

Social Work

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Definition of Social Work & Standards of Practice

Definition

"Social Work promotes social change, problem solving and human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well being. Social work draws upon theories and knowledge of human behaviour and social systems and intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

The above definition was agreed upon by the President of the International Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers in 2001. It is a definition, which is seen to be applicable to social work practitioners and educators in every region and country.

Social Work in its various forms, addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction. Social Work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of the individuals, families and communities they serve.

Christian Social Work embraces the above definition but brings to it the added dimension of the grace of God, which permeates the social work activity and makes available to all who are open to it, God's healing and wholeness. Prayer then is a critical part of Christian Social Work.

A simpler social work definition reads, "empowering clients to make realistic choices to attain positive goals, while at the same time ensuring the safety and well being of all involved in the process."

Social Work Standards Of Practice

All social workers must be able to practice in a competent manner.
The following standards reflect competent practice.

1 Ethical Practice

The social worker works in accordance with the International Federation of Social Workers' Declaration of Ethical Principles.

2 Cultural Practice

The social worker understands and values culture and ethnicity, and is able to deliver a service which is sensitive to, and honouring of each client's culture.

3 Purposeful Relationships

The social worker establishes an appropriate and purposeful working relationship with clients, taking into account individual differences and the cultural and social context of the client's situation.

4 Empowerment of Clients

The social worker empowers the client's positive participation in the working relationship.

5 Client's Personal Control

The social worker's practice assists clients to gain control over her/his own circumstances.

6 Use of Self

In working with clients, the social worker uses her/his own personal attributes appropriately.

7 Knowledge

The social worker has knowledge about social work methods, social policy, social services, resources and opportunities, and acts to ensure clients have access to these.

8 Accountability

The social worker only works where systems of accountability are in place in respect of his/her agency, clients and the social work profession.

9 Effective Advocate

The social worker is an effective advocate for change at community and government level on behalf of his/her clients.

10 Responsiveness of Agency

The social worker constantly works to make the agency and the social work system, responsive to the needs of those who use them.

11 Professional Membership

The social worker uses membership of the Social Work Profession to influence and reinforce competent practice of a high standard.

The Role Of The Social Worker In The Area Of Care & Protection Of Young People

An agency working in the area of the Care and Protection of Children and Young People must ensure the safety, well being and interests of the child or young person are given priority in decisions made for that child or young person.

The social worker must have the knowledge and skills necessary to work in a positive way with all who are involved with a child or young person (family, wider family, friends, neighbours, community groups, government departments) to ensure that the child or young person is safe and loved within a family environment and receives good health care and education.

Social work is all about empowering clients to make positive choices to achieve attainable goals, which will enhance their well being. Within the Care and Protection Sector, the social work role essentially becomes one of building relationships with adult family members (parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts) and the children and young people involved, and to empower the family to make choices to assure the children or young people are safe and loved within a family environment to which they belong.

The only exception to this role would be when a family is unable or unwilling to provide for the safety and well being of its children and young people and the social worker has to make, in consultation with a supervisor, a decision outside of the family, to ensure the safety and well being of the children and young people. Protection of children and young people must always take priority over any other consideration.

There are many parts to this social work role. For example:

- an assessor - gathering quality information from family, community and government resources.
- a planner - identifying the issues and empowering family and others in the response they will make to these issues.
- a protector - ensuring the safety and well being of children, young people and others.
- an advocate - speaking out on behalf of children, young people and their families.
- a co-ordinator - co-ordinating, facilitating family and casework meetings.
- a teacher - teaching parenting, budgeting and other life skills.
- a shepherd/support - supporting clients in practical ways, being a caring, listening supportive presence in times of turmoil and stress.
- a counsellor - counselling individuals and families with the safety and well being of children and young people in mind.

- a liaison person and transport provider - keeping children and young people and their families in contact, taking children to appointments.
- a recorder - writing reports for file, for courts, for schools, and other agencies, and for family conferences and reviews.
- a referrer - referring children, young people, or families to more appropriate agencies or specialists.
- a resource - providing information, advice to clients on family and community resources and programmes.
- a prayer - praying for the safety and well being of children, young people and their families.

In carrying out this role, the social worker must work in accordance with recognised international standards adopted by the agency, and receive regular supervision. This supervision must contain elements of accountability, teaching and personal support, all designed to ensure children, young people and their families receive a service of high standard, and the social worker is working in a professional, compassionate and fulfilling manner.

A Christian social worker has a unique opportunity to be a presence of God in stressful family situations. Through the social worker, God's peace, love, hope, wisdom and forgiveness can flow, bringing healing and wholeness to the family. This will happen only if the social worker each day, commits him/her self, their ministry and the families they are serving, to God. Prayer then, is an essential ingredient of the social worker's role in ensuring the safety and well being of children and young people.

Code Of Ethics For All Staff Employed By The Open Home Foundation

Section 1. General Principles

As staff of Open Home Foundation we are called to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our strength, and with all our minds. We are to honour God by our lives and to be open to him loving others through us. Our special gift is to be a channel of God's healing love to needy youngsters and their families.

We are called by God to care for His children so that they know they are loved, they are safe, that they belong. We are to welcome and love children and families in the name of Jesus.

We are called to assist natural and foster families to function in such a way that children in their care have no doubt that they are precious to their families and to God. It within strong, committed, caring families and family groups that children have the best opportunity to experience love that is unconditional.

In our work we must reflect the sanctity, the uniqueness of each life, from conception to death and beyond. We must strive to protect life, especially when it is vulnerable to abuse, to stress, to deprivation, to illness. Every human being is made in the image of God. Each person is unique and is precious in His sight.

We acknowledge that without exception, the uniqueness of each person is expressed within a cultural context, and that all people, without distinction are made in the image of God. Consequently we must accept and respect people of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, responding to them and their culture in such a way that they know they are precious to God and to us. Through our service we are accountable to God, to the children and families referred to us, to our community and to the Board of Trustees of The Open Home Foundation.

We are called to serve. The calling is a serious one. As individuals within Open Home Foundation and as an organisation we must place ourselves last and be the servant of all. Through our service, in love we are to be witnesses to children, to families, to our community of the healing love of Christ, and be a challenge to others to come and follow Him.

Section 2. Principles relative to our clients

We must see our clients as children of God, made in His image. Our relationship with them must be based on acceptance, compassion, respect, honesty and a desire to assist each person make choices which will enable them to realise their potential and to live a dignified, responsible and fulfilling life.

Each person has physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs, which have to be met if the unique talents they have been given are to flower. Our work should free our clients so that they can develop their talents and their giftedness for their fulfilment, and the enhancement of our community and the glory of God.

When we assesses that our skills, knowledge and resources are not sufficient to meet the needs of our clients we must be prepared to refer our clients to agencies or others who are better equipped to help them. Such referrals, though, can only be made with our clients' permission.

Our clients have the right to determine the direction of their own lives and to take responsibility for their decisions. When their decisions are seen to be outside of God's order, in love and with respect, we should be prepared to challenge their decisions in an appropriate way. When their decisions or actions place children or others at risk of hurt we are obligated to take action to protect the children or other persons.

We must respect the individual differences of our clients and in particular have sensitive regard to their cultural heritage. With each client we should make the effort to gain an understanding of their world perspective and his or her values and beliefs, and to base our response on this understanding.

Our clients have the right to a relationship of confidentiality, and a responsible use of information. The collection and sharing of information shall only be related to the achieving of an agreed goal. We cannot share information without our clients' permission unless a client is not able to be responsible, or someone is liable to be endangered or abused because the information is withheld.

We should be prayerful on behalf of our clients, frequently lifting them, their needs and desires to God and asking Him to bring good out of their situation.

Section 3. Principles relative to our colleagues, caregivers and Open Home Foundation

As a staff we are committed to each other in Christ. We are to be gentle, humble, compassionate and forgiving of each other. We are called not only to share the burdens of families and clients under stress, but of each other. We are to encourage and support one another so that the various gifts we each bring to the, work are released to be better used in the service of God and of our clients.

We are to be loyal to each other. If differences arise we must seek to settle these in a way, which leaves the dignity of those involved untouched. Any criticism must be expressed in a responsible, caring manner and through appropriate channels.

We have much to learn from each other. As we listen to and experience the various skills and knowledge and practices we each bring to the work we are enriched and become better equipped to perform our own tasks. As a team we have a responsibility to develop our knowledge and skills and we should constantly be seeking ways to do this.

We should seek occasions to pray together and for each other. We acknowledge that above all it is through prayer and our fellowship in Christ that the bonds of love among us will be shaped and strengthened and that we will be given the resources necessary for our work.

We should at all times faithfully represent Open Home Foundation, its principles and policies to our clients and to the community. Any disagreement with these principles and policies should be discussed internally through the recognised and appropriate channels within the organisation, and ultimately, if no agreement can be reached, with the Board of Trustees.

The Open Home Foundation is an evolving organisation dedicated to serving children and families in need. The Open Home Foundation looks at its staff to be constantly seeking better ways of serving our clients and encourages the putting forward of ideas and developing practices which will promote this.

Section 4. Principles relative to ourselves

We must be Christ centred with prayer a natural part of our day's activity. We must be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit on our lives. We must not compromise our Christian stance.

We must have an understanding of ourselves. We must know who we are, where we have come from and where we are going. We should take strength and energy from our Christian, our cultural, and our family heritage. In particular our value system should be clear and based on scripture.

We should be aware of our strengths and our weaknesses, and work within the limitations of these. A times this may require us to refer or delegate work. We should seek quality supervision and other support, which will enable our strengths to flourish and make us, and our clients, less vulnerable to our weaknesses.

We have an obligation to develop our knowledge and skills in the interests of our clients. We need to acknowledge that in this work of serving others, we can never be satisfied with what we know and what we do. Our work must be professional in its quality, and in its development.

We must take responsibility for the care of our families and ourselves. We should not meet our clients' needs to the detriment of our families. We must recognise that we too have physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs and see that these are met. Within the demands of our work we should live balanced lives getting adequate exercise, rest and relaxation. While we are called to be servants, we can only serve well if we have the energy and the health to do so.

Section 5. Principles relative to other agencies and organisations

We should develop relationships of trust, respect and co-operation with agencies and organisations, whose aims and methods we can support. We acknowledge that the more agencies share resources and work in together the more likely the needs of clients will be met. We must do this, though, without compromising our Christian perspective. Our Christian witness should be strong.

Along with other agencies and organisations we should work to encourage the development of quality policies and practices to the betterment of our clients.

We should be open to learning from other agencies and organisations. We can learn from example, from discussion, from attending courses, seminars and conferences. There is much that we can learn in this way that can enhance our own work.

Section 6. Principles relative to our community

The agency works within the community and through its own and official channels, is accountable to it for the quality of the service offered. We should be known in our community as a reliable, trustworthy, compassionate and professional organisation, and as worthy witnesses to God whom we serve.

We should strive to see that our community functions in a way that meets the basic physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs of each person, and encourages the potential of each individual to be developed to its fullest. There will be times when we find that community standards and practices are contrary to our Christian values and detrimental to our clients. On these occasions we must be prepared to challenge, and to educate, to bring about the changes we consider necessary for the overall well being of our clients and our community.

Care And Protection Social Work With Birth And Extended Families

The family usually comprises a group of people who live together, which includes one or more parents, and their children. The children can be the parents' biological children, their adopted children, or children who through an arrangement, such as foster care have formed a psychological attachment to them.

In the wider sense though, the family consists not only of this group but includes all those who are related to them through birth, marriage, or other legal process, e.g. grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, great grandchildren. In this sense the family comprises a wide group of people who are descended from common ancestors. It is in this wider group that the smaller unit of parents and children confirm their biological, spiritual and cultural inheritance, and develop a supportive, caring network around them.

The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife, father and mother, are called to give of themselves in love and in the gift of life, but supported and encouraged by members of the wider family. The family is the community in which children belong, are nurtured and protected, and educated by parents and by other relatives.

It is in the family that children experience the priceless gift of unconditional love which enables them in their turn to grow into caring, responsible adults with their God given potential in full flower.

It is in the family that children experience and learn the values of acceptance, tolerance, forgiveness, and care of each other, but especially of the unborn child, the young, the sick, the aged, the dying, the disabled

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It is in the family that children learn the great truths of life and especially that their life comes from a God who loves them dearly.

It is in the family that children experience and learn the richness of faith, hope and love, lived out in selfless lives.

It is in the family that children learn about the value of truth, honesty, integrity; how values and behaviour flow together as one.

It is in the family that children learn to be responsible for who they are and their behaviour.

