Teachers with cold, fixed stares can easily convey the message to the students to be quiet, without speaking.

There are occasions when two codes, verbal and non-verbal appear to be contradictory. For example, the social case worker tells the client that he is happy that the latter has come to keep the appointment but looks preoccupied or is frowning. When nonverbal messages contradict what the sender says verbally, the receiver usually believes in the meaning conveyed by the nonverbal component of the message.

Social case work interviews follow a mix of **formal and informal** communication. Formal communications denote a status differential; and follow a structure guided strictly by the purpose of the interaction. Communication in social case work interview, thus, may be described as formal. The content of the communication may consist of offer of professional expertise, suggestion, negotiation or problem solving. The worker is expected to use appropriate language, usually avoiding slang, which may be acceptable in informal communications. Informal communications may occur among family members or friends. However, the worker creates a climate of ease, comfort and friendliness; avoids jargon and uses words expected to be comprehensible to the client.

Intentional communication occurs when messages are sent with specific goals in mind. **Unintentional** communication takes place without the communicator being aware of it. The greatest number of unintentional messages is nonverbal.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Communication: Intrapersonal communication means communicating within oneself. When we think, daydream, solve problems, and imagine, we are in the realm of intrapersonal communication. It is individual reflection, contemplation and self talk. The person concerned is both the source and the destination of communication. Intrapersonal messages reflect ones habits, self- concept; self related roles, and ones attitudes, values, and beliefs. The most basic level of communication is intrapersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication is the foundation upon which interpersonal communication rests.

Interpersonal communication is a form of communication that describes the interactions of two or more people. The most significant setting for interpersonal communication is direct face-to face communication between two persons. An interview, a conversation, and intimate communications come under this heading. It is more persuasive and influential than any other type of communication, for it involves the interplay of words and gestures, the warmth of human closeness and in fact all the five senses. Feedback is the key word here. Feedback is instantaneous. In Interpersonal communication process, while interacting, the participants mutually influence each other.

Dimensions of Communication – context, culture

Communication occurs along two important dimensions - context of the communication event and culture of the persons interacting within the communication system.

Context

By context is meant the conditions surrounding the communication event - the circumstances or events that form the environment within which communication takes place. Communication does not occur in a vacuum. Communication is inextricably linked to the particular context in which it occurs, which in turn has a major impact upon behaviour. 'Context basically functions as the background for the content, much like a canvas for a painting'. (Clampitt quoted by Dixon and O' Hara, p.8)

Environments can place expectation and constraints on communication: i) a specific context may predispose the communicators toward certain probable interpretations over others; ii) the context will also play a significant role in shaping the response; iii) our behaviour will also alter according to the context.

While analyzing a communication process, the following contexts need to be kept in mind:

- **Psychological context**, which is who a person is and what he/she brings to the interaction. His/Her needs, desires, values, personality, etc., all form the psychological context.
- **Purpose of the communication or the need to communicate:** The purpose or the intent in the mind of the sender or the source of the communication determines the content, the encoding and the transmission of the message. In the case of professional communication, statement of purpose also takes cognizance of the receiver because the message has been created for the other person. The purpose of initiating communication may be - a) to inform or to seek information or clarification, b) to persuade or influence, c) to obtain a decision or negotiate for some change, d) to get something done, e) to maintain relationships, f) to respond to a previous communication.
- **Relational context** which concerns ones relationship to the other person. It is evident that the relationships among communicators will affect their interactions. The interactions between strangers are quite different from those between acquaintances or partners in a problem-solving venture. This kind of relationship factor not only influences the nature of messages transmitted but also the form of communication. It has been mentioned in the unit on interviewing that it operates within the context of professional relationship which is characterized by special features.
- **Situational context** deals with the psycho-social aspects of the situation, that is, “where” one is communicating. An interaction that takes place in a classroom will be very different from one that takes place in an office, a corridor, a park or a tea shop because of the associations generated by the same.
- **Environmental context** deals with the physical aspects of “where” one is communicating. Furniture and its arrangement, location of the place where communication occurs, noise levels, distractions like someone talking loudly near the place, temperature, season, time of the day, all are examples of factors in the environmental context.
- **Cultural context** includes all the learned behaviours and rules that affect the interaction. If one comes from a culture where it is considered rude to make long, direct eye contact, one will, out of politeness, avoid eye contact. If the other person comes from a culture where long, direct eye contact signals trustworthiness, then there is a possibility of misunderstanding, given the other person’s culture.
- **Physical and emotional conditions of the communicators** - Being physically unwell like having headache, fever, cough; feeling excessively thirsty, hungry etc. will evidently impact the communication process. The state of mind of the sender can influence the message. Anger, frustration, joy can all change the way the message will be perceived. Likewise, a similar emotional state of the receiver will impact the way the message is interpreted.

Culture and Communication

Culture is a learned system of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that is shared by a group of people. Cultures are not static but they change overtime. Sub-cultural or co-cultural groups like gang of adolescents, gender based groups or ethnic groups operate within a larger culture.

The culture that each of the communicators belongs to, determines not only the content and form of the message sent and its manner of transmission as well as the interpretation of and the response to the message received but also the probable success of the communication process. If the two communicators are drawn from different cultural backgrounds, there are strong possibilities of confusion, anxiety and stress occurring during the communication process.

Culture affects all aspects of communication process

- One's perception about people and events are culture-specific.
- Cultures provide one with roles, telling him/her who to be and how to act.
- The goals one seeks and his/her motivation to seek them are determined by culture.
- Basic notions about the self and human nature are shared in cultures.
- People from different cultures respond to their surroundings in different ways;
- In some cultures nonverbal cues are extremely important while other communicators rely more on language than on contextual cues to interpret information;
- Cultural values with regard to a) avoidance and tolerance; b) expected masculine and feminine behaviour and response patterns; c) status and role issues; d) distribution of power; and e) individual vs. family or group.
- Dress and appearance, use of specific words and ritualistic communication cues, acceptance of sender (social case worker) belonging to different age group, gender, religion, region – all are rooted in socially learned and culturally governed perceptions.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Space is given below for your answers.

1) Define communication. Describe briefly its important features.

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2) What are the elements of communication process? Bring out their interconnectedness.

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3) List different types of communications. Explain a) verbal and non-verbal communications; and b) one way and two-way communications.

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4) Discuss the importance of context and culture in communication process.

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2.3 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION-MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

A working definition for effective communication is to share meaning and understanding between the person sending the message and the person receiving the message. The key element here is 'understanding', that is to say, effective communication leads to understanding. Effective communication, therefore, implies that the

- Message is understood
- Message received is the same one that is sent. Effective communication may be understood to have occurred when the intended meaning of the sender and meaning perceived by the receiver are the same.
- Message achieves its intended effect, in terms of reaction, response or behaviour.

Identification is one of the key ingredients of effective communication. In fact, unless ones listeners can identify with what one is saying and with the way one is saying it, they are not likely to receive and understand his/her message. The effectiveness of communication is subjective by nature and requires a mutuality of experiences to be understood by the receiver as intended by the sender.

Here are some other prerequisites for communication to be effective:

- **Attention** - the sender needs to pay attention to what he/she is trying to communicate, and choose the best words and body language to communicate with; the receiver needs to pay attention to what is being communicated by listening and watching.
- **Attitude** - both sender and receiver need to have a positive (and respectful) attitude. They should want to communicate, and be willing to work to see that communication can take place. Using negative or blaming words shows a poor attitude - trying to understand the other's point shows a good attitude
- **Feedback** - both sender and receiver can give feedback to each other, either by using words or by body language. This helps to show whether the communication is being understood correctly or not.

Being an effective communicator means that other people take the person seriously, listen to what he/she has to say and engage in dialogue. The communication process is the guide toward realizing effective communication. It is through the communication process that the sharing of a common meaning between the sender and the receiver takes place.

Barriers to Effective Communication

Communication is a complex and often difficult process for both the receiver and the sender. Barriers on both sides of the process often deflect the real meaning of the message and inhibit clear, open, and rewarding communication. It seems a straightforward process, a message goes from point A to point B, but so much can go wrong at any stage of this process. When communication is broken it happens most often because interference or roadblocks occur in the communication process.

Being aware of all the steps in the communication process, and of the numerous possibilities for interference at each step, knowing the major causes of communication failures and detecting them as they occur is important for achieving effective communication. Generally, people involved in communication breakdowns are either (a) utterly unaware that the communication has failed and that misunderstanding has resulted; or (b) painfully aware of a communication blockage — or complete breakdown — and frustrated by not knowing the reasons why. In either case, people feel powerless to handle or remedy the problem. In fact, we not only have to learn to detect the barriers or interferences, but also to anticipate and overcome the same.

Numerous texts describing different barriers, interferences, noises or filters are available. The barriers are classified as **internal and external barriers** – internal barriers denoting those connected with impeding intrapersonal factors of the two communicators, and external barriers referring to environmental, contextual and the message and its transmission process related factors. Examples of **internal barriers** are fatigue, poor listening skills, attitude toward the sender or the information, lack of interest in the message, fear, mistrust, past experiences, negative attitude, problems at home, lack of common experiences, and emotions. Examples of **external barriers** include noise, distractions, time of day; sender used too many technical words for the audience, and environment. The fig 3 demonstrates the impact of internal and external barriers on communication chain.

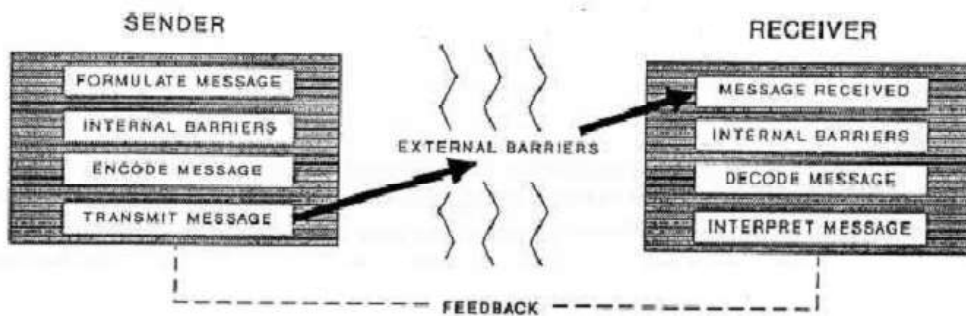


Fig. 3: Internal and External Barriers to Communication Chain

Source: Communication Process

http://www.tpub.com/content/administration/14300/css/14300_46.htm

Dickson (1999) has identified a number of such barriers or common sources of noise, which can affect communication accuracy and effectiveness.

- **Psychological:** These include the perceptual biases or stereotypes that can impact on how we interpret a particular person's message. People respond to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. Stereotyping is when we assume that the other person has certain characteristics based on the group to which they belong, without checking out to see that they do in fact have these characteristics. Beside these perceptual barriers, there are the factors of motivation, personal goals, expectations, and past experiences. The persons may be drawing upon their respective personal agendas; misconstruing the intentions and the meaning of each other's messages resulting in breakdown of effective communication. All these intrapersonal factors (in case of either of the communicators) may cause impediments to effective communication.
- **Semantic:** This is used to describe situations where language or cultural differences distort or interfere with the meaning of the message. In terms of language, a) the choice of words or language in which a sender encodes a message will influence the quality of communication. Because language is a symbolic representation of thoughts, motivations or intentions, room for interpretation and distortion of the meaning exists. Using words which are amenable to more than one meaning may make it difficult for the receiver to correctly interpret the message; b) Sharing the same language does not ensure understanding. What a teacher connotes by the words 'naughty', 'clever' or 'simple' for a child is likely to be different from the meaning attributed to it by a mother, father or a bystander. People belonging to different religions, regions (rural, urban or tribal), class or educational status may interpret the same words differently; c) Incongruence or inconsistency between the verbal and non-verbal cues also leads to communication breakdown or misinterpretation of the message; d) ambiguity or lack of clarity in the message presents roadblocks to accurate reception of the same; e) use of jargon or too many technical terms can lead to switching off by the receiver, thereby breaking down the communication cycle.
- **Environmental:** This refers to a range of factors such as size of the room, layout of furnitures, loud or intrusive noise, heating and lighting etc. Each of these can either encourage or inhibit interaction. All kinds of distractions caused by external stimuli are covered under this category.

- **Demographic:** Factors such as gender and age can impact on the way in which a message is interpreted. For example, one listener may nod his head to indicate to the speaker 'I agree', whereas another listener may nod his head to communicate 'I am listening' (but not necessarily agreeing).
- **Organisational:** Barriers to effective communication can be located within the agency or organisation itself. Absence of necessary infrastructure like spatial arrangements for interpersonal interactions, staff attitudes and orientation, and pressures on the professional participating in the communication event can present environmental barriers to effective communication.

Some of the other important and recurring impediments are mentioned below:

- The sender's orientation to 'talking at' and 'talking to' rather than 'talking with' the other person; assuming superiority over the other person – due to socio-cultural gap or professional status;
- Communicators' lack of confidence, that may be due to a sense of inadequacy or inexperience, shyness, lack of self-worth, or inability to assert, may lead to ineffective communication at different stages of the communication process;
- Sender's feeling of discomfort in interacting with particular type of persons like HIV⁺ patients, sex workers, terminally or mentally ill, physically or mentally challenged, and persons of the opposite sex. Receivers, on the other hand, may feel inhibited in communicating with people with authority (like police, social workers, doctors), with too young or too old, people of the opposite sex, with people from different culture or ethnic or social group;
- **Barriers to active listening:** Interrupting the speaker, rushing the speaker to complete what he/she has to say, being distracted by something that is not part of the on going communication, jumping to conclusions; "tuning out" or selectively hearing problem statements, or feeling physically unwell, or experiencing pain can make it very difficult to listen effectively.
- Glossing over the other person's response; assuming similar interpretations and generalizing - topping the speaker's story with one's own set of examples;
- Not seeking and giving feedback is a major barrier to achieving effective communication because in the absence of feedback the dialogue takes the shape of two monologues occurring simultaneously, thus defeating the whole purpose of interpersonal communication.

Some degree of noise in communication is unavoidable. The objective for effective communication is to be aware of possible sources of noise and to seek to reduce this to a minimum. This is in fact the first and foremost primary step to being good communicator. Some principles have been enunciated by experts for achieving effective and ethical communication.

Principles of Effective Communication

The major responsibility for initiating and maintaining the communication process is that of the sender - the social case worker in the context of interviewing. While both the worker and the client are communicators (see interpersonal two-way communication above) the role differential in the semi-formal type of

communication process inherent in a social case work interview expects the worker to assume primary responsibility. A number of principles have been enunciated to provide guidance to the sender (worker) to fulfill this task effectively.

