

# Succeeding at Your Internship: A Handbook Written for and with Students

EDITED BY

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# Chapter 1: What This Book is About and How to Use It

## The Need (for a Student-Oriented, Low-Cost, Effective Handbook for First-Time Internships)

This book was written over a 10-year period for, and with, university students taking a clinically-oriented practice course in a number of human services settings, broadly defined. As such, the text may be useful to counseling, psychology, social work, criminal justice, and other types of human services majors taking their first experientially-based internship, practicum, or “service learning” class. Of course, we realize that there are differences between the course structure for internship and practicum courses that depend on such things as major, college, and state requirements. Therefore, it is helpful to begin by defining how we are using these and other terms and concepts that are important in this book.

Despite differences concerning such issues as the number of clinical hours involved, the degree of supervision required, the type of duties, and so on, the internship and practicum learning formats share many common features. Since the most important ones include being situated in a real-world setting, experiencing a lack of professional experience, and dealing with active clinical supervision, we have chosen to use the terms internship and practicum interchangeably in this text. In order to reduce repetition, we tend to employ the word internship more often. Similarly, because universities are collections of colleges, we will also use these two terms interchangeably, although we also recognize there are differences.

In any case, the focus of this text is to help students who are just beginning to step into the clinical or professional world by giving them a sense of what to expect, when to expect it, and how to handle an internship, from finding one to completing one. In other words, the book is something of an experiential roadmap for beginners. This map was created with two perspectives in mind, that of the instructor and that of students who have “been there and done that,” which gives the book a unique tone. As such, the material is best read at the beginning of an internship. Occasionally, it is even useful to make it available to students before the class begins, especially if students must find their own placement sites, as many universities require.

The other terms or concepts that need clarification at the beginning concern what we mean by *human services* and *human service majors*. In this book, human services is a general term that describes any service, agency, or discipline whose primary focus is on facilitating the well-being of individuals and/or the communities in which they live. Since different majors can work in those settings, the phrase human services majors is used as a general rather than a degree-specific term. Consequently, those in human services, as broadly defined, are covered by this term. In other words, the internships discussed in this book are for majors interested in the helping professions in general.

What makes this look at internships different than others may be that it was designed and drafted by those who were going through their first internship experiences. Although they were always guided by a seasoned clinician who has taught a variety of psychology, social work, criminal justice, and counseling courses, the book is written in the students’ voice, often in their own words. “Succeeding at Your Intern-

ship,” then, really is “an experiential handbook written for and with students,” but always in conjunction with their clinician-professor.

## **The Problem**

What follows in this introduction could be placed in a preface to the book instead of an introductory chapter. Some of us, especially academics, look forward to the preface for at least two reasons. First, it prepares the mind for what follows, something akin to creating a rough, cognitive map that provides readers with an outline of what to expect as they move through the pages. Second, the preface often presents information not found elsewhere in the book, such as why the book was written, the needs it attempts to address, its intended audience, the author’s background, and so on.

Unfortunately, we have found that many students, and sometimes even instructors, simply bypass the preface. Doing so with this book is a mistake because it is necessary to understand what makes it unique before evaluating its merit, either as a student or an instructor. Most accredited human services programs include an experientially- oriented course. I have been teaching them for over 30 years and, like most instructors, have found that they teach me things as well.

For example, the first-time students take one of these courses, they are usually excited and anxious. As an instructor, I count on the excitement these majors have for their disciplines because that healthy enthusiasm, and the idealism on which it is often based, is necessary for success in the course and beyond. These individuals care about others enough to learn about helping them, and they usually look forward to what is often their first exposure to human services agencies, those who work in them, and the people they serve. Without this idealism and altruism, I suspect few people would enter these fields, given the type of salaries and stress these occupations often entail.

Nevertheless, these anticipatory feelings are accompanied by unpleasant ones, such as anxiety over not knowing what to expect, a feeling of being in over one’s head, or even a fear of failure. This dimension of starting an internship is important too. Its positive side is that these students recognize that they are about to touch the lives of others in special ways and are concerned about doing it in a professional manner. However, anxiety is also painful because it can evoke worries about inadequacy, rejection, or failure, especially if a college (or university) requires students to find a suitable site for the class or experience on their own. In addition to creating some pain, this anxiety can manifest itself in terms of practical problems, such as delays in finding internships because of procrastination, self-doubt, which can hinder the development of competence, and worry, something that often impairs the learning process.

We have at least two tools at our disposal to help with this higher-level teaching and learning challenge. One depends on the instructor and involves supervising the students in a group or one-to-one setting. I have done both, but more often my undergraduate version of the course is based on a group format. Here students are placed in various mental health, social service, and criminal justice sites where they are required to work a given number of hours per week and then meet with me as a group. The group is where they share their concerns, successes, and where they turn to support from their colleagues and me. My upper-level graduate internships tend to be more individually oriented, which creates a different learning environment. Either way, our supervision and support facilitate the success in which we are all interested.

The other tool usually comes in the form of books for the class, and there are several from which to choose. Some emphasize a particular theory or specific approach, while others are more eclectic. Some are more practically oriented and include many exercises and activities, while others are more scholarly or academic. However, they often seem to have two limitations that we want to address in this book. First, standard texts often fail to focus on the student's lived experience of the internship enough to help them feel that they are going about things reasonably well in this new and sometimes scary learning environment. Second, textbooks are typically expensive. For example, I recall one small paperback that had just under 100 pages of print, yet cost over \$100. That was a decade ago, and the cost of books has now become one more financial burden for the student. The need for an inexpensive, experientially-oriented book is what prompted me to look for a reasonable alternative for students and instructors.

## **A Solution**

A largely serendipitous event happened at the time I reached this point and became the first step in developing this book. A student in one of the internship classes I was teaching did not want or need a new field placement because he was already working at a human services agency that satisfied his career goals. Instead, this individual simply wanted a degree to earn a promotion and higher income within the same organization. He also expressed an interest in becoming an author. That combination created a unique opportunity at a fortuitous time, so I could not turn it down. Instead of burdening the student by requiring him to find or pick a placement at a new setting, I offered an alternative that ended up laying the foundation for this book.

Having authored a significant number of articles and books in clinically-related areas (Mruk 2013), I suggested that he could consider a different type of internship, one that focused on learning how to write a prospectus for a book. The idea was to create a description of what a low-cost, practically-oriented, student-friendly handbook for human services students taking their first practicum or internship experience might look like. He said "yes," and we agreed on a plan. By the end of that semester, he would write a 10-page overview of such a potential book. The final project would consist of, among other things, annotated chapter headings and crucial themes that students would likely encounter in an experientially-oriented human services internship or service-learning course.

The next step concerned addressing another problem, namely, the need for a *good* handbook for these courses. What defined good for us? Two things. First, the book had to be usable for different majors working in different settings. Since most undergraduates with interests in human services work must take a practicum or internship course, the book had to address themes that were common to all these majors. In contrast to most of the existing books designed to accompany these courses, this goal forced us to keep the academic diversity of students in mind. Rather than focus on a particular orientation, such as social work, or a general set of therapeutic techniques, such as cognitive therapy, we wanted the book to help beginners in general because they must also deal with more basic, practical, and concrete issues regardless of academic discipline or major.

This goal was met in a way that many of our colleagues might find interesting from a pedagogical perspective. Time and again, it was clear that the "real" student concerns went beyond learning about theory and practice. They also involved considerations such as knowing how to go about finding a practicum

if the institution does not provide placement sites, preparing for the interview for such a position, cultivating positive relationships with both colleagues and clients at the site, appreciating diversity, knowing about ethics, using supervision effectively, acquiring a beginner's level of employable competence, and leaving the placement in ways that create a bridge to the future. Since we already had a loose outline for a book written from a student perspective, it occurred to me that it could serve as the foundation for a practicum or internship handbook by sharing it with students and allowing them to add to it over time.

Consequently, as part of their course work, I began to have students write two-page papers on one of the themes in the prospectus. Then they would share their drafts with their colleagues, who would make suggestions for revision. Finally, the student would re-write the pages to the satisfaction of both the group and the instructor. Ten years later, students have expanded this "living book," as we began to call it, by turning themes into chapters and adding more information to it. Each chapter is based on student experience, but each one also includes practical suggestions and specific activities to help ensure success and illustrate the material. Students could choose whether they wanted their drafts to be considered for inclusion. Moreover, material that was submitted was modified by those who came after them and, of course, the editors. In this way, student confidentiality and instructor professionalism were appropriately honored. After following this process, we compiled chapter drafts into a manuscript and "tested" it as the main text for the course.

After reviewing the material with students in the practicum, we asked them when they would find the material most helpful in addition to, of course, using it during the semester. They said that sending them chapter two electronically well before the semester begins would help the most. This chapter deals with finding an internship site, preparing for the first interview, and reducing the anxiety often associated with these fundamental tasks. Having a guide to help students deal with these tasks before the semester has two advantages: Students have more time to find a site and the class does not need nearly as much time to get everyone up to speed at the beginning of the semester, which leaves more time for learning.

The second criterion concerned price. Given such things as ever-increasing educational costs, shrinking state funding, the uncertainty of federal grant and loan programs, and the growing burden of student debt, we felt a strong need to keep the price of the book low. The development of the manuscript addressed this problem nicely, as it was free to students in the course. Over the years, however, the online educational and publishing community started to lay the foundation for copyrighting so-called "open source books" as some states, including Ohio, started pressuring academics to "do something" about the rising cost of books.