It is in the family that children best learn male and female roles and how to relate to members of the opposite sex.

It is in the family that children perceive their identity and learn to treasure their biological, spiritual and cultural inheritance.

It is in the family that children learn how to celebrate the special moments of life, of achievement and togetherness, and to grieve and to support each other in times of death, of broken relationships, unemployment, and other occasions of loss.

While the above is an idealised statement of families and their value never the less it reflects a truism that it is within families that children have the best opportunity to be protected and nurtured and able to develop their potential as men and women of God. It is for this reason that in providing care and protection for children and young people, the social work effort must be focused on ensuring that each child belongs to a committed, loving family. This, after all is the birthright, the God given right of every child, that they belong to a family where they know they are precious, safe and loved. Put in this context, social work with children and families is a high calling and demands in response, a service of excellence.

Supervision: Policy

Supervision is an important factor in ensuring the agency delivers a quality service to clients. When it is well conducted, it plays a significant role for good, in service delivery; social worker education and support, and social worker accountability.

Definition

Supervision involves planned, regular periods of time that the social worker and supervisor spend together using as a focus the casework for which the social worker is responsible. The aim of the process is to ensure quality service to clients, and the support, teaching, empowerment and accountability of the social worker.

Supervision is Mandatory

All social workers must receive regular, professional supervision. Such supervision should be agreed upon by management, and be of a standard which enhances the quality of client services, the professional practice of staff, and ensures staff are accountable and do not work alone.

As a consequence, supervisors of agency staff must have a proven expertise in the area of service offered by the agency, along with the ability to both empower staff in quality performance as well as holding them accountable to agency policy and to recognised standards of professional practice.

Method of Supervision

(A) Formal Supervision

This occurs when the social worker and the supervisor meet together at pre-arranged times which are free from distraction. The social worker should come prepared for supervision, ready to discuss a particular case, or cases, with the issues for consideration clearly identified. The supervision should be conducted in accordance with agreed conditions and standards and a recognised supervision model. (One such model is attached as an example.)

It is good practice for the social worker, the supervisor and the director, to each sign a written agreement as to how supervision will be conducted. Such an agreement usually includes the frequency, time, location and duration of supervision, the expectations of the three parties concerned, as well as a statement which involves confidentiality but at the same time ensures, when necessary, management are informed of poor practice, or when issues of safety or illegality are involved, or when personal circumstances of the social worker are hindering performance. (An example of a written agreement is attached.)

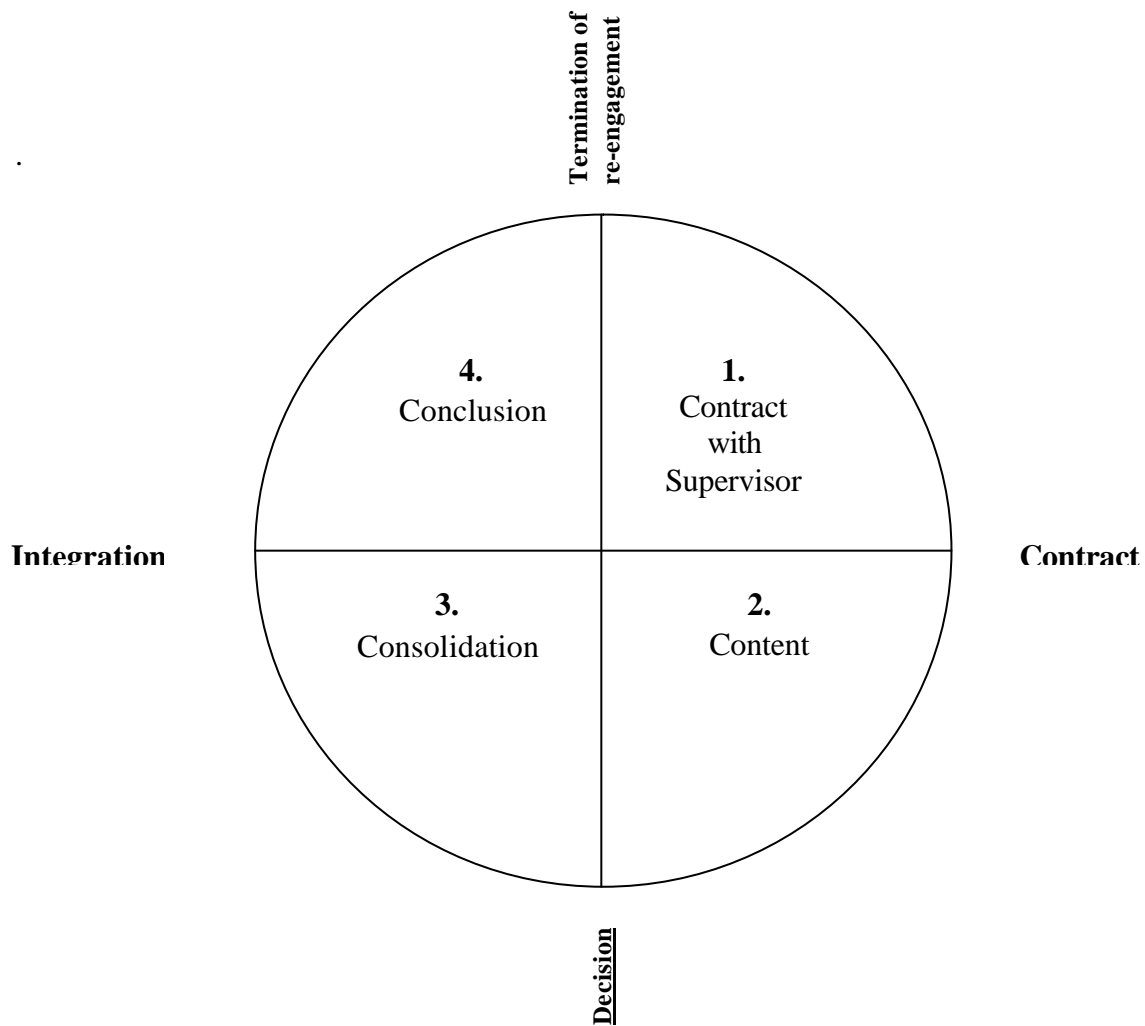
(B) Informal Supervision

The social worker must have access to a supervisor on a day by day basis to discuss important case work issues which arise (particularly issues of safety of children and young people) but also other issues pertaining to the well being of clients, which require immediate attention. Informal supervision, while it is part of the supervision process, is never a substitute for formal supervision. Both are necessary to ensure quality, professional practice.

A basic principle for social workers is to consult, and not make important decisions affecting clients on their own. The ready availability of both formal and informal supervision ensures that social workers do undertake the consultation process.

SUPERVISION MODEL

There are various supervision models. Beneath is one such model which reflects the supervision process.



1st Quarter – The social worker and the supervisor agree on the case to be discussed, and the concerns arising from the client’s situation.

2nd Quarter – The social worker and the supervisor discuss the situation and agree on the action the social worker will take in response.

3rd Quarter – The social worker and the supervisor work together to ensure the social worker is not only clear about the decisions made, but is empowered and supported to act upon them.

4th Quarter - The social worker and supervisor agree to either finish their supervision time or re-engage to discuss another casework matter.

Supervision - Procedures for Directors/Managers

Activity	Steps	Hints
Organise supervision times:	a) Set aside a specific time (usually one hour a fortnight) for staff member and supervisor to meet. b) Use an appropriate supervision model to make best use of the time available	This is in addition to providing day to day opportunities for staff consultation with senior staff. see attached model
Supervision objectives:	1. Encourage skills in a) Knowledge b) Organisation c) Preparation d) Communication e) Planning	a) Policies, principles and expectations of the agency b) Planning an effective time schedule. c) Preparing for interviews, case conferences, family conferences, court appearances etc. d) Research, analysis and recording written information; oral communication (telephone, reception, etc.) e) Plans of care, of social work involvement, with clear and realistic goals and tasks.
	2. Encourage personal, psychological involvement and process in casework: a) Developing effective relationships b) Understanding family and environmental influences. c) Understanding world view and value system	a) with individuals, family groups, colleagues and other agencies. b) which have helped create the worker's personality and those of his/her clients. c) from which the worker operates

Self Help For Social Workers

Social work, while a fulfilling and rewarding task, is demanding. It can be physically, emotionally and spiritually draining.

To avoid exhaustion, social workers must take care of themselves.

The following points are important in managing the energy and enthusiasm required for the role.

1 Actively seek to develop the knowledge and skills required for the task of a social worker in a child and family support service. A high skill and knowledge level will give you confidence and help you avoid unnecessary and energy consuming complications.

2 Make regular supervision a priority. Attend supervision well prepared, and ready to discuss issues, which are of concern to you.

3 Whenever possible, plan your day with a determination to do the most difficult phone calls, or visits, or other tasks, early in the day. Putting off a difficult phone call is stressful in itself.

4 Make prayer a vital part of your day. Invite God into everything you do, and always look to Him for the wisdom, the compassion, the energy you need to do the task.

5 Arrange a prayer partner for yourself, and ask this person to pray with and for you, and the families to whom you are ministering.

6 Keep yourself safe. Cover your travel and your visits with prayer. If you feel vulnerable going into a particular situation, take someone with you, having advised your Director of where you are going. If you are visiting alone and begin to feel at risk, make your excuses and leave.

Male social workers need to be wise so as to not put themselves into compromising situations with female clients. Female social workers too, must be wise and careful in their interaction with male clients.

Remember a vital principle of social work - don't act on your own but consult with your supervisor and Director.

7 Know your signs of stress. Everyone has them. When you recognise stress in yourself, do something about the cause. You are responsible for yourself.

8 Be aware of stress factors such as death of a family member, shifting house, illness and the like. If you are experiencing a major stress factor, discuss this with your supervisor and Director and make the adjustments necessary to help you cope.

9 Have friendships and interests outside of your work. It is healthy to switch off from social work and become involved in other things of interest; this is refreshing.

10 Eat and sleep well. Social Workers need to be fit and alert, so a good diet and regular

sleep are essential.

11 Follow a regular exercise programme. Social work is a sedentary but emotionally draining job. Exercise helps to release tension, while at the same time giving new energy to the body. Exercise will also help you to sleep well.

12 Take holidays as they fall due. Social workers need a change in routine and rest, as well as much as anyone else.

Dedication is an essential ingredient of being a social worker, but this dedication has to be from the perspective of being able to serve in the long term. A burnt out social worker is no good to anyone, whereas an experienced, dedicated but regularly refreshed social worker will go on blessing people for years to come.

Keeping Yourself Safe as a Social Worker

1 Have a prayer partner for yourself who will uphold you and your work, in prayer.

If you are visiting in difficult or stressful circumstances, arrange for your prayer partner to pray for you and the people you are visiting.

2 Take care on the road. Attend a defensive driving course. Be especially careful driving if you are tired or anxious or weather conditions are bad.

3 If you are visiting a home and you become ill at ease about what is going on and what could happen to you, make your excuses and leave. Next visit bring another person with you, or arrange to hold the meeting in a safer venue.

4 If you plan to visit a home where there are known aggressive people, take another person with you. Don't knowingly go on your own into a potentially dangerous situation.

5 Similarly, if at any venue you are holding a meeting there are likely to be present, people who could be angry and aggressive, make arrangements to ensure that all present, including yourself, are in an environment which will preclude aggressive behaviour.

6 Female social workers need to be wary of meeting male clients outside of an office situation on their own. It is best for such meetings to occur in a public place, such as a coffee bar, where other people are around. If you have serious concerns, always take another person with you.

7 Male social workers need to be particularly careful of meeting with women or teenage girls on their own, to avoid allegations of inappropriate sexual or other behaviour. Again, it is advisable that such meetings should occur in a public setting, or in the company of another person. In an office setting it is advisable the door be left opened.

8 Social workers are also vulnerable if they transport a client or clients of the opposite sex on their own. Wherever possible, have another person in the car, or if this is not possible, advise your office or home by phone when you are leaving a place, and phone again when you have arrived at your destination. If you have to deviate on the journey, ring in to explain and give times.

9 If possible, have a cell phone with you if you are visiting at night or going into a situation in which you could be vulnerable.

10 Always discuss any concerns you have with your Director or supervisor. In all circumstances, be prudent - do not take unnecessary risks, and have a prayer covering.

Contract For Supervision Agreement

between.....social worker

.....Supervisor

.....Director/Manager

1 .. will attend supervision with.....

