

Guiding Principles of Family Social Work

The following principles equip the social worker to emphasize family strengths and positive choices in family work. They will lay the foundation of family social work and convey a belief in the families capacities to institute positive change.

1: The Best Place to Help Family is in their Home

The home is the natural living environment for the family. Through observation in the home patterns of family interaction and behaviors, the family social worker is best able to develop a comprehensive assessment of the family.

Interventions based on accurate knowledge of families in their social context provide optimal opportunities for success. In this way, families do not have to face the challenging task of translating office based interventions and transferring the acquired learning; one step in the application process is eliminated. Family issues may require the family social worker to be in the home for many hours a week, focusing on daily issues and interactions.

Working out of the home, the family social worker can give immediate feedback an intervention, teaching new ways to interact and solve problems.

2: Family Social Work Empowers Families to Solve their Own Problems

A primary goal of family social work is to assist family members to become competent, as a parent, as partner, or as a functioning member of family.

Imposed solutions suggested by the family social worker may alleviate current stresses, but often fail to help the family become equipped to deal with future issues. Families change by learning and then practicing new skills. It is critical for the family social work to be aware that the over arching goal of family social work is to promote family participation in change in a way that increases self-reliance and dependence. Family vary in their ability to work while under stress. Some families have effective coping and problem solving skills but require a

special boost during a stressful time. Other families require ongoing assistance and support, often from several agencies. It is important to remember that all families have unique strengths and weaknesses and that no family completely lacking in abilities or strengths. An accurate assessment of the specific capabilities of families should come before the design of the intervention.

3: Intervention Should be Individualized and Based on an Assessment of the Social, Psychological, Cultural, Educational, Economic and Physical Characteristics of the Particular Family

Family social work begins where the particular family is. This principle is true whether it is the social workers first or a twenty first interview of the family.

Families strengths and issues must be assessed in an ongoing way and then evaluated to ensure appropriate and timely intervention. What is effective for one family may not work for an other family with similar problems.

Interventions based on set formulas do not permit modifications tailored to the special needs of a particular family. One advantage of family social work is its capacity to implement interventions reflecting the unique qualities of individual family. In fact, in the 1980s family workers were challenged to become more culturally sensitive because characteristics of ethnic families such as extended kinship networks had been considered dysfunctional by conventional family therapy standards.

4: Family Social Worker Must Respond First to the Immediate Needs of Families and then to their Long Term Goals

Hungry children need food; children from homeless families require shelter; sick children need medical care. They cannot grow and develop on future promises while their parents learn a trade or seek employment. The family social worker must assess a family's immediate needs and ensure that these needs are met. At the same time, the social worker can help the parents institute

plans for the future that will ensure that needs will be met in the longer term. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a useful road map for assessing the needs of children and families. On the basis of this assessment, plans can be made to meet these needs, starting with basic physical need. Maslow outlined a hierarchy of needs, starting with basic physical needs such as the need for food and shelter. The second level of needs involves safety. Satisfying these needs involves protection from physical harm, including living in safe neighborhood. The third level includes needs related to belonging. Belonging needs are met when one is accepted and valued by a group, the family being the first social grouping. The next tier involves esteem needs and the final level is the need for self-actualization. The family social worker must ensure that family members' basic physical and safety needs are met and then works with family on meeting its other needs.