Printed as a regular book, the manuscript would probably be about 110 pages long. Having attended many of the developmental and academic workshops Bowling Green State University consistently offers its faculty, I soon realized that a copyright and Creative Commons's license would help us reach this goal. The open-access format this organization provides makes it possible for us to offer a completely free version of the text to anyone who wants to use it. Another benefit of this approach is that, since it is in electronic form, it can be made available to the students well before the class starts. In other words, instructors could easily send students a link to the source and tell students to be sure to read Chapter 2 as early as possible so they could have help setting up an internship before class began. Of course, the



handbook can stand as a main course text, or it can serve as a supplemental one for a class that uses other material. Since it is written as a handbook, the text can also be used as an elective reading for students who wish to better prepare for taking their first heavily experiential training course on their own.

We also found it necessary to deal with two technical writing challenges that arose in the process of writing the handbook. One is the problem of *voice*, more specifically, the use of a formal academic voice versus personal informal voice in the book. The academic voice is more detached and professional, whereas the personal (first-person) voice is more free-flowing and familiar.

We asked students, instructors, authors, and college librarians about their preferences. There seemed to be an equal division between those who preferred the academic approach and those who preferred the personal approach. Fortunately, one of the editors teaches English, which turned out to be advantageous in making the final decision. As a result, we took a middle path. In other words, the third person is used when we are presenting more academic information. When we are addressing students concerns or experiences, we have used both the more informal first person and second person. Although such compromises often mean pleasing no one, it does reach both intended audiences, namely the more formal concerns of an instructor and the more experiential interests of the student. In this sense, the book reflects that the “teacher-student” and “student-teacher” approach Freire (1970) found so effective for learning.

The other issues concerned what to do with pronouns, such as *he or she/his or her* and the like. In order to remain “gender neutral,” we made the decision to follow what is becoming an acceptable grammatical solution: That is, to use the plural third-person pronouns *they, them* and *their*, when referring to a non-gender specific singular antecedent. For example, “The *judge* adjusted *their* robe.” Grammar purists will take exception to such “blasphemy,” but it is an effective solution that is gaining wider and wider acceptance.

## The Editors

Chris Mruk is a professor of psychology at Bowling Green State University and has offered internships for undergraduate human services majors as well as doctoral students in psychology for some 30 years. He also had a “real job,” as his wife is fond of saying, before coming to academia when he worked as a clinical psychologist. That experience includes employment in an inpatient psychiatric unit, supervising a heroin addiction program in Detroit, working as a crisis intervention expert in one of the nation’s first two 24-hour full-service emergencies psychiatric services, being a therapist in a community mental health center, directing a college counseling service at St. Francis University (Pennsylvania), and consulting for the Firelands Regional Medical System in Sandusky, Ohio. He has written a number of clinically-oriented books, one of which is in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition, as well as some 30 chapters and articles. Chris is the recipient of a number of teaching awards, including an appointment as a Professor of Teaching Excellence at Bowling Green State University. Details concerning his background can be found at [www.cmruk.org](http://www.cmruk.org). His primary duties in writing the book concerned its content and structure.

John Moor is a Teaching Professor in the Humanities Department at Bowling Green State University, Firelands. He has been teaching composition classes at the college since 1988. Before that, he taught high school English for 6 ½ years. He received his B.A. in English at Bowling Green State University in 1977 and his M.A. in Mass Communications from the same institution in 1988. He has written for several

local weekly and monthly newspapers over the years. When he's not grading student essays, he enjoys projects such as this—revising and editing manuscripts. (Really!)

Emily Gattozzi, MLIS (Master of Library and Information Science) is the Coordinator of Scholarly Publishing at Bowling Green State University. Her steady guidance and friendly helpfulness were instrumental in guiding this book through the open publishing process. Her work was the final step in reaching our goal: Offering students and instructors lower-cost alternatives to quality education.

## Chapter 2: Finding and Preparing for a Suitable Internship Site

### Introduction

Chapter 2 introduces the internship and helps guide students through the process of finding a “good fit,” though that might not turn out to be exactly as one imagined. More specifically, this chapter discusses much of what students want or need to know before finding and starting at their placement sites. Remember, your school may structure the course as a practicum or internship, but we are using the terms interchangeably because there is considerable overlap between them.

### Key Words

- **Human Services Worker:** A person who is trained to assist others to find appropriate and positive solutions to various life issues and problems. Their academic training varies widely.
- **Network and Networking:** The continuous development of a supportive system of sharing information and connections between individuals and groups that share common interests.
- **Internship:** An experientially-oriented course or learning situation aimed at providing students with real-life training and experience in a human service setting. Typically described as a practicum, internship, or service-learning experience.

It is important to know what exactly we mean by human services and what is expected of a human services worker before site selection. In general, human services and the related agencies they work at try to help people by addressing a wide spectrum of problems ranging from mental health to protective services. In so doing, they demonstrate a commitment to improving the overall quality of life for service populations and communities. Often, agencies will focus on a specific need or problem and direct their resources to help people deal with them. Human services workers come from several major areas, such as social work, psychology, liberal studies, criminal justice, and so on. They may hold many different positions in various types of human services agencies.

*Example:* There are three human services workers: one holds an associate degree, another has a bachelor’s degree in social work, and another in a different area. One decides to use the degree to work for a nursing home, helping to ensure that the residents are treated humanely. Another takes a job at a non-profit food bank where they deal with suppliers and clients while the third works with juveniles in the criminal justice system. All of them are professionals doing valuable human services work in relevant settings. Although trained differently, depending on their degrees or background, all of them are likely to benefit from having had a positive internship experience.

### Beginning the Internship

The internship and courses like it are learning experiences that students undergo to prepare for the workforce. It is an invaluable field experience where we, as students, can start learning to apply the

knowledge we gained throughout our human services coursework. The process is time consuming, and students entering the “helping system” for the first time may experience feelings of uncertainty, tension, or even anxiety. These feelings often occur during initial interviews when students are trying to find a site and during the first days at the site. Overcoming these feelings can help students do well at the site and better prepare them to empathize with clients and their struggles.

The internship is entirely different from traditional educational experiences in that students will utilize skills previously learned in coursework and implement them in new, unpredictable, real-world situations. Under the guidance of an instructor or site supervisor, students are provided with opportunities to learn as they go. Often this learning process is further enhanced in the classroom through interactions with the instructor who addresses student questions, comments, and concerns. The instructor also discusses course material and may hold weekly discussions where students can offer each other support and suggestions based on their own experiences. In this sense, an internship course can expose students to many different career paths as they learn about each person’s site and the work it does. It may also help to know that instructors look forward to these courses because they are often launching pads for students as they get ready to leave the academic nest for their future professions.

### **Choosing and Preparing for a New Type of Learning Experience**

There are many things to do to prepare for the internship experience, such as finding a site, making the first call, and requesting and preparing for interviews. Although this might be a stressful time, being prepared in advance through proper planning can relieve anxiety throughout the process. It also is helpful for you to find healthy ways to unwind and release such tension. The internship of your choice can be a rewarding, enriching, and successful experience if you prepare for it in advance.

Generally, the first concern you encounter is finding a site, although sometimes the college assigns you to one. Students majoring in human services are usually given information before the beginning of the semester in which the internship is offered. It is recommended that you become familiar with the materials and register for the course as early as possible, especially if you have to find a site on your own or if there is competition for those sites. The paperwork and the details associated with preparing for a site sometimes seem overwhelming because they often involve legal agreements between the agency and the college. If you are feeling overwhelmed with this process, it can be helpful to step back, take a deep breath, and look the material over to get a sense of what is needed. Then you can begin to use your developing problem-solving skills to form a step-by-step action plan aimed at reaching the goal of setting up your internship. Reading through this first chapter will help you identify the steps needed to secure a site. Again, it is recommended to start the process as soon as possible as it may move slowly. Agencies that take interns usually do so at their own expense, are generally very busy, and may not get back to you in a timely fashion. It is not uncommon to have to look for different sites until things work out, and that takes even more time.

Sometimes colleges or instructors will give you a list of potential sites for an internship. However, this may not be available in every class, so it is helpful to ask your instructor for site recommendations. Keep in mind that just because a site is not on the list, that does not necessarily mean it is off-limits. Most colleges have a process by which a new location is approved. Typically, it only involves instructor consent

and a little paperwork. While the list of sites is helpful to get you started, it is best to think about doing some networking, making the first call, setting a date for the interview, planning how to best handle the interview itself, and finding effective ways to finish the interview process. All of this might seem a little intimidating but being prepared can ease a lot of the tension.

## **Networking and Resources**

A network is defined as a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest. Often, we have relationships with people who can help us find a site, and this class is an excellent opportunity to utilize that connection. A resource can be described as an aid, especially one that can be readily drawn upon when needed, and often it involves our connections with others.

One of the first steps is to discover the resources you have through family and friends. By doing this, you will begin to network and find connections to others who will be beneficial to your success in finding a site. After searching through these “internal” resources, you should begin to search through your “external” resources, which may include churches, co-workers, classmates, instructors, or even personal acquaintances. Many times, we are unaware of how extensive our network is, which is why it is a good idea to explore your interpersonal connections at the beginning of the process.

Networking is a useful, ongoing tool that can expand your potential resources and can help you in the future. Of course, it is also important to turn to the usual resources, such as the Internet, social media, and Facebook sites, and to find the agencies in your community that interest you. After carefully deciding on a site that suits your human services interest, it may be a good idea to discuss it with family, friends, and acquaintances.