(social worker's name)

(Supervisor's name)

2 Supervision will happen at intervals, at a time and place which both parties agree to.

3. Supervision sessions will be approximatelyhours in duration.
(length of time)

4. Both parties agree to be on time for supervision, and to come prepared for the task.

5. Both parties agree the supervision session will be free from distraction or interruption

6 It is the social worker's responsibility to bring all clients and their situations to supervision within the period of
..... *(Length of time)*

7 The supervision process will be in accordance with an agreed model of working and will focus on:-

- a. social work quality
- b. social worker education
- c. social worker support and empowerment
- d. social worker accountability.

8 It is the responsibility of the social worker to inform the supervisor if:-

- a. any client's behaviour is dangerous, illegal or destructive, especially if the client is at risk of harm to self, to children or to others.
- b. the social worker is experiencing any major stress or health issues.
- c. the social worker is receiving counselling or other kinds of therapy or supervision.
- d. the social worker experiences thoughts and feelings about a client which work against the social worker delivering a professional and compassionate service.

9 The supervisor will ensure the supervision process is confidential. However, exceptions to this commitment to confidentiality may apply if the following factors are present.

- a. client or others' safety.
- b. illegal and/or destructive behaviour of clients.
- c. social worker safety and well being arising out of either client or work circumstances, or personal/family circumstances.
- unsatisfactory social worker performance.

The supervisor has an obligation to inform the Director/Manager of these issues if the social worker is not prepared to do so as an outcome of supervision. The supervisor will inform the social worker if this course of action is to be followed.

10 The Director/Manager will review this supervision agreement with the social worker and supervisor in

signedsocial workerDirector

.....supervisordate

Standards Required For Social Workers Providing Social Work & Foster Care Services To Families

- 1 The social worker understands how to engage and empower families, especially by being a good listener, showing respect, and acceptance, and by assisting the family to identify problem issues and a possible resolution to them.
- 2 The social worker understands family dynamics and is able to do a family assessment using the ecological model, which can be assisted by the use of genograms and ecomaps, timelines and other assessment tools.
- 3 The social worker understands theories of attachment, bonding, loss, grief, child development, and family cycles.
- 4 The social worker is able to discern special needs of individual family members, such as health, addiction, disability, psychiatric, emotional disorders.
- 5 The social worker is able to find out what has been tried in the past, and to use this knowledge on which to plan with the family for the future, utilising family strengths.
- 6 The social worker understands and values culture and ethnicity, and their significance in the lives of children and families. The social worker must be able to deliver a service which is culturally sensitive and competent, a service that seeks to honour the culture of a family. The social worker must also understand and appreciate his/her own culture.
- 7 The social worker understands factors which place a child at risk, and is able to monitor a child's safety and assess risk of abuse by a birth family, kinship family, foster family, adoptive family, or others. The social worker has the ability to ensure the safety of children and young people.
- 8 The social worker understands the risk and impact of foster care drift, multiple placements, separation, loss, lack of continuity of important past relationships, and is able use supervision, consultation and advocacy to remove or lessen the risks.
- 9 The social worker understands the importance of family continuity and shows an ability especially when a child is in foster or kinship care, to maintain and enhance significant relationships, and when possible to develop new ones.
- 10 The social worker is able to empower families with choices and hope for better things through clarifying what a family needs to be able to do, to keep a child at home, or within the wider family.
- 11 The social worker understands principles of case planning, and is able to empower the family to own and identify with the plan. The social worker, with the family, is able to draw up a plan which establishes clear goals and tasks and which links the family with wider family and community resources, and builds a network of love around the family
- 12 The social worker is able to work directly with the family by being a person of integrity, modelling good communication skills, providing effective social work and counselling

services, teaching life skills and empowering parents to learn new ways of managing behaviour.

13 The social worker understands the dynamics of team work and is able to work effectively as a team member to provide a variety of services to the family. In this, the social worker must be able to empower birth family, wider family, foster carers and professionals to work together for the best interests of the family.

14 The social worker understands the special needs of parents as they deal with difficult issues and is able to plan accordingly. The social worker needs to understand the process of alcohol, drug recovery, psychiatric illness, depression, grief, physical illness and use appropriate time frames.

15 The social worker knows what constitutes quality foster care and kinship care practice, and is able to establish safe and nurturing family environments for children and young people.

16 The social worker understands the importance of a foster child maintaining family relationships and is able to work with legal systems to ensure the principle of continuity is carried out. The social worker is able to facilitate quality access arrangements between the foster child and child's birth and wider family, always seeking to build quality relationships within the family, and wherever possible, to have the foster child returned to the family.

17 The social worker knows and understands the legislation which governs care and protection work and can effectively use the law to assist children and families. In addition, the social worker must be able to present appropriate applications, plans and reviews to Court and write accurate and focused reports to support these applications, plans and reviews.

18 The social worker understands how and why organisations and systems work and can advocate for individuals, families and groups of people who are powerless to do so. Especially the social worker understands the importance of putting forward the needs of children and families, and is able to do so in verbal and written communication.

19 The social worker knows, understands, and has a clear commitment to the agency code of ethics, and seeks always to work within the context of this code. The social worker understands his/her own value base and how these values influence his/her practice.

20 The social worker recognises the need for ongoing professional development and will seek opportunities to develop skill and knowledge level. The social worker has a commitment to work at all times under supervision.

21 The social worker knows that it is only as an instrument of God that his/her work can be deeply and lastingly effective, and therefore will come before God in prayer, day after day, seeking His wisdom, compassion, hope, and peace to share with those in need.

Casework Recording And Reporting

Purpose of social work recording

Recording is a basic part of good social work practice. The purposes for recording are as follows:

a) Case Recording

This provides an ongoing picture of the nature of social work and involvement with a client, progress in achieving social work goals and the eventual outcome.

b) Continuity of service

When a client comes to the attention of the agency, that entire office serves them, not just by an individual social worker. If an individual social worker is sick, absent, on leave or resigns unexpectedly, the service must be able to continue. Records are an essential factor in service continuity

c) Quality control.

Records are a way of determining the quality and quantity of services being provided. They enable supervisors and management to check that services are being carried out to an accepted standard.

d) Future reference

Records are invaluable when, years later, a youngster or a family member wants to trace events which happened while involved with the agency.

e) Planning and Court work

Proper records are of value in case planning, and are essential for reporting to court or any other authority or agency.

Standards for casework recording

Records should contain:

- identifying information (names, dates of birth, addresses)
- case plans
- all investigation details
- all assessment details
- all decisions or conclusions reached and why
- details of any referrals, made to whom, and when
- details of all actions taken
- details of any agreements entered into, for example foster care agreement
- status of child or young person
- details of any Court orders made
- thorough notes of all casework activity (dates, times of visits, and to whom and why).

Records must be:

- concise
- factual
- accurate

- logically written and clearly set out
- written immediately
- able to be shared with clients
- goal orientated
- free of labels for people and comments about them.

Reasons for High Standards

- good social worker supervision and accountability are dependent upon quality records
- the client's right to have accurate up to date information held on agency's file, and to which they can have access at any time.
- quality professional practice is based on good information and records
- helpful reports to courts, or other agencies flow out of accurate and up to date information.
- good records reflect agency respect for clients.

Note Taking

a) Notes should be made during interviews or phone calls. If this is not possible, they must be made immediately afterwards.

b) Notes taken at the time of the interview/phone call can be used in Court and so they should be:

- accurate
- as comprehensive as possible
- dated
- timed
- signed
- name printed.

NB Recorded notes made some time after the interview/phone call are more likely to contain errors in fact and judgement than records made immediately after the interview/phone call took place.

Responsibility for quality of records

The quality of the data paper or computer files is primarily the responsibility of the person taking the action, even if they delegate the task to a typist or support person. The social worker must carefully read and review notes and reports for accuracy.

Quality control checks

Directors/Managers are ultimately responsible for ensuring client files contain all relevant information, are accurate, up to date and reflect respect for the client. Case work recording should be an integral part of social worker training, at induction and refresher courses.

Periodically, files should be checked at random to ensure standards are being met.

Crisis Intervention Model (Naomi Golan)

This model complements the ecological model and the task centred model. It is a useful model to use when working with children and families, or other clients.

There are times when families are referred in crisis. The social work intervention has to happen immediately, not allowing time for the ecological model and the task centred model to be put into practise in the desired way. The emphasis of the social work intervention is on dealing with the immediate crisis, so as to bring some balance and peace back into the situation, thus enabling other work to be done with the family. The crisis intervention model provides a framework for this to happen.

Every person, every family, every group has a crisis at some stage in their life. The crisis can be anticipated, (e.g. marriage, moving house) or unanticipated (death, illness, unemployment). One or more of these events can start a crisis where tension and stress arise. These can be especially so in people for whom the crisis comes on top of other unresolved problems, (e.g. unemployment on top of separation and addiction). The crisis places people in a vulnerable state when they lose their capacity to deal with what is happening for them. It is in this situation that the crisis intervention model can be helpful especially for those whose failure to overcome difficulties in the past, quickly pass into a vulnerable, anxious, stress filled state.

The principles of practice behind the crisis intervention model are:-

- good rapport and communication skills.
- ability to identify, assess risk and safety and keep people safe.
- ability to identify major problems which may be more than the presenting problem.
- ability to enable clients to express and deal with feelings and thoughts.
- ability to provide meaningful support to clients.
- ability to help clients explore possible solutions.
- ability to draw up an immediate action plan with clients, with goals and tasks outlined.
- ability to provide effective follow up to decisions made.

The model is worked through in three phases. These are outlined as follows:-

Beginning Phase

a) Focus on Crisis

- here and now
- client expresses feelings, in relation to the crisis
- the crisis (triggering events) is discussed
- assess nature of client vulnerability and disturbance.

Middle Phase

a) Data Collection

- get missing information
- check inconsistencies with client.
- select, reflect main themes (e.g. loss, anxiety, fear, inadequacy).

Ending Phase

a) Termination Decision

- check how things are now, in relation to the crisis
- discuss finishing or moving on to further social work intervention.

- b) Evaluation
- reflect account of crisis, circumstances, feelings
 - reflect problems and difficulties
 - reflect safety issues
 - agree on priority problems
 - agree on problem or problems to be first addressed

c) Contract

- draw up plan with client to resolve problem(s)
- Define in practical terms, goals and tasks for client and for worker.

- b) Behaviour Change
- check how client is coping in problem area
 - check short-term goals set are realistic
 - check agreed tasks are realistic for both client and worker
 - decide on any other goal and tasks

- b) Review progress
- summarise progress
 - review main themes
 - review goals and tasks completed

c) Plan Future

- discuss present situation
- discuss client's plans
- agree on further social work involvement, or agree to finish.

The crisis intervention model can be effective in enabling a client to resolve an issue causing stress and anxiety and to be open to ongoing social work/counselling involvement. It is good to understand that for the majority of people, crises do pass and that in itself the crisis may contain some good. It is a fact that people in crisis are usually more open to assistance than they are at other times. This openness, caused by the need for relief from the tension and anxiety, means that clients are willing to learn ways of solving their difficulties. Success in this regard can mean that the problem solving technique is retained and used again when similar difficulties arise in the future. Crises can give an opportunity for a social worker to build a trusting relationship which forms the foundation on which to deal with other problems in the client's life.

MODEL INTERACTION

Crisis referral

e.g. teenage runaway

Assessment

Ecological Model

Planning

Task Centred Model

Crisis Intervention Model

Assessments

The ecological model provides the essential framework from which to carry out quality assessments. In itself it is only a framework, and still requires the social worker to be skilful and knowledgeable in using interview techniques and tools.

In this regard, social workers must have well trained listening skills, as well as being familiar in the use of tools which can help the assessment process. Examples of such tools are the genogram, the ecomap, time lines, and risk estimation system. These tools all help to gather information within the ecological framework, and all require the ability to listen sensitively and well.

