

**Name of Teacher: Dr. Rajkumari Ahir
(Course Coordinator, MSW)**

(Department of Sociology, MLSU)

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Skills of social group work

1. Active listening

Active listening is one of the most important soft skills for social workers, as it allows them to understand the specific needs of their clients and build productive relationships. By being attentive, social workers can establish a sense of trust and mutual respect that is crucial for helping individuals in need, especially if they're dealing with addiction, mental illness, poverty, or discrimination. Of course, active listening goes well beyond the verbal: The ability to identify emotional distress in a person's body language can guide social workers' communication styles and professional recommendations.

2. Communication skills

Social workers communicate with people from a diverse range of professional and cultural backgrounds, including clients, co-workers, care providers, government officials, and members of nonprofit organizations. As such, the ability to adjust your written and verbal communications is essential to effective collaboration when multiple stakeholders are involved. This includes adapting your tone, body language, and writing style to accommodate different audiences and settings. Social workers must also carefully document what they did for their clients and create detailed reports that outline their professional recommendations.

3. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to identify with another person's situation on an intellectual and emotional level. Most social workers are naturally empathetic, having joined the field because of their deep concern for those in need and a desire to help alleviate emotional stress. This trait allows social workers to build strong relationships by forming genuine connections with their clients, and locate solutions that can improve people's lives in tangible ways. While empathy is often an innate trait, according to Psychology Today, social work practitioners can sharpen their skills through training and development exercises.

4. Boundary setting

Although empathy is a core trait of successful social workers, it can also lead them to take the stress of their work home with them. Self-care is extremely important for professionals in this field, as they regularly assist individuals who are struggling with addiction, mental and physical illnesses, and poverty, which can take a toll on their emotional well-being. Setting boundaries between yourself and clients can not only help alleviate work-related stress, but it can also make you a more effective and compassionate ally without impacting your health.

5. Critical thinking

One reason social work can be challenging is that every individual or group deals with a unique set of circumstances, many of which call for specific solutions. After identifying the nature of a client's issues, social workers use their critical thinking skills to identify social services, government programs, and support structures that will have the greatest positive impact. This often requires the use of logic, analysis, and creativity, as social

Work practitioners must be able to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to similar problems.

6. Time management

Social workers have busy schedules, which can make it difficult to find a healthy work-life balance. Professionals in this field handle multiple cases and administrative tasks simultaneously, making time management an essential part of their daily routine. In addition to budgeting their time wisely, social workers must ensure all clients receive the care, attention, and emotional support they need without unnecessary delays. This often necessitates written schedules that outline all aspects of their workday, from client meetings and interventions to in-office tasks like applying for social programs and drafting reports.

7. Advocacy

In many cases, social workers advocate on behalf of individuals, families, and communities that are underserved by government and social services. To ensure their clients get the support they need, social work practitioners regularly call for the creation of new programs, the revision of existing policies, and the development of community-based support frameworks. Advocacy is a powerful tool for bringing about positive change and empowering individuals to overcome challenges in their lives. As such, aspiring social workers should cultivate communication and interpersonal skills that will help them affect real change at the local, state, and federal levels.

8. Cultural awareness

Working with clients from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds requires a great deal of openness and respect. Social workers use their sense of cultural awareness to help inform their interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively with a diverse range of individuals. While having strong opinions is only natural, allowing them to bleed into your work can make clients comfortable. Social workers should strive to remain objective in their judgments and focus on finding actionable solutions that will enrich the lives of the people, families and communities they serve.

In the case of social workers, Emotional Intelligence is an important skill for the role and it is thought to have a beneficial effect on stress. Emotional Intelligence is defined as being able to recognize emotions in yourself and others, understanding how emotions work and being able to manage emotions. Social workers are often subjected to 'emotional Labour', when they have to mask their true feelings in a situation where they may feel angry, embarrassed or even fearful with a hostile client or upset about the circumstances of a vulnerable child. Such experiences because chemical changes in the body as part of a stress response, which cannot be acted upon there and then, as there are limited opportunities for these feelings to be vented at work.

What are the boundaries?

These are a few of the major boundaries that may have implications for your practice and Behaviour.

1. Client focus. You are expected to place the needs of service users on your caseload at the center of any decisions that you make about them and their lives.
2. Self-disclosure. Information about yourself and your personal life should not be disclosed to clients.
3. Dual relationships. You should not hold more than one type of relationship with a client, for example, they cannot work for you, be a family member or receive extra private support from you, as well as be one of your clients.
4. Working within your competence. It is important that you understand the limitations of your role and of your personal capabilities, and when to refer to other professionals or to seek further support and advice for yourself and your clients.
5. Looking after self. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in a fit state to do the job that you are required to do. This covers not only your behaviour outside work but also how you manage your stress and emotions within work and caused by your work.

Crossing or breaking boundaries

The reality of work in the social care sector is that boundaries will get crossed at various points for a variety of reasons, whether it is simple human error, tiredness, stress, manipulation by clients, difficult situations, bad luck or just a bad day at the office. It is your job to spot potential and actual boundary crossings and to take appropriate action.

A boundary crossing is usually part of a pattern or a build up of behaviour between you and your client. Much of the build up may be internal for one, or both, of you. It is not practical for us to challenge everything that a client says or does that might be a crossed boundary and so we have to work in a world where we are essentially doing an ongoing dynamic risk assessment of the situation, intervening where necessary.