## Chapter 1

## Introducing Generalist Social Work Practice: The Generalist Intervention Model

**Learning Objectives**

LO 1-1 Employ a unique approach to helping in the field of social work.

LO 1-2 Define the process of generalist practice by describing its inherent concepts.

LO 1-3 Acquire and apply an eclectic knowledge base to practice.

LO 1-4 Apply the systems theory theoretical framework to practice.

LO 1-5 Apply the ecological theoretical framework to practice.

LO 1-6 Acquire professional values and apply professional ethics to practice.

LO 1-7 Recognize a wide range of practice skills to work with individuals, families, groups organizations, and communities.

LO 1-8 Emphasize principles involving values that underlie generalist practice.

LO 1-9 Appreciate and stress the importance of human diversity.

LO 1-10 Advocate for human rights, and pursue social, economic, and environmental justice.

LO 1-11 Demonstrate a wide range of professional roles.

LO 1-12 Define critical thinking skills and apply them to practice.

LO 1-13 Incorporate research-informed practice.

LO 1-14 Follow a planned change process.

LO 1-15 Employ the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM), which uses a seven-step planned change focus.

**Chapter Outline**

**Introducing Generalist Practice**

**Social Work Is Unique**

Focus on Any Problem

Targeting the External Environment for Change

Advocacy

Professional Values and Ethics

Partnerships with Clients

Adherence to Professional Standards

**What Is Generalist Practice?**

The Definition of Generalist Practice

**Defining Generalist Practice: An Eclectic Knowledge Base**

An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Fields of Practice

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Systems Theory**

Major Concepts in Systems Theory

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: The Ecological Perspective**

Ecological Terms

Similarities Between Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Differences Between Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Which Perspective Is Best?

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment**

Critical Thinking Questions 1.1

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Welfare Policy and Policy Practice**

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Work Practice**

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Research-Informed Practice and Practice-Informed Research**

Necessary Research Skills for Social Workers

**An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Values and Principles that Guide Generalist Practice**

**Defining Generalist Practice: Professional Values and Ethics**

Critical Thinking Question 1.2

**Defining Generalist Practice: Application of a Wide Range of Practice Skills to Target Systems of Any Size**

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Individuals (Micro Skills)

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Groups (Mezzo Skills)

Generalist Practice Skills for Working with Families (Micro/Mezzo Skills)

Generalist Practice Skills for Working in and with Organizations and Communities (Macro Skills)

**Defining Generalist Practice: Emphasis on Client Empowerment, Strengths, and Resiliency**

The Strengths Perspective

Resiliency: Seeking Strength amid Adversity

**Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity**

Intersectionality of Diverse Factors

The Potential for Discrimination and Oppression

Achievement of Cultural Competency

**Defining Generalist Practice: Advocacy and the Pursuit of Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice**

**Defining Generalist Practice: Work Within an Organizational Structure**

**Defining Generalist Practice: Assuming Many Professional Roles**

**Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills**

“Facts” May Not Be True

The Widespread Application of Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking Questions 1.3

**Defining Generalist Practice: Research-Informed Practice**

**Defining Generalist Practice: Planned Change**

**The Generalist Intervention Model (GIM)**

**Planned Change Steps in GIM**

Step 1. Engagement: Engage the Client System

Step 2. Assessment: Assess the Client and Situation

Step 3. Planning: Formulate a Plan for the Intervention Process

Step 4. Implementation: Put the Plan into Action

Step 5. Evaluation: Evaluate Results and Effectiveness

Step 6. Termination: Conclude the Planned Change Intervention Process

Step 7. Follow-Up: Reexamine the Situation and Progress Made

**Other Practical Generalist Skills: A Perspective on the Rest of the Text**

**Chapter Summary**

**Competency Notes**

**Highlights**

Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Educational Policy

Highlight 1.2 Concepts in the Definition of Generalist Practice

Highlight 1.3 Summary of Some of the Major Terms in Systems Theory and the Ecological Perspective

Highlight 1.4 Evidence-Based Practice

Highlight 1.5 Achieve Competency in Ethical Practice by Applying Ethical Standards

