

Advanced Clinical Practice Competencies

Social work competence is the intentional integration and application of social work knowledge, values, and skills to promote human and community well-being in practice. **A holistic view of competence is multidimensional and involves:**

- Knowledge
- Values
- Skills
- Critical thinking
- Affective reaction
- Exercise of judgment.

The nine competencies below represent the essential components of social work practice. Mastery of these competencies is demonstrated in an interrelated fashion. The process of learning is both developmental and dynamic and may involve focus on individual competencies. The goal of social work education is the integration of the competencies into holistic practice.

Each of the nine advanced clinical competencies describes the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes that comprise the competency, followed by a set of behaviors that integrate these components. These behaviors represent observable components of the competencies, while the preceding statements represent the underlying content and processes that inform the behaviors.

1. Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Social workers understand the value base of the profession and its ethical standards, as well as relevant laws and regulations that may impact practice. Social workers apply principles of critical thinking to frameworks of ethical decision-making in practice. Social workers understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions influence their professional judgment and behavior. Social Workers also understand the role of other professions in inter-professional settings. Social workers also understand emerging forms of technology and the ethical use of technology in social work practice.

Social work interns:

- Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior and appearance with awareness of differential norms across communities;
- Demonstrate self-reflection and self-regulation in clinical practice;
- Actively engage in supervision, collaboratively setting an agenda and demonstrating openness to feedback and with increased initiative, independence, collaboration;
- Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes;
- Make ethical decisions in clinical practice using NASW Code of Ethics, other professional social work codes, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, and consultation;

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- Communicate clearly and professionally in a timely manner in writing and verbally with sensitivity to the needs of differing audiences.

2. Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Social workers understand how diversity and difference characterize and shape the human experience and are critical to the formation of identity. As a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege, power, and acclaim. Social workers also understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and recognize the extent to which a culture's structures and values, including social, economic, political, and cultural exclusions, may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create privilege and power.

Social work interns:

- Integrate knowledge of how diversity and difference shape the intern-client relationship, assessment, goals and intervention in clinical practice;
- Employ cultural humility in clinical practice, integrating cultural self-awareness with knowledge of and openness to learning from clients about their own culture to guide interventions

3. Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice

Social workers understand that every person has fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education. Social workers understand the global interconnections of oppression and human rights violations and are knowledgeable about theories of human need and social justice and strategies to promote social and economic justice and human rights. Social workers understand strategies designed to eliminate oppressive structural barriers to ensure that social goods, rights, and responsibilities are distributed equitably and that civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural human rights are protected.

Social work interns:

- Use knowledge of the effects of oppression, discrimination and historical trauma on clients to promote human rights in clinical goals and interventions;
- Advocate for increased access to clinical and other social services to ensure protection of human rights.

4. Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

Social workers understand quantitative and qualitative research methods and their respective roles in advancing a science of social work and in evaluating their practice. Social workers know the principles of logic, scientific inquiry, and culturally informed and ethical approaches to building knowledge. Social workers understand that evidence that informs practice derives from multi-disciplinary sources and multiple ways of knowing. They also understand the processes for translating research findings into effective practice.

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Social work interns:

- Use an evidence-based process to identify and apply effective clinical interventions for particular populations, problems and settings;
- Where possible, apply practice experience to the development of new knowledge through participation in research;
- Use research methodology from multi-disciplinary sources to evaluate clinical practice effectiveness and/or outcomes.

5. Engage in Policy Practice

Social workers understand that human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, are mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels. Social workers understand the history and current structures of social policies and services, the role of policy in service delivery, and the role of practice in policy development. Social workers understand their role in policy development and implementation within their practice settings and engage in policy practice to effect change within those settings. Social workers identify social policies at the local, state and federal levels that impact client well-being and service delivery.

Social work interns:

- Assess how social policies impact the delivery of and client access to social services;
- Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate and advocate for policy changes that advance human rights and social, economic and environmental justice.

Competencies 6 - 9

There are several shared principles related to engagement, assessment, intervention and evaluation of practice that apply to Competencies 6 - 9. These include:

- Value the importance of human relationships which are the basis of all social work practice;
- Critically evaluate and apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to facilitate clinical practice with clients;
- Value the importance of inter- professional collaboration and communication recognizing that beneficial outcomes may require interdisciplinary and inter-organizational participation;
- Understand how their personal experiences and affective reactions may impact their clinical practice with clients;
- Apply knowledge about human diversity that characterizes and shapes human experience and relationships.

6. Engage with Individuals, Families, and Groups

Social workers utilize strategies to engage clients to advance practice effectiveness.

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- Effectively engage with clients as equal partners using empathy, self-reflection and other interpersonal skills;
- Develop relationships with clients that are professional, purposeful, and differential - characterized by clear boundaries.

7. Assess Individuals, Families, and Groups

Social workers utilize a range of methods to ensure comprehensive assessment and recognize the implications of the larger practice context in the assessment process.

Social work interns:

- Clarify the client's request for assistance; readiness for change and presenting problem;
- Gather and organize appropriate information to create a multidimensional biopsychosocial assessment in a written format;
- Formulate an understanding of the client including precipitants to the presenting problem, interpersonal dynamics, historically relevant events, and cultural influences;
- When appropriate, utilize this formulation to aid in diagnosis.

8. Intervene with Individuals, Families and Groups

Social workers utilize methods of identifying, analyzing and implementing evidence-informed interventions to achieve client goals.

Social work interns:

- Collaborate with the client to define goals within the context of the agency's mission and services;
- Initiate and implement treatment plans and contracts with the client to meet goals, based on appropriate clinical and human behavior theory and research evidence;
- Utilize clinical concepts such as transference/countertransference and differential use of self in clinical practice;
- Collaborate with other professionals as appropriate to achieve beneficial outcomes;
- Facilitate effective transitions and endings that promote mutually agreed-upon goals;
- Complete agency required documentation

9. Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, and Groups

Social workers recognize the importance of evaluating processes and outcomes to advance practice, policy, and service delivery effectiveness. Social workers understand qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness.

Social work interns:

- Select and use appropriate methods to monitor and evaluate outcomes;

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- Apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness;
- Document client progress in agency records as required by agency.