

Overview of Social Work

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Key concepts, roles, settings, and professional standards

1. Definition & Core Purpose

Aspect	Description
Social Work	A professional discipline focused on enhancing individual and collective well-being through the promotion of social justice, human rights, and the empowerment of vulnerable populations.
Primary Goal	To help people solve problems, improve their quality of life, and achieve their full potential within the context of their families, communities, and society.
Values (NASW Code of Ethics)	Service, Social Justice, Dignity & Worth of the Person, Importance of Human Relationships, Integrity, Competence.

2. Historical Milestones

Period	Milestones
Late 19th–early 20th c.	Emergence of charity work & settlement houses (e.g., Jane Addams, Hull House).
1917	First formal training program at the University of Chicago – the “School of Social Service Administration.”
1930s	Development of the <i>social casework</i> model; rise of public welfare agencies during the New Deal.
1940s–1950s	Expansion of clinical social work; integration with mental health services.
1960s–1970s	Community organization & advocacy movements; emphasis on civil rights and anti-poverty programs.
1990s–present	Evidence-based practice, interdisciplinary collaboration, and global social work frameworks.

3. Major Practice Settings

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Setting	Typical Client Populations	Core Functions
Child & Family Services	Children, parents, foster families	Abuse/neglect assessment, reunification planning, parenting support.
Healthcare/Medical Social Work	Hospital patients, chronic illness families	Discharge planning, counseling, coordination of community resources.
School Social Work	Students, families, teachers	Academic support, crisis intervention, behavioral assessments.
Mental Health & Substance Abuse	Individuals with psychiatric diagnoses, addiction	Psychotherapy, case management, relapse prevention programs.
Community Development	Neighborhoods, NGOs, advocacy groups	Program design, capacity building, policy advocacy.
Gerontology	Older adults, caregivers	Aging in place planning, elder abuse prevention, hospice liaison.
Criminal Justice	Incarcerated persons, victims, probationers	Reentry planning, restorative justice facilitation, victim support.

4. The Helping Process (Five-Stage Model)

1. **Engagement** – Build trust, clarify roles, and establish a collaborative relationship.
2. **Assessment** – Gather data (biopsychosocial, ecological), identify strengths & needs.
3. **Planning** – Co-create measurable goals; select interventions based on evidence and client preferences.
4. **Implementation** – Deliver services (counseling, advocacy, resource linkage) while monitoring progress.
5. **Evaluation & Termination** – Review outcomes, adjust plan if needed, and prepare for client independence.

5. Key Theoretical Foundations

Theory	Core Idea	Application
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Systems Theory	Individuals are embedded in interrelated systems (family, community, society).	Case formulation that considers multiple environmental influences.
Strengths-Based Perspective	Focus on client capacities rather than deficits.	Empowerment-oriented goal setting.
Ecological Model	Interactions between person and environment occur at micro	