## **Finding a Good Fit**

Finding a suitable site also involves figuring out what areas of the field interest you the most. If there is a preference for working with children, for example, you might want to consider applying to school districts, children’s services, daycare, or juvenile facilities. Similarly, if you are interested in geriatrics, look at senior citizen homes, assisted living facilities, or area agencies on aging. Some important details to consider when choosing a site that is a good fit involve asking yourself some questions, such as, “What are my strengths?,” “What are my weaknesses?,” and “What are my interests?” Then, reflect on your answers. Having this type of information is useful for determining where to start your search for an internship site.

In the example above, for instance, it would help to know if you could work with children or listen to people tell their life-stories. If you have some insight or understanding of people who deal with mental health issues, addictions, or who have been victimized, then those types of services might be worth exploring. Considering your strengths and interests is usually a primary step before exploring internship sites and can lead to more suitable matches.

Conversely, knowing what you don’t like or are not interested in is also valuable to consider. For example, if you do not have an interest in taking care of children, you may not want to investigate a site that focuses on childcare. In most cases, however, it is a good idea to look for a place that matches your strengths and interests because it is closer to a career path or even a job that appeals to you and your ap-

proach as a developing human services professional.

Be sure to examine the available sites in your area to see if one looks interesting. If there is not a site on the list that sparks your interest, it often helps to be creative. Remember, the same techniques used for finding a site are very useful when looking for a job in your desired field. New sites often require a bit more work in terms of setting up an internship, but starting from the ground up may also be a good experience and could be useful one day. If you do come up with an alternative plan or site not on an approved list, be sure to discuss it with the instructor as usually only hours worked at an approved site count toward the internship. After all, the college has various legal obligations to fulfill in providing internship experiences.

Next, find a few sites of interest that could work for the internship and do some research to learn more about the agencies before contacting them. This type of preparation increases the chance of finding a site that meets your, and the course's, needs. It is also a good idea to find at least three sites and rank them in order of preference. Remember, other students from your college, and other colleges as well, will be looking for sites. Opportunities are limited. Starting early and being flexible will help you avoid being squeezed out at the end.

## **Managing Time**

In order to prioritize tasks and obligations, it is helpful to keep in mind the course requirements, such as deadlines for finding an internship, getting one approved, making sure that it will provide the required number of hours, and so on. Since most students juggle multiple obligations, time management is a key to the successful internship experience, which is the aim of this book and your course. For example, it is a good idea to calculate how many hours are needed per week to complete your internship on time. Managing your time well prevents an overload that too many classes and outside activities often create, especially near the end of the semester when everything seems to be due at the same time.

Keep in mind that schedules may conflict. Sites are open certain hours, and you may have other obligations during those times. It is not uncommon for some students to reduce hours at work in order to participate in the internship. It is almost always helpful to try to develop a complete schedule rather than looking at just one part of it. For instance, you may have to look at your work, school, and family schedules to identify what times work best for you at the site. Since most internship sites do not pay and since students usually have bills to deal with, a site with a rigid schedule may not work for you if your regular job is not flexible. In that case, finding a site that is more accommodating in terms of its hours becomes more important and may even make that site more attractive than some others you might have been more interested in at first.

## **Something to Remember**

Finding an internship site may be one of the most important tasks you will perform during your college education. It is right up there with selecting a major in terms of its ability to shape your career. The site you choose will determine the skills you need to master, the people you get to know, the type of supervisor you have, and may even influence your overall level of satisfaction with your major. Given that the internship site will play a huge role in your development, it is important to carefully identify, investigate, and find a setting that will provide a rewarding educational experience. Thus, it is not recommended

to choose a site solely based on convenience or location, although you should not overextend yourself as well.

Since there are many types of human services and volunteer agencies, it may surprise you to discover just how many opportunities there are for an internship or even a job. Human services professionals can typically be found in schools, hospitals, mental health facilities, courthouses, detention centers, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, and a myriad of other facilities. You can even check your current workplace to see if it employs human services workers. If you are already working in a human services setting, many colleges allow a student to have an internship experience at their place of employment if they have new and supervised duties that meet the criteria of the internship. This path not only includes an income but also may lead to a meaningful promotion. Be sure to talk with your instructor if this possibility applies to you.

### **Concept Examples**

*Example.* Jane was in a meeting with Randy, a job developer, discussing places for a potential internship. The two were considering a faith-based site due to Jane's interests and the fact that there were a few social services agencies available that readily fit the requirements of the practicum. Some of them were even on the college's approved list. Randy suggested a Lutheran nursing home for Jane. All that was needed was a contact name. That night, Jane went to a church council meeting where a guest, who happened to be the development officer for a Lutheran social service agency, was present. Although the development officer attended the council meeting for other reasons, Jane used this as an opportunity to network and asked for her business card. After making a telephone call to that individual the next morning, Jane received the contact name of the administrator of the Lutheran nursing home. The speaker even mentioned Jane to the administrator. Before she knew it, she was given an internship spot at the nursing home. Jane saw an opportunity and acted on it by putting her "foot in the door."

*Example.* Two students, Amay and Maliki, were in a class together. Amay was already participating at a site. Amay knew that Maliki was looking for a site and was impressed by his performance and insight. Amaya referred Maliki to her site and gave him a good recommendation. Maliki was interviewed based on Amay's referral and offered an internship. This story is an excellent example of why networking is valuable. Keeping your eyes and ears open can provide opportunities that you may not even expect.

Once you identify what type of internship will fit your individual needs, it is time to do some legwork. Securing a site requires a degree of assertiveness because opportunities are usually limited as others will be looking for one as well, so it is your responsibility to follow up after the initial contact. Sometimes being assertive takes practice, and this is an excellent opportunity to perfect that skill.

### **Suggestions**

There is a variety of things you can do to help relieve the stress throughout the internship process. Some ideas may include planning ahead, asking questions, and doing advanced research on the sites you are considering for your internship.

Previous students suggest that newcomers can decrease anxiety and stress by planning and prioritizing time management. Another tip is to have any paperwork completed and ready to turn in on the first day of class. This simple practice allows you to start the internship as early as possible instead of waiting

and then having to cram the required hours into a shorter period.

Many internship sites have specific requirements that must be met even before you start. They may include, for instance, finger printing or background checks. It is important to ask about these possible requirements early in the process, so you can complete them before starting. Keep in mind that if a site has special requirements, fulfilling them will take extra time which could affect your start date. Also, it helps to select a primary and secondary site in case your preferred site does not work out.

*Example:* Anisha picked a site that she thought would be the perfect match. However, after an interview, she knew there was no way she would be happy working there. Consequently, she accepted a position with her secondary choice. Keeping in mind that positive networking is important, Anisha also made sure to express her appreciation to those at the first site for their willingness to interview her.

Most internship sites will request that you provide them with a resume. You can reduce stress by having your resume prepared in advance. If you do not know how to make a resume, there are resources available for building one. These can usually be found at the office of career planning and placement on your campus. You may also find an online template that you can use as an outline for your personal resume.

If a site does require a background check, getting that done ahead of time can save time as this process can involve several weeks, which would only delay you. Depending on the state in which you live, the background check can be obtained at the Department of Motor Vehicles, the local sheriff's department, or at a local police station. Your agency will be able to give better direction as to where you can obtain the background check. Background checks are usually good for one year and may be used for more than just the internship site. The price of background checks will vary. Keep in mind that some sites may reimburse the cost of the background checks, but others may not.

## **Summary of Preparing for the Internship**

As the list of site options that interest you begins to narrow, start doing some research on the sites to ensure that you will get what you are expecting from the agencies. Through research, future students can learn more about what activities take place at the site before contacting it. This information will help later during interviews as well. Also, be sure to have a primary and secondary selection in mind. Having a backup plan is always a good idea!

*Example:* Felix had his heart set on a certain site. He was later contacted and told that the site was unable to have him there because it already had too many interns. Felix then had to find another internship site at the last minute. If he had been prepared with a good backup plan, he would not have been caught off guard when the first-choice site wasn't able to accommodate him.

Again, in order to make your search for the best internship site less stressful, it's important to be prepared. First, you should have an idea of what population most interests you, such as children, the elderly, the mentally ill, and so on. Once you have a general idea, you can then research sites that serve that population. After you have found two sites that interest you most, you can set up interviews to secure your ideal internship site. If that ideal site does not materialize, you can follow up with your second and even third choices.

## **Preparing for the Interview**



A prospective site that has expressed interest in you may ask you to fill out an application or to do a face-to-face interview as part of the acceptance process. Even so, it is important to understand that your “first contact,” even if it is “only” with a phone call from a secretary, is a type of interview. Haven’t you developed first impressions of a doctor or hospital based on the first contact you had with a secretary or nurse? What about the first time you called the college or an instructor?

Sometimes, agencies ask the initial contact person about you, meaning that this encounter can play a role in whether you are selected or not. The chief editor of this book was offered a job once over many other candidates because he took care to treat the secretary respectfully while waiting for the interview. It turned out that she was involved in the hiring process and the 15 minutes he spent with her helped the team assess how he would likely interact with “regular people,” not just doctors and other mental health professionals. Whereas most of the candidates ignored her, his fair treatment of this person helped more than he realized!

You can also across as being better prepared by having a schedule of your availability ready as the site will want to know about hours and times. However, it also makes sense to be flexible as sometimes it is necessary to adjust schedules. Since the agency must pay attention to its own scheduling, the need to be flexible usually falls on you.

