

Overview of Social Work

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Key concepts, roles, practice settings, and professional standards

1. What Is Social Work?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A profession dedicated to enhancing human well-being, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups, through advocacy, direct services, and systemic change.
Core Values (NASW)	1. Service 2. Social Justice 3. Dignity & Worth of the Person 4. Importance of Human Relationships 5. Integrity 6. Competence
Primary Goal	Empower individuals, families, and communities to achieve optimal functioning and social inclusion.

2. Historical Milestones

Period	Milestone	Impact
Late 19th c.	Emergence of “settlement houses” (e.g., Jane Addams, Hull House)	First organized effort to address urban poverty and immigrant needs.
Early 20th c.	Formal training programs (e.g., 1904 Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy)	Established social work as a distinct academic discipline.
1930s	New Deal & Social Security Act (U.S.)	Created large-scale public welfare programs; expanded field roles.
1940s-1950s	Development of clinical social work & psychotherapy	Integrated mental-health services into social work practice.
1960s-1970s	Community organization, anti-poverty movements	Shift toward macro-level interventions and social justice advocacy.
1990s-2000s	Evidence-based practice & outcome measurement	Strengthened accountability and professional credibility.

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2010s? present	Emphasis on trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and technology	Modernizes service delivery and expands reach (e-health, data analytics).

3. Levels of Practice

Level	Focus	Typical Settings	Key Functions
Micro	Individual & family	Hospitals, schools, private practice, child welfare agencies	Assessment, counseling, case management, crisis intervention.
Mezzo	Groups & small communities	Support groups, residential facilities, community centers	Facilitation of support groups, program coordination, family mediation.
Macro	Policy, systems, large-scale change	Government agencies, NGOs, advocacy coalitions	Policy analysis, program development, research, lobbying, community organizing.

4. Major Practice Settings & Roles

Setting	Common Titles	Core Responsibilities
Healthcare	Medical Social Worker, Discharge Planner	Coordinate care plans, address psychosocial barriers, support patients/families.
Child & Family Services	Child Welfare Social Worker, Family Therapist	Conduct investigations, develop safety plans, provide reunification services.
Schools	School Social Worker, Guidance Counselor	Address academic, behavioral, and emotional issues; connect families to resources.
Mental Health	Clinical Social Worker, Therapist	Provide psychotherapy, crisis response, treatment planning.
Criminal Justice	Correctional Social Worker, Probation Officer	Offer counseling, re-entry planning, victim advocacy.

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Setting	Common Titles	Core Responsibilities
Community Development	Community Organizer, Program Manager	Design community programs, mobilize residents, evaluate outcomes.
Policy & Research	Policy Analyst, Researcher	Conduct policy reviews, generate evidence, advise legislators.

5. The Helping Process (Typical 5-Stage Model)

1. **Engagement** – Build rapport; establish trust