Good Assessments are based on the following principles:-

a) Prayer

The social worker prays for God's discernment and wisdom throughout the assessment process.

b) Purpose Explained

The purpose and process of the social work assessment is clearly explained to the client.

c) Ecological Framework

The social worker uses the ecological framework as the basis for gathering information and understanding the issues raised.

d) Humility - Sensitivity

The social worker is humble, sensitive, non judgemental in his/her involvement with clients, while at the same time exercising wise judgement.

e) Listening Skills

The social worker is empathetic and a good listener able to reflect back to clients their issues and situation.

f) Wide Source of Information

The social worker uses the ecological framework to gather information from a wide perspective, which includes family, wider family, community groups and government departments.

g) Cultural and Spiritual Influence

The social worker is aware of the influence of cultural and spiritual factors in the lives of clients, and is able to place his/her assessment within this context.

h) Interviewing Techniques and Tools

The social worker uses a developing range of tools (such as genograms) to assist the assessment process.

i) Factual, Nonjudgemental

The social worker's assessment is based on fact, using judgement, objectivity and information gained from a wide perspective. It is not based on presumption, unsubstantiated personal opinion or emotion.

j) Outlines Issues

The social worker uses the information gathered from a wide perspective to clearly define issues which are causing difficulty for the client.

k) Safety

During the assessment the social worker is able to discern issues of safety for clients and others, and to respond appropriately within a time frame commensurate with the concerns identified.

l) Supervision

The social worker uses supervision to help clarify and confirm the issues identified.

m) Concise, Factual Records

The social worker is able to record the assessment in a concise, logical, factual and accurate manner. The assessment must be devoid of subjective opinion unless this is identified and owned by the writer.

n) Immediate Recording

The social worker records visits and conversations as soon as is possible, with the understanding that immediately recorded interviews are more likely to be accurate than those which have been delayed, are recorded after a lapse of time.

o) Respect

The social worker, both in the assessment process and in the recording, shows respect for people, their values and their culture, with the understanding of the uniqueness of their heritage and current situation. Files must be entirely clear of derogatory or condescending comment.

p) Ongoing Assessment

The social worker is aware that good assessments are ongoing assessments as it takes time to get to know clients' situation in depth, and to keep up with the fluid nature of clients' circumstances which are part of every day living.

q) Planning

The social worker is able to use assessments as the basis for involving and empowering clients, and significant other people in a planned response to the issues identified.

r) Plans

The social worker is able to empower clients, and others, to draw up and own plans which have clear goals and tasks outlined to resolve the identified issues.

s) Consultation

The social worker, in both the assessment and planning process, will be committed to consultation with his/her supervisor and/or manager, on the understanding that it is dangerous to work alone. Good social work decisions arise out of the gathering of quality information, and consultation.

“Never work alone. Consult – consult – but not for ever.”

Principles Of Effective Interviewing For Both Individuals And Groups

Every person has a need to be:-

- accepted and loved for who they are.
- able to express their feelings and thoughts, especially in times of difficulty or stress.
- deeply listened to and understood.
- given a sympathetic and wise response devoid of judgemental statements.
- trusted and empowered to make their own decisions and choices.
- kept safe from the implications of their own or others actions.
- treated in confidence during discussions if this is their wish, provided no one is at risk or harm.

Successful interviewing reflects the needs outlined above, with the principles of the process flowing from them.

1) Prayer

The interviewer comes to each interview humbly, having committed the process to God, seeking to listen and respond with His heart and ears, and tongue.

2) The Environment for the Interview

Whenever possible the interview is held in an environment in which the client is comfortable, and which allows the interview to proceed without interruption or distraction.

When an interviewer is sensitive and careful as to where, when and how the client is interviewed, he/she gives a message of respect, acceptance and value to their client. This message is reinforced if the interviewer sits at the same level as the client and does not have a desk or some other symbol of authority coming between them.

The dress and attitude of the interviewer too, is critical in empowering the client to share openly about their situation. Sensitive manner and appropriate dress of the interviewer shows the respect he/she has for the client, and helps to build trust between them.

3) Interview Standards

It is important that the interviewer begins the meeting by drawing on the following principles.

- (a) The interviewer is committed to being transparently open and honest
- (b) The interview is commenced in a way that is culturally appropriate for the client, e.g. prayer, acknowledgement of ancestors.
- (c) If the interview is cross cultural and the client's main language is not the language of the interviewer, that the interviewer arranges to have a translator present. (It can be difficult to express deep feelings in a second language.
- (d) The client is given the opportunity to have a support person or persons in the interview
- (e) The interviewer explains who he is, the role he/she carries out, and the organization he/she works for.
- (f) The interviewer and the client agree on the purpose of the interview.

- (g)The interviewer is clear about what will happen to information shared by the client. This explanation should include the priority of confidentiality; that information will be shared with others only with the client's permission; that an exception to this would be if it was apparent the client or others are at risk of harm and are unable or unwilling to change the situation, and steps need to be taken to ensure the safety and well being of people. In this case the interviewer would still inform the client of what action he/she plans to take.
- (h)The client is aware of how the information that has been given will be recorded, where the file will be held, and how the client can have access to it.

4) The Uniqueness of each person

The interviewer sees every other person as unique. No two people are the same and therefore no two people can experience exactly the same problem. This principle avoids the interviewer deciding before hand what kind of person the client is, and the kind of difficulties they will be experiencing. Everyone's inheritance, experience and situation are unique, and therefore there can be no pre suppositions about people and their difficulties.

To be effective in the use of this principle, the interviewer has to be aware of his/her own special inheritance and uniqueness. He/she also needs to have a good understanding of his or her own worldview, and be able to respond sensitively to the uniqueness of each client.

The interviewer also needs to have a wide knowledge of human behaviour across the sexes, ages, abilities and cultures, and to appreciate the vast range of what is considered normal behaviour and thinking; behaviour and thinking which may be outside that considered normal by the interviewer, but which is never the less held to be so by the client.

5) Listening

The interviewer uses well practiced listening skills which are entirely focused on the client, and enables the interviewer to gain relevant insights into the client's personality, worldview, community, family and personal circumstances. Good listening empowers the client to share about circumstances, thoughts and feelings which are relevant to their difficulties.

Listening is not only hearing the words spoken, but is also observant of tone of voice and accompanying body language. All of these convey a message from the client – a message that has to be acknowledged and reflected back to the client to be clarified as having been heard and read accurately by the interviewer.

Quality listening allows the interviewer into the world of the client and to be empathetic with what the client is experiencing. For the client, this is a liberating experience as they realize that someone understands in a non judgemental way what is happening for them.

Quality listening skills are an essential feature of all aspects of the interviewing process and need to be practiced continually.

6) Expression of Feelings

Good listening during an interview allows the client to identify with feelings and allows the client to identify with feelings and to express them. This acknowledgement of feelings is an important step for a client in understanding and coming to terms with what is happening to them. Everyone has a need to express feelings. The expression of feelings has a beneficial result. For example, when anger is expressed it is reduced; when joy is expressed it is

enhanced. It is especially important that hidden negative feelings like anger, resentment, guilt, fear, doubt jealousy and the like, are brought out into the open during the interview.

An interviewer will only be able to acknowledge and respond appropriately to client feelings if he/she is aware of, and is in control of, their own feelings. An interviewer cannot allow client feelings to affect his/her own feelings: and in an objective way be able to hear and respond to the client's feelings. The interviewer must put aside their feelings.

It is helpful, during an interview, to see feelings as neutral, as neither good nor bad. The aim is to get feelings expressed and acknowledged, rather than judged.

7) Controlled Emotional Involvement

This principle relates to the interviewer's sensitivity to the client's experience, the words and feelings associated with the experience, and the appropriateness of the interviewer's response.

For this to happen well, requires all other factors which may be impacting on the interviewer's mind, to be removed. This means that the interviewer must know him or her self thoroughly, and have resolved experiences, thoughts and feelings which otherwise could become entangled with those of the client. During the course of the interview, the interviewer must be able to put aside their own personal issues and thus be free to focus on those of the client. If this is not possible, the interview should not take place.

A controlled emotional environment though, does not mean that an interviewer should be emotionally distant from the client. Clients need to experience the interviewer as committed, warm, caring, as well as insightful and helpful. What they do not want to experience, is an interviewer who allows their feelings to get mixed up with the client's. This is a recipe for disaster, and it is this which must be controlled by the interviewer.

An interview is a one direction process. The interviewer is there to listen, to understand, and to empower the client. The client's needs are paramount, not the interviewer's. An interview is not the place for an interviewer's needs to be expressed and met.

8) Acceptance

Every person needs to be accepted for who they are. This is especially so during an interview. The interviewer must convey an attitude which shows that the client is a person of worth, dignity, made in the image of God, and therefore free to talk about anything which is of importance to the client.

There is a difference between acceptance and approval. Every person is entitled to respect because they are made in the image of God. This does not mean though, that irresponsible, dangerous, destructive, illegal behaviour of the client is also acceptable. The interviewer can accept the person, show respect, and build a relationship of trust, without approving behaviour which is outside the boundary of responsible behaviour.

It can be empowering and freeing for a client to feel accepted for who they are. This acceptance may be a new experience for them, and the start of the process of accepting themselves and dealing with their issues.

The interviewer can though, consciously or subconsciously, put up barriers to acceptance. These can be caused by:-

- a) confusion between acceptance of a person and approval of behaviour
- b) insufficient understanding of the wide range of normal behaviour, taking into account cultural, genetic and historical factors.
- c) bias and prejudice.
- d) indifference, lack of respect.
- e) allowing personal feelings to become mixed up with client feelings, which take the focus off the client.
- f) unwarranted assurances that all will be better, which deny the client's reality and can be experienced as down putting.
- g) over identifying with, and taking responsibility for the client's situation, which again can be experienced as down putting. (There can be reasons though, for reasons of safety, when an interviewer does have to take responsibility for action, particularly when there is risk of death or injury).

When people feel accepted, when they believe that it really is all right to be themselves during an interview, then wonderful things start happening for them.

9) Non judgemental

Interviewers must be aware of themselves and understand the cultural, spiritual, genetic, educational, historical and relational factors which have shaped their personality. As part of this, they need to be aware of their values which guide their lifestyle.

The value base of interviewers, although usually not verbally expressed, is observed by clients from the demeanour and conduct of the interviewer and is a point of reference for them.

While an interviewer should be clear and sure about their values, they must not use this base to be judgemental of clients. Such an attitude is hostile to a positive and purposeful working relationship developing between the two. If a client feels judged, guilty and a failure it becomes difficult for them to re-engage with the interviewer to work on problem areas.

However, being non judgemental, does not mean that an interviewer should not use judgement. It is an important skill of interviewing to evaluate the messages given by the client and to determine appropriate responses. A crucial judgement interviewers have to make at times is about being non judgemental of the person, but using judgement in response to the attitudes, standards, feelings and behaviour expressed.

10) Self Determination

Clients make progress in their circumstances when they are empowered to take responsibility for themselves and their situation. The interviewer's role is to clarify problems and goals, and to empower the client to make choices which will bring about the desired changes.

Clients must own their difficulties and the choices they make to improve the situation. The interviewer cannot do this for the client. Instead, the interviewer must hold to the important principle of client self determination; that it is the client who in the end determines what will be done. If the decisions are imposed by the interviewer, they will not work, for the client

will have no commitment to them. However, if the decisions are of the client's choice it is highly probable the client will invest the time and energy necessary to bring about the change needed, particularly if at the same time they experience the support and the encouragement of the interviewer.

II) Confidentiality

Trust is a critical element in the interview process. A client will not share deeply of themselves if they doubt the interviewer will keep the information to themselves. A breach of this principle is destructive as the relationship of trust is broken.

At the beginning of the interview, the standards by which the interview will be conducted must be understood by both parties and agreed upon. This is particularly so as regards the purpose of the interview, and how the interviewer will respond to the experiences shared by the client. In this matter, the interviewer must be transparent and a person of integrity with words and actions going together.

It is common for an interviewer to explain that all information shared is confidential, unless the client has given permission for the interviewer to share relevant information with a person or persons who could assist in the resolution of the difficulties. It is good practice to record who will be contacted and what information will be shared with them, with the signature of both parties attached. This is a good safeguard to keeping the relationship of trust intact.

There is an exception to all the above. When the interviewer, using judgement, and if possible, supervision, determines that there exists serious risk of injury or harm to the client and/or others, it is appropriate for the interviewer to disclose this information to relevant people so as to ensure the safety and well being of the client and any others affected. Similarly, the interviewer may have serious concerns over destructive and/or illegal behaviour, and again, consider it appropriate to refer the matter to others.

The above exception is particularly relevant when the safety and well being of children, the aged, the infirm, or the disabled, is involved, but it equally applies to the safety and well being of all people, and not just those who appear especially vulnerable. If it is dangerous, destructive or illegal, and is outside of the client's ability or willingness to change, the interviewer has a responsibility to ensure that something constructive is done about the situation, and at times this will mean breaking confidentiality. However, the interviewer does have a responsibility to inform the client of the action being taken and the reason why. Honesty and transparency is important if the interviewer is to maintain an ongoing relationship with the client.

Conclusion

Good interviewing is dependent upon the interviewer establishing a relationship of respect, trust and commitment, with the client, in which the interviewer uses prayer, sensitivity, knowledge, and skill to put the client at ease, to listen, to empathise and to empower the client to make choices which will bring about the desired change.