## **Making the Call**

Making the first call is usually hard for most interns. Therefore, it may be helpful to make a list before placing the call. Begin, for instance, by writing down the number of hours required, the time frame in which the hours need to be completed, and types of experiences, such as the degree of client contact and supervision, that the college expects or requires from your internship. You might also add to the list some additional information you found about the site since that information may help you look more knowledgeable and motivated. Writing even a simple list can reduce any anxiety before the call because it gives you a plan and direction to follow.

Contact your first choice by calling (or emailing) the main number of the agency. From there, you may be directed to the department head that can provide the necessary information. If your first choice is unable to accept students, you can then call the second choice on the list, and so on. Eventually, you will have to set up a day and time to interview with the site supervisor. During the call, be sure to find out what the agency would like you to bring with you, such as your driver’s license or resume.

Finding an internship is like looking for a job in many ways, which is one reason many, if not most, internship courses require students to find one and get it approved by the college or the instructor. In other words, looking for an internship site is like trying to find a position and is, therefore, a type of on the job training. Like a prospective offer of employment, students can find it hard to wait for the site to return your call after an interview or initial phone call. Remember, these agencies are usually very busy, so while this step can become frustrating, it is “normal.” It can help to let the contact person know right away about the required deadlines so that a prompt response is more likely. If a response is not received within a reasonable amount of time, it is appropriate to contact the agency again. At that point, however, you should also consider exploring your second choice.

## **Asking for an Interview**

Now that the initial phone call has been made, it is necessary to be patient. However, it is a good idea to ask the agency if there is a good time to contact a potential supervisor by phone or email. After a reasonable period has passed (one to two weeks), do not be afraid to leave a clear, pleasant, and well-structured voicemail that includes stating the purpose of the call and a return number or email address. Doing so increases the likelihood that you will receive a call back from the site.

When the supervisor or agency responds, the next task is to ask for an actual interview. Again, try to speak in a clear and confident tone as it lets the other person know that you are motivated as well as interested in the agency. Have dates in mind that would work for potential interviews, as fumbling over dates gives off the appearance of being unprepared. It is important to be aware of how you handle yourself during the interview. Your behavior and nonverbal reactions reflect more than just yourself. You are also representing the school, the program, and the instructor during this call. Appropriate behavior and handling yourself well may affect the success that future students have. Finally, remember to be courteous and thank the person for their time, regardless of the outcome of the conversation.

You might find yourself waiting for what seems like a long time to get a response from the agency. If this happens, and it often does, there are a couple of options that might help you get in contact with the appropriate person. Give the supervisor at least five business days to return your initial call before calling a second time. If things take too long, it might be a good idea to go to the site and ask to speak with a supervisor in person or to set up an appointment through the receptionist. This route should only be used as a “last ditch” strategy as you may appear intrusive. If you take this path, be sure to dress and speak professionally.

## **The Interview**

Congratulations! Spending days or weeks looking for the right internship experience has finally paid off and an interview has been offered. The interview is often the most difficult part of obtaining a site. The interviewee only has a certain amount of time to sell their skills to the employer. Consequently, the interview can feel overwhelming. Fortunately, keeping a few key points in mind can help make for a successful interview.

One way to approach an interview is to see it as a time for you to promote your best qualities. Doing a few things in advance may help in this regard. For example, you may want to be sure to arrive a little early as being late may cause people to form a negative impression of your work habits before you even begin. It might even be a good idea to visit the site without entering it in advance, so you know where it is and how to get there if you are uncertain about those things. Similarly, be sure to bring any materials you were requested to present as well as the internship paperwork and any questions you have prepared ahead of time. In other words, try to treat this interview as you would any job interview. You should dress comfortably, but also appropriately. In general, try to get a sense of the “dress code” the agency seems to follow and make sure you look like a professional. It is OK to be a little more formal in an interview because employers usually expect that. Although a suit is not mandatory, it is a way to show you are serious about landing that site. For men, a polo or dress shirt with a pair of khaki pants would also be appropriate for more informal sites. In general, you should not have any exposed tattoos or, if you are a woman, you should not have too much skin showing, as some employers will frown on such things. Your

outward appearance is a visual representation of who you are and what you are all about, so make sure to represent yourself well. After all, first impressions are often lasting.

Again, it is advisable to check the location of the internship site and calculate some extra time in the event you run into unexpected complications. If you are able, drive to the site before the interview. This is helpful in becoming familiar with the new surroundings, finding adequate parking, and building in a cushion of time for other unanticipated problems that might occur.

*Example:* Cleo went to take papers to a site and typed the address into a GPS. The only problem was she arrived at the wrong location! Not only was it the wrong spot, but it was a family residence. Quickly, Cleo realized the error, left that location, and called the site to get the correct address. Thankfully, she had allotted extra travel time and made it to the site for the scheduled appointment time. Unanticipated traffic events and road closings could present the same dilemma.

*Example:* Finn anticipated some very bad weather on the day of his interview. He found a place near the site to stay the night before the interview. Finn took the time to find the appropriate building, checked out the parking situation, and was able to arrive thirty minutes early for the interview. With this extra time built into his schedule, he found a restroom where he was able to make last-minute adjustments to his appearance. During the search for a restroom, Finn spoke to a gentleman in the hall who turned out to be the person conducting the interview. He appeared to the interviewer as punctual, prepared, and presentable for his interview.

## General Preparations and Suggestions

- Review your qualifications.
- Be prepared to answer broad or open-ended questions: “What are your strengths and weaknesses?,” “Why do you feel like you are qualified for the position?,” and “What can you tell me about yourself?”
- Rehearsing an interview is one form of practice that can help people sound more polished and reduce being nervous during the actual interview. There is nothing wrong with asking a friend or colleague to role play an interview with you as rehearsal usually helps iron out the wrinkles in most presentations. If your colleague is also in your class, you can help each other in this way.
- First impressions mean a lot in an interview. Dress to make a good first impression. If you are unsure of what to wear, go with a professional look. This will convey to the interviewer how serious you are about obtaining a placement. Avoid wearing excessive jewelry, perfume, or flamboyant clothes. There are many clothing stores that are budget friendly if you don’t own any proper dress clothes for the interview and internship. Dress pants with a neat, clean shirt, loose fitting skirts or dresses, and clothes that reveal the least amount of skin as possible are ideal. In addition, being well groomed and having good hygiene is important.
- Have a pen and notebook ready to take down information, such as names and titles of the people you meet, the computer programs used at the site, or any other information that might be useful later if you are offered the position.
- Punctuality is important! Employers expect employees to arrive on time for work, and if you

arrive late for an interview, employers may question your ability to be punctual or to meet deadlines. Being on time or even being early to an interview shows that you're serious about the position, respect the employer's time, and appreciate their generosity for giving you the opportunity. These qualities help make good impressions on others.

*Example:* You can make an impression on others by knowing the names and position requirements of those with whom you met during an interview. It shows that you are paying attention, and it often opens the door to others' willingness to help you later. As Janet started her internship, she wrote down the names and job titles of everyone she was introduced to at the courthouse where her internship took place. A week later, Janet was dropping paperwork off at the judges' chambers and had reviewed her notes from the previous night. She remembered the secretary's name, as well as some of her duties, which allowed Janet to provide some extra information to the secretary. Since Janet had done her homework and researched the secretary's job requirements, she showed that she was "on the ball" even as a beginning intern. The secretary was very impressed with Janet's memory and her appreciation for the staff. In addition, the secretary mentioned it to Janet's supervisor, so as you can see, doing your research and taking notes on the site and the supervisor is extremely beneficial. Not only does it reflect well on you, but it also gives you more insight into what services your site provides.

### **Time for the Interview**

Finally, the time has come for the interview. Researching the agency is done, the carefully chosen outfit is on, you have arrived early, and you are well prepared, if not confident. Now you are ready to "sell" yourself.

When meeting the interviewer, greet them and offer your hand, if that is culturally appropriate, when introducing yourself. Friendly but professional behavior comes across as confidence and helps to create a good first impression. In addition, it is expected that you will use good manners with everyone you meet at the site. When you are invited to sit, make sure you sit up straight with shoulders back, and remain alert and attentive.

It may be helpful to practice a technique to facilitate attention and awareness at the interview. Many internships require a prerequisite course in interviewing skills before taking the class. If you did take such a course, then use one of the techniques to help professionalize your presentation. A commonly taught method that was developed by Gerard Egan is called SOLER (Murphy and Dillon, 2011), which stands for Sitting squarely, maintaining an Open posture, Leaning forward, making Eye contact, and remaining Relaxed.

Be sure to answer all questions honestly. It is better to respond with "I don't know" if you don't know an answer than it is to "fake it." Also, if you think you can find out the answer on your own, you might say, "I don't know right now, but I will be sure to find out." Avoid using slang and try to keep the interview positive by avoiding negative remarks about previous jobs or employers as you can never tell who knows whom! Furthermore, be cautious when talking about previous tasks or responsibilities that you disliked. Instead, try to remember the good things about the position.

Finally, remember the "three Ps" of interviewing: be prepared, be professional, and be polite. It is hard to go wrong when you stay within these guidelines. After all, no one expects an intern to be a

Sigmund Freud right off the bat!

## **After the Interview**

Make sure to thank the interviewer and say that you were pleased to have had the opportunity to meet with them. In addition, you can send a card thanking the interviewer for their time. This simple but increasingly uncommon courtesy lets the interviewer know how interested you are and reminds them of you. Follow-up calls are a good way of showing appreciation as well.