Highlight 1.6 Learn to Make Difficult Ethical Decisions

Highlight 1.7 The Macro-Level Approach

Highlight 1.8 Dimensions of Diversity

Highlight 1.9 Pitfalls to Critical Thinking

**EPAS STANDARDS CHART**

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| **EPAS Standard** | **Chapter Section** |
| EP 1 (Competency 1) Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior *(p. 6)*: EP 1 is cited. *(p. 23)*: Knowledge of social work values and ethics is essential for demonstrating ethical and professional behavior. *(p. 26)*: This exercise is designed to stimulate critical thinking about human needs and professional ethical behavior. *(p. 34)*: Professional behavior includes understanding and assuming appropriate professional roles. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Professional Values and Ethics; Highlight 1.6 Learn to Make Difficult Ethical Decisions; Defining Generalist Practice: Assuming Many Professional Roles |
| EP 1a Make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context. *(p. 6)*: EP 1a is cited. *(p. 24)*: The NASW *Code of Ethics* is discussed, and an international code of ethics introduced. *(p. 32)*: NASW’s emphasis on cultural competency is reviewed. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Highlight 1.5 Achieve Competency in Ethical Practice by Applying Ethical Standards; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity |
| EP 1b Use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations. *(p. 6)*: EP 1b is cited. *(p. 24)*: The importance of personal reflection in order to manage personal values is stressed. *(p. 32)*: Self-reflection regarding personal values is an important aspect of cultural competency. *(p. 38)*: Critical thinking questions are posed to encourage self-reflection. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Highlight 1.5 Achieve Competency in Ethical Practice by Applying Ethical Standards; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity; Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills |
| EP 1c Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, written, and electronic communication. *(p. 6)*: EP 1c is cited. *(p. 32)*: Cultural competency is an important aspect of professional social work. *(p. 33)*: Part of professional demeanor involves working effectively with others. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity; Defining Generalist Practice: Work Within an Organizational Structure |
| EP 1d Use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes. *(p. 6)*: EP 1d is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; |
| EP 1e Use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior. *(p. 6)*:EP 1e is cited. *(p. 33)*: Working in an agency context involves using supervision and consultation appropriately. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Work Within an Organizational Structure |
| EP 2 (Competency 2) Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice. *(p.7)*: EP 2 is cited. *(p. 30)*: It’s essential for practitioners to understand human diversity and difference in order to undertake effective social work practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity |
| EP 2a Apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. *(p. 7)*:EP 2 is cited. *(p. 32)*: Cultural competency stresses the importance of how diversity and difference shape life experiences. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity |
| EP 2b Present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences. *(p. 7)*:EP 2b is cited. *(p. 32)*: Cultural competency involves ongoing learning from clients about their diverse issues and experiences. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity |
| EP 2c Apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases ad values in working with diverse clients and constituencies. *(p. 7)*:EP 2c is cited. *(p. 24)*: Self-regulation and management of personal biases is an important aspect of social work values and ethics. *(p. 32)*: Self-awareness and self-regulation are important aspects of cultural competency. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Highlight 1.5 Achieve Competency in Ethical Practice by Applying Ethical Standards; Defining Generalist Practice: The Significance of Human Diversity |
| EP 3 (Competency 3) Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice. *(p. 7)*: EP 3 is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 3a Apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels. *(p. 7)*: EP 3a is cited. *(p. 33)*: Championing for human rights, and social, economic, and environmental justice is a core value of generalist practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Advocacy and the Pursuit of Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice |
| EP 3b Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice. *(p. 7)*: EP 3b is cited. *(p. 33)*: The idea that social workers should engage in practice that advance human rights and social justice is stressed. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Advocacy and the Pursuit of Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice |
| EP 4 (Competency 4) Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice. *(p. 7)*:EP 4 is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 4a Use practice experience and theory to inform scientific inquiry and research. *(p. 7)*:EP 4a is cited. *(p. 21)*: Knowledge of practice-informed research is essential for effective practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Research Informed-Practice and Practice-Informed Research |
| EP 4b Apply critical thinking to engage in analysis of quantitative and qualitative research methods and research findings. *(p. 7)*: EP 4b is cited. *(p. 35)*: Use critical thinking to engage in research and utilize research findings is an important aspect of professional practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills |
| EP 4c Use and translate research evidence to inform and improve practice, policy, and service delivery. *(p. 7)*: EP 4b is cited. *(pp. 21, 38)*: Knowledge of research evidence is essential for effective research-informed practice | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Research Informed-Practice and Practice-Informed Research; Defining Generalist Practice: Research Informed Practice |
| EP 5 (Competency 5) Engage in Policy Practice *(p. 7)*: EP 5 is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 5a Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services. *(p. 7)*: Social workers must seek to identify social policies where change is necessary in order to meet people’s needs. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Welfare Policy and Policy Practice |
| EP 5b Assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services. *(p. 7)*: EP 5b is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 5c Apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice. *(p. 7)*: EP 5c is cited. *(p. 19)*: Critical thinking about policy and policy practice is essential to advocate for the advancement of human rights *(p. 35)*: Using critical thinking to engage in policy practice and advocacy is an important aspect of professional practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills |
| EP 6 (Competency 6) Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. *(p. 8)*: EP 6 is cited *(p. 21)*: Understanding the process of social work practice is essential for working with systems of all sizes. *(p. 25)*:Generalist social work requires adoption of a wide range of skills to work with systems of all sizes. *(pp. 42, 43)*:Engagement is an important step in GIM. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Work Practice; Defining Generalist Practice: Application of a Wide Range of Practice Skills to Target Systems of Any Size; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 6a Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies *(p. 8)*: EP 6a is cited. (*p. 28)*: Generalist practitioners must have knowledge to engage and work with systems of all sizes, including macro systems. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Highlight 1.7 The Macro-Level Approach |
| EP 6b Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 6b is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 7 (Competency 7) Address Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. *(p. 8)*: EP 7 is cited. *(p. 13)*:Systems theory provides a useful theoretical framework for guiding intervention with systems of all sizes. *(pp. 42, 43)*: Assessment is an important step in GIM. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Systems Theory; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 7a Collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 7a is cited. *(p. 19)*: Critical thinking questions aim to assist in the organization and interpretation of assessment data in the case example discussed *(p. 25)*:A question is posed to encourage critical thinking about client assessment. *(p. 35)*:Using critical thinking to conduct accurate assessments is crucial. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment; Defining Generalist Practice: Professional Values and Ethics; Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills |
| EP 7b Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 7b is cited. *(p. 12)*: Generalist social work practice requires a wide knowledge base including a broad range of theoretical frameworks for assessment. *(p. 13)*: Systems theory provides a useful theoretical framework for guiding the assessment process. *(p. 15)*: The ecological perspective provides a useful theoretical framework for guiding the assessment process. *(p. 18)*:Knowledge about human behavior and the social environment is critical for effective assessment in social work practice. *(p. 28)*: Generalist practitioners must have knowledge to assess the involvement of systems of all sizes, including macro systems, when considering a planned change process. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: An Eclectic Knowledge Base; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Systems Theory; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: The Ecological Perspective; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment; Highlight 1.7 The Macro-Level Approach |
| EP 7c Develop mutually agreed-on intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 7c is cited. *(p. 27)*: It’s key to assess client strengths when undertaking the intervention process *(p. 49)*: Practitioners should always work with the client to establish mutually agreed-on intervention goals. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Emphasis on Client Empowerment, Strengths, and Resiliency; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 7d Select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and values and preferences of clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 7d is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 8 (Competency 8) Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. *(p. 8)*: EP 8 is cited. *(pp. 42, 50)*: Implementation of an intervention is an important step in GIM. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 8a Critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 8a is cited. *(p. 19)*: Critical thinking questions aim to assist in the choice of intervention alternatives in the case example discussed. *(p. 25)*: A question is posed to encourage critical thinking about client intervention. *(p. 28)*:Generalist practitioners should consider the involvement of systems of all sizes, including macro systems, when considering client intervention. *(p.35)*: Using critical thinking to intervene with systems of all sizes is vital to professional practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment; Defining Generalist Practice: Professional Values and Ethics; Highlight 1.7 The Macro-Level Approach; Defining Generalist Practice: Critical Thinking Skills |
| EP 8b Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 8b is cited. *(p. 12)*: Generalist social work practice requires a wide knowledge base including a broad range of theoretical frameworks for intervention. *(p. 13)*:Systems theory provides a useful theoretical framework for guiding the intervention process. *(p.15)*:The ecological perspective provides a useful theoretical framework for guiding the intervention process. *(p. 18)*:Knowledge about human behavior and the social environment is critical for effective intervention in social work practice. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: An Eclectic Knowledge Base; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Systems Theory; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: The Ecological Perspective; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Human Behavior and the Social Environment |
| EP 8c Use interprofessional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes. *(p. 8)*: EP 8c is cited. *(p. 33)*: Working within an organizational structure involves interprofessional collaboration. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Defining Generalist Practice: Work Within an Organizational Structure |
| EP 8d Negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies. *(p. 8)*: EP 8d is cited. *(p. 19)*:Knowledge about policy and policy practice is essential for generalist practitioners to advocate on behalf of clients and constituencies. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; An Eclectic Knowledge Base: Social Welfare Policy and Policy Practice |
| EP 8e Facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals. *(p. 8)*: EP 8e is cited. *(p. 52)*: Effective termination involves a planned, steady progression. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 9 (Competency 9) Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities. *(p. 9)*: EP 9 is cited. *(pp. 42, 51)*: Evaluation is an important step in GIM. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy; Planned Change Steps in GIM |
| EP 9a Select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of outcomes. *(p. 9)*: EP 9a is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 9b Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of outcomes. *(p. 9)*: EP 9b is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 9c Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate intervention and program processes and outcomes. *(p. 9)*: EP 9c is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |
| EP 9d Apply evaluation findings to improve practice effectiveness at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. *(p. 9)*: EP 9d is cited. | Highlight 1.1 Social Work, Social Work Education, and Education Policy |

