



# Understanding the Complexity of Service to Minors



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## Understanding the Complexity of Service to Minors

Social workers, especially those who work with minors, face a myriad of dilemmas when it comes to effectively providing the best counseling and advisory services because those clients are minors. Some of the dilemmas faced apply to important areas like informed consent, confidentiality and decisions about how much of self-determination of life decisions their client is able to take part in.

Clients who are minors face several unique obstacles. Some of those obstacles include being underage and not being mature enough to make important decisions for themselves along with various legal and other obstacles. Social workers feel the force of these unique challenges especially when they need to work along with the parents and appointed guardians of minors.

Social workers always strive to provide the best service to their clients regardless of age. Performing service in the most ethical way is always the goal and making decisions for young clients must always be done in an ethical way. It is so important for social workers to be aware of the complexity of providing services to minors when their goal is to act in the best interests of clients who are minors.

## Capacities Where Social Workers Will Be Working Primarily With Minors

There are many positions in social work when working with minors is the main focus. These positions include:

*Child Protective Services Social Worker (or CPS Social Worker)* - Addressing legal issues in cases where there is evidence of abuse in the home or elsewhere in the child's life. Addressing discipline issues, delinquency and school problems. Helping with such things as court hearings and offering expert advice when it comes to issues like custody.

*Foster Care Social Workers* - Counseling parents who are dealing with child raising issues and helping them to find good courses of action that will work best in the child's and family's favor. Assisting those foster parents in a job that can be tough when dealing with discipline issues, school issues and problems that arise due to past abuse.

*School Social Workers* - Working in the capacity of a liaison between homes of students and the schools, clinics, family service clinics, doctors, courts and protective services. Counseling students who are having problems in classrooms and problems with school attendance issues, misbehavior and truancy.

*Family Service Workers* - Counseling families who are in the midst of such problems as unemployment, drug use, mental health issues, homelessness, poverty and disabilities. Counseling those families to help them find the best resources that can help them in their unique situation.

*Youth Services Specialists* - Working with at risk youth trying to keep them from becoming involved in drug use, from joining gangs and helping to give advice to protect them from teenage pregnancy. Helping youth who are exhibiting behavior consistent with mental health problems. Guiding youth to the right programs that can help them navigate these difficult issues.

### **Additional Duties Of Social Workers Assigned To Working With Minors**

Social workers who work primarily with children are required at times to be a liaison between government programs, specialized agencies and families and children. They will also need to know how to counsel minors appropriately. Social workers need to be aware of and follow guidelines and best practices already in place when dealing with issues facing minors who are in their charge.

Social workers who work with minors will also need to have extensive knowledge of helpful programs within the community. They will need to be able to coach the minor and possibly their parents or guardians on how to apply for help through these agencies. They will need to know where to go to apply for help and the rules that need to be followed to get the help needed.

It may seem to be a simple thing, but social workers will also need to know proper ways of filling out and keeping paperwork on file for minors. There are special challenges inherent in dealing with the issues facing minors, and paperwork will have to accurately reflect the correct best practices for counseling and working with minors. Legalities come into play that must be followed, especially when preparing the required reports that deal with a child's unique situation.

## **Social Workers Must Have Knowledge in Many Areas When Working with Minors**

The education received by most social workers is broad-based and encompasses a variety of fields. When working with minors, there are extra areas social workers must be educated about to offer the best service to their clients and families. Social workers who work with minors must know more information in the following fields:

*Psychology* - Additional lessons need to be learned for a social worker to effectively work with children, and can include other courses in child psychology. Children are not simply small adults. They have special psychological issues that pertain only to them. Social workers must understand ways that children learn and grow, how they socialize, as well as differences in personalities, abilities and interests.

*Anthropology and Sociology* - Special considerations need to be taken into account especially in urban areas where minors in need of social services often come from many different backgrounds, cultures, social groups and varied ethnic groups. Often, sensitivity to these cultural differences and customs must be taken into account when working with a minor.

*Legal Issues And Laws* - Social workers must have a working knowledge of court operations, laws, rules of various agencies and knowledge of the democratic process in general, especially as the laws and rules apply to clients who are minors.