Principles are rules, guidelines or standards for action. Principles of effective communication provide signposts for keeping the focus on and direction to achieving the goal of communication. Given below is a list, though not exhaustive, of some of the principles.

- Communication among people does not depend so much on technology, that is, expertise in use of words, electronic media etc, as on forces in people and their surroundings.
- It is, therefore, vital to be other-oriented rather than message-oriented, that is, consider the needs, motives, desires, and goals of others (clients) and adapt your message to them.
- The next principle is to understand that communication is more than the surface meaning of words. Communication is the understanding not of the visible (evident, perceptible signals) but of the invisible and hidden;
- **Be aware of the communication process:** One should be aware of every aspect of the present communication - the purpose, objective and needs. One needs to be aware of what is occurring within the self; aware of what the others present feel; aware of all that is occurring between the communicators and aware of all that is happening around the communicators.
- One of the most important principles of effective communication is to get appropriate feedback to ascertain whether the other person has received the message in the manner that one had intended.
- Providing feedback, on the other hand, communicates that one respects the other and is interested in what he/she has to convey to me the one is showing that respect and interest by trying hard to understand the other's point.
- The sender (worker has to be self-aware of various intrinsic factors such as motivation, needs, self concept, values, belief, socio-cultural background, knowledge, experiences, communication abilities, stereotypes, and so on because these may influence the quality and effectiveness of the interaction and the communication process influence the interaction process
- Initiate the communication process keeping in mind that the person at the receiving end does not know anything about what he/she has in mind or what he/she is saying.
- Communication must be complete in all respects, without any gaps.
- Make the message using simple and carefully selected words.
- Listen carefully and try to understand the information needs of the recipient. Think from the recipient's point of view as well. In other words, connect with the receiver (client).
- Plan the process of communication well. Organise key points of ones message. Use words that denote (describe concretely) and not connote or imply.

- Select the best communication method keeping in mind the purpose of communication, the receiver and the context of intended communication. It may be needed to use more than one method of communication within the same episode of interaction, that is, use multiple communication techniques.

As an overview of the communication principles it may be stated that it is advisable to i) plan ones communication well; ii) be aware of ones communication with self and others; iii) effectively use and understand verbal messages; iv) effectively use and understand nonverbal messages; v) listen and respond thoughtfully to others; vi) appropriately adapt messages to others.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Space is given below for your answers.

- 1) What do you understand by effective communication? Explain its characteristics.

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- 2) Explain the meaning of barriers to effective communication. Describe briefly different types of barriers.

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- 3) Why do one needs principles of communication? State important principles of effective communication.

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2.4 BASIC SKILLS OF COMMUNICATION

The ability to effectively communicate at work, home, and in life is probably the most important sets of skills a person needs. Communication skill is a set of skills that enables a person to convey information so that it is received and understood. Communication skills refer to a repertoire of behaviours that serve an individual to convey information.

Communication Skills – elements, skills

The three **basic elements** of effective communication skills are: Active listening skills, Verbal skills and Non-verbal skills. Communication skills involve acquiring expertise in adopting active listening stance; using words or language appropriately to encode the intended message and transmit it efficiently; to support the verbal message with congruent non-verbal cues; and to observe and interpret the non-verbal cues of the other person accurately.

Communicating is not an isolated skill. It involves several skills. For example, speaking involves not only getting ones message across but also being able to listen and understand what others are saying (active listening) and observing the verbal and nonverbal clues in order to monitor the effectiveness of ones message.

Another dimension of communication skills goes beyond the skill in effectively **‘communicating-to’** others. The worker has also to develop better ways of being some one who can be **‘communicated-with’**. (Thayer, p.39) This element brings the issues of creating a climate and setting a stage for the communication event, building positive relationship, and operating from the professional self.

Although basic communication skills are important for both the communicators engaged in interpersonal communication, the sender, the social case worker has primary responsibility for accurately conveying the message to the clients and maintaining the communication cycle. It was seen in the foregoing exposition on communication that social case work interview is a form of communication, especially interpersonal communication. Therefore, the social case workers are committed to make concerted efforts to acquire and enhance communication skills.

Skills of communication

Following are some of the basic skills of face-to-face oral interpersonal communication:

- Establishing purpose of communication – deciding on what is to be communicated and why; planning well the content and the manner of communicating it; anticipating the likely responses of the receiver of the message; to acquire as much information about the other person as possible.
- Creating climates – setting the stage for communication to take place. It may mean fixing acceptable meeting schedules; selecting an appropriate place with minimal distractions; making seating arrangements and so on.
- Building relationships and achieving credibility or trustworthiness – demonstrating warmth, welcoming and caring stance; establishing rapport and a working relationship by clarifying roles and expectations of the participants in the communication process.
- Focusing on and understanding the audience- their needs and capabilities.
- Speaking coherently and precisely while keeping tab on the non-verbal cues that are sent. Use of lip reading, sign language and finger spelling in case of persons with hearing impaired form a part of this skill.
- Observing, listening, responding and questioning: verbal communication and nonverbal cues convey messages only; observing, listening, responding and questioning provide ongoing feedback to negotiate what they mean.

Observing skills include noticing and interpreting accurately the cues, especially the non-verbal cues, conveyed by the receiver. This presupposes worker's (sender's) unbiased, non-judgmental and empathetic stance.

Active Listening: Effective communication is heavily dependent on effective listening; however most conversations do not take place with the full attention of those taking part. Active and effective listening is a specific skill that can be consciously developed and practiced. It is an active psychological process which enables us to attach meaning to all the information one receives. Developing effective listening skills involves two specific steps: dealing with *barriers* that prevent listening; and developing and using listening *behaviours*.

- There are various *barriers* to listening, including jumping to conclusions; hearing what one wants to hear; rehearsing ones response and being inattentive.
- *Active listening skills* include using attending behaviours (e.g. maintaining an open posture, comfortable eye contact, leaning forward); delaying evaluation; maintaining attention; and 'tuning in' to feelings.

One needs to listen more intently in social work conversations than in everyday ones, as one strives to understand the other persons' point of view, to piece together the current and past elements of their story, to understand relationships, and to consider ones responses.

Verbal (oral) skills or accuracy and fluency in speaking encompass logical and concise word usage. These constitute skill in providing information- giving factual context related information, explanations, information about boundaries, and offering opinions and proposals; asking appropriate and sometimes probing questions for gathering information; answering questions; responding to the receiver's verbal and non-verbal cues by minimal verbal comments; reflecting back feelings and content, paraphrasing; and giving feedback.

Responding skills are not limited to verbal skills. Besides verbal responses like feedback, explanations, questions or paraphrases, the worker (sender) responds to the client (receiver) non-verbally. These skills involve being aware of ones own body language – gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, appearance - and regulating the same in such a manner that the words and non-verbal cues sent by one are congruent in their message conveyed to the other person. It also constitutes in being comfortable with oneself and ones role as primary communicator.

It is a significant fact that one needs to constantly work towards developing effective communication skills. No matter how good and effective a communicator maybe, one does face certain barriers, from time to time, which forces them to work on becoming even more effective in their skills to communicate. Considerable **training and effort** goes into acquiring skills for making any communication effective.

Qualities of an Effective Communicator

It is not enough to be a skilled communicator – one who has acquired expertise in the use of the 'nuts and bolts' of effective communication. It has been mentioned a number of times in the foregoing discussion the importance of the personality of the sender. The intrapersonal factors, the mental and emotional framework of the worker; and expression of his professional self during the communication process provide necessary and crucial support to effective communication process. Some

of the qualities mentioned below can be developed through effort, training and guidance; some others are innate those one is born with. However, in most cases, one can minimize the gap between ones personal and professional self by willing and concerted effort.

- Sincerity is an important quality in the effective communicator. Sincerity means “without deceit, pretense, or hypocrisy; being truthful and straight-forward.” (Webster) Sincerity ensures congruence in verbal and non-verbal messages being sent by the sender. Genuineness leads to openness in all one’s dealings.
- A corollary of sincerity is honesty – being honest to oneself and to others makes one reliable. Others find one dependable and, therefore, are willing to listen to what he/she intends to tell them.
- Courtesy towards and respect for others’ individuality is an important quality.
- Empathy, sensitivity, warmth and caring attitude are prerequisites to establishing positive relationship with the other person, which, in turn, is essential for effective interpersonal communications.
- The professional relationship is for the client and so is the interpersonal communication in which worker and the client engage. The worker, therefore, has to achieve a very high level of self-awareness and self-discipline so that his own needs, aspirations and anxieties do not, during the communication process, impinge on the client’s needs and concerns.
- Maintaining flexibility and adaptability facilitate other-orientedness in the sender’s approach.
- A willingness to be accountable makes it possible to honestly review one’s work and to commit oneself to continuous training and learning.
- A positive attitude to life and an effort at personal grooming add to a frame of mind that helps in achieving effective communication.

2.5 IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL CASE WORK INTERVIEWS

Communication skills are critical for success in professional life. The importance of communication is obvious in professions such as teaching, law, sales, counselling and social case work, where talking and listening are central to effectiveness. Interviewing, a primary tool of social case worker, constitutes basically of ‘talking’ and listening’ or ‘communicating’. Social workers are expected to be able to communicate and engage successfully with a variety of client groups - children and young people, elderly, men and

women adults - presenting a mix of concerns, problems and needs. They talk to clients, their relatives, colleagues, may other people throughout their working time. Therefore, one of the most important skills for social case workers is a well-developed capability as a communicator. Being a good communicator is half the battle won.

Poor communication can waste time and energy and cause conflict between people. By improving communication skills one will have a clearer understanding of what

people are saying to us; others will be less likely to misunderstand oneself; problems will be solved quickly; one will be able to identify others' needs; and be able to resolve conflict because it is through communication that collaboration and cooperation occur.

Communication is by definition interactive and always takes place within a relationship. That means quality of relationship and quality of communication are deeply connected with each other. A social case worker is committed to initiate and maintain purposeful interaction with the client within a comfortable and safe working relationship. Some of the major purposes of social case worker's engaging the client in interpersonal communication are to provide and seek information and to influence and facilitate change. It is good communication when what one wants to say is understood in the same way by the other. Importance of acquiring skills of effective communication is, therefore, evident.

Understanding communication process and its likely impediments is basic to being a good communicator. Being a good communicator is often about feeling confident in those situations where one don't always feel comfortable.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Space is given below for your answers.

- 1) Describe major communication skills. Discuss effective listening skills in detail.

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- 2) What qualities are important in a good communicator? Explain what is meant by 'high level of self awareness'.

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- 3) Why are communication skills critical for social case workers? Discuss.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

Communication is not just a vital skill, it is a necessity. Communication is one of the most fundamental assets one has as human being.

Communication is a two-way process that involves getting ones message across and understanding what others have to say; and a two-way method utilizing both spoken words and nonverbal messages.

Communication establishes relationships and makes organizing possible. Every message has a purpose or objective. The sender intends — whether consciously or unconsciously — to accomplish something by communicating. Communication is also context–related. It does not happen entirely within the limits of relationship but in a larger world which affects both the nature of the relationship and the nature of communication.

Communication is defined as a process by which one assigns and conveys meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast repertoire of skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating.

A Good Communicator: exchanges ideas, feelings, and values — uses appropriate language, tone, pitch, and volume — gives relevant information — uses non-verbal signals to emphasize and support messages — clarifies — solicits feedback — listens — responds and reacts — conveys understanding.

The ability to effectively communicate is a critical skill. The more ones becomes an effective communicator the more likely one is to achieve what one wants.

There is another facet of communication. Howsoever natural communication may be to human beings, it is a complex and often difficult process for both the receiver and sender. Barriers on both sides of the process often deflect the real meaning of the message and inhibit clear, open, and rewarding communication. Communication is so difficult because at each step in the process there is a major potential for error. It is critical to understand different elements of this process and the sequence of different links in communication chain; understand and be aware of the potential sources of errors and constantly counteract these tendencies by making a conscientious effort to make sure there is a minimal loss of meaning in communication.

Communicating well or poorly can spell the difference between success and failure in human relationships of almost every kind. Most of us already have deeply established communication habits that serve us well or poorly and may be difficult to change. But whatever skill we may possess, we can always improve. Gaining in the ability to communicate with and influence other brings significant rewards.

Now that you have learned the communication process, you can begin to evaluate your communication skills. Begin to watch yourself in action. Each time you communicate observe what you do, how it went, what went well, and what could have been better. You can improve your communication skills by observing people who communicate effectively, learning new skills, and practicing those skills.

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UNIT 3 INTERVIEWING-SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Contents

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will

- learn about the core and generic skills required to engage in interviewing process;
- learn about different techniques to be used to effectively help clients;
- learn about some dos and don'ts to avoid pitfalls in the interview process; and
- reflect on your own interviewing prowess by analyzing the illustrations offered here.

It is hoped that the worker will be more confident in taking up interviews of clients and set out to help and become good interviewers.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As interviewing is the most used resource or tool of social case work, interviewing skills are the central skills on which all the components of the social case work process depend. (Kadushin, p.3) You have, by now, learnt about the concept and nature of interviewing – the most frequently used tool of social case work. You have also recognised that the concept of communication is inherent in the interviewing process. In other words, you are expected to have comprehended 'what', 'why', 'when', and 'where' of a social case work interview and its process. Now, you need to learn the 'how' of the social case work interview. Budding professionals may be able to comprehend the concept of interviewing, but face considerable difficulties in actually applying this conceptual learning in real life and practical situations. They suffer from anxiety and feel lack of confidence while starting an interview or continuing it. They may find it difficult to keep up the momentum as well. They wish to know 'how to start an interview, what are the questions that could be asked or avoided, and how to deal with emotionally charged issues'. They do acknowledge that social case work, a primary method of social

work profession, involves not only helping those in need of help but also doing it well.

Social work is related to some of the complex problems and perplexing areas of human experience. The complex nature of social work is due, in part, to the fact that it involves working with different class, race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, culture, health, geography, expectations and outlook in life. Differences can be seen in the different ways that problems are presented, communicated and perceived by individuals and in terms of the solutions sought. It is for this reason that social work is, and has to be, a highly skilled activity.