**Experiential Exercises and Simulations**

Seven exercises are provided for this chapter. Exercise 1.1 describes a simple activity to “break the ice” and help people feel more comfortable in class. In addition to serving as another ice breaker, Exercise 1.2 encourages students to think about their future roles in social work practice. Exercise 1.3 introduces students to a variety of concepts involved in generalist practice. Exercises 1.4 and 1.5 explore systems and ecological concepts, respectively. Exercise 1.6 explores the macro approach to generalist practice versus the micro and mezzo approaches. Finally, Exercise 1.7 introduces students to the concepts of social work values and ethical dilemmas in practice.

# Exercise 1.1: Breaking the Ice

1. Brief description:

You will be asked to share some personal information about yourself with the class to begin to “break the ice” in the group.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Reveal some personal information about yourself to others in the class.

2. Begin to demonstrate your communication skills.

C. Procedure:

1. To introduce yourself and share some information with others in the class, take a sheet of paper and write down the following information:

a. Your name.

b. One adjective that describes what you like best about yourself.

c. One adjective that describes what you like least about yourself.

d. Your hometown or area in the city where you live.

e. How you feel having to talk about yourself right now.

2. One person in the class should volunteer to begin. In turn, share what you’ve written with the rest of the class.

**Commentary to Instructor:** This exercise is a very simple ice breaker with the basic objective of opening up communication for the group and letting group members begin to find out some things about each other. The idea is to set the stage for open communication in the class. Because of the exercise’s simplicity, the type of items mentioned can easily be changed or expanded. For example, students might be asked to state what makes them happy or what they consider to be their greatest achievement. A long list of items can be very time-consuming and even boring. Therefore, the number of items students are requested to respond to should correspond to class size. The more students there are, the longer the exercise will take.

Asking for a student to volunteer to begin, even if a brief silence must be tolerated, places responsibility on class members to participate. It also conveys to students that active participation is often expected in practice classes, and it helps to establish a climate of openness. It is sometimes helpful for the instructor to volunteer to share the same information about him- or herself either before or after the students do. This can provide the opportunity for an instructor to act as a role model for open communication, or it can be used to thank students for their effort and subsequently reinforce participatory behavior.

Students are asked to write down their responses so that they don’t waste a lot of time thinking about what to say when their turn comes up. It also helps shyer students share information more easily. Instead of becoming nervous and forgetting what to say, in the worst case, they can read their responses.

Finally, the instructor might conclude the exercise by openly stating that its intent is to establish a tone of openness and participation for the course. Students should feel free to ask questions and participate in exercises and discussions.

**Time Allotment:** A minimum of 10 minutes, depending on class size.

**Material Required:** Pencils, paper, and this workbook.

# Exercise 1.2: Where Are You Going in Social Work?

Brief description:

You will be asked to respond to a number of questions regarding personal and professional goals.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Clarify your interest in the field of social work.

2. Identify some of your specific areas of interest and need.

3. Tell your instructor something about yourself, especially related to your specific areas of interest and need.

C. Procedure:

1. Take a sheet of paper, put your name on it, and answer the following questions (label each answer with the appropriate letter):

a. In which areas of helping are you specifically interested (for example, adoptions, mental health, work with the older adults, alcohol and other drug abuse)? List all that you can think of. If you aren’t sure or don’t know yet, say so. That’s OK.

b. Ideally, what would you like to learn from this course? Please be as specific as possible. What skills do you think you really need to learn?

c. What are your reasons for going into social work?

d. What practice situations do you think you might run into that scare you?

e. What strengths do you feel you bring to the field?

f. What weaknesses do you feel you have that might affect your work in the field?

2. Break into small groups of four to six persons. Pick *two* of your answers and share them with the others in your small group.

3. Hand your papers in to your instructor.

**Commentary to Instructor:** This is a brief exercise which can serve both as an initial ice breaker and as a means of getting to know students better. The questions are not highly personal, but they give the instructor a general idea of “where students are” in terms of interest and skill level. This exercise also sets the stage for a classroom climate of openness, self- exploration, and communication. Instructors can add any additional questions about student interests and experiences that may be relevant to course content.