*Counseling and Therapy Services* - Knowledge of what therapies are available to help in specific situations, with emphasis on how diagnosis should be made in minors. Social workers will also need knowledge of agencies that can give help as needed by minors and will need to know specific rules that are applied to extending these services to minors.

## **Unique Abilities And Skills Required When Working With Minors**

Most of the abilities and skills required for social workers working with minors are similar to those required for working with other age groups. However, since children often cannot and are not allowed to make decisions for themselves, social workers are charged with helping to find the best solution for the child to difficult problems while allowing them to keep their sense of dignity and autonomy.

Often times, the social worker may be the only person standing between the child and their safety. Other adults in the child's life may not be capable of making the best decisions for the child, so the social worker becomes largely responsible for seeing to it that the child is taken care of in a safe way. Skills and abilities needed to work with children in this capacity include:

*Sensitivity to the Needs of the Child and to Problems* - Knowing when something is wrong in the child's life or when something may go wrong is an important part of providing effective service to children.

*Ability to Come up with Potential Solutions to Complex Problems* - Knowing the child's unique situation and being able to assess those situations and to be able to suggest potential solutions.

*Critical Thinking Ability* - The ability to effectively use logic and the skill of reasoning to look at solutions to problems and decide if the solution will be an effective answer to the client's problem.

*The Ability to be an Active Listener* - A skill that is important in all aspects of life, but is especially important when working with children and families is the ability to really listen to what is being said. This includes understanding what is being said, verifying what the person is telling you by repeating it back, and being able to process what was said without interrupting the person talking. This is a skill that is not often easy to develop, but is so important when working with children, adolescents and families.

*An Ability to Practice Confidentiality* - Being able to keep details about a child's situation private is an ethical and sometimes a legal part of the job. The minor in your care is depending on you to keep details of their situation private.

*Being Clear When Speaking and Speaking Effectively* - Another skill that is imperative to have mastered when working in often intense life situations. The ability to convey your thoughts in an intelligent and respectful way and in a way that others can understand becomes so important when working with children and young adults, their families and various agencies.

*Being a Service Oriented Person* - Having the true wish to make a difference in the lives of children and young adults who often come from homes that are less than ideal.

Having a passion and a real belief that helping others is the most rewarding thing a person can do in life is a desirable trait and skill to have, especially in the often sensitive issues surrounding working with children.

*Effective decision Making and Using Good Judgement* - This is one area that is often difficult to teach, but is a skill that is so important for social workers to have when working with children and families. Using other skills, like critical thinking and comprehension, go hand in hand with knowing how to effectively make decisions and in using proper judgement when making those decisions. Decisions made about a child's life situation can have a tremendous impact on that child's future and on their family's future.

*Reasoning Skills Including Inductive And Deductive Reasoning Abilities* - Being able to see the entire problem and possible solutions and to make correct judgements based on abilities of deductive and inductive reasoning. Being able to find similarities between events and being able to piece together information to come up with a good conclusion.

### **Other Skills Social Workers will Need When Working with Minors and Families**

There are other important skills that are sometimes difficult to teach in a classroom situation and are usually gained through experience in the social work field while working with children, their families and assorted agencies. The best goal is to be able to come up with a solution that will be best for the child and will allow the child to live in and be surrounded by a safe and nurturing environment. These skills include the following:

*The Ability to Negotiate with People and to Resolve Conflicts* - Being able to offer that voice of reason when people are often in highly emotionally charged situations and they are unwilling to listen to reason. Being able to effectively negotiate solutions that will be best for everyone involved. Conflict resolution skill is so important, especially in situations when custody of a child is in question.

*Dealing with Angry and Unpleasant People* - Often dealing with families and those close to a child can be an emotionally upsetting and heart wrenching thing. Being able to keep a calm demeanor and to be seen as an anchor in a difficult situation is not an easy thing to do, but is desirable when working with minors to help them through

situations affecting their families and other relationships.

*A Good Ability to Remain in Control* - Being able to control ones emotions and think in a reasonable way even when circumstances become heated. Often exchanges can occur that are not pleasant to be involved in and knowing how to diffuse a difficult situation goes a long way towards being able to effectively help minors. Having the ability to walk away if necessary and regain composure and to keep ones composure can be difficult to do, but is so important when working in highly volatile situations.