Another important skill to develop is the ability to accept rejection. For a variety of reasons, not all human services agencies are willing or able to take on students. Sometimes it is for lack of money, a shortage of staff time, an excessive workload, or unforeseen circumstances such as cutbacks at the agency. Seldom is it personal, unless you have done something inappropriate. Don't be afraid to be assertive, as discussed earlier, and ask if there are any other sites they know of that you could contact. Remember, you are always networking, and it is possible to do that here as well. Making a positive impression at those sites can help you in the future when looking for a job.

If you seem to hit a wall, remember that there are many other sites that you can investigate. You can also talk to your instructor about the possibility of creating a new one if you have an interest or setting in mind. In the meantime, brush up on resume writing and interviewing skills. With this added effort, something will work out. In over 30 years of placing students in internships, the primary editor of this handbook has never had a student fail to find or create an internship opportunity.

## **The Internship Itself**

### **Transitioning In**

Now the interview process has finally come to an end and you found an acceptable site. What is next? Of course, it is important to find out answers to such basic questions, such as what to wear and where to report. You will probably be scheduled to have an appointment with a supervisor and fill out the proper paperwork is filled out. Paperwork is an important part of human services because it fulfills legal requirements, and it is necessary for the agency to be paid for its services. Remember, most colleges will not count hours at a site unless it is an approved placement and liability forms have been completed. It may even be necessary to find a different site if the internship you are interested in does not comply with the college legal requirements.

It is very important to understand what your responsibilities and duties will be as an intern. Each site should have a detailed list of duties that can also be discussed during the interview. Some colleges even require an "educational agreement" that specifies them. All in all, it is better to be clear on these duties ahead of time.

### **Getting Started**

Soon you will reach the point where anxiety and confusion are replaced with excitement and anticipation. Graduation may be around the corner and now you can apply the skills you learned in class to real world problems and issues. In addition, supervisors, coworkers, and others in the field all possess an immense body of information that cannot be obtained from a textbook or lecture. The internship provides a unique environment to meet new and interesting people, gain valuable experience, and perhaps even help others in need. Remember, the internship is like a practice game. You are going to execute the

“plays” of your trade, but also have the freedom to explore opportunities while being guided instead of left completely on your own.

Now that you are placed, it is likely that you will deal with a lot of paperwork and other technicalities even before working with the clientele. Often, for example, you will need to sign a confidentiality agreement. At some early point in this process, interns are given an orientation and some basic training. It is a good idea to read any handbooks and policy material the agency has available to help you prepare for the internship. Reading organizational charts, program procedures, and rules of conduct may seem tedious, but it is a good way to anticipate certain problems and avoid mistakes. Your jobs in the future will make such things mandatory, so getting used to it now is good training.

As you begin to get comfortable at the site, the use of unfamiliar computer programs may pose a challenge. If the different computer programs used at the site are difficult for you, ask a knowledgeable friend or family member about them or perform some online research to find information that will help you better understand them. Do not be afraid to ask the supervisor for some program training, too. For future reference, be sure to take notes on how the program works. Keeping a pen and paper on hand shows genuine interest, attentiveness, and eagerness to learn during the internship. It is important to be open-minded and willing to learn from people who have experience in this field. Remember, there is always something to be learned, so be sure to pay attention.

### **Challenges Along the Way**

Starting an internship can present any number of challenges. For example, you may find yourself working at a site that is less than ideal simply to fulfill the requirements of the course and graduate. In this case, the challenge is to make that site a valuable learning experience. If nothing else, finding out what type of work you do not like is an important lesson that can save you time later.

Setbacks are a part of life, so they may occur at your placement as well. If an unexpected challenge arises, it is a good idea to talk with your instructor or supervisor. They are there to help and may be able to make suggestions about how to handle or improve a situation.

### **Unique Circumstances**

If your background involves circumstances that might be a problem for an agency, you may experience anxiety when looking for an internship. Such “disqualifiers,” as they are sometimes called, are something that will impede your internship and no longer make you a candidate for the site. Some of the most common ones include past criminal activity, a violent history, and drug use. Do not be discouraged if you have disqualifiers in your background. They are a challenge, but they can be overcome with more thought, preparation, and effort.

It is almost always a good idea to let your instructor know about these things before applying to sites if you think they will present a problem. Creating a situation where the instructor finds out about it after the fact makes things more difficult for everyone. The same is true for the agency, of course. Although you may want to time the information well, asking for clarification during the initial interview is much better than waiting until you start at the site. After all, people do not like to be surprised after the fact. Also, holding information back can make you appear dishonest.

Some areas of human services work are more receptive to these issues than others. For example,

those who have previously suffered from substance abuse related issues make up a significant percentage of those who work in the field of chemical dependency. People who have had mental health issues may be more knowledgeable about them than “newbies.” Individuals with physical limitations may be better positioned to appreciate those who struggle with health care issues. Although there are no guarantees, if you have a history in any of these areas, the individuals who work in them may be more flexible about these issues than those who are unfamiliar with them.

Again, it is best to be prepared to discuss disqualifiers during the interview. That issue should probably not be the first thing that you bring up, but having the conversation before finalizing an internship position will improve your chances of acceptance. It is also a good idea to bring documentation supporting the outcome of the charges – such as dismissals, letters of recommendation by probation officers, instructors or even therapists. Being prepared, honest, and professional will enhance your experience. If a specific site is unable to place you because of one of these issues, it may know of an agency that does not have a problem with it. Networking can turn a negative situation into a positive outcome!

## **Conclusion**

While finding an internship site can be stressful, it can also be a very rewarding experience. Reading materials provided by the instructor or talking with them in advance will help you prepare before you start the internship. Additionally, it is helpful to research sites you are interested in and have all the paperwork completed and questions ready in advance. There is always a possibility that complications will arise, but careful planning will help reduce stress in those situations. Of course, it is important to keep in mind that you are representing yourself, your instructor, and your college during your internship.

## Tools for Chapter 2

### Activity 1: What would you do?

Those who helped write the drafts of this book experienced many types of internships and situations. Sharing them with readers and having readers imagine these scenarios can help both illustrate points and offer helpful suggestions. Activity A involves imagining that you recently accepted an offer at the site you really wanted. While working on finalizing the paperwork and obtaining the required background check, the site allows you to start next week since your background check can be done through them. However, the person who must finalize the agreement between the university and the agency is on vacation for two weeks.

There are four courses of action you can take:

- Start next week to keep on track. The paperwork and background check may take a long time to finalize.
- Wait to start at your site until the paperwork is complete. If the agency is willing to allow you to begin before their requirements are fulfilled, then that's their choice.
- Wait until the paperwork and background check are complete. If it takes a long time, at least you will learn the value of starting the process earlier.
- Find a new site.

Now, what do you do? Why do you want to take that route? Discuss your thoughts on all the options with your classmates.

### Activity 2: Roleplaying

Activity 2 aims at giving you the opportunity to demonstrate and improve your interviewing skills through roleplaying. Creating a mock interview is a useful exercise because it will help you understand what is expected during an initial phone call and in-person interviews. This type of practice can also ease your anxiety about being in the spotlight while responding to a series of professional questions. It may even be helpful to videotape yourself acting out the interview to assess your body language and how you answer questions. The interview process does not have to be an anxiety-provoking situation; roleplaying and mock interviews are great tools for helping you get the site you want while reducing your nervousness.

Steps to follow:

1. Know the interviewing process
  - Dress appropriately
  - Be prepared for basic, open-ended questions
  - Do your homework on the site(s)
  - Practice professional listening
  - Do not be afraid to ask your own questions
2. Create a safe and comfortable environment in which to practice



- Setting up your mock interview in an area that does not make you uneasy will allow you to focus on the roleplaying tasks at hand.
  - Role-play with people you know. You will need a friend, colleague, or family member who will give you feedback. The advantage of roleplaying with a colleague, especially one who is taking the class too, is that you are on equal ground and can even take turns.
3. Be open to feedback
- Feedback is supposed to help you reflect and grow. Critiques from a trusted person can be just as scary as the real interview process, but remaining open-minded will only benefit you when you are in front of your site supervisor.

## Chapter 3: Getting Started at the Site

### Introduction

The aim of Chapter 3 is to offer information, suggestions, and activities to help new interns get started at their internships. This material addresses issues such as, how to discover the way a site operates, thinking about some of the more common protocols agencies may use, as well as when and where it is appropriate to express individual thoughts and opinions. It is hoped that by the end of this section, you will discover the benefits of professionalism and networking.

### Key Words

- **Confidentiality:** Spoken, written, and behavioral communication practices designed to provide and maintain an individual's or group's privacy. Includes licensing and HIPPA requirements.
- **Professionalism:** Acting in a way that reflects the ethics, standards, and practices associated with a group recognized as providing a particular type of service. Professionalism in human services consists of such things as conforming to the ethical standards of a profession while exhibiting courteous but conscientious behavior in the workplace.
- **Transference:** A Freudian term used to describe a client's unconscious positive or negative feelings or behaviors triggered by another, often the therapist or clinician.
- **Countertransference:** A Freudian term used to describe a professional's unconscious feelings and behaviors aroused by a client, patient, consumer of services, or even a supervisor. Countertransference is natural and may be positive or negative in its tone.