While skill and knowledge are important factors, the most important factor is that the client feels accepted and understood and responded to as a unique person of worth in his/her own

right. This is the critical factor in all interviewing which is going to have a positive outcome in the client's life.

Planning

The aim of social work is to empower clients to make positive changes in their lives. Effective social work always has a purpose.

In this regard, planning is an essential component of social work. It ensures that clear and realistic goals are identified and owned by clients, and the tasks necessary to achieve these goals are outlined and agreed to.

“The Task Centred Model”, (Reid and Epstein) forms the basis of the planning process. Task centred work focuses on performance in practical tasks, which will resolve particular problems. The Task Centred Model takes problems as given, to be resolved in a practical way. It advocates clear definition of problems, goals, tasks, time limits and client self direction and empowerment.

The principles on which this model is based are –

- a) clients engage in the social work process to bring about positive change in their circumstances.
- b) agreed changes are identified and owned by the client as goals to be achieved to overcome difficulties.
- c) The tasks necessary to achieve these goals are also identified and owned.
- d) Goals and tasks are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time framed.
- e) A review process is built in to determine progress towards the goals, and the need for any changes.

These principles ensure that the social work process is focussed and purposeful, with the clients receiving the necessary support for them to achieve their stated goals.

Assessment and planning go together. The Ecological Framework provides the basis for quality assessments and the Task Centred Model does the same for planning.

Planning with Children and Families

The following principles guide a quality, planning process for children and families with care and protection issues.

(a) Quality Information

Effective plans flow out of quality information which is gained from a wide perspective, using the Ecological Framework.

(b) Consultation

Consultation needs to be undertaken with the family, to determine the significant family and community people who can help with the issues affecting the children.

(c) Planning Participants

Good planning is dependent upon the involvement of all who are significant in the children's lives, e.g. the children, (if appropriate), family members, friends, and representatives of community services. If cultural issues (e.g. language) are a factor, a cultural liaison person must be involved.

(d) Facilitation

The planning meeting is facilitated by a person (possibly the social worker involved), skilled in assisting members of groups to identify issues, express their views and arrive at conclusions.

(e) Location

The planning meeting is held in a setting which is familiar to participants and encourages them to take an active role in proceedings. The availability of food and drink also assists in members feeling comfortable and welcome.

(f) Good arrangements

People invited to the planning meeting are well informed of the nature and the purpose of the meeting, and receive their invitations in time for them to make arrangements necessary for their attendance.

(g) Meeting Beginning

The meeting begins with prayer (if appropriate), followed by the welcome and introduction of all participants, along with the explanation of their involvement with the children and parent(s), e.g. sister, uncle, teacher, social worker.

(h) Purpose of Meeting

The facilitator outlines clearly the purpose of the meeting, by identifying and writing up the issues of concern, and inviting participants to discuss together, how these issues can be addressed. The intent is to draw up a workable plan with realistic goals and tasks outlined.

(i) Focussed

The facilitator keeps the meeting focussed on the issue under discussion, ensuring all participants can have their say and be heard. Negative personal comments, and discussion which goes off at a tangent, are discouraged.

(j) Empowerment

The facilitator empowers the meeting to decide upon a plan which will address the care and protection issues of the children. Ideally, the plan will be agreed to by all the participants.

(k) Written Plan

The decisions of the meeting are recorded in a written plan with clearly outlined goals, and tasks of the participants in achieving these goals. The goals and tasks are:-

Specific, i.e. clear, stand alone, obvious.

Measurable, i.e. it can be determined if tasks are done and goals reached.

Attainable, i.e. the tasks can be done and the goals reached.

Realistic, i.e. the tasks and goals are right for the circumstances.

Time framed, i.e. the tasks and goals can be done within a certain time.

(l) Written Agreement

The plan is a written agreement entered into by all the participants. It identifies –

The goals to be achieved.

The tasks of family members, (including children when appropriate) in achieving these goals.

The tasks of community members in achieving these goals.

The tasks of the social worker in achieving these goals.

The progress towards the goals will be measured.

The time frame in which this can happen

A date for a review planning meeting to be held to check on progress against the plan.

(m) Copy of the Plan

Everyone present at the meeting is given a copy of the plan, which is dated and has a record of the names of all who participated in the meeting. Ideally all participants sign the plan.

(n) Review of Plan

Every plan is reviewed by an agreed date. The review involves:

- all people involved in the original plan, plus any other significant person.
- the review focuses on the agreed goals and tasks.
- if the goals have been achieved, these are acknowledged in an affirming manner.
- if the goals have been achieved only partially, family members are encouraged to work towards completion of goals, by the drawing up of a further plan.
- if no progress has been made towards the goals, the meeting considers the appropriateness of drawing up a further plan, or taking other measures to ensure the well being of the children.

(o) Early Review

An early review of the plan is held prior to the set review date, if it is apparent that important circumstances have changed or because the original plan is not working.

General

The task centred model and the planning which flows from it, may not be effective with families where:-

- members are unwilling to take responsibility and work towards change.

- where problems are complicated and of long standing.
- where constant debilitating crises and long term psychological and psychiatric problems are the main issue.
- where there is a family environment of constant risk to children, which is unlikely to change.

Given these limitations in chronic and/or abusive situations, it remains important to plan for the well being of children. Each child has a right to belong to a family where they know they are precious, safe and loved. If this family is not to be their own birth family, then a carefully thought through approach has to be made, to find an alternative kin ship family or foster family who will commit themselves to provide a permanent home for the child. To achieve this goal of a permanent, safe and nurturing home, the assessment, planning principles already outlined must be implemented.

The Ecological Model and the Task Centred Model ensure that significant people in a child's life come together and plan for the child's future regardless of their circumstances. It is in this process, under girded by prayer, that it is highly likely the best decisions for children will be made.

Conflict Management

Conflict is part of life. Conflict sooner or later is part of every relationship. It is all about having different opinions, regardless of the circumstances which led to these different points of view.

Conflict in itself is neither good or bad. All that it does is reflect different opinions, different viewpoints. What makes conflict good or bad is the way it is handled. If it is handled well, conflict can be a good thing, for it can lead to better understanding, stronger relationships and improved skills for resolving conflict in the future.

Denying conflict, or refusing to deal with conflict, is not healthy. In fact it is destructive of relationships. Denial of conflict is like sweeping dirt under a rug. It only appears to get rid of the problem. It does nothing about the circumstances which gave rise to the difference of opinion in the first place. In reality, the problem will intensify because the conflict producing behaviour never gets changed.

Denial is destructive not only on the relational level, but also on the personal level, since those who deny the conflict are also forced to deny their feelings of hurt, disappointment and anger.

There are several ways to deny conflict.

a) **Displacement**

A person angered or disturbed by another, takes their frustration, and anger out on a third person, e.g. an employee, in unresolved conflict with an employer, coming home and being angry with his wife.

b) **Disengagement**

A person chooses to withdraw rather than deal with the conflict, e.g. a husband storms out in anger from an argument with his wife, stays out for a time and then returns as if nothing had happened.

c) **Disqualification**

A person discounts their angry reaction, blaming themselves for feeling this way, e.g. a mother feeling it is not the Christian thing to have angry feelings towards her child.

A person like this, covers up angry emotions rather than admit to them.

All forms of denial are a barrier to growth, and destructive of relationships.

Styles Of Conflict Management

There are five major styles of conflict management.

a) Avoidance

This style is marked by a low degree of co-operation and assertiveness. It shows little concern for self, others and relationships. It can send a signal that the individual does not care enough to work out problems, which remain unresolved

However, there are times when withdrawal is good. When there is a risk of violence or when there is high emotional feeling which makes rational discussion unlikely; when there is a need to take time to think through the issues. These are positive reasons for withdrawal, unlike the reason of withdrawing so as to avoid ever having to face up to the conflict

b) Accommodation

This is characteristic of yielders, which involves a high degree of co-operation and a low degree of assertiveness. This style shows little concern for self, high concern for others, less concern for relationships.

Yielding may be appropriate when an issue is much more important to one person than another; it can be a self giving act of putting another person's wishes ahead of one's own. However, if yielding is motivated by a desire to show how self sacrificing one is, it can become a form of manipulation. Similarly, yielding out of fear and rejection or a need to be liked, particularly if it is a habitual response, is destructive of relationships. Yielding to another person may not be in the best interests of that person, e.g. a parent giving in to a child.

c) Competition

This is characteristic of winners and involves a low degree of co-operation and a high degree of assertiveness.

There are occasions when it is right to impose a decision on other, particularly in times of crisis or emergencies or illegal activity when decisive action is needed. In normal circumstances, though this assertive way of handling conflict drives it underground only for it to resurface later. It tends to escalate rather than decrease conflict. Winners often win the battle (the point) but lose the war (the relationship) in the process.

d) Collaboration

This is characteristic of resolvers and involves a high degree of co-operation and assertiveness. This is the style best suited for conflict in relationships, particularly long term relationships.

The advantage of this style is that it offers maximum satisfaction to all. The disadvantage is that resolving conflict takes a lot of time, effort and emotional energy. In addition, it tends to advantage people who are skilled in the use of language.

Resolvers like to keep the point of conflict in discussion until the issue is resolved to the satisfaction of all. They put a lot of energy into seeing that conflict is not swept under the carpet.

In some situations this is a disadvantage, particularly if others do not think the issue is of great concern, and therefore not worth the time and energy demanded. In these cases people tend to distance themselves, and the relationship is hindered.

e) **Compromise**

This is the characteristic of compromisers which involves a moderate degree of co-operation and assertiveness.

Compromise can be the best way to handle a conflict when there is inadequate time to work out a collaborative effort. When used too often, it becomes an easy way out, leaving people less than satisfied.

Some conflicts can best be handled by compromise, particularly if they are short term decisions of little ongoing consequence, whereas it is not a good solution for long term life impacting decisions.

Each of the above styles of handling conflict will prove, at one time or another, to be the most appropriate, although generally, resolution and compromise in that order bring the best results. However, it is imperative that people bring flexibility in their response to conflict for this allows for the finding of creative solutions.

Good conflict resolution requires a reaction to the opposite extremes of denial and avoidance on one hand and confrontation and attack on the other. It also requires an awareness of natural individual style of conflict management and knowing when this style is appropriate and when it is not. Given this, the following rules are essential in good conflict management.

Clarifying Issues and Goals

The first task for those in conflict is to clarify what it is they are arguing about, and what changes or goals they want. This clarification of both the issue in dispute, and the goals desired as an outcome, are crucial in conflict resolution. The clarification gives needed focus and direction to the subsequent discussion, and should remain at the centre of it.

It is a fact that if the outcome or goal desired is common to all involved, the conflict resolution is easier than if people have different outcome expectations. When there are multiple issues, the first task is to prioritise the order in which they will be discussed.

Choose the right time

If time is available, and if emotional intensity does not preclude a reasonable argument, some conflicts can be constructively resolved when they arise.

At other times it is right to delay the time, especially if a number of people (e.g. family members) are involved. A time needs to be set which will enable all members to the dispute to be present and contribute in a positive manner.

Choose the right place

This needs to be a place where all those in conflict feel comfortable and not intimidated.

Begin in a Positive Manner

If appropriate, begin in prayer. Acknowledge some of the good things the others have brought to the relationship and/or the situation.

In every situation there are good features to affirm. This affirmation can bring a positive tone to the subsequent conflict discussion.

Stick to the Issues

This is critical. Other issues must not side track the conflict discussion. If the issues are important they need to be acknowledged, then put aside for later discussion. Failure to do this means the first issue under discussion becomes lost in a welter of words and feelings.

Give everyone the chance to speak without Interruption

Every person to a dispute has the right to speak out and be heard. Good conflict management requires the full participation of all concerned, without any one person dominating.

Listen Deeply

Conflict management requires good listening skills. It requires a commitment to understand what the others in the conflict think and feel. It is difficult to get resolution without this understanding.

Do not bring up the Past

It is tempting to bring up past hurts and complaints. Dumping this past baggage onto a current issue of contention is devastating, and often destructive of a successful outcome of the meeting.

Do not hit Below the Belt

Comments which are designed to belittle or put down others, particularly if they are aimed at their person and personality, are destructive of the resolution process.

Discussion must be factual and centred on the issue, and not on the person and their area of sensitivity and vulnerability.

Take the other Person Seriously

Good listening and care for others, requires that their comments are taken seriously and not ridiculed, ignored or laughed at. Ridicule or ignoring is down putting of the other.

Express Feelings Honestly but non Abusively

In conflict discussions it is important to own feelings and not to impose them on others. Anger is a good example. It can be appropriate to be angry and to acknowledge this anger in the discussions. It is not appropriate to berate others for the anger felt. It is much more constructive to focus on the behaviour, or the event which caused the anger. In this way the person being addressed is not made to feel defensive or wounded by personal accusation.