*Ability to be Concerned for People and to be Socially Oriented* - Having the wish of really making a difference in the lives of children who are sometimes in overwhelming and terrible circumstances. This wish is often what keeps social workers going even through the most difficult times. Being able to see a child through hard times and the rewards seen when that child grows up to be a good and decent, contributing member of society in spite of the challenges they faced in life is one of the biggest rewards of the job of working with children.

*A Good Attention to Detail with a High Standard of Integrity* - Two of the most important skills needed especially when working with children is an uncanny ability to pay attention to the smallest details and to see possible solutions where others may not see them. It is also important to keep up a high level of the utmost integrity when dealing with minors and their families. Always being honest with clients and handling all dealings with them in an ethical way is one of the most important requirements of providing service to minors.

*Cooperation Combined with Flexibility* - Being able to have a good-natured demeanor even when dealing with hostile and angry people and knowing how to have a give and take, cooperative relationship with clients and others social workers must work with when dealing with minors. Keeping a pleasant attitude even on difficult days goes a long way towards making the job more rewarding and more tolerable on those hard days. Keeping an attitude of flexibility combined with an openness to change also helps.

*A High Level of Dependability* - In situations where a child is living with abuse, neglect and a myriad of other issues, they need to know that their social worker assigned to their case is the one person they can always depend on to constantly be helpful to them and looking out for their best interests. Social workers sometimes

are the person standing between an innocent child and a terrible environment and that child is very dependent on the strength and abilities of their social worker to help them to find the best answers to difficult problems affecting their life. Chances are, that child may have had very few people they could really depend on in their life and this becomes crucial to having the most helpful relationship.

*A High Level of Stress Tolerance Combined with Persistence* - A minor is depending on their social worker to help them even through the toughest times and situations. A high level of tolerance for stress is a necessity along with the ability to persevere even through the toughest situations.

### **Reaping the Rewards of Effective Service to Minors**

Social work with minors can be extremely challenging, and can also be one of the most rewarding things a person can ever undertake in a lifetime. Being a champion for the youngest and most vulnerable members of our society is a very noble occupation and one that is not to be taken lightly.

There are so many complex challenges that come up when supplying effective social work solutions to minors and their families. It is so important to be aware of these complex challenges. It's also important to have effective steps in mind for offering the best service possible.

Society today is more complex than ever before, with so many more diverse problems and obstacles that are just a part of everyday life today. A person who can reliably be there for a child dealing with these problems becomes a lifeline for that child and for their family. Helping that child, and their family, to traverse the issues affecting them offers a real sense of accomplishment at the end of a day.

To see a child grow up to be a productive and valuable member of society and to know the obstacles that child has overcome to succeed and to meet their goals is such an amazingly rewarding thing. That is what keeps social workers going even through the most intense and difficult situations. The pride one feels knowing that they have been able to help a child to overcome horrible obstacles along their path to becoming the wonderful adult they have become is often a wonderfully gratifying thing to go through.

## **It is so Important to Have Thorough Knowledge of the Complexity of Service to Minors**

To give the best service to minors, it is so important to be knowledgeable about all the intricacies that naturally go along with working with minor clients. Knowledge of child development is important. Understanding family dynamics is crucial.

Minors who are adolescents face a whole new set of challenges. Often they are changing physically which adds to the difficulty of working with them. Adolescence is also a time of hormonal changes and emotional changes. Adolescents are sometimes treated as adults with regards to the decisions they make. At the same time, they are still treated as children who have very few rights.

In addition, in society today there is social pressure and peer pressure which adds to the complexity of providing service to minors. Technological advances make life better, but at the same time they complicate life. Minors often do not realize the consequences of their actions, especially when using things like social networking websites. They do not have the maturity and sometimes do not have the forward thinking ability to know the potential results of their actions.

Adolescents often can act compulsively, reacting to emotional stimulation instead of thinking rationally before acting out. This is where the help of a social worker becomes so crucial. Helping minors to be aware of the consequences of their actions can help them to make better decisions.

Having a better knowledge of the complexity of providing services to minors can help any social worker to be more effective in their work and can help them to effectively counsel and guide their minor clients. The goal is to offer the best service possible to make sure children grow up to become responsible and contributing adults. The rewards of working with minors are plentiful and exciting when one knows all the complexities of working with minors.

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