Social case work, a method applied to help individuals and families, presents similar challenges before the practitioner. A social case worker needs to demonstrate skill, ability and competence in all the phases of social case work, across varied client groups; and for numerous and complicated problems and concerns presented by these client groups. The worker is responsible for helping both **effectively** (that is, achieving the goal and aim of the helping process) and **efficiently** (that is, ensuring the helping process to be smooth and safe, requiring minimum of effort and resources). The worker is further expected to continuously upgrade his capabilities and expertise in all areas of professional competence, including knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

In this unit, we will discuss some of the important and core skills that constitute the “toolbox” of a social case worker. The best way to acquire these skills is, of course, using these tools under the guidance of a master (supervisor); some illustrations, some dos and don'ts, however, go a long way in overcoming anxiety and hesitancy in initiating the interviewing process. Besides, these basic skills are the techniques which are those sets of behaviour which actually help the worker establish rapport with the client, propel the interview process further, help to keep the focus, and achieve the goal of the interview as well as of the entire case work process. These techniques, embedded within the skills, are often described interchangeably as skills.

3.2 INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Before one talks about the skills required for achieving efficient and effective case work interviews, it is necessary to understand what a skill is.

Interviewing Skills defined

A skill is an ability that has been acquired by training and experience; it is a learnt capacity to carry out pre-determined results often with minimum of outlay of time, energy or both. (Wikipedia) Skill connotes an ease or effortlessness in doing or getting something done. It also implies possession of certain qualities and attitudes required for performance of designated tasks. Skill, a synonym of ‘proficiency, ability, competence, adeptness or expertise’ is grounded in the knowledge of the fundamentals that underpin the activity being undertaken.

Johnson (1998, p.55) defines *skill* as “a complex organization of behaviour directed towards a particular goal or activity.” Interviewing skills, then, are abilities to do all the tasks pertaining to interviewing with ease, competence and proficiency. Interviewing skills, therefore, are described in terms of roles and responsibilities undertaken and tasks to be performed within the boundaries of professional values. Techniques, on the other hand, are the specific acts or behaviours that the

interviewers engage in to achieve the goals of interviews. There is frequently an overlap in describing a particular behaviour of a social case worker as either a 'skill' or a 'technique' like in the case of skill of questioning and the technique of questioning.

Interviewing skills bring relevant knowledge and professional values together and convert them to action as a response to need and concern – the aim of an interview within the larger goal of the entire helping process. Like all social work skills, interviewing skills may also be described as pertinent 'knowledge in action'. These skills involve appropriate selection of techniques for a particular situation and an ability to use them effectively. This selection of techniques is based on a conscious use of knowledge filtered through social work values within a relationship with the client. (Johnson, p.55)

To recapitulate, an effective interview

- 1) has a clear purpose – It can be obtaining information; passing on information; clarifying information; seeking change in beliefs and /or behaviour; problem-solving; ventilation of feelings.
- 2) It is been planned.
- 3) It is controlled interaction.

It is, therefore, understandable that the interviewing skills of the worker have to demonstrate his abilities and competence in achieving the above-mentioned objectives.

Classification of Interviewing Skills

Interviewing skills have been classified into different dimensions like generic vs. specialized (related to particular client group or field of practice); and core or foundation vs. specific to particular stage of helping process or interview process. Some skills are generic to all types of interviews like observing, relating, listening and communication skills and there are skills that are important for specialized situations or client groups like victims of abuse, socially disadvantaged groups, and physically or mentally challenged persons. Some skills are basic to entire process of successful interviewing and some are relevant more to the particular phase of a particular interview or the helping process itself. In fact, same skills may figure in the list of generic, basic and foundation skills as also in specific skills. The main difference in specific or special skills may be more in details, timing and emphases rather than in basics. For example, acceptance, empathy and communication skills (listening and speaking) are the core or essential not only at the beginning of the worker-client encounter but also are important throughout the interview or chain of interviews in the helping process. They may require different emphasis at different time and may be offered with a stronger mix of challenging in certain cases than in others. Here, the focus will be on generic or basic interviewing skills that are applicable in all interview situations. The new professional will then be equipped with specialised skills as required by his or her particular area of practice.

Core or Foundation Skills

Even before one speaks of basic interviewing skills, we need to mention core conditions and attitudes which underlie all successful interviews.

- Skills are embedded in relevant knowledge and values. A sound theoretical knowledge of human beings in their particular social context and understanding of motivations of behaviour are prerequisite to the skilful use of interview processes and techniques. It means that one needs to understand theories that offer knowledge of human growth and behaviour, nature and causation of personal and social problems, and dynamics of social groups, systems and institutions and their impact on human beings.

Comprehension of socio-cultural background of the client groups; and practical knowledge of available community resources – both government programmes and voluntary endeavours are vital to managing successful social case work interviews.

Besides, understanding of professional values and principles, as well as high levels of self-awareness – understanding of ones values, beliefs, prejudices, aspirations and needs, life experiences and relating capabilities are essential knowledge-base for skilful interviewing.

Further, it is equally important to constantly update oneself about outcomes of practice-based research to critically comprehend efficacy of various theoretical orientations, techniques for assessment, and intervention or therapy; in other words to critically reflect on different practice models and orientations.

- Establishing a clear purpose of the interview/s is also a core condition. The entire interviewing process is governed by its purpose. The purpose is also determined by the agency mandate and mission. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the agency's aims, programmes and activities, resources and also its limitations and boundaries is very essential for the interviews to achieve their purpose whether generic (to initiate and maintain the interviewing process) or specific to the interview's context.
- Interviews require a positive relationship between interviewer and interviewee as a prerequisite for success. It is hoped that one is familiar with the core attitudes that are vital for establishing a positive helping relationship. Genuineness, warmth, acceptance and respect, empathy, immediacy or concreteness, and non-possessive and non-judgmental attitude are core qualities that need to be inculcated by a social case worker, especially in performing his/her role as an interviewer. In fact, a dent in the working relationship with the client may lead to a break in the very interview process.
- Interviewing skills presume that the social case worker has arrived at a sound judgment on how best to work within a particular environment, the level of intensity and the length of the period required. It can also involve formulating judgment about the level of skill that the work requires and what the practice emphasis should be, particularly at the beginning, middle or end of a piece of work or course of action. (Trevithik, p. 21)

Core Skills

Observing, active listening, relating, interpersonal communication, assessment, and decision - making skills are considered core skills of social case work interviewing.

- 1) The foremost of the basic interviewing skills is, therefore, **relating skills**. It is not enough that one has the core qualities mentioned above. One should be

able to communicate the same to the interviewee or the client during the interview. Relating skills feature in the category of interpersonal skills and communicating skills. It involves establishing 'rapport' with the client, putting him at ease, 'tuning in' with the client, quick assessment about the client's immediate need or anxiety and making efforts to mitigate the anxiety, and communicating respect, genuine interest and willingness to help. Rapport involves winning the confidence of the client which may be achieved by showing interest and attention, proper introductions or greetings, listening and eliminating social distance.

- 2) Active or creative listening skills – Listening skills are considered the core skills, required in all interview situations. Listening actively or creatively is crucial to help the client to talk, to articulate his concern or problem. Active listening – being with the client in his struggle to deal with difficulties and problems – is appropriate at many points in the interview. Also, social case workers often work with persons whose language expression may be somewhat different from that of the worker's. One should not presume that the client has a coherent version of his/her difficulties readily. Their thinking and feelings about the problem may be fragmented and blocked. The skill of active listening is that of drawing out the client's story.

The silence of the listener is a receptive silence. It both invites and respects disclosures. It is not keeping quiet. Rather it is an active and creative **responsive process** - seeking to verify whether the worker has understood what the client is trying to convey. It is a form of feedback – a tangible demonstration to the client that one has understood or is trying to understand what the client has expressed. In listening, it is important to understand what the client is attempting to communicate, focusing on all aspects of the client's expression. To do this the worker seeks to understand what the spoken words means to the client. Active listening is being able to hear how others gather and form their thoughts and feelings, and the meaning they give to particular experiences. (Refer to the unit on communication).

Listening is closely linked to **attending** behaviours – both physical and psychological. Physical attending behaviours include eye contact, posture or general body position that communicates that the counsellor is paying attention to the client. Psychological attending is an ability to pick up the client's non-verbal as well as the verbal messages. Listening, thus, involves listening to the client's tone of voice; listening for cues to the client's feelings; for generalizations, deletions, and distortions; and listening for thoughts and emotional themes. Effective listening skill leads to reducing the tendency to hear selectively as a result of judging, criticizing, or evaluating the words of the client.

Remembering what the client communicates is another important dimension of listening. Skills of hearing and observing are not of much inherent value unless one can retain the information received from the client.

- 3) Although mention has been made to relating and listening skills first, these, in fact, depend on some other skills like **observing skills**. These skills tell one what he/she sees and what to look out for. Noticing non-verbal cues like facial expression, tone of the voice, gestures and other movements of the body, appearance and dress; feeling states and what causes these; watching

out for client's reactions or pattern of responses to our comments or questions and their response to the worker and the interview situation – all lead the worker to understand the client's frame of mind. Observation skills also help the worker to know how far the client is tuned-in to the purpose and process of the interview.

The purpose of observing is to gain better understanding of the ways in which the client experiences the world. Observation skills get reflected in an ability to accurately interpret subtle and indirect communications related to issues of power and authority, difficulties in seeking and receiving help, topics involving stigma or taboos, inhibitions concerning expression of powerful feelings. The worker, however, needs to remember that these observations lead to tentative hypotheses or preliminary hunches to be verified over time and not seen as 'truths' about the client.

Generic or Basic Skills

Some experts have mentioned large number of generic social work skills. most of which are relevant for interviewing process, the most frequently used tool of social case work. This enumeration includes those behaviours or interventions of a social case worker which some other experts and practitioners have covered under the category of techniques. Among numerous generic skills, besides the ones that have been covered under core skills, include the following:

- Skill in communicating core conditions and involvement – These are communicating empathy, acceptance, warmth and genuine interest through attending, listening and giving feedback, and welcoming.
- Engaging skills – These core skills initiate contact with the client, clarify the purpose of the interview, and arrive at mutually accepted objectives of the ensuing interaction.
- Exploring skills – These skills help encourage the clients to share their thoughts and feelings about themselves, the concerns which led to the contact with the worker, and the situation (social context and environment).
- Information gathering skills – Exploring leads to collection of information so as to achieve complete and realistic understanding of person-problem- situation constellation.
- Probing and questioning skills – Probing is used to elicit facts, ideas and feelings concerning the person, problem and the situation. Generally probing takes the form of questioning.
- Reflecting skills – Reflecting skills include skills in reflecting content and reflecting feelings. These are empathic skill of communicating worker's understanding of the facts forming parts of the client's message and the feelings conveyed openly or indirectly through the message during the interview. Active listening, paraphrasing, questioning, giving feedback are some of the techniques used to accurately reflect content and feelings.

Another dimension of reflecting skills is to reflect the meaning of content and feelings as understood by the worker. It does not involve interpretation of the message with its content and associated feelings. The reflective response of the worker represents an accurate and equivalent form of the client's message.

- Assessing, analytical and decision-making Skills - The collection of relevant and reliable information is integral to the completion of an effective assessment. Assessing skills involve looking for linkages in different facts (both objective and subjective), arriving at certain inferences so as to provide bases for considering alternate plans of action (who will do what, why, when and how) or to form hypotheses for further exploration as well. Assessing, then, requires organizing and analyzing descriptive information; formulating a tentative opinion or judgment as to the problem, drawing upon various psychological and sociological theories, crisis theory and so on. For example, after collecting evidences of a child's behaviour (disrupting the class), the worker arrives at the tentative assessment that child is engaging in a 'attention-seeking' behaviour. Decision-making skills are vital components of assessing skills.

Budding professionals or students are able to collect a mass of information through the interviews but lack the courage and decision-making skills to organize the data collected and draw logical inferences. Having a strong knowledge base is vital to arrive at professional judgments. However, one must remember to treat all inferences as tentative. One may have learnt that assessment is ongoing, that is, any subsequent information may necessitate change in the definition of problem and concomitant dimensions.

- Setting Measurable Goals – Having arrived at a definition of the problem and considered probable solutions (plans of action), the worker along with the client selects one plan of action or solution and establishes achievable goals set in measurable terms so that it is possible to evaluate the results after their execution. Other skills like motivating the client, enabling him/her to view his/her problem and situation realistically and persuading him/her to take ownership of the goals to be set and to agree to participate in their execution are required to demonstrate the skill of establishing measurable goals.
- Intervention Skills including Referrals - Intervention skills entail the worker's ability to facilitate selection of an appropriate plan of action as established by the worker and the client and to help execute it – through the client or those in the client's social environment, through human service agencies or doing it himself on behalf of the client.
- Evaluative skills – Evaluating the progress of the entire helping process or the achievement of the set goals is an important skill. It is not enough for the worker to feel that the action has been successful. It is for the client to confirm that it is so. Evaluation has to be a participative activity. Skill to engage the client in this process and help him review the gains, if any, is very important for critical evaluation of the helping process.
- Skill to negotiate a positive ending with clients.
- Skill in using techniques.

You have noticed that the skills mentioned above *follow the stages of the social case work process*. Interviews occurring at the initial phases are mostly for the purpose of establishing rapport and information gathering (social study). The skills which assist a social case worker in this task are engaging, exploring, probing, questioning and reflecting skills. Interviews classified as diagnostic interviews have assessment as their purpose. Assessing and goal-setting skills are relevant

for this type of interviews. Intervention skills are relevant for therapeutic interviews and evaluative and terminating skills are more relevant for the interviews at the termination stage.

There are some skills which are useful for attending to *different tasks within a single interview episode*. These include planning the interview, setting the climate of the interview, welcoming a client, introducing self and the purpose of the interview, engaging in communication process for seeking or giving information, giving and receiving feedback, focusing on the main purpose of the interview, dealing with emotionally charged situations, handling ambivalence or resistance of the client, to summarise what has transpired in the interview and evaluate it and achieve a positive ending with either fixing of the next session or future follow up.

Before we move on to a discussion of interviewing techniques you need to keep in mind that -

- i) Interviewing skills are sets of worker’s behaviour – in terms of what the worker actually does in an interview;
- ii) Skills are not discrete or separate entities - one skill category may include or require some others also. They are complementary to each other, and also overlapping in the functions they fulfill. For example, effective application of interpersonal skills require communication skills, reflecting, analytical skills and skills in using techniques; or assessment skills may need skill in questioning and reflecting, using different tools of assessment and appropriate techniques and interpretative and analytical Skills; and
- iii) Even if a skill has been shown to be associated with a particular stage or phase of the process, it may be required at other stages also.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What do you understand by the term ‘interviewing skills’? What are the core and generic skills?

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2) Explain skills of listening and observing. Why are these skills important in social case work interview?

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3) List down generic skills of interviewing. Discuss any two skills in detail.