**Time Allotment:** 15 minutes.

**Materials Needed:** Paper, pencils, and this workbook.

# Exercise 1.3: What Do Social Workers Do?

Brief description:

You will be given a series of vignettes that illustrate problems commonly encountered by social workers in social service agencies. Small groups then brainstorm some of the possible intervention strategies generalist social workers might consider to solve the problems involved.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Discuss basic types of social worker interventions at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

2. Recognize the complexity of many of the problems encountered in generalist social work practice.

3. Recognize the importance of interpersonal skills.

4. Identify some practice areas in which you could benefit from skill development.

C. Procedure:

1. Read Chapter 1 and/or listen to your instructor’s lecture concerning Chapter 1 prior to beginning the exercise.

2. Divide into small groups of four to six persons. Read each of the vignettes below, and discuss possible answers to the questions following each scenario. Select one member in each group to jot down the ideas your group proposes. This is in preparation for sharing these ideas later in a discussion involving the entire class.

**Vignette #1**

A fifteen-year-old can hardly make it through the morning until he can meet with his dealer and get some crack. He thinks briefly about how it didn’t used to be this bad, how he didn’t used to need it this much. But he doesn’t want to think about that for very long. It’s too uncomfortable. He rationalizes that life is short and he wants to make the most of it. Besides, all of his friends use drugs, too. He’s no different.

Questions for small group discussion:

a. How might a social worker approach this young man regarding his drug use?

b. What questions might you as a social worker ask?

c. How might you encourage this young man to open up to you about his problems?

d. What if the young man won’t say anything?

e. What if the young man expresses hostility or anger toward you?

f. What types of resources might be available to help him at the micro and mezzo levels?

g. What types of programs and services at the macro level might be available?

h. What types of programs and services might be developed at the macro level?

**Vignette #2**

Forlorn, homeless people are starving in the streets. Public funding for a community mental health program has been drastically cut back. That program had provided a halfway house where people could stay, receive counseling, and have their medication monitored. Years ago, the long-term, inpatient mental institution had been shut down. It was much too expensive. Now with the cutbacks, the community program can barely exist. People with serious mental and emotional problems have been turned away and are roaming the streets with nowhere to go.

Questions for small group discussion:

a. What services do you feel these people need at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels?

b. How might you as a generalist social work practitioner go about advocating for these people? What types of social service agencies and organizations could you target for such advocacy?

c. What programs could be developed?

d. What are some ideas for possible funding sources?

**Vignette #3**

A family of four who have lived on their family farm for five generations is dispossessed. They had several bad years of crop failures and were unable to pay back the loans they so desperately needed to survive at the time. They are living in their ’93 Chevy van now. They can’t find any housing they could possibly afford even while working full-time, minimum-wage jobs.

Questions for small group discussion:

a. What services do you feel these people need at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels?

b. How might you as a generalist social work practitioner go about advocating for these people?

c. What types of social service agencies and organizations could you target for such advocacy?

d. What programs could be developed?

e. What are some ideas for possible funding sources?

3. The class should then come back together to discuss each group’s ideas. The instructor will lead the discussion. Each group’s selected representative should summarize the group’s findings.

4. The instructor will then lead the entire class in a discussion addressing the following questions:

a. In summary, what types of micro, mezzo, and macro interventions did the groups discuss?

b. What was your reaction to the complexity of the problems?

c. Did this experience help you to see social work intervention in new ways? If so, in what new ways?

d. Where did you get stuck? What problems seemed exceptionally difficult to solve?

e. What skill areas do you feel you need to develop?

**Commentary to Instructor:** This exercise is intended to be a very basic introduction to the types of skills necessary in generalist social work practice. Students frequently enter the field focusing on micro level, interpersonal and counseling skills. This exercise intends to introduce them to the concept of multilevel intervention approaches from the very beginning of their practice course content.

Students will probably express some amount of frustration in that they won’t know what to do, especially in response to questions involving macro interventions. An instructor should be prepared to share suggestions with the entire class during discussion. This exercise provides a good opportunity to introduce the types of skills they will need to master for actual practice. It should also stimulate their interest in learning specific practice skills.

**Time Allotment**: 45 to 60 minutes (instructors can choose to use only one or two of the vignettes instead of all three. This will significantly decrease the amount of time used).

**Materials Needed:** This workbook.

**Exercise 1.4: Understanding Systems** [[1]](#footnote-1)1

A. Brief description:

You will be given a description of a family and its members followed by a series of situations occurring within the family. Discussion focuses on the direct application of systems concepts to this family and its situations.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Examine the meanings of various systems theory concepts.