The internship is intended to be a positive experience that will help you prepare for a professional career in human services. It is an opportunity to learn new skills and often includes becoming aware of potential mistakes one could make in the workplace setting without being completely responsible for them. One goal of the internship is to explore real-world professional possibilities while learning about them. In other words, the primary goal of an internship is to learn about and experience the duties of the profession in a specific environment, hopefully one that interests the student as a potential professional. Keep in mind that although the internship does have the character of an upper-level service-learning opportunity and real-work responsibilities, it is also intended to be a rewarding experience to help prepare you for a successful career in the future. It may be helpful to keep in mind that the instructor and the agency staff typically want you to do well, and they are usually happy to help make that happen.

### Networks and Networking

Another aim of an internship is to offer the individual an opportunity to either lay the foundation for, or even increase, the ability to connect with other professionals and the resources they offer through

“networking.” Good networking is, of course, a two-way street where professionals share information, techniques, resources, and common goals with each other. Networking with other professionals, agencies, and community resources is important because, as a human services worker, you are constantly working with people who need services or who provide them. The stronger, broader, and more positive your network is, the easier it will be for you to be effective in your work. A good network also has other benefits, such as building a positive reputation, expanding career possibilities, and reducing the possibility of burnout.

As a student, it is important to begin building a network of professional connections with other professionals and agencies in your field of study as early as you can. After all, during the time of your internship, you will meet many new people and deal with other organizations than just the one with which you are interning. It may be helpful to realize in this regard that in some sense, you have already been networking for a long time. It is something human beings do as social creatures. After all, you helped create and were a part of a network of friends in high school and another one in college. The difference now is that your reputation affects the lives of others, namely those with whom you work. Therefore, it is important for you to be mindful about networking and how others see or respond to you as a professional. One helpful suggestion is to remember that everyone you meet at your workplace is a potential success, resource, ally, or opportunity. Never dismiss anyone as being unimportant as the person you ignore one day may be the person you need in order to get your job done on another. Simple rules of conduct that our parents taught us, such as being kind, polite, honest, and friendly, are the glue that turns relationships into connections.

## **Employment Opportunities**

The overall aim of the internship experience is to help train you for a job in the field. If you do well, which includes effective networking, the internship experience might lead to an actual job offer. In fact, the editor of this book who teaches internship courses has seen this satisfying development occur every year. Even if your internship does not result in a job offer, or if it does and you do not wish to accept it, good performance and networking are likely to result in positive references that you can list on your resume, along with the names of the people you networked with at the agency. Often, these contacts either offer leads to positive recommendations or to job opportunities. In other words, taking the internship seriously and trying your best to do a good job can open doors for other potential opportunities – or close them if you fail to take advantage of those networks.

## **Seeing the Internship as a Learning Experience**

Students will gain experiences while working at the site. Most of the time the internship will be a good fit, especially if you had a role in selecting it. However, students might find themselves faced with a situation where they must have an internship to graduate and take the first one that comes along. At other times, what looks like a good internship site at the beginning does not necessarily end up feeling that way. It is helpful to realize in these circumstances that if an internship site is not what you expected, it is not the end of the world. You can still learn a lot about the field, basic skills, and yourself.

In fact, having an internship site that is not the “right one” offers an unexpected value, such as avoiding that career path early on instead of spending many unhappy years in it just because it is a job

that pays your bills. Of course, it is also helpful to remember that an internship is not a permanent position. In addition, most internships involve class time with the instructor and other students who may have internships at different sites. Each one represents different learning opportunities, procedures, practices, and so on that you can learn from as your colleagues share their experiences. In other words, there are many ways to learn from your internship experience.

## **The Basics**

From the student perspective, starting your internship often begins with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it is exciting -- after all those classes, you finally get to do something! On the other, it can be a little scary -- most of us worry about looking stupid or “messing up” at work, especially in the beginning of a placement. It may help to remember this type of reaction is normal. Even so, there is reason to approach the first day with some confidence. Your instructors have been there before you and the classes you took have at least provided a good cognitive map of what this field is all about. Viewed this way, the internship represents an opportunity to experience the work environment in action, to get acquainted with members of the staff, and to begin to learn about the job. Your internship is the perfect opportunity to practice skills and values you have been striving to embody.

## **Scheduling**

It is important to figure out a schedule that works for you and for the site. To that end, you should work with the site’s supervisor or director to arrange the hours that are best for all parties. Some sites will be very accommodating with your scheduling needs. Others may have more rigorous requirements. In all situations, it is important to remember that the agency is being generous enough to give you supervised clinical duties. Sometimes they depend on you being there to help address client needs. So, remember to be open and honest with the person doing the scheduling in order to avoid conflicts.

If a schedule conflict does occur, be sure to talk to the supervisor in advance about what is best for the agency and yourself. One of the worst things you can do at an internship is to be erratic in your attendance or to change schedules frequently since doing so can disrupt the lives of clients, the duties of the person supervising you, and the function of an agency. The primary editor of this book has found that scheduling difficulties is the single most frequently reported problem that agencies have with interns, so it is to be avoided.

Keeping track of hours might present similar issues. On one hand, you are not an employee and can “leave” any time you want. On the other, the class and the agency require accountability, especially if there is an hours-worked requirement. Some sites will give you a copy of the schedule but leave it to you to track the hours needed for the internship. Others might require signing in and out. One helpful idea is to print out a personal schedule log to manually track the hours. There are also phone apps that can help you track your hours. You will need to find a method that works for you and the site.

## **Dress Code**

Most placement sites will have a dress code of one type or another. During your interview, make sure you learn what your site expects in this regard. First impressions go a long way, so do not give the staff or clients the wrong impression by dressing inappropriately. A typical dress code is “business casu-

al,” which usually means clean slacks, a shirt or blouse, and appropriate footwear. Wearing tight clothing, low-cut shirts, short skirts, or sandals are not appropriate. However, while knowing the dress code makes it easier to fit in, it does take some planning. For example, the site may have a “dress down day,” which could turn awkward if you dressed “up” instead of “down” that day. Forethought is the proverbial ounce of prevention that can make all the difference between being “just” an intern and being a “good” one.

## **Behavior**

Displaying a positive attitude and its corresponding behavior is also important. Your manner can affect the type of experience you have. It also can determine your reputation with potential employers. Wearing a smile, always being courteous, and comporting yourself in a mature fashion are great ways to demonstrate that you are a professional. In contrast, displaying a poor attitude and behavior can quickly have a negative impact on your reputation and follow you into the future.

## **Getting Comfortable**

It is not uncommon for beginning interns to feel awkward or even anxious about fitting in to the social culture of the agency and its staff. That reaction is normal and is best seen as reflecting a desire to do well. It may help to remember at this point that your internship is a learning experience, that others know that too, and that no one expects you to be perfect. Learning is a process that involves uncertainty and trial and error. So, in one sense, you are not expected to know everything, which is a real luxury when you think about it because everything changes when you take a job. Dealing with mistakes now can help prepare you for the future when the stakes are likely to be much higher. Therefore, it is helpful to see doubts, confusions, and mistakes as providing you with an opportunity to learn and to grow as a developing professional in the field.

One thing that can help deal with this “ego alien” part of the learning process is to organize your knowledge of the agency and what is expected there. You may wish to consider, for example, making a list of all the important people, titles, and duties that you will need to remember. This list can help you to recall important details when they are needed and show you what you need clarification of until you have a sense of your place, duties, and self in the organization.

Remember important locations so that you do not have to ask for help each time you are sent to find something or someone. Knowing where individual offices or supplies are located can be helpful. For example, if you have a question about finances, it would be helpful to know that Sue deals with finances. This way you do not go to the wrong person, like Desmond, who helps with placing the clients and doesn’t deal with finance questions. Such a simple practice as knowing a person’s name and what they do may also make you look like you either know what you are doing, or you are a quick learner. Just think of how good it feels when someone remembers your name and what you do!

## **Policies, Procedures, & Politics**

After completing the first few days of the internship, it is important to understand the administration’s rules and regulations. This practice is important for several reasons, but the most important one is to keep you and the people you work with, including other staff and clients, safe, on the right track, and out of trouble. An agency’s standards and procedures are so important that it is a good idea to ask for a

manual or the code of conduct rules and then study them well.

Some people find it helpful to take notes for future reference about how the agency runs. Policies and procedures manuals also often include an outline of daily duties, the dress code, important phone numbers, the code for the security system, and other pertinent information. The agency may even provide you with your own copy – if not, you might ask to read it during breaks or as a part of your initial duties. After all, agencies always have a set of rules to follow, and it is part of your job to follow them while interning there.

While it is easier to read through this type of material, some agencies are so informal that they do not have much in the way of written policies to show you. In this case, a great way to learn about policies, and to help the agency, is to ask if one of your duties can be to collect them and write a draft of a policies and procedures manual. The agency can then review and revise it for the staff or for a future intern to have. If the site approves this request, the project can also be a good opportunity to start becoming a member of the team.

### **Fitting in as Part of the Team**

Many new interns find themselves wondering where they fit into their agency and its culture. Sometimes trying to determine exactly how to fit in socially and professionally can seem a bit daunting, especially at the beginning. You may experience being nervous or uncertain about how to handle something. These reactions are perfectly normal. For instance, if you think about how many times you have had to start out as a new student, member of a team, or as an employee in your lifetime, you will know that this feeling of awkwardness and uncertainty will pass. As an intern, you also have the freedom to ask for help when needed, to take time to get comfortable, and to feel good when you have mastered the job's challenges. In many ways, starting the internship is like starting a new job, and you have probably done that before, too. The bottom line is that fitting in usually takes time, which means that it helps to be patient.