It is important though that feelings are expressed. It is right that the others know how one feels. For example, if anger is not expressed it can lead to resentment, hate and revenge. But if it is expressed, and acknowledged by others, it can bring healing and peace.

Do not Play Games

Conflict management requires people to the conflict to be straight and transparent as to what the issue means to them and what they want changed and why. Hidden agendas or secret motives are ultimately destructive of relationships. So too are attitudes of martyrdom and/or feigned weakness or inability which puts pressure on others into doing favours which don't really resolve the conflict.

Do not be Passively Aggressive

This is a difficult manner to overcome for on the surface it reflects co-operation but underneath hides resentment and anger and more a desire for revenge than resolution.

It is much more constructive to openly express the feelings held, provided they are not dumped on others.

Avoid Asking Unnecessary Explanations of Behaviour

Sometimes it is not helpful asking others to justify what they have done. They may not know why they behaved this way. Rather it is better to acknowledge the situation and then seek the way forward that is going to be in the best interests of all.

However, there are times when it is helpful to those concerned to hear the explanation of why things happened. This can bring understanding, clear the air and enable to discussion to move on to resolution.

Wisdom and sensitivity in this area is essential.

Avoid Labelling and Name Calling

This is essential. Calling others names which are derogatory or labelling them so they are entrapped in a particular category of people is insulting and a sure way to inflame the situation.

Every person is entitled to respect, to have their opinions heard and their feelings acknowledged.

Avoid Triangles

This principle acknowledges that conflicts can only be resolved when they are discussed openly and honestly by those involved, and not by involving others who are not party to the dispute. Involving others in this way usually is done with the intention of giving one of the parties an advantage.

The exception to the above is if all parties in the conflict agreed to ask an outsider to mediate their discussion. This is an entirely different process than one party arbitrarily involving an outsider.

Summarise

Go over the decision(s) arrived at, ensuring all parties accept and agree to the summary made. Ideally, write down the decisions.

Pray

God's promise is to work everything together for good for those who love him, and this includes conflict. God will work in conflict which is committed in prayer.

Facilitation of Conflict

A common social work role is to facilitate conflict Management, whether this be with two individuals or with a group such as a family.

The rules outlined above are essential ingredients of conflict facilitation. In addition to these rules, the following are good practice for a facilitator to follow.

Preparation

The first task is to set the right time, place and venue for the meeting; to come to the meeting in good time, aware of who will be present and with some fore knowledge of the issues to be raised. This preparation provides a good basis from which the meeting can begin.

Welcome

Ensure that all participants at the meeting either know each other or are introduced and are made to feel welcome. Good seating, availability of food and drink, all help to create an atmosphere in which people are comfortable. A prayer to start the meeting adds extra grace.

Rules of the Meeting

Outline principles such as – conflict issues to be defined and prioritised if necessary; one issue to be discussed at a time; parking of new issues that arise for later discussion; everyone has the right to speak and be heard; past issues are prohibited; no name calling or labelling of personalities, or belittling comments; feelings and opinions are to be owned by the person speaking; decisions arrived at will be recorded, repeated back to participants for final agreement.

Clear Guidance

Ensure the meeting proceeds along established guidelines with an insistence upon everyone being treated with respect and given ample time to speak and be heard.

Objectivity and Neutrality

Show understanding of people's positions without taking sides.

Awareness

Be sensitive to different conflict management styles of participants (withdrawers, yielders, winners, restorers, compromisers) as well as the age, maturity, sex, ability, emotional strengths and vulnerabilities of those present. Good facilitation requires sensitive encouragement of all participants to take meaningful part in the process.

Focused

Ensure the meeting stays centred on the issue under discussion and does not become side tracked into other issues or irrelevant details. Bring resolution to one issue before moving onto another. Keep a focus on things that can be changed.

Clarification

Summarise the situation and positions frequently. Write down decisions arrived at. Repeat the decisions to the meeting, clarifying any misunderstandings or doubts. Ensure that the agreement reached is understood by all participants.

Finishing Up

Thank all participants, check that they feel all right about leaving the meeting and whether there needs to be any personal support given after the meeting has concluded. If appropriate, set the date for another meeting, and conclude with a prayer.

Conclusion

Conflict is part of everybody's life. Being able to confront conflict and resolve it is a skill of enormous importance for a healthy and satisfying life.

“How we view, approach and work through our differences, does to a large extent determine our whole life pattern.”

David Augsburger

Loss And Grief

Grief is a complex emotional and behavioural response to any significant loss.

Grief is a normal response to the loss of any significant person, object or opportunity. It is an experience of deprivation and anxiety that can show itself in one's behaviour, emotions, thinking, relationships and spirituality.

Any significant loss will trigger grief:

death
miscarriage
abortion
separation
divorce
broken friendships
retirement or unemployment
loss of home or loss of country
amputation
loss of health
loss of youth
unrealised expectations
loss of a precious object
loss of status
loss of money
loss of purpose or of usefulness

Life is full of loss. Loss and grief surround us. It affects everyone, without exception. The experience of loss and the emotions of grief are normal and to be expected. It is usual to feel these emotions when something happens to deprive us of somebody or something that meant a lot to us. It is healthy to recognise this reality and to see it for what it is; an opportunity to express deeply held feelings about the richness that was part of our life but now is not; and an opportunity to be able to continue to incorporate this richness into our life while becoming open again to new experiences.

Temporarily, grief can immobilise us, but long term it can extend us, teach us to enjoy what we do have while we still have it, and help us to understand that life has limits, that each moment is important, and that no relationship should be taken for granted.

Tasks of Grief

Grief arises when something or someone of value has been lost and the griever is faced with the emptiness and difficult role of readjusting. There are four often difficult and time consuming tasks in this period of readjustment:

- 1) to accept the reality of the loss.
- 2) to feel and consciously admit the pain of the loss

- 3) to adjust to the new environment created by the loss of the person or thing.
- 4) to move on, acknowledging the loss but building new relationships and opportunities.

The accomplishment of these tasks is complicated by the strong emotions which a person works through as they go through the grieving process.

There are some recognisable stages to this process. However, it has to be stated that the grieving experience is unique for each person. Not everybody moves through the stages sequentially, and for some, the stages repeat. People move through the grieving process at their own rate and in their own unique way. How one grieves depends on one's personality, beliefs, culture, nature of the loss and the circumstances. It is a common but unique experience.

Stages of Grief

Shock

When a person is in shock he or she usually – seems stunned
doesn't react quickly
appears dazed
may not hear what is said.

Denial

When a person is in the process of denial he or she usually thinks -

there was a mistake
it couldn't have happened
they don't believe it
something will happen to change it

Anger

When a person is in anger he or she usually –

feels resentful
blames others
wants to fight, argue
shouts, screams
speaks vindictively

Depression

When a person is in the stage of depression he or she usually

becomes withdrawn
blames self, full of guilt
appetite fails, or eats too much
cries easily
panics
has trouble with sleep (too much or not enough)
moody
feels hopeless
fearful

Acceptance

When a person reaches the stage of acceptance he or she usually:

begins to accept the loss has happened.

still feels the loss but begins to rebuild
their life
returns to normal activities
is more in control of their emotions

Acceptance does not mean the loss has gone away. Rather it is a recognition that the loss has happened; there is an emptiness because of it but that life has to go on and be rebuilt around the emptiness caused by the loss. It is an experience which has been incorporated into life and will be part of the ongoing journey of life, but in a constructive and not destructive way.

Intensity of Grief

Each type of loss appears to bring its own kind of suffering. Often the intensity of grief is determined by the intensity of love, especially in relationships. The death of a parent, spouse, child, grandparent or grandchild in particular can be events which trigger intense grief.

The loss of a child can be particularly stressful. Parents often feel guilty, angry, depressed, self condemning and incompetent. For parents to be separated from a child by death or by other circumstances is one of life's most devastating losses.

Children and Grief

Similarly, for children it is devastating to lose a parent, or close family member whether this is through death or through the child being removed from the family for one reason or another. To lose Mum or Dad or Grandparents, and then maybe the family home, friends, or school, can be traumatic for children, and their grief can be intense.

Children and young people grieve in a different manner from adults. Because of their immaturity, the intensity of their feelings and (depending on age) their lack of suitable language concepts to understand and express what is happening for them, their grief is expressed through their behaviour. Often their reactions can be misinterpreted as misbehaving. This is likely to be punished and thereby causing more trauma to them.

Because children sometimes are not able to understand and express verbally what is happening for them, and because adults similarly do not understand and respond in a helpful way, children are not able to come to terms with their loss. Instead their lives can become "stuck" and marked by periods of anger and depression, and all the associated feelings. This unresolved loss can have profound effects on their behaviour right through into adulthood.

Children And Young People In Kinship Care – Foster Care

Children who come into care of relatives or non relatives have often experienced huge loss. This loss may include one or more of the following:

- death of parent(s) or separation from parents
- separation from brothers or sisters
- loss of home
- loss of friends
- loss of school
- loss of self respect and esteem (especially if abused)

- separation from Grandparent, Uncles, Aunts
- parent's marriage separation
- parent's ill health, addiction, incapacity
- loss of toys, pets, familiar objects and environment
- loss of health or mobility.

All that has been familiar in a child's world may have been removed. There is enormous grief in this for a child, even if their world was not particularly safe and loving. It was their world to which they belonged, and now it is gone.

Given all this, children coming into kinship care – foster care can be in the depth of grief. Sadly, this grief may not be recognised as such by the adults around.

Foster Care And The Stages Of Grieving – How It Can Affect The Child

Shock and Denial

At this early stage the child shows little emotion and appears to be managing well. The child may behave in a perfect way with little evidence of previous difficult behaviour. The child's emotions tend to be shallow and there is a false sense of happiness.

The foster child denies anything is wrong and may say she/he is on holiday and the parents will soon return.

Anger and Protest

When the child realises that s/he is not going back home, a range of angry reactions against the parents, foster parents, social workers and others associated with the placement become evident. The emotions could include feelings of: rejection, abandonment, anxiety, fear, hostility, worthlessness, humiliation etc. The child may have angry outbursts, cry a lot, or run away. There could be fighting with other children causing damage in the home, insolence and attack on toys and objects.

Depression – Despair

The child's anger gives way to protecting one's own private world. The child begins to build a wall around themselves and may not even talk about their origins. The child begins to act as if the loss no longer matters. They will draw into themselves and may regress in behaviours, e.g. bedwetting, thumb sucking. They may stop learning at school. They may appear apathetic,

lazy or indifferent. This turning in on one's self can lead on to the child building a world of fantasy in which to live. For them the real world has become too painful and so they build a fantasy world where they can live happily with their own family.

Resolution

The child finally realises that the loss is real and perhaps understands the reasons for the placement and begins to live with it. The child seeks out new relationships with the foster parents and possibly their birth family. The child begins to return to more established behaviour patterns and shows signs of getting their life under way again.

It needs to be borne in mind that it is impossible to predict which sequence a child will actually pass through or indeed whether they will pass through all the stages. Some stages will occur and may be repeated, while others will be missed.

Just as each child enters care for a different reason, each child will react differently to the separation and placement experience. Some of the factors which affect an individual child's reaction include:

- age and developmental level of child
- contact with birth family during placement
- child's own separation experiences
- duration of the placement
- the length and quality of the child's relationship with his/her birth parents
- the quality of support given the child during placement.

Birth Family And Kinship Care – Foster Care

Grief is not only a factor for children who are placed in care, it is a factor for their family. Grief is common amongst parents and other close family members when their children are cared for by someone else. Often this loss of children comes on top of other significant losses which can go back to their own childhood, and which have never been resolved.

These losses can involve:

- loss of parents through death or separation
- loss of family home
- unfulfilled expectations
- loss of employment
- loss of status
- loss of friends
- loss of spouse or partner
- loss of self esteem
- loss of financial security

On top of all this loss comes the loss of the children into someone else's care. In this situation parents can feel judged, a failure, guilty or worthless.

Accordingly they too have a grief reaction, and all the strong emotions outlined earlier are real for them as well. The feelings attributed to the stages of anger and depression are often dominant for parents in these circumstances. They can come across as belligerent to

withdrawn and indifferent. At times people are judged on these reactions as not being worthy to parent, whereas it is not that they don't care but rather their feelings of grief take them over.