2. Apply these concepts to a series of concrete family life situations.

C. Procedure:

1. After reviewing the systems theory concepts presented in the text, arrange yourselves in a circle. This allows for maximum observation of the role-play activity.

2. The instructor will describe members of a family system and other people involved with the system. (As the text describes, families are systems that lie somewhere between micro and mezzo systems.) The family you’ll discuss are the Abbots.[[2]](#footnote-2)2The basic family system is pictured below. Rectangles indicate males; ovals indicate females. Double-pointing arrows indicate that the couple is married. Children are depicted by a vertical line descending from the arrow to their names. Dotted lines indicate relationships between people who are not married. The ages of family members follow their names. The specific people involved in this exercise are as follows:

* **John Abbot** and **Jill Abbot** are married. They have two children, **Ashley** and **Jack**.
* Ashley is married to **Victor Newman**. They have no children.
* Jack is married to **Nikki**. Jack and Nikki have a daughter named **Victoria**.
* Victoria is in love with **Ryan**, her boyfriend.
* **Nina**, a friend of Ryan’s, really enters the picture a little later in the exercise.



3. The instructor will ask for volunteers to play each role. Each role-player’s first name should be written on an eight-by-five-inch note card and placed in front of him or her so that class observers can remember who is playing what role. The family members are to sit together inside the class circle.

4. Your instructor will present the role players with a series of situations. The situations are not sequential; each stands alone. For each situation, each member involved will be asked to respond as if he or she really was that family member. Players can add any additional details they wish about the family members they play.

5. The instructor will separately present each of the following situations to the role players:

**Situation #1**

Jack finds out that Victor and Nikki are in love with each other. Jack is mad and moves out.

**Situation #2**

Victor dies of AIDS. How he contracted HIV is unknown, although Ashley suspects drug use with tainted needles. The entire family is horrified and fearful.

**Situation #3**

Victor is involved in the upper levels of management in DideeDry, John’s paper diaper company. John owns 40 percent of the stock and is president of the company. John has a stroke and loses the use of his right side. Victor vies for control of the company. He goes to the board of directors and proposes that he take over the presidency. The board is seriously considering his request. The company needs a capable president. John is furious at Victor, as he wants to relinquish neither his control nor the presidency. John feels it will simply take some time for him to recover. Jill feels such wishful thinking is totally unrealistic.

**Situation #4**

Jill finds out that John had an incestuous relationship with Ashley in her early teens.

**Situation #5**

Victoria doubts Ryan’s faithfulness and gets an HIV test. She eagerly awaits the results and tells only her mother, Nikki, about her worst fears. Much to Victoria’s dismay, Nikki is so worried that she tells the rest of the family about it.

**Situation #6**

Ryan breaks up with Victoria. Two months later, Victoria discovers she’s pregnant with Ryan’s baby. Victoria runs into Ryan and Nina together. Nina announces that she and Ryan are engaged.

6. Each role player involved in the situation should share his or her feelings and describe how the situation might affect the family.

7. After receiving feedback from the individual role players, observers and role players should discuss the situation using systems theory concepts. Relate each systems theory term to the dynamics that might be occurring in the family. For example, any of the situations might upset the family’s *homeostasis*. Other examples include the types of *input* and *output* involved, and the formation of various *subsystems*.

**Commentary to Instructor:** Abstract concepts such as those portrayed in systems theory are often very difficult for students to grasp and apply to real-life situations. Asking students to relate these concepts to specific situations provides a more concrete basis for such applications. Having volunteers assume the role of family members helps students focus on the terms and their meaning. Using a family simulation also helps students to formulate a theoretical basis for understanding family systems. The intent is to provide some foundation knowledge for later work with families in practice.

Using the complicated family scenarios can make systems theory less formidable to students. However, instructors should feel free to replace the players and situations proposed above with any family configuration and interactions they choose.

Instructors should also feel free to limit the number of role players and their respective situations. This exercise can be adjusted to the amount of time available.

The ratio of role players to observers, of course, depends on the size of the practice class. This ratio is insignificant. It’s important that both observers and players be actively involved in the subsequent discussion of systems concepts. The role playing serves only as a mechanism to enhance student interest and involvement.

Throughout this workbook, characters in role plays will be arbitrarily designated as males or females. Since there is some degree of falsification and pretense inherent in roles anyway, it usually doesn’t matter.

**Time Allotment:** 40 minutes.

**Materials Needed:** 5”x8” notecards with prescribed roles for each player, and this workbook.

# Exercise 1.5: Comparing Systems and Ecological Concepts

A. Brief description:

You will be given a description of a family and its members followed by a series of situations occurring within the family. Discussion focuses on the direct application of ecological concepts to this family and its situations. (This exercise is identical to Exercise 4 above except that ecological concepts are substituted for systems theory concepts.)

