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# UNIT 4 ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS

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Role of Social Worker in  
Child Care Settings

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you will be able to:

- identify various child care settings;
- describe the need of child care; and
- analyze the roles of social worker in different settings.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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Several initiatives have been taken in India for promoting child development. It is commonly accepted that the foundation stone for development is laid during childhood. Therefore, it becomes very important to provide the best growing environment to a child. Programmes like ICDS, training programmes like mobile crèches, the Vanasthali Rural Development Centre, Mahila Samakhya, Gujarat and so on have been initiated by the Government. Non Governmental organizations also run programmes for child care. An individual interacts with several social systems around him/her. While interacting with these different systems, he/she faces certain problems, which need intervention. In this Unit we will learn how a social worker should deal with these children facing problems and who are in need of intervention. Social workers enhance the social functioning of individuals through maximum utilization of their inherent potential. Believing in dignity and worth of people, they hold that sometimes people can be in a state of disequilibrium due to personal and social challenges. Social workers attempt to prevent and reduce this disequilibrium by linking people to appropriate social systems and resources. They develop expertise in building relationships and facilitating communication.

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## 4.2 CHILDREN IN NEED OF CARE

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There are some children who are in need of help since problems occur in their daily life.

Problems many a times occur in the family between parents and children. Children may complain of favouritism or over-protectionism of parents. Parents may perceive disobedience or emotional outbursts as problems of children.

Problems faced by children in the family system: Some parents are overly protective and overly indulgent with their children. Such children get tied down with their

parents and lose their individuality. In contrast, few parents are indifferent to their children. They may neglect them or reject them. This may alienate and estrange the children.

Some parents verbally abuse their children or punish them physically. This may lead to the child becoming stubborn and aggressive. Some parents exhibit favouritism towards one child at the expense of the other. Some parents resort to an equally unhealthy behaviour of comparing one child with the other and letting down that child. Favouritism and comparison may lead to low self-esteem in children. Too much authoritarianism stifles the independence and autonomy of children. Too much permissiveness leads to indiscipline and lack of self control.

Some parents are too demanding and want their children to become high achievers, rising to great heights in the field of education and successful career options. Such children may be unable to cope with these kinds of stress and develop anxiety and panic which may take the form of severe mental disorders.

Despite all the supportive services for children, some cannot live with their own parents, and substitute care has to be provided for them. They may require such care for a relatively short period of time, for some years, or for the whole of their childhood. This need may arise because their family has disintegrated for some reasons. Parental illness, incapacity or death, marital difficulties, homelessness and illegitimacy are some likely causes. Other children because of their own mental, physical or emotional handicap, cannot be contained in their own homes even if these are undamaged and secure. In some circumstances, a child's handicap and a family's problem interact and combine to produce breakdown.

The incomplete family whether affected by death, desertion, divorce or separation, is inevitably closely associated with child care needs. The working classes, particularly the manual workers, are at special risk. Families that have moved home and are without relatives or friends around them are also vulnerable. Families of unemployed fathers appear to be in particular danger of breakdown. Poor housing conditions are closely correlated with child care need.

**Check Your Progress I**

1) Do you think some children are in need of special care? Discuss.

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2) Is there any child in your vicinity who is in need of special care?

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## 4.3 DIFFERENT SETTINGS AND ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER

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There are some “supportive services” to families which enhance child-parent relationships and strengthen parents’ abilities to provide for their children’s need. Family support programmes incorporate efforts to preserve or strengthen families and maintain children in their own homes. Intact families access the supportive services of family counselling agencies, child guidance clinics and community mental health services.

“Supplementary services” fulfill some missing part of the parental role. Supplementary services are provided when the parental role is inadequately covered. Social workers join with parents to enhance their abilities for parenting.

“Substitutive services” replace parents’ roles in the family. Substituting another family or living arrangement implies that “someone else takes over all aspects of the parental role. Substitute services often require a change in legal custody of the child, a change of guardianship, severance of parental responsibility, or termination of parental rights.

Therefore social workers have to play different roles in different situations. Here we will discuss some of the different services specific to child care and welfare and the roles of social workers in different situations.