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3.3 TECHNIQUES OF INTERVIEWING

Every interview involves two related components: the techniques that move the participants toward achieving the objectives of the interview, and the relationship, which defines the nature of the emotional, attitudinal atmosphere in which the techniques are implemented. While positive relationship is essential for an effective interview, it alone is not sufficient for achieving success. “Technically skillful interviewing in the context of positive relationship is what ensures that the objectives of an interview are likely to be achieved.” (Kadushin, p. 99)

A technique is a procedure by which a task is accomplished. It is a goal-oriented behaviour performed in a practice situation by the social case worker. It is a planned action deliberately selected by the practitioner. Techniques extend the range of the interview. The client is not satisfied merely by our skilful communicating empathy or acceptance, if the actual purpose of coming together is not fulfilled.

Given below is a brief discussion of some of the more frequently used interviewing techniques.

Questions and questioning techniques

Asking a range of different questions is central to interviewing. Interviewers use questions to extend the range and depth of the interview - to start the interview, to check and confirm answers already given, to facilitate understanding, to clarify issues, and to make transitions. Questions stimulate and energize the interviewee to share both factual and affective information. Questions instigate exploration of different areas and different levels of feelings. Interviewers use questions to encourage interviewees to tell their story and to elaborate on what they are saying. In fact, asking questions is a multipurpose intervention. Six kinds of question topics have been identified:

- 1) Behaviours - about what a person has done or is doing.
- 2) Opinions/values - about what a person thinks about a topic.
- 3) Feelings - note that respondents sometimes respond with “I think ...” so be careful to note that you’re looking for feelings.
- 4) Knowledge - to get facts about a topic.
- 5) Sensory - about what people have seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelled.
- 6) Background/demographics - standard background questions, such as age, education, etc.

Types of questions (according to the manner of asking)

- **Open questions:** These questions are useful in eliciting information and encouraging clients' involvement. They allow the client to answer at their own pace, to expand on and clarify significant areas of concern. Open questions demand a fuller response than 'yes' or 'no' answers. For example
 - *What does present situation mean to you?*
 - *How does it feel now that you are away from home?*
 - *What usually happens when you argue?*
 - *What led you to contact us this time?*
 - *How did these difficulties begin?*
 - *How can I be of help?*

However, too open and broad question is difficult to answer, like, “ “What sort of a person would you say you are?”

- **Hypothetical questions:** These are open questions which invite the client to speculate about their own and other's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Hypothetical questions help clients to articulate their fears and explore them in relative safety of the social case work interview. Once these fears are put into words they are available for modification by challenging. For example:

What do you imagine would happen if you asked your friend to repay your money?

What do you imagine would happen if you said 'no' to her? Or

What do you imagine is the worst thing that could happen if you said 'no' to her?

- **Circular questions:** These questions are often used in family therapy and social case work with families, with involuntary or unwilling clients. This involves asking each member of the family in turn to comment on the behaviour, event or problem of other family members in ways that bring out 'circular causality'. For example, “a child sulks when scolded. The father reacts by shouting at the child, which results in child becoming more withdrawn and the mother shouting at the father, which the father blames on the child, who withdraws further, and so on.” (Trevithik, P. 90)

There are two main types of circular questions- dyadic and triadic questions. The worker may ask a client speculative questions such as what another person might think about the client and client situation. Those questions are called *dyadic* because dyad refers to number two: the client and someone else. Similarly, a *triadic question* adds a third person to the dyad. These questions highlight patterns in the interpersonal relationships and how others in the client's milieu view the areas of client's concerns. For example, a family member comments on the relationship or interaction between two other family members.

Diadic questions

- *How does your wife feel about your drinking problem?*
- *What is different about the days when your son doesn't cut school?*
- *Who will be most relieved when this problem is resolved?*

Triadic questions

- *If your husband was here today, what would he say are the biggest problems in your marriage?*
 - *How does your mother feel about your father's thoughts about your being asked to leave college?*
 - *What does your mother think about the way your wife feels about your drinking problem?*
 - *Worker (asking Renu's sister): Preeti, what does your father/ mother do when Renu becomes withdrawn and depressed?*
- **Seeking Explanation:** It suggests how different observations might be linked and connected; it offers possible causal relationships between one event and another. For example

Worker: Well, what makes you think that it is better for the children that they go and live with their father?

Client: Well see, we have problems in the family.

Worker: With whom?

Probing/Clarifying Questions: These are open or closed questions that serve to build on the person's previous answers, comments and responses. They use information already established in order that the worker can explore further. Clarification is a way of achieving concreteness, that is, removing vagueness. These questions also demonstrate to the person that they are being actively listened to. Some examples of probing questions include

- *Tell me more about that?*
- *What happened next?*
- *How did that happen?*
- *Can you tell me why?*
- *Can you give me an example?*

Scaling questions: involve using simple mathematical values in a relative way, typically from one to ten, where a client ascribes a mathematical value to describe the level of intensity regarding an affect, a behaviour, a thought, or any other related query. For instance,

- *On a range from one to ten, how painful was it for you at the beginning of this session? With one being very painful and ten being no pain whatsoever.*

Percentage Questions: Percentage questions can be useful in many of the same ways as scaling questions, such as gathering information, goal setting, and measuring progress and motivation.

- *Worker: What per cent of the time would you say you feel depressed?*

Client: I'd say it would be about 80 per cent of the time.

Worker: What is it like during the other 20 per cent of the time?

Making Statements: Making statements often serve the purpose of probing, encouraging the clients to share information, or to verify our perceptions of their messages. Statements can act as substitutes for questions so that the interview does not sound like an investigation. For example:

- *You have talked a great deal about your husband's behaviour towards you and your children. I wonder how you respond to him.*

Unhelpful questions - to be used sparingly

- Closed questions-This type of question usually requires a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. Closed questions give limited scope or freedom in choosing responses. This type of questions is considered unhelpful and is, therefore, to be avoided as the basic purpose of the interview is to enable the client to explore areas of concern. Examples of closed questions

- *How long did you live there?*

- *Are you happy?*

- *Is it difficult for you to talk to your father?*

- **'Either or' questions:** These are a variation of the closed questions. They are restrictive as they present the clients with two options when there may be more. Further, the options offered may have come from the worker's frame of reference and not as a result of exploration of the client's experiences. For example

- *Worker: Will you ask her tomorrow or wait until she asks you?*

Client: Neither. I don't think I will tell her at all.

- **'Why' questions:** These are problematic because they are often difficult to answer. They put the client on the defensive especially if it is used too many times as they sound as if accusing or blaming and, expecting clients to provide justification of their position. Instead of "why did you get so angry?" it could be "What do you think made you so angry about....?"
- **Leading questions:** These questions are asked in such a manner that is designed to elicit a particular reply. For example
 - *Is you wife upset by your behaviour?*
 - *That's a good plan of action, don't you think so?*
 - *Surely you feel happier about it now?*
- **Multiple questions:** mean asking several questions together. These confuse the client. Very often, only one part of the question, usually the last or the first,

gets answered. Multiple questions also sound interrogatory and put the client on the defensive.

- *When did you decide to leave? Where did you go? Was it far?*
- *You say you weren't sure about your ability to cope. How do you feel now when it's over and you have done with it?*

- **Loaded question:** *“Do you think you should accept this crazy idea?”*

Reflective Techniques

Reflective techniques are very useful for communicating empathy, interest and acceptance and listening attitude. They also serve the function of giving feedback and confirming message received from the client. It demonstrates ones understanding of the client's 'story' or at least ones willingness to understand. Here are some of the reflective techniques.

Paraphrasing

In paraphrasing, the essence of the client's statement is restated, though it is a selective restatement of the main ideas with words resembling those used by the client but not the same. Its main purpose is i) to ensure that we have grasped the sense and meaning of what is being communicated; ii) to communicate core values of acceptance, understanding, and active listening; iii) to build trusting relationship; and iv) to gather accurate information. Paraphrasing clarifies and joins different themes. For example

Client: I suppose I've always felt a failure. I didn't go to university like my brother and I'm not in such a high powered job. Everything that he's done has turned out well.

Worker: You're comparing your achievements with your brother's and telling yourself that you're a failure.

Client: Yes. Sort of not quite first class, you know. (Culley, p. 43)

Summarizing

Summaries are essentially longer paraphrases. Using them enables the worker to bring together salient aspects of the session in an organized way. It does not includes worker's hypotheses. Summarising is a useful way to i) clarify content and feelings; ii) review the work; iii) close an interview session; iv) to open a new session by summarizing the previous session; v) to prioritise and focus on significant issues; and vi) to move forward in the interview process or achieve transition or change in focus. For example

- *Worker: It seems that of all the changes and new demands you're facing now, the one which you anticipate with most concern is caring for your mother. You sounded anxious when you spoke about her. I wonder if that is how it seems to you.*

Client: Yes, she is really on my mind.... (Culley, p. 48)

- *Worker: Let's look at what we've discussed so far. You have talked aboutIs there anything I've missed out? (the client shakes his head) Ok, what do we still need to look into? (Trevithik, p.97)*

Reflecting Feelings

Clients' communications about their concerns or situation are often loaded with open or covert emotional overtones. Being able to catch the feelings underlying an apparently factual statement enhances rapport with the client and confirms your understanding of the client's account of his experiences. Sometimes, the words used denote feeling states, though it is not the case. The worker needs to accurately decipher what the client is actually conveying. For example:

- *Client: I don't think I could do it. I'd only fail. I ... well – I've never been able to get grades like that before and I'm sure I couldn't now.*

*Worker: Your past records convince you it's not possible now. (paraphrasing)
You're feeling a bit afraid now to even try. (reflecting feeling) (Munro et al, p. 41)*

Supportive Techniques

The client who seeks help from of the professional is often at the low end of his confidence. He has a sense of failure, inadequacy, feeling of being a victim of circumstances and being alone in his struggles of life. Supportive techniques not only give a new lease of life to the client but also it establishes trusting relationship, and motivate the client to engage in the problem-solving or change process.

Supporting: Interviewers express their support by overt expressions, both verbal and nonverbal. Showing support includes expressions of *praise and appreciation* of the client's abilities, qualities, and coping efforts. This technique demonstrates the worker's active approval of the client's qualities and achievements. The psychological safety of a good relationship and the worker's attitude (core conditions) are in themselves supportive. The interpersonal atmosphere created by using this approach makes the client feel comfortable, safe, and relieved. The involvement of the worker in helping with the problem is also supportive. The client feels that he is no longer struggling with the problem alone.

However, there are more *explicit acts of support* that help a client solve a problem. The worker may have to do work concerning some formal procedures, like filling some forms for obtaining aid from an agency. In the case of children in care institutions, the worker may have to look for their families and help them get repatriated. In some cases, it is not enough to provide the address or name of the contact person of a referral agency. More *active* support is often required to ensure that its benefit *does* help the recipient.

Encouraging: There are verbal and nonverbal ways of encouraging the client to continue to share his or her thoughts, feelings or behaviours. It also is a way to tell the client that it is ok to take his time, and that the worker is with him in this journey for exploration. For example: minimal comments like "hum", "Yes?" "Tell me more", asking for details "Can you give me an example?" or simply nodding the head.

Normalization: Normalization attempts to reframe the client's problem situations as being common to all persons. The normalization statement also contains the worker's implicit acceptance of the client. It does not mean acceptance of the crimes or maladaptive behaviour but accepting it as human. The example given below encourages a divorcee to give his family some more time to settle down and supports him in his wish for quick settling down.

Client: We're having a rough time being a blended family. The kids resent her as my new wife.

Worker: Maybe you expected there to be instant closeness, or you hoped things would settle down more quickly. Most people find that it takes quite a while before they get blended.

- *Client: Since the divorce, the kids have been absolutely rebelling against everything and everybody. And that includes me! I feel as if I'm the mother who has lost all control on my family.*

Worker: That's often the case with teenagers when major life changes occur to them. It may mean sitting down and plotting a new course with them.

Assurance and reassurance: Assurance and reassurance cover anything that the worker does to increase client's sense of confidence. Assurance involves focusing on the strengths of the client rather than on their limitations; on their coping efforts in the past or in other situations rather than on their current sense of inadequacy and failure. However, assurance should be grounded in some logical and factual bases and not in unrealistic optimism. For example, saying "Don't worry! Everything will be alright" to a patient who is waiting for an operation to amputate his leg offers no assurance to the patient. It also presents an image of an insincere and callous professional. Assurance on the basis of the prognosis given by the doctor will carry more weight.

Interventive and change-oriented techniques

As stated earlier, interventive techniques are those actions of the client which facilitate i) change in the client's behaviour and perceptions and internal resources; ii) change or modification in social environment or difficult situation so as to reduce or remove its debilitating impact on client's social functioning; and iii) mobilization of community resources. These techniques may range between worker's being directive and his being facilitative. That means that some techniques require the worker to be more directive, taking more control over the interview process and some where the worker takes a back seat and encourages the client to take more responsibility for the change process. The selection of the technique will depend on the need, timing, stage at which is the interview process is and the level of worker-client relationship.

Information giving involves sharing of facts, theories, statistics and other information gleaned from various sources. Information giving rarely involves a moral or ethical judgment. The worker needs to be careful that there is no overload of information. It is tailored to the client's needs and his capacity to use the information. In other words, this technique involves giving information that is clear and useful and preparing and guiding the client in how to use it. Sometimes, it is enough to give the source of information and how to access it. Some client may feel insulted if they are treated as incapable of securing information themselves (given the source) while some others may feel overwhelmed with the thought of using the information on their own. They may need further action-oriented help from the worker. The worker, therefore, has to assess the situation and the capability of the client. Client may need information about human service agencies like residential care, vocational training institutes, or procedures for obtaining aid from other agencies. Parents of teenaged children, persons caring for mentally challenged persons, mentally ill or chronicall patients may need psycho-educational

material to better understand the needs of the persons under their care and their own role.