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Examine the meanings of various ecological concepts.

2. Apply these concepts to a series of concrete family life situations.

C. Procedure:

1. After reviewing the ecological concepts presented in the text, arrange yourselves in a circle. This allows for maximum observation of the role-play activity.

2. Follow steps 2 through 6 presented above in Exercise 4, but replace ecological concepts with those of systems theory.

**Commentary to Instructor:** Essentially, the same comments apply to this exercise as to Exercise 4 above. If you have time, you might choose to do both and then initiate a class discussion that compares the two approaches. If you decide to do this, you should be prepared to articulate the similarities and differences between systems and ecological concepts. Students sometimes have problems articulating such abstract concepts.

**Time Allotment:** 40 minutes (for exercises 4 and 5 combined, approximately 60 minutes).

**Materials Needed:** 5”x8” notecards with prescribed roles for each player.

# Exercise 1.6: Change the System, Not the Person

A. Brief description:

You will be given three vignettes and asked to propose potential solutions based on macro system (versus micro or mezzo system) changes.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Assess problematic situations within a macro system context.

2. Propose potential macro level intervention solutions.

C. Procedure:

1. Divide into groups of four to six persons.

2. Read the following three vignettes. Take approximately eight to ten minutes to discuss each vignette. For this exercise, you do not have the option of changing or moving the individual to solve the problem. Think in terms of how the problem might be solved through macro level changes—what major organizations or community groups can do to effect change. For each vignette, focus on the following questions:

a. What policies might be changed?

b. What community services might be developed?

c. What might your strategies be to achieve these changes and services?

(Remember, do not change the individual. Focus only on macro system change.)

**Vignette #1**

You are a public social services worker in a rural county. Your job includes doing everything from helping older adults obtain their social security payments to investigating alleged child abuse. Within the past six months, six farm families in the county have gone bankrupt. Government farm subsidies that used to be available have been withdrawn. The past two years have been bad for crops. Now the banks are threatening to foreclose on the farm mortgages. As a result, the six families will be put out in the cold with no money and no place to go.

What do you do?

**Vignette #2**

You are a social worker for County Social Services. It’s a rural county with a few towns of ten thousand people but none larger. Your job as intake worker is to do family assessments when people call in with problems (anything from domestic violence to coping with serious illnesses). Your next task is to make referrals to the appropriate services.

You have been hearing about a number of sexual assaults in the area. Women are expressing fear for their safety. People who have been assaulted don’t know where to turn. The nearest large cities are over eighty miles away. You have always been interested in women’s issues and advocacy for women.

Now what do you do?

**Vignette #3**

You have a seventy-year-old client named Harriet living in an old, near-inner-city neighborhood in a large city. Since her husband died seven years ago, she’s been living alone. She has no children. She is still in good health and likes to be independent.

The problem is that her house has been condemned for new highway construction. The plans are to tear it down within six months. There is no public housing available for older adults within five miles of where she lives. She would like to stay in the area because she’s got a lot of older adult friends there.

Now what? (Remember, don’t move Harriet.)

**Commentary to Instructor:** It’s very easy for social workers, especially when they’re just beginning in social work practice, to focus on changing the individual. Applying interviewing and problem-solving techniques to an individual in a practice situation is exciting. Figuring out how an individual client thinks and functions is fascinating. Additionally, the individual is right in front of you. The other systems with which the individual client is involved are much more abstract. Their interactions and effects often seem vague and distant. Because of the complexity of outside systems, students often find it more difficult to pinpoint targets of change.

This exercise stresses how important it is for generalist social work practitioners to think in terms of needed changes beyond the individual client system. It’s important to stress for students a number of ideas. First, the individual provides only one focus for potential change. Second, macro system changes are seldom easy. They often involve influencing large numbers of people or changing organizational policies. Third, sometimes conflict is necessary despite how uncomfortable it may be. Fourth, focusing on such large system change is a unique aspect of social work that may open up multitudes of new problem-solving alternatives.

Students will likely find these scenarios difficult to solve from a macro perspective. They may find the task extremely frustrating. However, in teaching generalist practice, it’s important to encourage students to start thinking about interventions beyond the micro and mezzo levels from the very beginning of their skill acquisition process.

**Time Allotment:** 45 minutes.

**Materials Needed:** This workbook.

# Exercise 1.7: Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

A. Brief description:

The ethical dilemma presented below involves making tough decisions about the distribution of limited resources. You will be asked to make decisions regarding who is to receive and who is not to receive urgently needed resources.