### **Foster Care**

By fostering we mean the care and upbringing of a child in a household of which neither of his parents is a member. By definition it is obvious that fostering is an ancient concept: from earliest times it is likely that the orphaned or the abandoned child would have been fostered by neighbours, friends or other members of the tribe. Here we will consider fostering as a more formalized activity – initiated, arranged, and supervised by a properly constituted child welfare agency.

There are formal requirements with regard to the selection and approval of foster parents.

Though the majority of foster parents are married couples, some foster mothers are spinsters, widows or divorcees.

Short-stay fostering makes up a large part of the work where children are placed in foster homes to see them through minor emergencies and crises that are happening in their own families.

The home and material conditions are investigated by the social worker; medical history checked upon as well as references taken upon. There are interviews between the social worker and the foster parents spread usually a fair period of time. First of all the social worker will make an attempt to find out what the foster parents are offering, what their needs are and what their conception of fostering is. The Social worker will then talk about fostering in general and how as a professional social worker he/she views it, and will outline the hazards and difficulties as well as the satisfaction and make certain that there is some realization that fostering could profoundly affect the family and call for quite big adjustments. If there is then a mutual wish to continue, the social worker will attempt to assess how best foster parents’ offer to help can be used. The social worker will try to look at their life experience, how they have tackled difficulties, and she/he will look at their relationship together and as parents.

When a foster home has been found by the social worker there will be visits by foster parents to the nursery or home and often the child’s nursery nurse will go

with him/her on his/her first or second visit to the foster home. In some nurseries foster parents who are to foster young babies are invited to stay overnight in order for the baby to get used to the new way they will hold him, feed him, etc. These are intensely personal matters and to a tiny baby mean everything to him.

The Social worker will have a direct relationship with the child, though with the very young ones her visits will be more to the family as a whole. She will perhaps become a familiar person to the child, playing with him/her and doing things like taking him/her for rides in her car as he/she gets older. The social worker will, where possible, be in touch with the natural parents to discuss and involve them in fostering of their children. She will need to work differently with different varieties of parents. The social worker may have to arrange visits of parents to the foster home or may help a teenager to come out of his/her difficulties.

For any social worker in this field, then, the great art is to assess the situation before even the placement is made. She needs to assess and educate the prospective foster parents and also needs to assess the life experiences of the child, his needs, and his defenses.

### **Residential Care**

In social work there is strong emphasis towards treating the cause of the illness. In the fulfillment of the task of residential care certain elements are basic and obvious: the growing child needs food, clothing and shelter. During the nineteenth century, it was recognized that the child also needed education if in due course he/she was to hold his/her place in society.

For all the changes in thought that time has brought, these five elements provision of food, clothing, shelter, education, and moral training – remain the responsibility of the homes. Recently the task of trying to deal with children's emotions has been added to these five elements.

The recognition that the nurture of the child's emotional well being is the "sixth element" of residential care has undoubtedly led to a revolution and has made the task of the residential worker more skillful, more demanding, and less easy to define. The alternative to placement in a foster home is a placement in some form of residential establishments. In ideal conditions the latter mode of placement might have advantages: carefully selected, skilled, trained professional staff operating with small groups of children would be able to give warmth, the opportunity for identification and that degree of detachment and interpretative skill which the child deprived of his own home seems to need.

But in the present times the conditions are far from ideal. Briefly, there is a gross insufficiency of people of the right temperament and calibre entering the profession of residential child care and remaining in it. For child placed in residential care the group may be too big; it may be understaffed; identification with the permanent member of staff may be difficult to achieve. However we know that there are children who are better placed in residential establishments because placement in foster homes can only add to their problems. It is no use to foster children whose parents are unable to accept the fostering at any level, and who may be able to resume care of them later.

Different residential settings like orphanages, short-stay homes etc. exist for children and young adolescents. Some of the tasks of social workers in residential establishments is

- to find out ways to mend or re-establish the child's home, or to bring about matrimonial reconciliation.
- sometimes it is very difficult for the parents to accept that their child is placed in a home. They are unable to face the sight of them living in a residential

setting. So they do not visit the child. This leads to failure in relationships and the child may grow rejective and bitter. The role of the social worker becomes vital over here. He/she needs to bring harmony and bridge the gap occurring due to this reason.

Individual remand homes cater to either boys or girls; only rarely are they for both. The population is mainly delinquent comprising children who are waiting for a form of supervision, a court reappearance or placements in long-term residential establishment. It is very important for the staff to be able to live and work in harmony to create a happy and lively atmosphere for the child to grow up in.