Advising is a form of directive but it should not be seen as a command or demand.. Advice is perceived as *the* solution to the client's problem. Counselling and advising are often used synonymously. Very often, the clients themselves ask the worker to advise them- "please *you* tell us what we should do in this case?" It is so easy to fall in this trap. The client may wish to avoid the responsibility of taking a decision and transfer it on to the worker. While advising, as a technique has a place in the worker's toolbox, it has to be used judiciously after having understood the client's situation and concerns. Advising is not offered in terms of 'what the client should or should not do'. The worker may advise the client on how to think further, to consider more broadly the likely consequences of their actions. Advising sometimes acts as an adjunct to information giving. While information giving involves providing factual particulars, advising implies offering of worker's opinions. The worker has to take responsibility for the advice he gives and, therefore, needs to give reasons to the client as to why he feels a certain options are better than others. But this should still leave the client free to make choices, without his feeling guilty about rejecting the worker's suggestion. In fact, the worker's suggestion may help reduce indecisiveness and clarify the client's own mind about the situation under focus. For example

- *The usual consequences of taking that options are*
- *If you want to consider that it almost certainly means that you would have to*
- *Well, why don't you try courses in Art? You say you want to explore other fields after sciences and you like the art teacher. (Client undecided about which course to opt for)*

Influencing and persuading: These techniques are used to attempt to change the client's beliefs, attitudes or behaviour. In fact, social case worker is seen as person who influences the client. Sometimes all that a client needs is a 'push' to get started or make a decision. However, it should be used only after a complete understanding of the client and his situation. The client's inability to respond positively to the worker's influence may lead to hurdle in the worker-client relationship. Although the most obvious way of persuasion is direct advice giving, social workers often 'evoke' the change by indirect means, e.g. by questioning or making statements. A persuasive question or statement may be understood as a contrast to a suggestion or piece of advice, because it gives the respondent the power to state how things are. For example:

- *Have you ever thought after one of these outbursts that you might see a doctor?*
- *Has it ever occurred to you that you can....*
- *Client: It's no use. I just don't feel comfortable in that situation.*

Worker: I'm sure you can do it, especially if you follow the way we rehearsed it here.

Interpretation: Interpretations are explanations of, or insights into, a situation. They are attempts to impart meaning about a client's behaviour based upon the

counsellor's observations and understanding. Interpretations will be more helpful if they emerge from information presented by the client rather than from the worker's experience. Interpretation is to be seen as merely one possible explanation of an event. The client may have another equally valid explanation. Therefore, worker needs to offer interpretations tentatively. Interpretation often puts the worker in a more authoritarian position within the relationship. Trust with the client is an essential ingredient for successful interpretation.

- *You sound as if you're extremely embarrassed about having failed in the exams. Perhaps your aggressiveness towards others is an attempt to cover up your shame. Could that be right?*
- *From what you have said about your father, it seems that you are really frightened of him.*

Directives: are instructions given to the client – telling the client what to do. Timing in giving a directive is important – when a specific piece of action is indicated and when the client is ready. Asking the client to try out certain behaviours outside the interview, making log entries of certain actions performed at home / work place / school etc. are examples of directives.

Deframing: is an attempt of the worker to challenge certain negative beliefs of the client without being preachy. It can be a powerful tool for influencing the client when dealing with a client's dysfunctional and useless beliefs. Some examples are given below:

- *How do you know that to be so?*
- *What makes you say that?*
- *How is that so?*
- *Where did you get that idea?*
- *On what basis have you reached that conclusion?*
- *What makes you so sure?*

Educating: Educating involves several dimensions. It goes beyond giving information although giving information is one of its components. Educating or coaching may involve sharing your ideas about parenting with parents of very young children or adolescents (for example discussing psycho-social stages of child's development); engaging the clients or their significant others in the learning process or skill building exercise; developing specific guidelines for better social functioning.

Referrals: Not everything that a client needs may be fulfilled through the agency with which the social case worker is associated. The complex nature of human problems and concerns often necessitate combined efforts by various human service agencies. Appraisal of the presenting problem may bring out that the client needs to go elsewhere (process of intake). The interview then serves the purpose of giving relevant information to the client about his ineligibility for service in the present agency. The worker further offers referral to other suitable resource. Referral involves giving necessary information about the services, procedures for obtaining help from there, giving support and assurance that the referred agency will be

appropriate for the client's purpose and that the client is free to return to the worker in case of difficulty.

Self-disclosure – It is the sharing of personal experiences by the worker to the client related to the session with the purpose of helping. It is intended to facilitate client disclosure. This technique may be used in order to challenge and promote new awareness by sharing some experience in the worker's own life. As self-disclosure shifts the focus from the client to the worker, it should be used minimally. "The general rule is that self-disclosure should not occur unless it is in the interest of the individual seeking help." (Trevithik, p.106) This technique can be very useful for people who feel isolated and alone in their suffering. This can also break down feelings of shame, guilt or self-blame. It can be used for sharing thoughts and feelings and can help clients see the workers as 'ordinary human beings' as well as professionals. The worker may use self-disclosure as a model to talk about feelings.

- *Worker: I have had bouts of depression (you are not the only one) in the past so I have some idea about how you are feeling but people experience depression in very different ways.. Can you describe what this depression is like for you? (retaining focus on client's experience)*

Client: Do you still suffer from depression?

Worker: No, I'm fine now. It is important to say that depression can and does lift. What we have to look at is what will help you to overcome this depression. (Trevithik, p. 107)

Activities as techniques: Although interviews are perceived primarily as talking and listening events, activities are occasionally used as tools of assessment or intervention.

- Various diagrammatic tools are available to the social case worker to aid in assessing and redefining the client's problem and concern, in modifying perceptions, gaining insights, and evaluating results of interventions. These aids include genograms, ecomaps, culturagrams, flow charts and life road maps. A special feature of these tools is that they are constructed and developed jointly with the client and others in his social milieu.
- A genogram is a type of family tree. It provides an immediate visual representation of the individual or family being assessed. It is a 'snapshot' of how that person or family is structured and viewed at a particular moment in time. It can be useful in highlighting to social case workers those areas that may cause concern, and information that is lacking and needs to be sought. It may also identify areas or themes for further exploration with the client. The information gathered in the genogram interview is purposive and concerns interactions as well as relationships within families.
- An ecomap seeks to show how family members act and react to each other and how the family as a whole relates to other families, groups and organisations in society. It also can be used to demonstrate interrelations between various levels within environmental living systems. A visual representation of the way systems and sub-systems interact may be helpful here.

- Culturagram is designed to assist social workers in the analysis of the meaning and impact of culture in the life of those families and individuals being assessed. Constructing a culturagram involves a skilled use of communication skills. Asking sensitive questions is not easy in any situation. Culturagrams have been employed in the sensitive area of elder abuse and domestic violence.
- Flow diagrams and life road maps can be used to provide a chronological history of significant events and moves in the family's and/or individuals' lives. It is useful to provide information of the family composition at these various stages to consider the various expected and unexpected transitions that the family may have undergone.

The five tools we have discussed above help to structure the process of assessment. Not only do they provide an interactive and participative way of collecting information but they also elicit important topics to explore further and to determine the focus of future assessment. Using these tools can also provide key insights for clients completing them. Although insight into one's situation is unlikely to promote change in itself, it can encourage motivation to work towards change and by doing so assist in planning and implementing effective implementation strategies.

- Picture stories can also be used to better understand client's problems, which may have hidden aspects – not consciously known to the client himself. The pictures or sketches should emerge from the information so far shared by the client.
- Role playing and role rehearsal are useful techniques for giving confidence to the client in trying out new behaviours or in confronting difficult situations outside the safe environment of the interview. Role playing means acting out how a person with a particular function usually behaves. The emphasis is more on feeling what it is like to act in a certain manner. Short role playing is usually enough. Role rehearsal implies trying out behaving in ways different from the client's typical behaviour. Techniques like empty chair help a client imagine how a different behaviour from a significant other will impact him.
- Activities with Children: Young children – voluntary or involuntary – as clients often feel inhibited to 'talk' in the interview. Activities like games, art and craft or creative writing are great aids to establish rapport with inarticulate children. These activities also help the worker in arriving at an appraisal of emotional and social situations of children which may otherwise be difficult to achieve. Children often express or ventilate their emotions through art and craft activities. Some brief questions, encouraging comments and statements on the work being done by the child (taking care not to break his concentration) may elicit enlightening responses.
- Challenging : To challenge means to question, to dispute, to stimulate. Challenging encourages clients to review, to question their current perspectives, and to facilitate deeper exploration. Challenging, therefore, does not imply that there is a 'right' way of looking at situations. It only denotes worker's attempt at enabling clients to reassess themselves and their concerns. Challenging techniques involve certain risk of damage to worker-client relationship. They should, therefore, be used only when the worker is sure that he/she has the complete trust of the client. Use of these techniques should be avoided in the early phases of the interview or in the helping process.

The worker may challenge the client if i) he is overlooking his strengths and weaknesses; ii) there are discrepancies in the client's communications; iii) there is lack of understanding of the consequences of behaviour; and if iv) clients have irrational and self-defeating beliefs. As mentioned before, the worker needs to be tentative and concrete in challenging and to consider whether the client is able to receive the challenge.

- Confrontation: means helping the clients identify and face distortions, discrepancies which keep them from effective change. This may increase anxiety and avoidance but is necessary and can be constructive. There are occasions on which the counsellor needs to draw attention to particular behaviours or beliefs that are negatively affecting the client's life. There are times, too, when the worker has to confront the client with bad news, at other times the worker needs to tell the client of the effect they are having on the worker. Confrontation may be relevant when excuses need to be challenged – for example “it won't happen to me”; “it is not as bad as it looks”; “nothing needs to be done at the moment”; or “I'm not the one who needs to do something”.
 - *You say constantly that you are going to get up on time and get to school, but you never do.*
 - *You are furious at your husband and claim that he beats you badly, but you do not wish to leave him.*
 - *You had said yesterday that you had no source of income, but the staff member who went to visit your home gives a different picture. What is the true picture?*
 - *Every time we talk about your grandfather's death you tend to speak about something else. I wonder if you are deliberately avoiding talking about his death.*
- Immediacy: Maintaining positive relationship is essential to carry on the social case work interview. Immediacy is exploring the client's experiences and feelings about the worker, the worker's relationship, or the work the worker is engaged in, as they occur presently. Immediacy involves exploring the here and now in the relationship between worker and the client. The worker brings the situation out into the open and discusses it with the client by using present tense statements. There is reference to the present and not to the past, say last week or last fortnight. It usually relates to the worker's view of what is happening in the relationship.

The client may be demonstrating defensive reactions, passing the buck by holding the worker responsible for certain events or client's experiences. Client's manner of relating to the worker may be representative of their general pattern of relating with people. Use of immediacy demonstrates to the client a model of open and honest communication.

- *Right here and now with me you seem to be disinterested / feeling frustrated/ experiencing*
- *Right here and now as I'm talking, I notice that your eyes are turned away from me. You seem to be thinking about something else. What are you thinking or experiencing right now?*

Interview Process - Oriented Techniques

These are the techniques which facilitate establishing, maintaining and propelling the interview process so that the purpose of the worker-client interaction may be achieved. Some such techniques are mentioned below.

Focusing and topic following: is used to direct or maintain attention to the work at hand. Occasionally, the client and even the worker may move away from relevant issues. While these diversions may end up providing greater understanding, they are largely unproductive. Through focusing the worker directs his/her efforts and energy on relevant topics to achieve agreed-upon purpose. Interviews are purposive conversations and not friendly chats to spend the time of the day. Sometimes, the client provides discursive and long-winded description or accounts of various experiences. The worker has to bring the client back to the information most relevant. Focusing helps make interview process both effective and efficient.

- *Would you hold on to your thought for a while so that we can come back to it later? Let's complete our plans first. Is that ok?*

Partialising and prioritising: During the information gathering or exploration stage a lot of material may be collected; presented problems may have several dimensions to be addressed to; or there may be a number of problems asking for the worker's attention. In such a case, this technique adds to the efficiency and effectiveness of the interview process. The worker, along with the client, can identify different components of the problem and then set priorities – which part of the problem or which problem needs to be tackled or focused first and which later. There are often interrelationships between the issues presented by the client.

- *You sure have a lot happening all at once. It sounds like everybody in the family has their own share of problems and you're affected by them all. I wonder, since, there are so many issues to address – your husband's behaviour, your son's, your own feelings about it all – could we start by looking at them one at a time? Does that make sense to you? Okay. Which piece of all of this concerns you most right now? Let's start with that one. (Cournoyer, p.189)*
- *A woman had come to a psychiatric clinic to get treatment for hysteria. During the interview, she shared her anxiety about her physically challenged young son. She was very concerned about her son than about her own ailment. Also her husband had lost his job due to TB and was trying, unsuccessfully, vegetable vending at home.*

The client may be asked 'which concern is most important? Which issue is causing most distress? Which issue could be dealt with in the case work interview and which could best be handled in some other way (referral)?

Silence: While this may occur unintentionally there are many benefits if used correctly. It provides both client and worker time to process what is being understood. It promotes introspection, keeps the focus on the client, and helps the client collect his or her thoughts for expression, or it can be used as an encourager. It can also be used to challenge client's statement. The use of silence should not be confused with a pause in the interview process, which is intended to be momentary. Silence is used by the worker deliberately. As interview is perceived as a talking therapy, silence may cause awkwardness in the worker. It is important to feel

comfortable with silence, by understanding why it has occurred and what purpose it may serve.

- *Worker: So far we've spent about 15 minutes together, and you've said very little. We've already discussed the consequences of your not coming to future sessions. Your parents may decide to take action that may not please you. Now I'll remain silent for a while, and whenever you feel like saying something to get things moving along, I'll welcome your remarks.*

Statements to achieve Transitions within an interview or between interviews: There are occasions when the client is unable to move away from the recital of a painful or exciting experience. Without restricting the client's communication, the worker can use comments or simple statements to either bring client back to the main issue under focus or move on to a new dimension of the issue. The ending or opening comments can also help in shifting grounds.

- *I know that you wish to dwell more on this experience, but could we move on to*
- *In our last meeting we focused on Do you think today we could talk rather on?*
- *Today we were able to discuss.....I wonder whether.....can be taken up in the next session.*

The list of techniques given above is not exhaustive. Different psychotherapies or case work theories mention different techniques aligned with their theoretical perspective. It is a good idea to get familiar with available information about different techniques and use eclectic approach in selective use of the techniques which will deliver the best results in helping the client.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) Describe the function of questioning techniques. Discuss different types of questions. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.

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- 2) Explain reflective techniques. Give examples.

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3) Describe in detail supportive or challenging techniques.

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4) How are focusing and partialising important for achieving the purpose of the interview? Explain these techniques with examples.

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3.4 THINGS TO LOOK FOR IN AN INTERVIEW

Given below are some of the things which are worth observing during the interview because deciphering them may lead to better understanding of the client and his concerns; and facilitate movement of the interview towards its objective.