It should not take long to get an idea of what the site's culture is like. Some offices will have a lot of camaraderie and will be a pleasant place to work. Other sites may be more formal and structured. In addition, all agencies have their “pecking orders,” office politics, and interpersonal challenges. All are opportunities for you to learn how to fit into a professional social environment—now and in the future. You also have one important advantage that should bring some comfort: You are expected to be a learner, which means that you do not have to be perfect and your time at the site will have a clear end-date.

### **Finding Your Own “Place”**

During your internship, you may be moved around from office to office or from spot to spot in order to see how different parts of the agency work. Moving around like that may make you feel out of place or in the way. So, it may help to recognize that experiencing different places or locations provides an opportunity to learn more about the job and to add to your developing professional network. Even so, it does help to have an actual office or physical location to call your own as a personal space can provide a sense of familiarity and stability –like a “safe spot.” Some interns are fortunate enough to have an office or desk assigned to them. Most of the time, however, agencies do not have such space available, which means that you need to be more creative. For example, you can bring something to the workplace that makes you feel

more a part of it, such as a favorite coffee cup, or you can find a quiet area to consistently use.

## **Asking for Help**

Throughout the course of the internship, you are likely to face situations, conversations, or tasks that you will be unsure about. Sometimes interns think that asking for help is a sign of weakness and will try to avoid it. However, doing so is often a mistake, sometimes a serious one. Interns are not expected to know everything, but should ask for guidance when they need it. That responsibility is a part of your role, not the agency's. The real danger is not asking when you are unsure because that could lead to even more problems. Since you are dealing with other people's lives in a human services agency, failing to ask questions could be detrimental to clients and to you!

You may not always know what the right thing to do is, but you can always consult with the staff at the site. Again, that dimension of being an intern is a part of your role and responsibilities. Ideally, you should feel comfortable about initiating a request for assistance with your site supervisor. Since you must rely on a supervisor for guidance, it is a good idea to start building a good relationship with that person right from the beginning.

Most internship courses set aside time to meet with your instructor and fellow interns in the class. If so, you have lots of resources and support available, as well as a time and place to access them. Sometimes, as an intern, you will not feel especially comfortable with a supervisor or have one that is so busy that they cannot give you the time you feel you need. In these cases, there are other options to consider, such as talking with a worker at the site with whom you feel more comfortable or discussing issues with your instructor.

In general, asking for opinions and advice lets the staff know that you appreciate and value their experience and insight. Taking time to ask questions to ensure things are being done correctly also shows people that you are engaged in the experience, respect the facility, and take your position very seriously – just as an intern should. Asking relevant and timely questions may also help create positive relationships and even strengthen your network at the agency. Remember, most people who work at human services agencies like helping people and your role as an intern gives them a chance to show someone else what their profession entails.

## **Making Comments and Suggestions**

Input can also go both ways, so upon occasion it is appropriate to make suggestions to a supervisor or staff member. Of course, there is always a chance that the staff person or supervisor may disagree and say 'no.' However, if the comment or suggestion results in a positive response, then it is a win-win for you and the agency. It shows, for instance, that you are paying active attention and trying to connect with the facility. Offering input can also convey the impression that you are capable of independent professional thought. When speaking up, it is important to do so in a timely, respectful, and professional way.

## **Keeping Busy**

Downtime, which is to say periods when you do not seem to have anything specific to do at the site, is likely to happen at various times during the semester. There may be times when neither the supervisor nor any of the other staff members will have the time to assign you to specific tasks. Even though

these times may seem confusing or frustrating, they are opportunities to take some initiative at the site. The following suggestions may give you some ideas about how to go about making such an opportunity work for you and the agency:

- This time could be used to start a project that the agency wants to move forward on but has not had time to do yet. Or, you might offer to start one they have not thought about. For example, one student who was visually handicapped asked if he could organize a set of therapeutic and referral sources for therapists to offer visually-handicapped clients who are a part of the caseload. That agency continued to offer these resources for therapists and clients to use long after the intern left!
- Even if such a project “only” involves copying material, organizing a backlog of files, or updating file information, the work has value. Most agencies get behind in such work because it has a lower priority than dealing with clients, yet the work must be done for funding or regulatory purposes. Every time an intern does something like this for an agency, it means that the regular staff can help people more and not be distracted by paperwork. In other words, you are providing a service to the agency it would have to either pay for or pull someone off more important duties to get done.
- Agencies usually have several people doing different types of work. When not engaged in your own duties, it may be a good idea to ask if you can shadow other staff members. This activity not only exposes you to different aspects of the field, but it also gives you a chance to expand your network. After all, most people appreciate it when someone takes an interest in what they do, and you may learn more than you expected.

Be willing to help others. Making yourself available to a variety of experiences that may come along is helpful with your growth. Asking questions pertaining to the job and offering suggestions at the appropriate time are good ways to display a positive behavior and a genuine interest in the agency. The more you show that you are willing to expose yourself to as many areas as possible and a willingness to learn and grow, the more receptive mentors will become.

## **Responsibilities**

Successful interns can usually expect to be given an increasing degree of job responsibilities. Moving from simple to more complex tasks is a sign that you are mastering the duties and growing as a professional. If things go well, you may even begin to feel more like an employee than an intern. These developments mean that your skills are improving, that the agency has some measure of confidence and trust in you, and that you are viewed as competent enough to handle the job.

When performing your internship work, it helps to be responsible and commit yourself to the duties that are assigned to you. At the same time, it is important to seek out new and more advanced experiences to grow with and learn about in the field. However, interns should never overstep their boundaries. Nor should they take unnecessary risks to engage in activities that they do not feel trained to do. In those cases, it is absolutely vital that you are able to say “no.” In the event that you feel like the job is more than you can handle, you can ask for help, discuss the issue with the supervisor, or even simply refuse if you think your well-being or that of a client is at risk. Be sure to discuss such events with your course instruc-



tor – preferably in advance.

Of course, how you handle such events or requests matter too. It is better to say, “I’m sorry, I cannot do all of these tasks and continue to be efficient and effective,” or “I don’t feel capable of doing that at this point in my training.” Remember that you are representing yourself and the college during the internship, so how you say “no” is almost as important as knowing your limits.

## **Making Contributions**

It may be easy to overlook the contributions you make at the internship site. For example, you may have “pushed a lot of paper” and feel you did nothing important. Seeing things this way makes it easy to forget your own value. There may, indeed, be times when you feel that the work you are doing is pointless, without value, or contributes nothing to the agency. Keep in mind that the other staff members already have years of experience, education, and training in the field. They had to start somewhere, too, and it was usually at the bottom. Therefore, it is likely that they did the same entry-level or basic work that you are currently doing. It may be helpful to realize that while some tasks may seem small and useless, helping to complete them makes it easier for the agency to keep running effectively, especially if they are short staffed.

*Example:* Paperwork, such as filing, copying, or running statistics, may be one of the least exciting tasks that can be given to you. Yet, without proper records, the agency can lose funding, which means that staff lose jobs and, consequently, that clients lose help. As you can see, then, paperwork and other mundane tasks have their own important place in running a successful agency. The same may be said for other, smaller tasks interns often do, such as mailing letters, making phone calls, and looking for resources. All these less prestigious tasks substantially lighten the workload of one or several other employees. The result is that more services are directed to the people who need them the most. While you may not appreciate the value of these smaller things until you have your own caseload, it is possible to take pride in knowing you have contributed toward the greater good of the agency and all who work there.

## **Working with Clients**

Some students have already had volunteer or job experiences that involved working with clients in a human services setting. Many, if not most, have not, so the internship may be the first time they experience direct client interactions as a developing professional. It is important to remember that even as a new human services professional, you are participating in this internship to help the clients of the agency and to work with them. While these duties may involve a lot of new responsibilities, it is important to keep in mind that your previous instructors and course work provided valuable information and knowledge. These resources, along with your own personality, can now be applied to a real-world professional setting and the clients it serves.

## **Professionalism**

Professionalism is listed in the box of key terms for this chapter because it should always be your goal to learn how to comport yourself in an appropriate manner. A professional demeanor for a human services worker includes maintaining agency and clinical standards as well as being courteous, conscientious, punctual, and focused at the workplace. Whether you are dealing with staff or clients on either a

professional or personal level, it is important to remember that what you say can affect others. Your words and actions may even follow you for months if not years later, especially if you live in a small town. Knowing that, it is good practice to keep conversations clean, respectful, and appropriate. Always be aware that you are representing the college, the agency, and the discipline, as well as yourself.

Eventually, you will be able to feel more relaxed and comfortable--as well as more professional--at your site. This type of comportment is helpful because new situations can arise at any time, and this manner of self-presentation prepares you to respond appropriately to them. Being open in this way can also de-escalate situations.

## **Transference and Countertransference**

Transference and countertransference are key words in human services. Transference, which involves a client consciously or unconsciously responding to you as a professional, is based on unresolved conflicts a person has from their past. For instance, if you are in a position of authority and are working with someone who has had conflicts with authority figures in the past, that person may “transfer” their anger or resistance to you. This transference causes them to react to you in way you did not intend. If you also have unresolved issues, then you may counter their transference with your own, which is called countertransference.

Your course work should have taught you about these types of relational dynamics and many human services workers are in positions that evoke such conflicts. Sometimes the unresolved issues generate positive feelings, and sometimes they evoke negative ones, which is why they are called positive or negative transference or countertransference. For example, if a person resists your authority by treating you negatively, they may be living out unresolved conflicts they have with their parents. If you, as a clinician, “like” a client because they consciously or unconsciously remind you of someone you care for, you may become too attached to them and extend to them extra time or favors at the expense of others.