B. Objectives:

You will be able to:

1. Recognize the fact that some ethical dilemmas have no perfect solution.

2. Identify your personal values with respect to the situations presented.

3. Recognize the importance of ethical decision making in social work practice.

C. Procedure:

1. Make decisions on an individual basis regarding the following situation:

You have $30,000 to spend. You must choose where it will be spent. Below are ten situations. Each situation requires spending the full amount of $30,000 in order to do any good. Dividing the money up would be useless. It would help no one.

Which of the following persons should have the $30,000 made available to help them?

a. A premature infant (born three months early) who must be maintained in an incubator and receive medical treatment.

b. A fifty-two-year-old man who needs a heart transplant in order to survive.

c. A fifty-two-year-old man who needs a heart transplant in order to survive and who also happens to be your father.

d. A five-year-old child with AIDS.

e. You, who have graduated but have been out of work for six months.

f. A divorced single mother with three children, a tenth-grade education, and nothing but the clothes on her back.

g. A person with a cognitive disability who needs to live in a group home.

h. A fourteen-year-old runaway who is addicted to cocaine and alcohol, has been prostituting herself to survive, and needs the money to enter a drug treatment program.

i. Rehabilitation for a convicted child sexual abuser who himself was sexually abused as a child.

j. A dispossessed urban family consisting of a couple in their late 20s and their three small children.

2. As an individual, decide how you would choose to spend the limited resources.

3. Subsequently, participate in a discussion involving the entire class. Your instructor can help you address the following questions and issues:

a. Who should receive priority in receiving needed funds?

b. What criteria should be used to make such decisions?

c. What personal values did you employ in making your decision?

d. What issues and considerations made decision making difficult?

e. To what extent is such a decision-making situation similar to or different from situations and decisions you have encountered in real life?

f. What could help you make such decisions more easily?

**Commentary to Instructor:** This exercise can be used to introduce students to the concept of ethical dilemmas. Distribution of scarce resources illustrates one of the ethical dilemmas commonly faced by social workers. In many real life instances, there is only a limited amount of money to spend. Social workers may need to make choices about who gets resources and who does not.

Students are likely to express serious frustration while struggling with this exercise. By definition, an ethical dilemma involves the inability to do the perfectly right thing. The crux of the dilemma entails having two or more ethical principles (each being *the right thing to do*) in conflict with each other. In other words, it is impossible to do both or all of the *right things* no matter how hard you try. Of course, such dilemmas are frustrating when your intent is to do *the right thing*. Thus, doing *the right thing* requires making a hard decision where you are forced to do something you consider, to some extent, *wrong* or bad. For instance, providing the $30,000 to the five-year-old with AIDS means *depriving* the fourteen-year-old cocaine and alcohol addict of help and treatment.

Students need to know that social work practice involves the consistent application of professional ethics to make the best choices possible, if not perfect choices. Of course, the point can be made that there are many types of ethical dilemmas. Distribution of limited resources provides only one example. This example does provide the opportunity to introduce the importance of ethical decision making and to refer to Chapter 11, which focuses entirely on ethics and values.

**Time Allotment:** 25 minutes.

**Materials Needed:** This workbook.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The system that social workers need to change or influence in order to accomplish their goals is called the target system. Give an example of a target system from a micro level, mezzo level, and macro level system. Describe a change that might require an intervention at all three levels.
2. What is the difference between competencies and component behaviors? Is ethical and professional behavior a competency or a component behavior? Explain your answer.
3. Consider the ecological perspective as it relates to individuals and families. What are its key features? Generalize these key features to the ecological perspective of communities.

**INQUIRY ESSAYS**

1. Empowerment is an important concept in generalist practice. It is defined as the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situations. How have you been empowered in your own life? In what ways have you empowered someone else?

2. Now consider the task of empowering a group or organization. Based on your own personal and work experiences, how would you go about this process? What are some key factors you would take into account when working towards empowering a group or organization?

**ONLINE LEARNING**

**Client System Assessment Tools for Social Work Practice**

<https://www.nacsw.org/Convention/WengerClemonsJClientFINAL.pdf>

**Kirst-Ashman’s Planned Change Process Series of Videos**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL035FFC4493D1687E>

**Introduction to Social Work Video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJXRB1V5eVw>

1. 1 The description, objectives, and much of the procedure and commentary for this exercise are taken from “Exercise 1: The Family System” in K. Kirst-Ashman and C. Zastrow, *Student Manual of Classroom Exercises and Study Guide for Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 Thanks are extended here to Ruth Kirst who provided help regarding character development. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)