- Content of opening and closing sentences – These sentences tend to contain particularly significant material. They also may give cues about client’s attitudes toward self and the environment.
- Shifts in conversation – These shifts, particularly when related to similar topics, can indicate that a particular topic is painful, taboo, or something the client does not want to discuss.
- Association of ideas - Observing which ideas the client seems to associate with, which other ideas can give the worker an indication of unspoken feelings.
- Recurrent references – When the client continues to bring up a subject, it indicates that it is a subject of importance to the client or one the client would like help with.
- Inconsistency or gaps – When these are present, it is an indication either that the material being discussed is threatening to the client or that the client is unwilling to openly share in this area.
- Points of stress or conflict – In cross-cultural action systems, stress and conflict may indicate areas of inadequate knowledge about cultural aspects of the client’s functioning. This may also indicate misunderstanding on the part of the client or areas of client bias or prejudice. (Johnson; Garrett)

3.5 SOME DO’S AND DON’TS OF INTERVIEWING

Scattered in the discussion of skills and techniques are mentions of the dos and don’ts of case work interviewing. Here are some of those repeated for emphasis with some others:

- Put the client at ease - establish rapport.
- State the purpose of the interview in clear terms. It is more important in the case of involuntary clients – those referred by others against their will.
- Introduce yourself; address the client with his name. Make sure to get the pronunciation right - in case the name is unfamiliar to you.
- Take care how you dress. It is generally better to dress a little conservatively so as not to offend client's cultural sensibilities.
- Allow clients to state the problem from their point of view and at their pace.
- Get feelings as well as facts – feelings may be more important though less likely to be expressed without encouragement.
- Listen attentively.
- Probe in depth to ensure all the relevant details are known.
- Use open questions.
- Before asking about controversial matters (such as feelings and conclusions), first ask about some facts.
- Ask questions about the present before questions about the past or future.
- If possible, get the clients to suggest solutions.
- Discuss implications of different solutions, if appropriate.
- Agree to a best solution, if appropriate.
- Resolve dilemmas of client's dependence on you or self-reliance through empathic understanding of the client and his situation.
- Agree to a course of action to be taken, if appropriate.
- Periodically review the grounds covered.
- Arrange next meeting, if necessary.
- Keep appointments; fulfill other commitments like finding relevant information, locating referral agency.
- Make effort to develop self-awareness through training and supervision.

Alternate ways of opening an interview

- Introduce yourself.
- Explain how you discovered the problem.
- Ask directly how you can be of help – in walk-in situations, like in hospital patient welfare departments.
- Who sent the client to you or you to him – in cases where the clients have been referred to you by – parents / spouse / son / daughter / relative / teacher or principle / court / doctor / superintendent of a residential institution.
- Summarise the problem being faced by the client.

- Ask for help or advice regarding the particular problem -from the client or significant others.
- Suggest a possible advantage to the client for solving the problem by accepting to meet you or accepting your proposal.
- Refer to the client's known view, if so.
- Refer to the client's background , cause , origin of the problem.
- State the organization you represent, its policy, services provided and the procedures for securing those services.
- Ask for ten minutes / half-an-hour (or longer if necessary) of the person's time.

Common mistakes that can be avoided

- Talking frequently about yourself and how you solved this or that problem; prematurely disclosing your own feelings and opinions. Don't automatically compare the client's experience with your own.
- Attempting to cheer up the other person- "Everything will be ok. Don't worry."
- Offering suggestions or solutions too early in the process. Immediately providing or seeking a solution for the problem.
- Displaying inappropriate emotions like excitement, grief or pain along with the client. It is not empathy.
- Trying to do something (anything) for the person.
- Failing to take the client's problem seriously.
- Suggesting that the problem is in the client's imagination. Don't invalidate the client's feelings.
- Interviewing in an environment not conducive to listening.
- Sarcasm, blaming or moralising.
- Anticipating responses or hearing what you want to, or expect to hear, completing client's sentence for him.
- Interacting in a patronizing manner.
- Interrogating rather than interviewing by asking questions in rapid, disjointed manner.
- Attending predominantly to a single dimension of the client's experience – only facts or only feelings.
- Frequently interrupting with a comment or question.
- Neglecting to use the person's name or mispronouncing it.
- Using terms that stereotype people or groups – like 'Biharis' (belonging to Bihar state), 'Dalit' (from lower caste), 'single mother', 'divorced woman'.
- Using sentences in absolutist terms – like 'always, never, all or none.

- Speculating about causes of problems before adequately exploring the person-problem-situation.
- Don't try to solve the problem before you know what it is – there may not be any problem.
- Do not evade the issue or belittle it.
- Do not commit yourself too quickly or appear to take sides.

No checklist of dos and don'ts can prepare the worker fully for the field. There are unanticipated situations or responses to handle which no amount of planning can equip the worker for. Yet, it does not mean the worker should lose courage and shy away from taking initiating interviewing. Many of the techniques and skills are part of the worker's social and emotional development. The main difference lies in the worker using them deliberately and with anticipated outcomes.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) What things do you need to look for in an interview and why?

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2) What common mistakes do practitioners commit in the interviewing process? How can these be avoided?

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

The social case worker functions from a position of influence. What a worker says or does not say in the course of a social case work interview influences the client. What is emphasized or ignored also makes a difference. Wording, phrasing, interrupting, or remaining silent: all influence what the client is feeling and thinking in the professional relationship. In fact, for any given client statement, the worker has the choice to take that statement in many directions. The worker, therefore, has responsibility to appropriate skills within the boundaries of professional values and principles.

To become skilled interviewer, the worker needs to develop knowledge base relevant for his/her practice setting; prepare to applying social case work principles, like principle of confidentiality, record the experiences and analyse them critically

to learn from them; and periodically evaluate the interviewing style in the light of recent research findings. As a professional, the worker has a commitment to acquire necessary skills, develop relevant competencies and attitudes for interviewing, the most frequently used tool of social case work.

In this discussion it has been mentioned only generic skills and techniques. Depending on client groups you are targeting to help, he/she needs to acquire in-depth knowledge about their special needs, their strengths and weaknesses, life experiences within their particular social environment, and services available to meet their needs and concerns. Communicating empathy; moving at their pace; taking time to win their trust; using techniques to enhance their self-esteem, empowering them through knowledge of social systems and how they impact them, and imparting them skills to take charge of their own lives; imparting relevant information about community resources; mediating with social systems and sub-systems through representing client's interests; and advocating on behalf of them could be some other areas of expertise.

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UNIT 4 RECORDING AND DOCUMENTATION IN SOCIAL CASE WORK

Contents

**Manju Kumar*

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to help you

- understand the importance of documentation and recording in social case work;
- comprehend the process of recording, structure and content of case records;
- offer some guidelines and aids to recording, thereby; and
- enhancing and augmenting the worker's recording skills.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A review of literature on social work reveals that throughout its history, social work practitioners have recognized and appreciated the importance and usefulness of recording their interactions with their clients. Traditionally, documentation helped practitioners coordinate and evaluate service needs and delivery. Early in the history of social work profession, Mary Richmond used case records as the basis for her study of practice. Gordon Hamilton noted that effective recording is inseparable from good case work. Case documentation not only supports the delivery of services to individuals, families, couples (and small groups), but it increasingly has new applications in keeping with the changing environment in which social workers operate. Recording has always been an integral part of social work practice, including social case work. Besides, recording has proved to be a valuable tool for social work education.

National Association of Social Workers established standards for effective and ethical practice in Social Work. One of these relates clearly with social workers' responsibility to document comprehensive record of their work. "Social workers shall maintain records or documentation of social work services, which reflect the client and client systems' pertinent information for assessment and treatment; social work involvement and outcomes with and for clients; and in accordance with care goals and legislative and administrative regulations and policies"

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(Standard 13, NASW, 2005) This perspective looks at recording not just as a tool of practice but mandatory element of ethical professional practice.

Effective communication is essential in social work. How one speaks and how one listens have enormous impact on how well one does his/her jobs and how successful one is in them. Effective communication is also absolutely necessary if we are going to be helpful to clients. Recording is a form of written communication, which performs numerous important functions in ensuring that the worker offers effective and efficient service to those in need of help. Students under training to become social work professionals are required to document their efforts to learn to help clients.

Recording, however, is seen as a bane of student-life of social work trainees. Students feel writing case work records to be, a monotonous, unwelcome chore – a necessary evil. For some, who have a facility in written communication, it is still manageable. For others for whom writing down their thoughts and opinions is difficult, recording is a very bothersome activity. It is true that it is a time consuming activity requiring considerable thinking through. Very often, recording an interview with the client takes as much time as the interview itself or even more. Still, recognizing its value as a practice tool and an important professional skill, it is worthwhile to learn about its uses and techniques.

4.2 RECORDING AND DOCUMENTATION IN SOCIAL CASE WORK

Social case workers keep records to document and retain information about their clients and the process and progress of their services. Individual case records are used in planning, implementing, and evaluating services to each client. Aggregated records are used in planning, monitoring, and evaluating services to a group of clients. ...The case record is a focal point for accountability to the client, to the organization, and to the profession. (Kagle, p.1). Among Standards for Clinical Social Work in Social Work Practice established by National Association of Social Workers, documentation is mentioned as a required responsibility of social workers, “Documentation of services provided to or on behalf of the client shall be recorded in the client’s file or record of services”. (Standard 8, 2005)

Purpose and functions of case recording and documentation

The field primarily looks at documentation’s function as a diagnostic, assessment, planning, and intervention instrument although in recent times, records perform several other functions as well. Kagle (1984) has defined social work records in terms of their focus, scope, purpose and functions.

- Focus of records is to individualize and typify the client, the need, the situation, and the service transaction ;
- Scope includes linking goals, plans, and activities to the assessment of the client-need-situation and to the resources available; and
- Purpose is to facilitate the delivery of services to or on behalf of the client; and
- The record Functions as an important resource in communication about the case, while the process of recording involves reviewing, selecting, analyzing and organizing information about it.

Uses and Functions of Social Case Records:

- 1) Identifying client and client's need – social case record describes the client, his characteristics, needs, concerns or problems, situation and his social environment. These particulars assist the worker in planning client care and services that are necessary.
- 2) Provide basis for deciding client's eligibility for receiving service from the particular agency.
- 3) Documenting the activities undertaken and services rendered to the client or on his behalf. This documentation helps in client's securing reimbursements (if applicable), in demonstrating adherence to procedural guidelines provided by organizations or funding agencies. Records, if maintained regularly, demonstrate activity and movement in the helping process and facilitate decision - making by the social case worker.
- 4) Assessment and Planning: Clear and comprehensive documentation of all case-related facts and circumstances is essential for assessment and service planning related decisions. Recording information is seen as one of the essential skills of assessment process. Careful and thoughtful information collection ensures that social workers have an adequate foundation for their reasoning and intervention plans.
- 5) Evaluating the client's condition and on-going treatment. Records document the course of the client's evaluation, treatment and change in condition including impact of services on the client. Measured outcomes and service effectiveness are central to social case work. At their core lie data and information recorded throughout the helping process.
- 6) Documenting communication between the worker and other professionals contributing to the client's care. In interdisciplinary settings like health care and mental health agencies, rehabilitation services, child care agencies, schools and correctional settings, social case records serve as a vehicle for inter-professional and interagency co-ordination and collaboration.
- 7) Records serve as bases for peer review system. Peer review of social case work documentation helps promote the uniformity and consistency with which services are delivered; and workers are exposed to the professional practice of their colleagues. In health care settings, especially, records have potential to help identify patient problems and need not be met by the existing system of health care delivery; such gaps in service can then be brought to the attention of the management of the medical care centre for consideration and possible resolution. Peer review of records also helps enhance social worker performance and service delivery.
- 8) Maintaining continuity and co-ordination : Good documentation plays an important role in passing information between social workers especially
 - i) In situations where the workforce is changing like when the client is transferred to another social worker, either due to change of assignment, leaving job, or end of field placement term (in case of social work trainees).

- ii) For service planning – e.g. the documentation can produce information about children’s passage through the services (from children’s home to foster care or after care) and number of children using these services.
 - iii) In case of gaps in contact with the client, either due to client’s or worker’s absence for a protracted period; or
 - iv) The client’s situation and problems are complicated, requiring multiple and extensive interventions. Records help in maintaining thematic continuity to get a comprehensive overview of the case and services rendered.
- 9) Sharing information with the client: In contemporary social work practice, clients can access information contained in their case records. While it puts pressure on the worker and his relationship with the client, it can be seen as facilitating client review of the information shared with the worker, and client’s participation in the helping process. Various methods may be used to involve clients in recording and evaluating all that is being done with the client or on his behalf.
- 10) Demonstrating and measuring worker accountability: Records thus serve as instruments of evaluating professional practice; to sensitize workers to practice within parameters of professional ethics and values; and legal safeguards.
- 11) Administrative tasks, like decisions about client needs and services to be offered, and budgeting are done by using social case records.
- 12) Social work education and field instruction: Social case work records have traditionally served as a tool for educating future social work professionals – both in the classroom and on the field. Case records, if used appropriately, prove excellent class room teaching aids. For experiential learning they are necessary accompaniments to field instruction. Process records submitted by students form the basis for the supervisory process, which is an integral part of social work education.
- 13) Research for practice improvement and theory building: Aggregated records or case records taken singly provide important qualitative data for summative (for example, arriving at collective description of client attributes, problems or services required by the clients) and formative (for evaluating practice effectiveness and areas for improvement, undertaking qualitative analysis of the interviews, observations, and interventions) research. Records provide essential data for broader service programme evaluations. In early years of professional development, data from case records were used for building social work theories.
- 14) Protecting practitioners- Social workers, in many countries, have begun to recognise the significance of documentation as a liability shield and risk-management tool. Records provide evidence in case they have to defend themselves against ethics and complaints. Without thorough documentation, social workers may have difficulty defending their actions.
- 15) Organising thoughts and information and facilitating recall: The process of recording helps the practitioner to organize and crystallize his thoughts about the client situation, hunches about what needs to be done and likely plans of

action. The worker collects a vast amount of information about the client-situation / problem-environment. To offer professional intervention, this information has to be organized and analyzed. Very often, despite there being a lot of information, some vital piece of information may be missing. The process of recording helps locate such gaps and encourage further exploration. Also, the process of documenting worker's activities and client responses, acts as an aid to worker's memory of all that occurred in the client-worker encounter or at different phases of the helping process.

Content of Records

What goes into a social case work record depends on who it is for. There are a number of persons who access or use it: the practitioner, the agency or college supervisor, the funding agency, collaborating agency, or legal system. Too much content, too little content, or the wrong content can harm clients and expose practitioners to considerable risk of liability. How comprehensive or selective should be the information that forms the content of the case record?