### **Adoption**

Sometimes children are placed for adoption since their natural parents are unable to rear them. For this the applicants to adopt must notify the local authority of their intention to adopt. When an application to adopt is presented to the court, the court appoints a “guardian ad litem” usually a social worker.

His/her role is three fold:

- to check that consent to adoption has been given under the present law. The parent in fact usually the mother, is asked three times to give her consent; firstly, when she asks an adoption agency to place her child for adoption; secondly when the application is filed by the adopters when the mother signs legal consent formally before a justice of the peace, and finally she will be questioned by the social worker to ascertain whether she really wishes the adoption to proceed. When she signs consent at the second stage she does not need to know the name of the adopters since they are given a serial number by the court.
- that the order if made, will be in the interest of the child. The social worker verifies all the statements and documents and interviews all concerned.
- thirdly that the applicants are suitable to adopt this child. The court, through this social worker, wants to ascertain that the adopters are suitable, that they are medically fit (a medical certificate being required) and that this placement is in the child’s interest.

The responsibilities of the Guardian Ad Litem are very closely linked to those of the Court and emphasize their importance for assessment and recommendations to the court's decision making. Guardians Ad Litem and the Court have the same overriding duties – to consider the need to reduce delay, to have regard for matters set out in the welfare checklist and to consider all available options. It is the responsibility of the Guardian Ad Litem as it is of the Court to give paramount consideration to the child's welfare. The appointment by the Guardian Ad Litem of a solicitor to represent the child should provide complimentary pairing of legal and social work skill aimed at ensuring the voice of the child is heard in proceedings affecting that child and that the best interests of the child are served. This is a new interface for both social work and the legal profession requiring ongoing reflection and consideration of the process. It is incumbent on both the Guardian Ad Litem and the solicitor to ensure the best representation possible for the child. This can only be achieved by an openness on both sides to constructive criticism and a willingness to develop skills where required.

The Guardian Ad Litem’s involvement with a child in specified public law proceedings begins usually at the time of application and should end when a final order is made. The negotiation may be to do with resources and ensuring their availability through the care plan. It may involve the encouraging of reluctant, suspicious parents to undertake the assessments planned by the Trust or perhaps to

at least look at facilities on offer to the child-this can obviously require mediation also. Many of these processes take place away from the court scenario and are based on a respect for individual roles.

Sometimes problems occur when the child is not told of the true situation, for e.g. when grandparents adopt but the child is made to believe they are his parents and that his biological mother is a sibling. The social worker's role becomes important here. After the adoption has been made, a social worker pays regular visits to observe the development of the child in the adoptive home. Social workers have to resolve any conflict arising in the relationship between the child and the adoptive parents.

**Check your progress II**

- 1) Comment on the role of social worker in residential care.  
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- 2) How do you think a social worker can help a child who is being adopted?  
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**School Social Work**

School social work helps children who have difficulties making a satisfactory school adjustment. These difficulties may be expressed as truancy, failure in school subjects, and timid, fearful, withdrawn, or over-aggressive behaviour. Other indications may be stealing, using narcotics, fighting, sullenness, inability to get along with other children or to accept the authority of the teacher, or demands for special attention. The maladjusted child is often a serious handicap to other children in the class. The social worker usually observes the child in class first and then discusses his or her problems with the teacher and principal. The social worker also consults school records, the school nurse, the attendance or truant officer, and above all, the child. Sometimes a discussion with the child changes his or her attitude. The school social worker, in most instances, contacts the parents after the interview with the child in order to ask for the parent's help in improving the child's adjustment in school.

The school social worker interprets the methods and philosophy of the school to the parents, which helps the school to establish constructive parent-school relationships. He or she interprets the school programme to parent-teacher associations, civic groups, and the community and participants in faculty meetings, school committees, and group projects. The school social worker seeks to maintain an independent role, so that the child does not identify the social worker fully with school authority.

The school social worker's functions vary in different communities. Whether he or she should also serve as a truant or attendance officer is questionable, but the execution of the compulsory school attendance laws is not limited to legal means. It is also debatable how much school social workers, teachers, and school counsellors may effectively prevent the development of mental disorders.