Often this grief goes unrecognised for what it is, and parents are not given the support they need to come to terms with what is happening for them now, and with what has happened for them in the past. As a consequence of this lack of understanding and support parents can hide their pain in alcohol, drugs, prostitution and similar addictive and destructive behaviours. This in turn adds to their feeling of inadequacy and gives further credence to the viewpoint that they are not worthy parents.

Understanding Grief

The understanding of the critical role grief can play in kinship care – foster care is essential for good placement practice. If the grief component is not recognised and responded to, the strong emotional feelings which are a part of grief, can dominate the relationships which are associated with the placement. Good placement practice requires therefore, that steps be taken to ensure the feeling of loss is reduced to a minimum and that maximum support, bearing in mind the grief people will be experiencing, is given to the child in care and their birth family.

Support for People in Grief

Grief cannot be cured. It does not suddenly go away. The pain is eased when a person has adjusted to the loss and begins to rebuild their life around the loss. Sensitive, caring support is needed while this process is happening.

Type Of Support Needed

A Good Listener

People who will listen and listen without imposing any of their thoughts and feelings on the person in grief. A listener who will allow the person to share in their own way, and in their own time, without forcing them to do so. People in grief need a good listener. Guilt, anger, confusion and despair will all be expressed at times and need to be heard.

A Person Who is 'There'

People who are there to listen when needed, but also to do the practical things which speak of love, of care, e.g. make a cup of tea, bring a meal, do the shopping. This practical help frees a person to grieve, especially in the early stages. There is immense value for a grieving person to have somebody who is just there for them.

Sensitive People

People who do not push or pry but rather who are available, willing to listen, willing to help, but also willing to back off if the griever wants to be alone for a while, or speak to someone else. A person in grief needs others who are sensitive to their fluctuating needs and feelings.

Personal Support

Families in grief are made up of individuals in grief. Each person's grief will be unique. Each person needs to be listened to and understood in their own right and in their own way. Too often children get overlooked in this regard.

Acceptance of Grief Outpourings

Listeners, supporters who are not surprised by, at times sudden outpourings of crying, frustration, anger or guilt and accept these emotions as being part of the grieving process. It is reassuring for a person in grief to know that it is acceptable for them to express their feelings openly.

Sensitive Help in Decision Making

People who can sensitively help the person in grief, make necessary decisions, while discouraging the making of less immediate decisions until more time has elapsed and the intensity of grief has eased.

Comfort And Security For Children

Children need reassurance by words and actions that they are loved and cared for. Children are sensitive to any signs of adult insecurity and need to know they will not be forsaken. They need lots and lots of loving care and fair, firm boundaries.

In a time of grief, children need a secure network of love around them. This is especially so in the provision of kinship care – foster care.

Professional Help

People who are aware of their own limitations and will encourage a person struggling in their grief to seek professional help if this is thought necessary.

For example, grief can put a lot of stress in the body when people are least able to resist the onslaught of disease. In addition, stress can lead to exhaustion, headaches, indigestion, loss of sleep, loss of appetite or shortness of breath. A referral to a doctor can provide some physical relief in these circumstances.

Similarly, when the emotional effects of the grief are extreme, a referral for professional counselling can be helpful. The need for this is not always recognised by a person in grief.

Prayer

People who will pray and bring comfort with words of scripture but without preaching or using religious clichés.

Foster Care Practice And Grief

(The following practice is based on the ecological model)

Grief is a real factor in foster care. It affects the children in placement, their birth family and any other people who have significant relationships with the children in care. Grief can even become part of a foster carer's life as they love a child and then allow the child to return to family, or some other placement.

Network Of Love

The social work task in foster care then becomes one of reducing the sense of loss as much as is possible, not only for the child in placement, but for the birth family and other people, such as the foster family. One of the important ways for this to happen is to build a team of all the

people who are important in a child's life and through this teamwork to ensure a network of love surrounds the child, a network which ensures that past relationships are maintained and encouraged.

Children can cope with separation from their birth family better if they know why they are in care and that their family is not only still there for them, but are part of the planning which surrounds the care. They know through this they have not been abandoned, as all the important adults in their life are working together for their best interests.

It is similar for the birth family. The grief of having children placed in care can be lessened for them if they are treated with respect, and encouraged to have a significant and ongoing role in the planning and care of their children.

The separation may not be easy for either the child or the birth family, but building strong links that embrace the birth family, the foster family, the social worker and the agency, supported by other professionals, can help so much to reduce the sense of rejection, of guilt, hopelessness, inadequacy or anger which can be a feature of foster care placements. There is no question that the stronger and more varied the links which bind all parties to the placement, the more safe, secure and loved the child in placement feels and the more valued birth family members feel.

Good Social Work Practice

Given all this, the following social work practices are recommended.

Awareness

Be knowledgeable and aware of how grief can impact on a kinship care – foster care placement and be committed to a practice which reduces to a minimum a sense of loss.

Listening

Be skilled in listening, and practice and practice the art of being an empathetic and understanding listener. This is an essential element in supporting people going through traumatic situations.

Strong Links

As much as possible, build strong links among all who are involved in a placement. In this, seek to affirm the position and role of each person and ensure they have personal support for their own particular needs. Everyone, but especially the family members concerned, needs to have somebody that understands, and is there for them in a supportive way.

Team Work

As much as is possible, build a team of all main participants for a placement, and especially involving them all in the planning process. This involvement affirms each person with the expectation that they have something of value to offer the child or young person.

Plan of Care

Have a plan of care with a clear goal and specific tasks outlined for all participants as to what each will do to achieve the goal. The plan should be inclusive of birth family, foster family, child or young person in placement, social worker and other professionals, and reflect a determination for all to work together in the best interests of the child or young person.

Continuity of Relationships

Ensure the plan (taking into account circumstances which are unique for each placement) maintains and builds contact and relationships amongst the parties. The ideal is to build relationships and not to destroy them by ostracism or exclusion.

Birth Family Relationships

In particular, seek to build the relationship between the child or young person in placement, and their own birth family. The stronger the relationships in this regard, the less the sense of grief for those involved. Keep change to a minimum.

In making a placement, make things as familiar as is possible for the child, in terms of culture and location. The less change for the child the better in terms of way of life, schooling, friends and interests and the like.

Comfort, Security for Children

Be aware that separation from family is a traumatic loss for children, especially if they do not have an understanding of what is happening for them. Children in this situation need lots of comfort, of reassurance and security, as well as the opportunity to have ongoing contact with their family. This applies to a kinship placement as much as to a non kinship placement. Separation from parents is never easy.

Trained Foster Carers

Ensure the foster carers are well trained and prepared, including understanding and responding to expressions of grief. The foster carers are the people the child or young person in care will look to mostly for comfort, a listening heart, reassurance and hope. In this regard, foster carers need to have a good understanding of grief, its affect on behaviour and helpful ways of responding to grief.

Relationship with Birth Family

Similarly, foster carers need to be well trained in building relationships with the birth family and be able to respond in an appropriate way to discussions and behaviour which reflect a person in grief. The building of relationships in this regard can do so much to bring peace and comfort to troubled people, and further build the wall of love and security around the child in care.

Familiar Things

Encouraging the child or young person to bring with them to the placement, toys, photographs, books and similar things which provide a link with their past and their home. These familiar objects can bring comfort in a stressful time. Similarly, helping a child to start a "Life Book" about their birth family and their foster family can help to keep their links going with the past and build new links with the present and make sense of it all

A good analogy is of a plant to be replanted elsewhere. The move is more likely to be successful if much of the soil the plant's roots are in goes with the plant to its new position. It needs some of its old environment to do well in its new position.

Prayer

No matter how good the social work – foster care practice, there will be hurt and loss. This is why prayer is important for through it God works to bring healing to the pain.

Conclusion

Grief is inevitable in the placement of children and young people in kinship care – foster care. However, the intensity of the grief can be reduced considerably through a commitment to build and enhance the relationships which surround a child in care.

Listening

Good listening is an art - it has to be learnt - and practised, and practised, and practised and....

Listening is one of the most **basic** ways to convey a sense of respect, to treat another person with dignity.

Listening says, "You are **worth** listening to."

When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when we receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain/suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action, or word or advice is the simple presence of someone who cares Simply being with someone is difficult because it asks of us that we share in the other's vulnerability, enter with him or her into the experience of weakness and powerlessness, become part of uncertainty, and give up control and self determination. And still, whenever this happens, new strength and new hope is being born."

Ground Rules of Listening

- 1 Pray that God will give you understanding, discernment, wisdom, compassion. Whenever possible, pray before each meeting. Pray for a listening heart.
- 2 Use your eyes as well as your ears. Use your tongue as little as possible; and when you do, use it to clarify, or to ask open ended questions, or to say things like "and what happened next or, hmm."
- 3 Before a person even speaks, observe their manner, their demeanour, and their dress; the way they walk or sit.
- 4 Give the person your full attention; position yourself in such a way that the person knows that they are the centre of your thoughts. If possible, remove distractions, e.g. turned on TV set.
- 5 Listen not only to words and sentences, but also to tone, inflection, speed of speech, all the time seeking to understand what meaning the person is trying to convey and how they are feeling.
- 6 At the same time, watch bodily movements - face, hands, eyes, and posture. What these suggest are doing on for the person; how are they feeling?
- 7 As you receive messages, clarify them back - not only verbal messages but feeling messages too. You are trying to understand not only what the person is meaning, but what they are feeling e.g. "You have been let down and you feel angry?"
- 8 Through this listening/clarifying, empathise with the person. Empathy is when we suspend our own frame of reference for a time and enter that of the person's we are listening to. It is experiencing their world as they perceive and feel it.

- 9 Don't be afraid of silences. Understand silence as much as speech. Observe what is going on, and be ready to clarify.
- 10 Listen to the language of tears. They can convey joy, pain, sorrow, frustration or anger. There is a difference between hysterical attention seeking crying and sobs of grief which come from deep within a person. Clarify your observations.
- 11 Be transparent in your presence to the person. Be yourself, genuine, open and accepting of the person in an unconditional manner. If the person suspects that you are not for real, or that you are not really listening, the cause is lost.
- 12 If you are struggling to understand where a person is up to, in your heart, ask God to help you clarify. Listen with His ears as well as yours.

Training Module - Listening

Goal

Students will understand the principles that make a good listener and be able to demonstrate these principles in practice.

Important Points

- 1 To be a good listener requires constant practice.
- 2 Listening is a fundamental tool in empowering people and enabling them to make good decisions.
- 3 Prayer for discernment provides the base for good listening.
- 4 People communicate not only through words, but also through voice tone, body language and through their appearance.
- 5 Listening requires observation of a person. Their voice tone, body language, appearance as well as listening to words spoken.
- 6 The objective of good listening is to convey respect for, and understanding of, the person, and what they are experiencing.
- 7 A good listener is a reflective listener, reflecting and clarifying back to the person the essence of both what they are saying and what they are feeling.
- 8 A good listener is able to empathise with the person by suspending their own world view and experiences, and entering the world of the person being listened to.
- 9 A good listener is attentive and focused, reflecting this through their body posture, eye contact and their clarification and understanding of what the person is communicating.
- 10 A good listener does not interrupt, uses open ended questions, is not afraid of silences, is encouraging of what is being shared, allows emotions to be expressed, does not give advice, does not bring in their own experiences for comparison, and always seeks to understand the meaning of what the person is conveying through their words, tone, body language and appearance.
- 11 A good listener is transparent in their open, accepting and honest manner.
- 12 Good listening is an essential tool in any relationship. It builds understanding and destroys prejudice and misunderstanding. It conveys a message of value and respect for the person concerned.

Suggested Activities

- 1 Invite students to share their understanding of the principles of good listening. Write these on the white board and clarify and add to, if necessary.
- 2 Invite a student or two to share an experience they have had of being listened to at a time of personal crisis for them.
 - (a) What did the good listening experience do for them at the time?
 - (b) What were the good points about the way the person listened to them?

3 Role Play

Set up two role plays by students using situations described by the tutor. One situation will involve a listener who is not attentive, and is more concerned with his/her own circumstances than that of the person being listened to.

The second situation will involve an attentive listener who is empathetic and is able to reflect meaning and feeling.

At the end of the role plays, get both those listened to, and those listening, to describe what the experience was like for them.

At the completion of the exercise, again reinforce the principles of good listening.

- 4 Break students into groups of three - one to talk about something of personal importance, one to listen and one to observe. Allow 5 minutes or so, and then get each participant to share in their group what the experience was like for them. The observer's role is to feed back to the listener what he/she observed as the strengths and weaknesses of their listening role. Repeat the exercise until all in the group have experienced all three roles.
- 5 In the reassembled large group, encourage further comment on the listening experience, with the tutor both modelling and reinforcing the principles outlined.