In the current scene of social work practice, "Practitioners' first rule of thumb when documenting cases should be to include sufficient details to facilitate the delivery of services and protect themselves in the event of an ethical complaint or lawsuit". (Reamer, 2005) Considering that records are expected to reflect unique nature of client-problem/concern-situation complex placed in the agency context, the content of each record will understandably vary. Different approaches to practice, different service delivery patterns, and different procedural requirements in different service environments lead to differential recording. (Kagle, 1984) However, there are some common areas of information that every case record needs to include. That information is relevant for a case record which shows how 'client-situation-problem' and available resources form the basis for service decisions and actions. Some of the areas considered essential in case records are given below:

A. Identifying and demographic details

- 1) An identifying mark like a number or symbol assigned to each case handled by the worker/agency.
- 2) Identifying data about the client – full name, age, sex, religion / caste (if relevant or required), address, contact number, educational and occupational status, income (if relevant as it is a sensitive area for most persons), marital status.
- 3) Social history (demographic particulars to establish client's social environment) - family composition, educational and occupational status.

B. Referral

- 1) Source of referral – who has brought the problem or concern to the notice of the worker; the client himself, some family member, agency staff member, from worker's own observation, or referred by some authority like court, school authorities etc.
- 2) Reported reason for seeking help – the immediate reason for approaching the agency – with date and time of referral, and date and time of first encounter / action taken by the worker or someone else.

- C. **History of the reported problem /concern:** In cases of chronic or mental illnesses; handicaps – mental or physical; marital discord or domestic violence antecedents along with their impact on the client and significant others need to be mentioned. Whether this history covers incidents only of the recent past, from the onset of the problem, or start from the very childhood will depend largely on the nature of the problem and the procedural requirements of the services to be rendered. For example, for a child reported to be mentally challenged, milestones achieved right from early childhood may be important while information about the precipitating factors leading to the onset of mental illness may be enough in the case of the mentally ill persons. In case of adoptive parents, certain medical tests and facets of family history, not only of the adoptive parents but their respective families as well becomes necessary.
- D. **Reports of any tests made:** by the worker, health/medical/rehabilitation professionals (including mental health workers). For example, the results of previous or current psychological, psychiatric, and medical evaluations, objective information based on other independent sources and noted. Data derived from or interpretations of ecomaps, genograms etc. need also to be included in the case record.
- E. **Assessments made:** About level of client's motivation to share responsibility for the helping process, description of problem areas identified by social case worker; identification of key persons in the problem-solving process; hypothetical statements of their causes and impact; statement of alternate plans of action and grounds for deciding on a particular line of action; measurable goals – immediate, or long term - to be stated
- F. **Decisions made and services provided:** actual interventions or tasks performed by the worker, client or others as part of the service/treatment plan decided upon as a result of the assessment; notes on progress of the action plan execution
- G. **Contacts made with other professionals for consultation or collaborative actions:** Contacts with others - collateral sources of information or for participating in the execution of service/treatment plan.
- H. Final assessment and evaluation of the service rendered.
- I. Information about transfer, termination or referral.
- J. Closing summary of the entire helping process, period of the helping process, number of sessions with the client, any critical incidents.

As mentioned earlier, the final content will depend on several factors but the information selected to be contained in the case record has to be balanced and relevant for the particular client and his needs. Essentially, it should provide comprehensive picture of the nature of social case worker's involvement with a particular client, progress in achieving professional goals, and the eventual outcome of the interaction between the worker and the client or agency.

Forms of Case Records

For the purpose of recording the above-mentioned areas of information, different forms of case records are employed by the practitioners. Some are used more frequently than others. Different types of records are used jointly or simultaneously

because they complement each other. Here are some of the usually employed forms of records:

- 1) **Process records:** They provide moment-by-moment narrative of clients' behaviour and interactions between practitioners and clients. Process records give almost verbatim account of each session or encounter the worker with the client and/or others, and of home visits. Process records also include the worker's thoughts, opinions and feelings, although they have to be specified as such and not as facts. This type of record is frequently used in educational and supervisory processes and forms the basis of students' experiential learning.
- 2) **Summary records:** These records are very important in situation in which long-term, ongoing contact with a client, and a series of workers may be involved. Summary records primarily include entry data, sometimes social history, a plan of action and periodic summaries of significant information and action taken by the worker, and a statement of what was accomplished as the case was closed (closing summary). Periodic summaries may be made at specified periods of time like every two months or after every 5 sessions or they may be made when it is necessary to document some fact or action. It is focused more on what happens with the client rather than on the worker's inputs. Summaries may need to be updated from time to time. There are several kinds of summaries that may be made by the worker:
 - i) Periodic summaries
 - ii) Closing summary – They include a) date of final contact, b) date of the beginning of service, c) the reason of contact between worker and the client, d) agreed upon problems and goals for work, e) the approach taken, the nature of service/intervention worker provided and the activities worker and the client /others undertook, f) evaluation of progress, g) problems and goals that remain unsolved or unaccomplished with reasons, h) brief assessment of the person-problem-situation as it now exists, and i) reasons for closing the case. *In the closing summary prepared by students for assignments in their field placements, they do well to mention the concepts and skills applied during the current case.*
 - iii) Diagnostic summary – This is the record of the worker's assessment of the client's situation and the problem and the evidences on which worker's judgments or inferences are based. Any subsequent information having an impact on the initial assessment, necessitating review or revision of the same has to be incorporated periodically.
 - iv) Summary outlining plans of action and goals of intervention in measurable terms, detailing as to who will do what, when and how. What are the expected outcomes also find a mention in these.
 - v) Summaries for the purpose of transfer, referral, consultation or interdisciplinary case conferences – Clients (service users) and carers emphasize the need for social workers to be able to communicate effectively, verbally and in writing, with other professional groups, in order to be able to access services that they need, and to avoid repetitive questioning from the various professionals involved in their lives.

- 3) **Problem-oriented record:** These are particularly useful for social workers employed in interdisciplinary settings like health care agencies. These records contain four parts. First is the data base that contains information pertinent to the client and work with the client. Second is a problem list that includes a statement of initial complaints and assessment of the concerned staff. Third are the plans and goals related to each identified problem. Fourth are follow-up notes about what was done and the outcome of that activity. Problem-oriented records usually consist of two forms: checklists; and a narrative based on SOAP format, that is, *subjective* – patient’s report, *objective* – facts as determined by clinical activity, *assessment* – a statement about the nature of problem, and *plan* – for dealing with the problem. (Johnson, pp.393)
- 4) **Standardized forms:** These summarize client information using short answers or checklists. These forms are developed by many agencies serving a specific client group like the mentally challenged or ill or the abused and battered, to get uniform set of relevant information. In recent years, more structured and systematized forms of recording are being used for ordering information, checking its validity, and drawing up and testing hypotheses.
- 5) **Case Notes:** These are the records of worker’s intuitive observations, reflections on treatment or interventions provided, and mentions of critical or significant incidents. Reading through last week’s notes may make the worker have certain expectations of ‘this week’s’ session. Keeping notes helps him to remember particular details, and to plot the progress of the client. Out-of-office experiences, such as home visits, attending weddings or funerals, going on hikes or for tea in a restaurant, taking a client to a medical or a specialist’s appointment, and clinically meaningful incidental/chance encounters are also included in case notes.
- 6) **Log or Journal Entries:** Logs or journals can be very useful in some fields of work. Someone who meets with a lot of different people in his or her work might keep a log or journal as a personal record of meetings and what was discussed. Note taking means jotting down details of meaningful contacts, including important phone calls and important or clinically significant collateral contacts, at the first opportunity. These notes act as aids to memory or recall at the time of actual documentation.
- 7) **Card Files:** In some agencies, like schools, data about the case work with a client are maintained on cards, which can be easily retrieved and give thumbnail picture of the entire case work done till then. Some illustrative entries in card file are as follows:
 - 1) Name _____
 - 2) Referred on _____
 - 3) Referral From _____
 - 4) Initial Assessment _____
 - 5) Meeting 1 _____
 - 6) Meeting 2 _____
 - 7) Meeting 3 _____
 - 8) Review Notes
 - 9) Meeting 4 _____so on _____

Brief entries are made after each encounter and progress reviewed.

These are some of the forms in which social workers may document case records. More than one form may simultaneously be used for one client.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Why is recording essential in case work practice? Explain its uses.

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2) What are the informations to be included in case work records? Discuss.

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3) What are different forms of case work records? Explain briefly different types of summary records.

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4.3 PROCESS RECORDING

A process recording is almost a verbatim written record of an interaction with a client. It is a narrative reporting of all that happened during a contact with the client, including the worker's feelings and thinking about what has happened. Process recording is most often used when working with individuals and families. Recording is done on an ongoing basis; done regularly as the case moves, based on chronologically linked material.

Nature of Educationally-Oriented Process Recording

Process recording has received great emphasis as a teaching-learning tool of social work education, especially for facilitating field based learning. Process Recordings, a written description of an interview/interaction, reflecting both the content and the dynamic interaction, are requirements specified by all social work education institutions.

The written reconstruction of an interview/ interaction assists the student and facilitates the learning process in a variety of ways.

- i) It provides an opportunity for the student to rethink the interview, with a focus on remembering the interview content, analyzing the various interventions, and developing an understanding of their experiences and perceptions of these interactions.
- ii) It is an excellent tool for enhancing reflective abilities and critical thinking, crucial abilities for an effective social case worker. Reflective practice provides vital link between theory and practice. In practice students/practitioners encounter client problems /situations which are complex and multidimensional. Reflection, analysis, and rational assessment of these elements are necessary to be able to achieve effectiveness in social work process. To engage in critical reflection requires “moving beyond the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding, into questioning of existing assumptions, values, and perspectives.” (Imel, 1998) The very process of recording, particularly process recording, offers students opportunities for a) reflecting on their encounters with the clients, the dynamic nature of their relationship with the clients, and the complex nature of the case work process; b) critically reviewing the work done; and c) identifying feeling and emotional content underlying all decisions.

When we are actively doing something we rarely have the time or opportunity to be consciously deliberative or analytical, and so the manner of our ‘reflection’ is likely to be much more holistic, intuitive and automatic while writing process records. It is also called ‘double-loop learning’ which occurs when an ‘error’ is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of underlying norms, values and objectives, as well as the techniques or strategies. They argue that double-loop learning is necessary if practitioners are to make informed decisions in rapidly changing and often uncertain contexts.

- iii) It provides a picture of the student’s interviewing style, is a reflection of the students ability to ingrate knowledge and theory gained in the classroom, in assigned readings and in the fieldwork setting.
- iv) Helps the student develop social work practice skills and techniques. The interview/interaction content related in the recording provides the bases for learning elements of casework, methods and techniques, as well as reinforcing and refining the current level of practice skill.
- v) The development of self-awareness is basic to effective social work practice. Process recordings provide significant opportunity for professional learning and growth for students in this area. It requires that the student objectify their observations of the person in their environment, and interactions and behaviours between people, to evaluate these observations and behaviours, with particular focus on interactions, and to evaluate and develop awareness and understanding of the conscious use of self in the interaction process. It allows students to identify judgmental attitudes, transference and counter transference issues, and basic values inherent in the social work profession.
- vi) It allows the fieldwork instructor to individualize both the student and the client/situation and identify specific areas of student development.

Educationally oriented process recording can be completed in a variety of styles and formats.

- One style, the complete process recording format, requires a verbatim recording of all the events that took place in an interview/interaction, both verbal and non-verbal. These recordings are done in a chronological order, and describe in detail all events.
- Another format of educationally based recording is selective process recording. In this model, there is a selective presentation of significant factual data and nonverbal content necessary to understand the client and the situation.
- Another model of recording is the structured process recording. This model provides a basic structure and outline of topic areas to be included in the process account.
- Summary recording can often include a process or detailed description of certain portions of the interview or interaction.

All of these models include some type or reconstruction of the interview/interaction, or particular portions of an inter/issue area. Each of them also includes discussion of the conscious feelings and reactions a student experiences as they interact with clients/situations.

Content and Structure of Process Recordings

Content: Despite the fact that process recording contains critical narration of all that happened during student's contact with the client, there are some areas which must be covered in the narrative of each session with the client or some other person connected significantly with the case under focus. Following are some of these:

- 1) **Purpose of Session:**
 - a) Statement of the purpose that is concise, clear and specific in relation to the actual session;
 - b) Relatedness between this session, and the previous session(s), if any; and
 - c) Relate purpose to the particular function of the agency, and the client's capacity and motivation to utilize the services;
 - d) Indicate what the client considers the purpose of the session to be;
 - e) Indicate how these perceptions of purpose (client's and yours) are similar or different.
- 2) **Actual Content:** It is the actual interaction, with questions and answers, observations about non-verbal cues. It includes a description of how the interview began; pertinent factual information and responses of both the client and the student in relation to this; the feeling content of the interview, as it occurs, both on the part of interviewee/s and the student, and particularly, the student's response to this (how it was handled, etc.); a description of any action or nonverbal activity that occurred; the social worker's observations and analytical thoughts regarding what has been happening during the interview; notes on the preparation for the next interview and a description of how the interview ended.

- 3) **Impression/Assessment:** Student's impressions, begin with facts and expand into a theoretical context.
 - a) Describe your initial impressions of the attitudes and feelings of the client(s) at the beginning of the session. Describe, in general terms, the client's physical and emotional climate at the beginning of the session. (Posture, tone of voice, dress, mood, affect, etc.;
 - b) Describe your initial impressions that your client expressed non-verbally;
 - c) What did you observe throughout the session– client's behaviour and affect;
 - d) Was the behaviour/affect appropriate;
 - e) How does this behaviour/affect fit with what you know about the client's past behaviour/feelings.
- 4) Major Themes/Issues that Emerged:
 - a) Patterns observed in client; your current assessment of the client. include client(s)' strengths and weaknesses;
 - b) How is your current assessment the same as or different from your original assessment;
 - c) Theoretical/practice connections you notice; Indicate the theory or other knowledge, learned in your other courses, that helps you to understand the process and content of this session, e.g., what knowledge of human behaviour or the human condition applies in this practice situation; and
 - d) Defense mechanisms observed in client.
- 5) **Interventions:** Mention significant interventions
 - a) Analyze your interventions; identify skills you used;
 - b) Assess your work - What is your impression of your effectiveness; what were the strengths and weaknesses in your practice during the session? Was the purpose of the session accomplished?
 - c) How did you handle the interview? How did the client respond to you?
 - d) Describe any areas of concern or discomfort raised for you during this particular intervention; and
 - e) What would you change?
 - f) Professional Use of Self: Describe your role in the session, paying particular attention to:
 - i) Your body language;
 - ii) Your feelings/values (did they help or hinder the process); and
 - iii) How did you handle/deal with your own feelings.
 - iv) Plan
 - i) Brief statement of your plans for next session; and

- ii) Long range goals that you perceive are relevant for this client.
- v) Issues, questions or problems
 - i) Indicate areas you want to discuss/explore in supervision; and
 - ii) Include value dilemmas, counter-transference issues and diversity issues.