Practical experience has shown that the school social worker is frequently successful in solving behaviour problems and disciplinary questions. Sometimes he or she is able, through the use of other community resources, group work agencies, and family welfare services, to improve the conditions in the family that caused the child's failure or maladjustment in school.

The school social worker should have professional training in social work and an understanding of the educational process. He or she should be able to work with children and adults and to operate in a team relationship with the school faculty. He or she also needs a sense of humour, imagination, flexibility, and a good knowledge of community resources.

### **Juvenile Homes**

Since India achieved independence in 1947, a great interest has been evinced in the field of child welfare. One reason of this could be the Constitution of India, which gives special protection to women and children. In 1986, the Juvenile Justice Act was enacted. One of the main objects of this legislation was to bring the operations of the Juvenile Justice System in the country in conformity with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, 1985. It was also intended to lay down a uniform legal framework for Juvenile Justice so as to ensure that no child under any circumstance is lodged in jail or police lock up. The Act envisages separate machinery required for the protection, treatment, development and rehabilitation of Juveniles coming within the preview of the Juvenile Justice System.

The juvenile, is a person of age 17 or below who had come in conflict with the law. This enactment safeguards basic interests of children and takes care of their development needs. To deal with officially identified delinquents and criminals, every democratic society has created a system of correctional agencies. These agencies have been given the task of administering the penalties assigned to delinquents and criminals. These agencies are expected to protect the community during the offender's period of supervised status by controlling his behaviour. Furthermore, they are expected to help the offender, so that he can return to normal status, better able to be a constructive member of the community.

To meet the requirements of the aforesaid laws, most of the states in India have created short-term and long-term institutions. The short term institutions are called by various names such as remand homes, observation homes, reception homes and auxiliary homes. These short-term institutions provide immediate shelter and provisional care to the transients in the legal process. The long – term institutions have a higher and a bigger objective of working towards permanent rehabilitation and aftercare. They are known by varying names such as industrial schools, borstal schools, reformatory schools, children's homes, fit persons institutions, bal mandirs and vigilance homes in different states. These institutions have home, facilities for liberal education and provide food, clothing, medical aid, in – door recreation and vocational training to their inmates falling in different age for varying lengths of time. The prime function of these Juvenile Correctional Institutions is to re-educate and train the child to become responsible well-adjusted citizens.

It should essentially be a treatment facility with an integrated treatment programme. Child is expected to learn self-discipline, to accept more responsibilities and act and react in a more socially acceptable manner. The major function of correctional

institutions is to prepare inmates for social, economic and emotional rehabilitation. In order to achieve this goal, institutions provide various services and conduct activities such as residential services (food, clothing and shelter), health services, education and vocational training, recreation and discipline, social and psychological services.

The social worker's specific main tasks in correction are as follows:

- 1) Act as the officer of the court or other quasi-judicial body to investigate and report about the offender and his/her social situation, contributing the results of such social observations in an appropriate and meaningful way to the making of legal decisions.
- 2) Supervise the client's social activities in such a way that violations of the conditions of his/her status and his/her success in meeting conditions are perceived and can be reported. The general control plan provided in the status is individualized according to the client's need for constructive social control. Controls are provided by the social worker in such a way that the client is supported in viably conforming behaviour and inner growth toward self-control is stimulated.
- 3) Help the involuntary client to handle the stress produced by the law enforcement and correctional process constructively. Motivates oneself to ask for and use help in the modification of delinquent and criminal behaviour. The social worker needs to modify his/her behaviour in the process and take a responsible part in the social change of the correctional institution and in the development of the field of service of the correctional institution, contributing from his/her professional knowledge and experience to the determination of policy.
- 4) The social worker helps the offender to change his/her offending behaviour therefore his/her can relate constructively to others and become socially acceptable. This is done through working with the individual to help his/her to change through better understanding of himself/herself and by tapping his/her own strengths and resources; and through modification of his environment to bring about a more healthy social climate in which he/she has to live. The social worker encourages the offender to talk about his/her problems, to feel about them, and to come to an insightful understanding of himself/herself, accompanied by socially constructive behaviour.

The social worker role also includes:

- a) advising and helping the juvenile and his/her family cope with the situation;
- b) visiting the juvenile;
- c) supervising the juvenile, among others;
- d) submitting the report on the progress of the juvenile. The reports may give details that could be used by the court, to determine the success or otherwise of the probation.