Social Work Assessments And The Ecological Model

Each family is made up of unique individuals and as a consequence, each family is unique. Each family has its own special configuration of personalities, roles, relationships, values, genetic, spiritual and cultural inheritance, history, current circumstances, and day by day living patterns.

This uniqueness means that the social worker must approach each family referred to the agency with profound respect and sensitivity. The social worker must be prepared to spend time with the family, building a relationship of trust with them and through this relationship, getting to understand a little of their circumstances which have given rise to the issues of concern. The social worker must be humble enough, despite their learning, to acknowledge that he/she knows nothing about the family referred, and this knowledge will grow only if the social worker is prepared to take time with the family, the wider family, and community people who know the family, listening to them and discerning with them the issues of concern, and appropriate responses which could be made.

Presume nothing, and pray for wisdom, discernment and compassion, is a good attitude for a social worker to have in visiting a family for the first time.

Assessment

Effective social work with a family is dependent upon the social worker's ability to carry out a quality assessment of the family.

Purpose of Assessment

The purpose of an assessment is to assist a family to understand the issues which are affecting them, and empower them to make choices which will improve their situation.

The only exception to this is when a family's situation contains destructive or illegal activities, which puts at risk the safety and well being of members, especially children, requiring the social worker to take immediate action.

The Uniqueness of each Family

Each child, young person and family being assessed must be treated as unique and accorded grace, dignity and respect, with the social worker always bearing in mind that no other family has ever existed, or will exist in the future, who has this family's unique blend of genetic, cultural and historical factors

The Ecological Model

It is highly recommended that the Ecological model be the basis on which all assessments are made. The model takes into account personal, family, cultural, community and ideological factors, which makes up a client's world view. The Ecological Model is designed to give the social worker an insight into the world of the children and family.

Need Definition

How a need or issue is defined determines in large measure what will be done about it. It is because of this truth it is essential social work assessments are inclusive of all the factors that influence the circumstances of children and families.

The Ecological Framework

The Ecological Model was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. It provides a framework of practice which challenges social workers to gain an understanding of all the influences which impact upon children and their families.

The ecological Framework ensures a comprehensive analysis. It guides social workers in what to look for, and can reveal factors which might otherwise go unnoticed. It helps social workers to look beyond immediate and obvious factors to see where the most significant influences lie.

Subjective Versus Objective Reality

It is often stated that human development takes place between individuals with their own specific genetic makeup and the environment. The environment is a wide range of complex influences ranging through family, community, geography, ideology, government, and culture. Every individual experiences this environment in a subjective but powerful way. How they experience the world around them is their reality, even if it is not the objective reality observed by others. If people define situations as real, then for them they are real. Social workers then need to be aware of the subjective world of their clients as well as the objective world. Skilful and sensitive interviewing of both the client and others who know the client, are essential in this regard.

The Ecological Framework Structure

The ecological environment can be likened to a set of widening squares, or a nested structure, with each inside the next like a set of Russian dolls. This structure is outlined as follows.

1) Microsystem

The innermost square or doll, is described as the microsystem. The microsystems contain all the different settings in which the developing child takes part. e.g. family (the most important), school, clubs, church, friends etc.

The social worker must be ware of all these different settings and in particular needs to be able to analyse within them:-

- a) the quality of the activities of the child.
- b) the qualities of the relationship the child has with others in the settings.
- c) the nature of the different roles the child adopts in any particular setting.
- d) How genetic and health factors affect these activities, relationships and roles.

Children need to have the experience of belonging to microsystems, and in particular to families, where they know they are precious, safe and loved unconditionally, and are given opportunities to develop their God-given potential. In making good assessments the social worker must be able to analyse the quality of the microsystems with which the child interacts, for they play a critical role in healthy child development.

The family is a microsystem. In this regard family means all who are related to each other. Family then is wider than the immediate or nuclear family. It embraces the wider family which, in many cultures is understood to be the basic family unit, and not fragmented by small nuclear units. Given this, it is imperative that the social worker gains insights into the nature of roles, relationships and activities within the wider family, particularly as they affect children.

It is within microsystems that the basic needs of children, parents and others are met on a day-by-day basis. Positive microsystems are fundamental to the well-being of every person, and the provision of such systems must be a goal of any social work intervention.

2 Mesosystem

The second square or doll, is described as a mesosystem. A mesosystem happens when a client is involved in two microsystems (e.g. family and school) and the relationship between these two settings forms.

The social work assessment task becomes one of being aware of, and analysing, the nature of this relationship. As mesosystems, their potential contribution to the child's development is assessed by the number and nature of the links that are present between the settings. For example, with the family/school mesosystem, if there is good interaction between the two, not only of the child, but of the family, and if both are in agreement over goals and values, the chances are high that the child's development will be enhanced. But if the child is the only link between the two, the potential for the school complementing the family and vice versa is lost.

Mesosystems are enhanced and benefit the client if:-

- a) there are a number of positive links between the settings.
- b) that settings share goals and values.
- c) that trusting, caring, empowering relationships exist between settings.)
- d) that there are a number of people known to both settings.
- e) quality information flows between both settings.

In summary, the stronger and more varied the links between the settings, the more powerful the resulting mesosystem will be as an influence on the client's development.

3) Exosystem

The third square or doll in the ecological framework is the exosystem. Its focus is on policy-making agencies that make decisions in regard to clients without their direct involvement.

Often assessments only take account of those settings in which the client is actually present, as if there were no other influences on a person's life. However, there are other settings that

exert a powerful influence on a person's life, but in which the client is not present or can play a direct role. These are called exosystems. For example, a child's exosystem includes the parent's workplace, school boards and committees, government departments, local authorities, television programming, and the like. The child's exosystems include any setting in which decisions are made that affect the child, but in which the child is not directly present. An example of this would be a board of trustees making a decision about discipline or religious education in the school.

In summary, exosystems are decision making bodies that draw up policies that affect clients, whether these are children and families or others. These influences are often disregarded in the discussions about the factors that affect clients and their development.

Good assessments reflect awareness of these factors, and encourage a response which will inform, challenge, involve, those whose policy decisions affect the lifestyle of clients. It is in this regard that the advocacy skills of a social worker are important. There are many examples where inadequate housing, benefit payments, medical care, unemployment, transport services, account for pressures which bring stress upon children and families. These pressures cannot be ignored by the social worker in making assessments and planning a response.

4) Macrosystem

The final square, or doll in the ecological framework is the macrosystem. It is this level which provides the ideologies which determine the policies in force at any one time. The macrosystem includes culture, values, beliefs, political systems, class structure, which exert an influence which pervades all of society. Ultimately it is the macrosystem which not only determines the policies which affect clients, but which shapes the world view of clients. A classic example of the impact the macrosystem has on people is the difference between people's lifestyle in an authoritarian communist state, as opposed to a democratic capitalist state.

While political ideologies are powerful factors affecting people, so too is culture. Culture can be defined as the way of life of a people. Each culture has its own special way of doing things. This affects the way they organise their microsystem, mesosystem and exosystems. For example, a Maori family's way of doing things is different from an Indian family or a New Zealand European family, or a Chinese family. Religious beliefs and values are an inherent part of cultural expression sometimes enhancing, sometimes modifying the traditional culture, but always having to be taken into account.

The social worker cannot effectively assess a family unless they gain an understanding of the ideological, cultural, value base which shapes their world view. To ignore this is to ignore powerful influences which permeate every aspect of a family's way of doing things. In effect, understanding the macrosystem of a child and their family will give the social worker a context in which to make sense of the way the family thinks and behaves.

Summary

The ecological framework ensures that social workers address different levels of influence on a client. This is what makes the framework an important model in carrying out quality

assessments, for not only will it help to define the need and the causes, but it will determine the response needed.

The Ecological Framework

Macrosystems

The culture, the beliefs, the values, the political systems, the ideologies which determine policies that affect clients as well as shape their world view. It is all pervasive of the systems which it embraces.

Exosystems

Agencies who make decisions which affect the client, but with whom the client has no direct involvement.

Mesosystem

The relationship between two groupings in both of which the client is involved.

Microsystem

A grouping in which the client is a part, e.g. family, school, work.

e.g. Family – school
Family - work
Church – school.

e.g. Government Department; School Boards
Local Government; Television Programmes.

Some Identifiable Risks For Children, As Reflected By The Ecological Framework

1) Microsystem

Where positive, caring and safe microsystems for children are available, the children generally feel good about themselves, are able to form satisfying relationships with family, teachers, friends and the like, they learn well and participate in good activities.

There is an old saying, "It takes a village to raise a child". There is no question that children who have the benefit of growing up amidst a wide range of relationships that span age groups, generations and backgrounds, and who experience these relationships as nurturing and stimulating, enjoy a special advantage in developing into mature, caring and competent adults.

For children who do not experience safe, nurturing and empowering microsystems, especially family and school, the risks are real that their physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, and social development will be retarded in some way.

The emotional climate of a microsystem is probably the most important indicator of potential risk. If a child experiences rejection, abuse, conditional love, indifference, neglect or negativity, their self esteem and confidence is undermined, their development can be delayed and they become at risk of developing behaviour which can have self destructive, neurotic, psychotic, delinquent or aggressive tendencies.

Children have a God given right to belong to microsystems, and in particular to families where they know they are precious, safe and loved, and in which they receive good education and health care. It is well known how beneficial this kind of environment is to the well being of children.

2) Mesosystem

Children respond positively in mesosystems in which they are involved, when there are a number of people known to both settings, who share goals and values and relevant information and enjoy open and trusting relationships.

In this kind of environment, children feel safe and encouraged as they experience important people in their lives working together for their benefit.

These positive relationships between settings reinforce the positive role of each setting with the child. One complements and empowers the other, as can often happen in the relationship between family and school or family and church.

When the children are the only link between two settings, the potential for both settings to contribute to their development is weakened. In this regard, both settings work in isolation and do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding to build upon and reinforce what each is doing. Further, this situation tends to isolate children and leave them to cope on their own with what may be negative and abusive relationships. Children's safety is much reduced in this situation.

Sometimes there can be a number of links between settings, but which are negative in manner. These negative relationships can undermine the welfare of children for in effect, they can put one setting against another in an air of hostility. This situation not only leaves children feeling unsafe, but works against settings complementing what each is doing in the care, nurture and education of children.

Children need adults across settings, who support and encourage each other in their particular roles. They provide an umbrella of love and safety over them which is so important to their healthy development

3) Exosystem

Children can be affected for good or for bad by decisions made in the exosystem.

An exosystem which favours children is one which has policies that actively value children and families, and seeks to protect and empower them. Children and families have a better chance of flourishing in this positive environment.

However the converse situation holds risks for children. For example if government, both national and local, pass legislation which does not take into account impact on children and families it can have a negative affect on children. Reduction in benefit levels, school zoning, transport routes and charges, working conditions, access to services and the like, can all put strain on families, which in turn can mean that parents find it difficult to give the time and energy they would like, to their parenting role.

Similarly, decisions made by employers can also impose stress, whether this be redundancy, longer working hours, relocation of site, or change of structure and roles. On the other hand, if employers are committed to the support of families, such stress can be minimised. Flexible and reasonable working hours, and even the involvement of family in the work setting can give strong support to the parental role. The acknowledgement and support of the employer, of cultural issues associated with times of births, deaths, marriages and other occasions, can greatly enhance family life. The absence of this acknowledgement and support works against family life to the detriment of children.

Societies generally are not good at looking at policy decisions through the eyes of children. It is a legitimate role of social workers to advocate strongly on behalf of children and families so that policy matters take their needs into account. If exosystems are to actively promote quality family life they must include a pro-child ideology.

4) Macrosystem

The macrosystem contains the basic values, beliefs and ideology by which things are done in a society. It is a kind of "blueprint" upon which the society is based. This "blueprint" drives all the policy which flows from it. If this "blueprint" reflects values among others such as the equality of all people, the sanctity of life, the preciousness of children, the irreplaceable role of families, the desirability of quality services to enhance family life, then generally, children and families will receive the services, support and encouragement they need. Children though, become much at risk when these values are not reflected in the macrosystem as is reflected in societies where children are aborted, used as cheap labour, made into child

soldiers, sold into sexual slavery, denied an education, denied good health care and abandoned to survive on their own.

Children are the most vulnerable members of our communities. They deserve caring adults who will work to change the ideologies of all societies into pro children, pro family ideologies. Again it is a legitimate social work role to advocate for a society which places a high value on children and families, and earnestly seek their well being.

Prayer is an important part of this process, for ultimately it is in sincere and persevering prayer which brings about the most profound change for good in society.