Structure

One of the ways to benefit from process recording mitigate the difficulties in documenting process records is to use a structured format for incorporating the content mentioned above. Structure process recording, utilizing checklists of assessment and treatment issues provide the student with a comprehensive and organized format to analyze the complexities of social case work interventions.

Different Schools/Departments of Social work or human service agencies have adopted different formats for this purpose. The narrative may be reproduced in a running manner, that is, in paragraphs under different headings, as enumerated in the areas of content mentioned above; or it may be stated in different columns in tabular form (see table below).

Supervisor's Comments	Content - Dialogue	Gut-Level Feeling/Response	Student's Analysis/ Assessment
The field instructor can make comments and give feedback right opposite the interaction or feelings/reactions the student records.	Student uses this space to record interaction word-for-word . This is to include verbal and non-verbal components. Include all others present, communications such as silence, interruptions, and other interactions which may not be part of the planned intervention or interview.	Record how you were feeling as the dialogue, activity, or interaction was taking place. Be as open and honest as you can. Use this to look at your feelings and not to analyze the client's reactions.	Analyze your interventions; Identify skills you are using; Assess your work.

The format used in one of the department of Social Work is as follows:

- 1) Face Sheet – Prepared for each client. It has the following items-
 - a) Name of the agency
 - b) Name of the Client
 - c) Address or other contact details
 - d) Age, sex, language
 - e) Educational, occupational and marital status
 - f) Financial status
 - g) Family composition, position of the client in the family

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- h) caste, religion, region of origin (if necessary)
 - i) Referral Note- when and why the client contacted the agency; who referred the client to the agency/student (the source and reason for referral, date of initial contact)
 - j) Presenting problem or concern
- 2) Report of each session
- a) Name of the interviewee: client/other family member or significant others
 - b) Date and serial no. of the session
 - c) Location (place) where the session took place
 - d) Duration of the session
 - e) Name of the student
 - f) Purpose of the current session
 - g) Details of actual interview, recording both objective and subjective data, giving verbal and non-verbal content (see ‘actual content’ in the previous section)
- 3) Plan for the next session, also description of tasks to be done by the student, client or the interviewee
- 4) Observations, impressions and assessments, including student’s inferences, and evaluations
- 5) Areas/issues selected for discussion with the supervisor
- 6) Supervisor’s Comments

The content that the student is able to record depends on his capacity to recall the occurrences in the interview or home visit as well the ability to objectively analyze the subject matter. It devolves on the student to identify aids to memory and recall, like taking notes or keeping a diary with brief notes about significant facts or impressions and observations. It is also important to record the sessions as early as possible, preferably within 24 hours.

“While appreciating many of the agonies involved in this method, I remain convinced that it affords a veritable gold mine of insights and teaching material. It can lead to precise discussions about the content of interviews, as opposed to sweeping generalities and student conclusions about their findings. It opens the door to teaching about interviewing techniques, again based on the content of what the client is bringing up, rather than on abstractions. And ultimately it has the potential for becoming an active learning tool for the student himself, as he comes to analyze his own process....” (Urdang, 1979)

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

- 1) What do you understand by process recording? Explain process recording as a teaching-learning tool.

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2) Describe briefly the content of a process record.

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3) Why do one needs a structure for a process record? Illustrate by giving example of any one format that you may have used.

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4.4 RECORDING AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Keeping client's information confidential is one of the important principles of social case work. As part of the helping process, the worker needs to gather a lot of information from or about the client. Much of this information is of an intimate and essentially private nature, often touching upon particulars of life experiences which the clients are keen to keep secret. The worker persuades the clients to share these with him/her giving them an understanding that these are vital for problem solving or dealing with their concerns. An assurance that the information revealed by them will be kept confidential helps clients to open up. In fact, applying principle of confidentiality is crucial for maintaining positive working relationship with the clients and winning their trust.

Speaking about private information is one thing and having it documented is quite another. There is a kind of formality in written communication. The moment one sees someone noting down what he/she is speaking, the person at once become self-conscious; the fluency of his/her speech becomes stunted and the responses, at least for some time, become studied. Students or practitioners are usually advised not to take notes during the interviews with the clients as it inhibits frank disclosures. It puts a lot of strain on the students or practitioners to recall all that they heard during, for example, an hour long session. Many clients do not object to worker's recording demographic details, accepting it as a required procedure for securing help. In cases where sessions are taped on video or audio, it requires a lot of effort at rapport building before client's trust is won and assent obtained. The students / practitioners can resort to making short notes immediately after the session

or at the earliest opportunity so as not to miss crucial information or significant observations.

Very often clients are unaware that their sessions with the worker are being recorded. Getting to know of this part of the helping process, suddenly or inadvertently, creates unpleasantness, a sense of abuse, and a breach in rapport. Depending on the client, nature of his need or problem, and procedures of service delivery, the worker may share that he/she will be documenting certain particulars to facilitate the helping / problem-solving process.

It is important to know what *level of confidentiality* is necessary to maintain during the course of the case work process. There are two levels of confidentiality: Absolute and relative. While absolute confidentiality means that social worker does not divulge confidential material under any circumstance; relative confidentiality can be breached under certain circumstances.

Mental health records or report of investigations ordered by courts are legal documents. Record of any activity which is covered under legal provisions can be accessed by various professionals. Information recorded in cases which have been referred by other agencies like schools or residential institutions may have to be shared with the latter. Case records are shared with the worker's supervisor for learning and consultation purposes. From earliest times of social work history, students' records of their work with the clients have been acknowledged as excellent teaching-learning tools. That implies that the records are shared with the student's supervisor. Information culled from aggregated case records is valuable source of data for research to improve practice as also to inform changes in policies affecting services and service delivery systems.

How, then can one maintain client's information confidential? The issue is raised especially in the context of situations which have been mentioned under the heading of relative confidentiality. Also, is there any information which is to be kept absolutely confidential? There can be no clear cut answer in the case of absolute confidentiality. The worker has to use his professional judgment in deciding what information about the client may or should be kept completely confidential, without affecting fulfillment of other demands made on them. Very often, name, contact details and other identifying particulars are withheld from the documents shared with other professionals. The worker has also to decide how the information may be presented to the court so as not to undermine the innate dignity of the client. Case records that are documented with strength-perspective take care of some such contingencies. However, the records have to be authentic, accurate and comprehensive to be useful. The selection, organization and analysis of the material during the recording process, therefore, become crucial.

One essential requirement for maintaining confidentiality is an acknowledgment of this mandate by all those involved in the process of recording, reviewing it or using it for the client's service, whether at the level of human service agency, educational institutions or legal authorities. For example, in an interdisciplinary setting all the professionals involved in the care process should maintain confidentiality, in teaching-learning setting, both student and the supervisor are bound by this principle.

According to Canadian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics (1993), "the obligation to maintain confidentiality continues indefinitely after the social worker has ceased contact with the client."

Ways of upholding client's right to confidentiality

The concept of '*informed consent*' has been invoked in cases where client's information has to be shared with others, either during the current case work process or at the time of referral or transfer. This concept covers the need of securing informed consent for sharing information disclosed by the client even with the close family members. Informed consent means that the client comprehends the purpose for which his information will be shared with others outside the confines of the worker-client encounter and gives his consent for the same. It also implies that the client is clear as to what information and how much of it will be shared and with whom. There are situations where the concept of informed consent may not work – where the client has shared information that may involve a threat of harm to self or others. In case the information is acquired from a very young child, the worker has to determine whether to disclose it to the child's family or staff in a residential institution. Even in cases where sharing of information is mandatory like in court cases, the clients need to know why it is so and what use the information will put to.

Social workers should not release any confidential information contained in documents unless they are sure they are authorized to do so—based on client consent or in response to a court order, for example. It is well, in this regard to acquire legal know-how.

A relatively recent development which may have an impact on confidentiality issue is making *records accessible to clients* (or his significant others if relevant). This means that clients have access to their case records like patients in hospitals have access to their medical reports.

The worker needs to *avoid engaging in unnecessary conversation* regarding clients. For beginners, encounters with the clients are new and often difficult experiences. They may be excited at having skillfully handled a difficult situation in the interview. They tend to discuss client's information with their peers, seniors or even family members – at home (sometimes in the presence of visitors; or in classrooms, canteens and even buses. It is with a misguided notion that recipients of the information are not going to encounter the clients rather may give some advice. The students may consult their peers or supervisors through a proper system which respects client's right to confidentiality.

While using records for supervisory, public education or research purposes, the personal *identifying data can be withheld or modified*.

How the *records are stored* in the agency has serious implication for keeping case records confidential. The worker needs to ensure that records are not accessible to unauthorized persons that no person is overlooking while the worker is documenting the record. Unless the worker is very careful, the information the worker writes may be seen by others. This precaution is applicable to case notes or even journal entries which the worker may write as aids to memory. Store hard copy records in a safe, locked place that is reasonably protected from theft, intrusion, fire, earthquake, water damage and unauthorized access.

Client's information and particulars of worker's activity (service) are increasingly being *stored electronically*. To keep computer records private, the worker has to keep the following in mind:

- i) Protect your computer records by use of password, virus protection, and firewall, and access log.
- ii) Remember that computers crash and burn so regular backups are very important. All computerized documentation needs to have a backup in a secure location. Print hard copies of very important documents
- iii) Understand the limits of e-mail. Know who else may be on the other end of the e-mail. Have informed consent from clients before providing information to them or anyone else via e-mail.

There are instances when genuine research interests have been jeopardized in the name of obligation to maintain confidentiality. Even students are directed by supervisors - agency or faculty - not to record personal data about the client, making the supervisory process ineffective. Both student and supervisors are bound by the same professional ethics including obligation to keep client information confidential. One has to keep a balanced view in the matter and decide judiciously the kind of personal and intimate information to be included in students' records.

4.5 GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE CASE RECORDING

We have seen in the foregoing discussion that social case records are an essential component of social case work practice. Case recording is not only an important practice tool and skill; it reflects the very effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of case work practice. Good records are the primary proof of quality of care; they are rather part of standards of care of and service to the clients.

It is important to follow certain guidelines so that recording remains within code of professional ethics. Guidelines are also relevant because the characters in case records do not speak for themselves. They obtain a hearing only in the translation provided by the language of the social worker. It will be worthwhile that students make note of the guidelines given below

- Stick with the facts. Recorded information should be factual, accurate, objective and necessary.
 - i) Factual - Describe objectively what you see, hear, smell, physical and behavioural changes.
 - ii) Facts and your opinions or inferences should be mentioned separately. Your hunches or opinions should not be used as facts which provide rationale for your decisions.
 - iii) Accurate - Document sequence of all events as they occurred. Be sure to include the who, what, where, when, the time, place, and persons involved.
 - iv) Complete: If you didn't document it, it didn't happen. Document all contacts, telephone calls, patient/family contacts and consultation with other professionals, and collaborations with other care agencies.

v) However, process of selection is important in documenting case work records. Even in process recording, principle of selection is applicable. Experience and training goes a long way to acquiring ability to select significant information from a mass of data collected.

- Recorded information should be clear, concise, and specific.
- Clarity of language: Practitioners should use clear, specific, unambiguous, and precise wording.
- Services provided should be clearly identified.
- Assessment of the client-situation-problem/concern should be necessary component of case records. Mention treatment/problem-solving interventions provided - based on professional assessment that can be supported with evidence. It is very risky to document conclusions with terms or phrases such as “the client was confused” or “the social worker behaved aggressively toward the client” without including supporting details. You, therefore, need to always include explanatory details that support a conclusion or assertion.
- Timely : Records should be written down when the worker’s memory is clear of the events. Few social workers relish the task of documentation, whether for clinical, supervisory, management, or administrative purposes. Documentation takes time and often looms as an onerous task—a necessary evil associated with professional life. As a result, social workers sometimes put off documenting their observations, decisions and actions. Delayed documentation can compromise the credibility of social workers’ claims about what is reflected in the notes.
- Avoiding advance Documentation. In an effort to save time and expedite documentation, social workers occasionally record notes in advance of an intervention or event. Sometimes, however, the planned interventions or events do not occur or unfold differently than expected. The prematurely recorded notes would therefore be not accurately reflect what happened and thus would undermine the social worker’s credibility.
- Do not air agency’s dirty laundry. Details concerning understaffed programs or personal opinions about the competence of a colleague do not belong in a client’s record.
- Ensure confidentiality of records, whether stored as paper files or as electronic data. Some social workers maintain separate records for sensitive information that must be protected and joint files for more routine assessments and summaries of services provided. For example, a social worker who provides an individual counselling session to one member of a couple, as a supplement to counselling the couple, can create a separate file for that client in which private issues, such as a report of struggles with sexual orientation, family violence, or substance abuse, are recorded. In the couple’s joint file, the social worker would record the fact that they sought marital counselling to address “relationship issues.” Maintaining separate records in these circumstances may help the social worker protect each individual client in the event that a dispute arises, for example, a child custody dispute or divorce.

- Records should reflect the worker’s competence, thoughtfulness, decision-making ability, and capacity to weigh available options, rationale for treatment selection and knowledge of clinically, ethically and legally relevant matters. These should also help in identifying the worker’s errors so that the same may be rectified.
- Do not alter records if hindsight brings up some gaps or errors in practice.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1) Write an essay on the issue of confidentiality in case recording.

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2) Explain briefly some of the important guidelines for achieving effective and ethical case records.

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

Documentation in social work (as also in social case work)—whether it concerns clinical, supervisory, management, or administrative duties—now serves six primary functions: (1) assessment and planning; (2) service delivery; (3) continuity and coordination of services; (4) supervision; (5) service evaluation; and (6) accountability to clients, insurers, agencies, other providers, courts, and utilization review bodies. (Reamer) What goes into a record and how it is documented are important considerations. Different formats and structures have been developed by different agencies or social work educational institutions to facilitate Selecting and documenting relevant information about the client-situation-problem complex, professional assessments, and the nature and process of service delivery and its evaluation. As social case recording is a reflection of professional practice, certain guidelines have been documented to ensure ethical and effective recording. Ensuring confidentiality is a requirement of case recording in all practice settings. Writing clear, precise and accurate records is a skill that all budding social workers need to acquire. Rather than perceiving it as a dreaded chore, it will be worthwhile for students to identify ways of augmenting their ability to recall. Utilizing supervisory process constructively is another way of getting over difficulties of expressing in writing their feelings, opinions, inhibitions and biases. If you recognize and perceive the gains recording helps you make in your professional development, you will be willing to put in that extra time and effort in documenting your work with the clients.

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