The tasks of the social worker in correction include four particular aspects:

- Investigation for the purpose of securing information about the client's failure or success in meeting the obligation of his/her legal status;
- The use of controls to modify the client's behavior;
- Acting as a legal authority in the client's life with responsibility for value change; and
- Correctional decision making.



All these are important in working with offenders, especially when helping them to adjust better to society. The correctional social worker's most important task is to change the values and behaviour of the offenders, so that they begin to accept the values of the particular community. Therefore, the social worker's aim is to help the offender, not to punish him/her. Though the social worker faces many challenges such as, lack of cooperation from the police (usually the junior officers), lack of cooperation from the home/family (either out of ignorance or contempt for the juvenile), lack of cooperation from the juvenile himself/herself, lack of logistics for SWO to go round, inadequate staff (Social welfare officers, Social Workers etc).

The goal is to utilize the knowledge and skill of the profession in a corrective manner, to rehabilitate the offender, to help him/her to help himself/herself, so that he/she can return to and become a part of his/her society and lead a constructive life.

### **Children with Disabilities**

The birth of a disabled child can be a traumatic and shattering event for a family. That is a dominant way in which both professionals involved and researchers have treated the subject. As a consequence, it has usually been assumed that along with appropriate information and practical assistance, parents also need skilled help to overcome the loss, grief and bereavement they feel as a consequence of failing to produce a healthy child.

A disabled child is vulnerable and likely to be abused in different ways like: neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse. All of this can happen to disabled children as much as any child, and they may occur for different reasons in some circumstances. There are some additional forms of abuse that may be specific.

There are, thus, at least three areas where a social worker has an important role to play : in providing emotional support when needed, in providing practical assistance and resources, and in reducing the negative impact that dealing with an unfeeling professionalized bureaucracy may often have. These need to be considered separately.

The main role of social workers is to help the parents to grieve in a healthy way. The social worker's role mainly rests with the parents of the disabled child , if they are living with their parents.

Sometimes the situation may produce anger and frustration within parents at the way in which others in the society are reacting towards their children. There arises a need of emotional support to the family and the social worker can be helpful in adjusting with the social attitudes. Just as the social worker may be called upon to help a child develop herself/himself identity through perhaps assertiveness skills, so too she/he may be called upon to support the parents in a similar way. By moving from the individual to the social model, what the social worker does to refocus her/his intervention on the help needed to become aware of and deal with disabling barriers.

What is also clear is that social workers must adopt a flexible approach and not base their interventions on preconceived ideas or theories of how families cope. Thus, in providing emotional support, the appropriate place to start is with the coping strategy of the family itself, and while it is important not to see some reactions as pathological and others as healthy, it is also of great importance and the social worker should ensure that any action of the family members is not disabling to the child. This means that the social worker will often be working in a situation of uncertainty but he/she should not attempt to impose a professional decision upon a personal problem.

A second area in which families with a disabled child may need help is in the area of practical problems. The main practical problems such as suitable housing, a reasonable income, reduction of the limitation on mobility that may be caused and perhaps an increase in time and energy spent on the “normal” child care tasks that all parents are required to undertake.

It can be part of the social worker’s job to help in this organizing and adapting: in making sure that the family is receiving all the financial benefits it is entitled to, contacting organizations like the family fund where necessary, and negotiation with other agencies such as housing departments.

In case of institutionalized children social workers conduct their tasks along with other professionals like medical practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists etc. Their main task thus becomes capacity building of the children, providing emotional support and helping the child to lead a less dependent life.

**Check Your Progress III**

1) How can a social worker intervene in problems faced by children in school?

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#### 4.4 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit we have discussed about why it is important to have an organized child welfare practice and what are some of the different areas where a social worker can be of help to a child in need. By now you might be able to identify a child in need of intervention and what type of service is needed for the child. You have studied about adoption, foster care, residential care, Juvenile homes and what roles a social worker plays in these settings.

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#### 4.5 KEY WORDS

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- Overindulgent** : indulging or involving in excess
- Substitute** : person or thing put in place of another
- Sullenness** : morose, gloominess
- Truant** : child who does not attend school
- Preconceived** : forming of an opinion beforehand
- Delinquent** : a person who offends law
- Pathological** : condition caused by mental or physical disorder.

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