

Introduction to Social Work Practice

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(A concise, organized guide for students and newcomers to the field)

1. What Is Social Work?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A professional discipline that promotes social change, development, cohesion, and the empowerment of individuals, families, groups, and communities.
Core Values	Service, Social Justice, Dignity & Worth of the Person, Importance of Human Relationships, Integrity, Competence.
Primary Goal	Enhance well-being and help people solve problems in everyday life.

2. Foundations of Practice

Foundation	Key Points
Human Behavior & the Social Environment (HBSE)	• Examines how biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors influence behavior. • Uses ecological systems theory (micro?, meso?, exo?, macro?levels).
Social Justice & Human Rights	• Advocacy for equitable access to resources. • Recognizes oppression, discrimination, and systemic barriers.
Ethical Practice	• Guided by the NASW Code of Ethics (confidentiality, informed consent, dual relationships, etc.). • Integrates best research, clinical expertise, and client values.
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)	• Ongoing assessment of outcomes.

3. The Helping Process (The “Helping Cycle”)

1. **Engagement** – Build rapport, establish trust, clarify roles.

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2. **Assessment** – Gather data (biopsychosocial, strengths, needs, risk factors).
3. **Planning** – Set collaborative, measurable goals; develop intervention strategies.
4. **Implementation** – Deliver services (counseling, case management, advocacy).
5. **Evaluation** – Review progress, adjust plan, document outcomes.
6. **Termination** – Prepare client for independence; ensure follow-up resources.

Visual cue: Think of the cycle as a **continuous loop**—evaluation informs the next round of planning.

4. Major Practice Settings

Setting	Typical Clients	Core Functions
Child Welfare	Children, families	Protection, foster care placement, reunification services.
Healthcare	Patients, families	Discharge planning, psychosocial support, advocacy for services.
Mental Health	Individuals with psychiatric diagnoses	Counseling, crisis intervention, community integration.
Schools	Students, families	Counseling, behavior interventions, family outreach.
Community Development	Neighborhoods, NGOs	Program design, capacity building, policy advocacy.
Criminal Justice	Offenders, victims	Re-entry planning, restorative justice, victim support.

5. Core Intervention Strategies

Strategy	When to Use	Example Techniques
Counseling & Psychotherapy	Emotional distress, trauma, coping deficits	Solution-focused brief therapy, CBT, narrative therapy.
Case Management	Complex service needs, fragmented resources	Needs assessment, service coordination, follow-up.

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Strategy	When to Use	Example Techniques
Advocacy	Systemic barriers, rights violations	Policy briefs, lobbying, client representation.
Group Work	Peer support, skill building	Psycho?educational groups, support groups, task groups.
Community Organizing	Social change, collective action	Community meetings, coalition building, public campaigns.
Crisis Intervention	Immediate risk, acute trauma	Safety planning, de?escalation