

Interviewing in Social Case Work

Definition: An interview is a conversation between two or more people (the interviewer and the interviewee) where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee. Interviews can be divided into two basic types, interviews for assessment and interviews for information.

Meaning and Purpose of Interviewing

In the common sense, view interview means mere conversation between two persons. In this sense, any idle talk between two without having any purpose behind it may be called interview. But in social work the term “interview” is used in a special sense and it bears special significance. Interview in social work refers to a professional conversation between the social worker and the client. It is always guided by some purpose. The main purpose of interview in the social work is to secure information about client’s behavior, problems, resources etc to establish good relations between the client and the case worker, to explain the agency’s policy to the client to inform him about the services possible to be rendered by the agency and also to help the client release his anxieties and tensions.

Importance of Interviewing

A social worker cannot help the client in his social functioning effectively unless he has a clear understanding about the client’s behavior, problems and strengths to deal with the problem. An important tool by which a social worker can collect direct information about the client’s problem, behavior and resource is interview. It is true that social worker can secure information about the client by writing letters by reading his past records etc. but direct knowledge has special significance. However, direct and first hand knowledge about the client can be had only through interview. Through interview, the social worker can secure information not only by asking questions and hearing answers but also by observing and interpreting the client’s mode of moving, talking etc. It also helps the worker to explain the agency’s policy to the client and establish **RAPPORT** with him by assuring him of all possible help. It enables the client to express his feelings of sorrows, sufferings and frustration to the worker and get a temporary relief from mental anxieties.

Techniques of Interview

Successful interview essentially requires the application of some techniques which are follows.

1) Acceptance

The success of interview depends on how the interviewer approaches the client when he comes in contact first time he may feel anxious and fearful. The interviewer should approach him in such way that he develops feelings of being accepted by the interviewer. But it does not mean that interviewer should accepts his anti-social behavior. What it implies is that the interviewer should accept him in the sense of understanding what is going on in his mind. This acceptance will reduce the anxiety and fear from the mind of client and lead to develop counter acceptance of the

interviewer by the client. This acceptance will establish rapport between him which is an essential factor for successful interview.

2) Observation

Observation is by the most important stage and technique of interview. This is the stage when almost all the relevant information are collected. This is why during observation, the worker (interviewer) should keep his senses alert to observe 'what the client says' and 'what he does not say'. He should also observe when the client remains silent and what is communicated through silence and what is signified by the gesture and postures of the client to quote. It is less obvious to remark that we should not equally observe what he does not say, what significant gaps there are in the story. We should note also such things as bodily tension, excitability because; they supplement the picture given by the client's words.

3) Listening

Listening is an important technique of the interview. An interviewer who listens to the client with patience can know more about the client than one who does not listen with patience. Because a man who is under stress and strain seeks to get some relief from his anxieties and tensions by expressing to others how miserable his life is. If he finds a good listener, he will go on telling what he has not even been asked. But if he is given to understand that he is not being listened to, he may try to conceal many relevant things and get rid of the interviewer as soon as possible. This is why a good interviewer must be a good listener.

4) Listening before talking

Listening before talking is another important technique of interview. If the client is allowed to talk freely without any interruption from the interviewer, he will feel relaxed and go on expressing what is going in the top of his mind without nay hesitation. This gives the interviewer an opportunity to become acquainted with the client to give answers to questions without their being asked and to suggest the method in which further approach should be made for collecting additional information, if required. It also enables the interviewer to see the problematic situation from the client's viewpoint.

5) The art of questioning

Perhaps the central method of interviewing is the fine art of questioning. The question should be asked in such manner as will create feelings of friendliness and cooperation, not of fear and suspicion in the mind of client. The question should be asked in the language with which the client is acquainted. Irrelevant question s and questions taxing the patience of the client should be avoided.

6) The art of talking and ,making comment:

Successful interview demands from the interviewer the skill in the art of talking and making comments. The interviewer should be cautious while making any comment on the client problems and behavior. He should make comment only for purposes similar to those for which the questions are asked to give reassurance and encouragement to the interviewee and to lead him to discuss further significant

matters. In addition, the interviewer may talk for the purpose of giving information and suggestions are welcomed by the client.

7) Answering the questioning

Very often the interviewers are troubled by questions asked by the clients. The interviewer can establish good relationship with the client by answering these questions. Sometimes the interviewer may face questions whose answers are not desire able. In that case he may intelligently direct the attention of the client to his own problem.

8) Leadership or direction

Assuming the leadership by the interviewer through the interview session is a sign of skillful interview. The interviewer should allow free expression to the client. In many instances, the client's suggestions may be called upon to formulate future plan. But in any case, the interviewer should keep leadership in his own hand, because he possesses more experience, more professional knowledge and skill. He is well informed about the agency's policy and knows well how to go ahead with client's problem. This is why every interviewer should take the leading role in the interview. He should guide the conversation along the path that will enable him to determine whether or not he will be able to help the client and if so, what respect.

9) Interpretation

The purpose of the interview in social work is to understand the client's behavior and his problem and to help him effectively. But many factors about this may not be expressed by the client. They may be revealed through the gesture, postures, mode of talking and other movements of the client. If sufficient knowledge about the client and his problem is to be obtained from the interview, the interviewer must possess the skill to interpret the various clues to the underlying situation which are presented by the client through his movement and mode of talking and behaving.

10) Closing the session

It is the last stage of the interviewing process. But the success of further interview, if necessary, depends on how to the previous interview ends while closing one session the interviewer should give thanks to the client for taking the troubles. The interviewer should not be given any understanding that with this ends the relationship between him and the interviewer.

Essentials Conditions of a Good Interview

Good interview requires not only knowledge and skill rather knowledge and skill are likely to be ineffective unless certain preparations are made for interview and unless certain precautions are taken. Annette Gratte has mentioned four essential conditions of a good interview. They are as follow:

1) *Physical setting:*

Creation of the favorable environment condition is an essential condition of the interview. Such an environment should be created where the client will feel happy and free. The interviewing setting should be made free from any other interference so that the interviewing session is not interrupted. The physical setting of the interview should ensure some degree of privacy to the client. Otherwise, it will be difficult job to secure detail information from the client. Site for interview should be selected according to the convenience of the client as far as possible.

2) *Recording*

Since human memory has limitation, it is practically impossible for the interviewer to memorize the entire conversation of the client and recollect it when necessary. This makes recording an essential condition of interview. But the question is how for recording during the interviewing session is wise? There are certain things for example, name, dates, age, place of residence and employment etc. which may be recorded when the conversation goes on. It is expected that no client will mind to allow interval for record of these things. But if the interviewer remains busy in recording throughout the whole session it may create suspicion in the mind of the client and he may think that he is not being properly listened to by the interviewer. This may have adverse affect on the interview, because the suspicion mind of the client may lead him to conceal many things. In recording, the interviewer should take certain precautions so that the client does not feel disturbed. In writing down the interviewer may use certain symbolic words which will enable him, in future, to recollect the whole phase of conversation.

3) *Confidentiality*

Very often in the social case work processes interview is designed to collect information about the private life of the client. The purpose of the interview will be achieved and benefit will occur only when the client is assured that his private affairs expressed in the interview will not be disclosed outside. Thus maintaining confidentiality constitutes an essential condition of a good interview.

4) *Background knowledge*

Interview is undoubtedly a complicated task, in interview, the interviewer is expected to take out many things from the client which he does not reveal in usual circumstances. This demands possession of adequate knowledge and skill by the interviewer. The interviewer is also expected to be well equipped with agency's policy.