Knowing and setting boundaries are standard ways of managing transference and countertransference in the human services settings. Depending on the type of work your agency does, clients do not typically understand this dimension of their interactions with you. One good indicator that negative countertransference is occurring between you and a client is that you find them “getting under your skin.” Another warning signal is finding yourself thinking about them too much. These signs should remind you to bring up the possibility of transference and countertransference with your supervisor or instructor. Doing that early usually helps avoid unnecessary problems. This dimension of human services work is important to know about because it also involves unconscious feelings concerning gender, race, social class, age, and so on.

*Example:* Sue, a client you have been working with daily, may not view you as part of the professional staff because you are “only” an intern, and she develops feelings for you. If a client asks for a date, remember to remain professional and establish clear boundaries; be firm but polite in doing so. In Sue’s case, you might explain that dating a client is both unprofessional and prohibited by the agency, and you aren’t willing to violate these standards. If the client continues with inappropriate behavior, be sure to bring that up with your supervisor.

## **Safety Issues**

You may have already learned that human beings are often unpredictable. Therefore, there are many safety issues to keep in mind in most types of human services work, including internships. For instance, if an internship involves in-home or off-site visits with clients, you must remember to be aware of the possibility of danger and take appropriate precautions. Learning, remembering, being aware of, and following agency and instructor safety guidelines are the first steps in this process.

In general, it helps to notice your surroundings whenever you find yourself in an unfamiliar environment. Always note potential hazards and possible alternatives for “escape,” such as the location of exits, phones, and others who can help if you need it. Be careful not to turn your back on people who are angry or impulsive. Always make sure co-workers know where you are. Once in a great while, an intern may be in a situation where they have that “gut feeling” that something is wrong. Do not ignore it! Again, your safety is always a primary concern.

An internship site aims to provide a guided opportunity to obtain the experience necessary to enter your field. Do not be afraid to say “no” if you feel any given situation seems dangerous to you or even just unsafe. Once the internship is over and you have joined the workforce, a supervisor or co-worker will not always be along for all encounters with the public, so now is the time to ask questions about how to handle safety issues.

## **Limitations**

Most people feel a little uncomfortable when taking on new responsibilities. This anticipatory discomfort often comes with being in a new environment or feeling unsure of oneself when other people depend on you to know what you are doing and that you are doing it well. However, if you are asked to do something you are not qualified or trained to do, then it is important to speak up. Failing to do so could put the agency, its clients, the college, and yourself at risk. There may be times when the most responsible thing to do is to acknowledge your limitations and ask someone with more experience to take over.

*Example:* You work with a variety of cases, some of which may include theft or other relatively minor violations. However, you find that the client was raped, and you know you are not trained to deal with that. In this case, it is important to let the supervisor know that you need to turn the client over to more experienced staff or have intensive direct supervision. Understanding your limitations does not mean you should never try new things --the idea is to gradually acquire more skills. Although you should not be the primary contact person for the individual in this case, it might be a good idea to see if it is possible to participate as an observer, like a medical student learning how to see people in a physician’s office. Always consider your own limits when determining your ability to help clients. When in doubt, ask for help or advice before jumping right in without the proper preparation.

## **The Internship and the Classroom: Instruction with Support**

As indicated earlier, most internships include some sort of a classroom experience to go along with it. The idea here is to combine theory with practice under the guidance of an experienced instructor and to learn how to operate as a member of a team or group. This standard clinical or professional training format is also a good way for the instructor to monitor progress, head off problems, and facilitate your professional development. Typically, undergraduate or first-time internships provide this level of instruction in a group format. It involves several students going out to their sites during the week and then

coming to a regular class meeting to review and discuss their experiences with their instructor and fellow interns.

This format has additional benefits. One of them is to give students the opportunity to learn about or even vicariously experience other internship sites and career possibilities in the field by listening to you colleagues describe their experiences. Having interns share experiences in this way reduces the sense of isolation while offering support since all of you are going through the same learning process but in different settings.

These meetings provide support to you during this process and provide an opportunity for you to share experiences and other events encountered during the week. Questions and concerns are addressed by the instructor, which often benefits other members as well. Remember, instructors do not like to be surprised by problems, especially after they occur, so if one seems to be brewing, it is best to discuss it as early as possible. After all, even basic problem-solving skills include knowing that it is easier to deal with minor problems early in the process than after they have become major problems later.

### **Student Colleagues as Resources**

When settling into the internship, it is helpful to realize that your fellow students in the internship class are a part of your network both in and beyond the course. During the semester, they can also become an important resource for your development as a professional. Providing the rules of confidentiality set down by the college, instructor, and site are appropriately honored, talking with classmates about your experiences at the site provides an opportunity to compare individual internship environments as well as opportunities in a field. For example, work environments can be as small as a single office in a courthouse or as large as an entire floor of a building. The inner workings of each facility will differ as well.

By talking about the styles of supervisors, roles of staff members, and the unique aspects of each facility, these discussions may provide insight into numerous areas within the field. If there are several people in a class working in a similar setting, you may also see that they vary considerably by how they approach helping people. In some very real sense, the classroom portion of the internship experience is like having several internships at the same time. After all, you can learn from the experiences your colleagues share and come to know things about different types of sites as career possibilities. Such groups may also help you prepare for something called “team meetings.” These are times when the staff members of an agency come together as a group to help clients by reviewing notes, establishing comprehensive treatment programs, evaluating client progress, discussing client issues, and so on.

### **Professional Presentations**

Human services professionals are often expected to make presentations at their site and in the field. The audiences for those presentations can vary, from presenting a case at a team meeting to presenting information to a large group of professionals. Many instructors help students prepare for this part of the job by having them learn how to do a report on their agency and present their role in it to the class as a part of the internship. Sometimes, especially in more advanced internships, the agency may ask the intern to develop and lead a presentation either at the site or in a field setting.

Since many people feel uncomfortable with public speaking, it is best to practice a presentation in a safe setting first, such as a class or a small-group meeting. Practicing a professional talk often means do-

ing some research on a topic or service your agency specializes in, developing a PowerPoint presentation, and then taking the class through the slides so that you know what to do when the real world calls on you to make a formal presentation in the future. Here are steps to keep in mind while preparing a presentation:

- First, pay attention to how you present yourself. The way you dress for a presentation is the first impression your audience will have about you. Professional dress can vary, of course, but it typically includes dress pants/slacks, a blouse/dress shirt, a suit or an appropriate skirt, and appropriate footwear. Your demeanor is also one of the first things your audience encounters, so make sure it is positive. Remember, people look better when they smile, so do your best to “be” the part as well as to “look” like the part.
- Second, having visual aids for the presentation not only adds interest, but it also helps the audience better understand what is being said and keeps the audience’s attention. There are some general rules to consider. One is that PowerPoint presentations are helpful because they add a visual element to the talk, which makes it more stimulating. But remember, PowerPoint is meant to guide you through a presentation, not “be” the presentation. Make brief points on the slides for reminders as to what to talk about, so don’t include a word-for-word script of what will be said during the presentation. Yes, the bells and whistles are fun, but they distract both the presenter and the audience. Be sure to keep the PowerPoint simple and to the point. Putting too much print on a slide or just reading them to the audience may cause what is called “Death by PowerPoint.”
- Third, preparing handouts in advance allows the audience to take something away from the presentation. This technique also allows them to reflect on what was said and to remember it better. However, it is also important to give your audience some time to look at or read the handout before going over it. If you do not, you are likely to find that the audience is paying more attention to the handout than to you!
- Fourth, show up early anytime you are giving a presentation. This simple courtesy shows the audience that you are dedicated, conveys a sense that you believe that what is being presented is important, and it also lets the audience know their time is respected. Showing up early also enhances preparation time, allows one to check equipment, and make last minute adjustments, if necessary. Sometimes, it seems like there is a cosmic “law” that says, “If something can go wrong it will,” and showing up early helps to prevent that from happening. Finally, an early arrival allows you to begin the presentation on time, which helps reduce worries about time constraints.
- Rehearsal: Many people benefit from rehearsing their talks because that ensures you know what you are going to show and learn what needs to be cut or expanded. After all, practice makes perfect. Others find a rehearsal too constraining or that it reduces their ability to be spontaneous during the talk. In that case, preparing good notes or outlines may be helpful since “winging it” is a last resort and not recommended. It is also a good idea to prepare for questions at the end of the presentation. If you do not know the answer to a question, do not panic. Instead, be honest by saying, “I don’t know,” and then follow up with, “I will find out

and get back to you on that.”

- Finally, pay attention to the details and be flexible. Whatever the details may be, whether a time limit, a small space or a small audience, or a surprisingly large one, be sure to keep these presentation tips in the back of your mind. If you worry about running out of time because you talk too fast and may run out of things to say, then prepare a few extra slides you can use at the end. If you tend to go slow or the questions take longer to answer than you anticipated, know ahead of time which slides you can skim or skip without hurting your presentation. These practices may help you create a professional, formal-sounding presentation. Keeping them in mind can also reduce public speaking anxiety by giving you more confidence.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is one of the key concepts taught to most human services students because it is a crucial dimension of human services work. The need for confidentiality is also a part of your obligation to the practicum class, as well as the agency and its clients, both during and after the internship. It is likely that you have heard about the importance of confidentiality in your other courses or maybe even know about it from your experience with the health care system’s HIPPA requirements.

Confidentiality is usually a legal obligation, though it may have modified forms, such as in law enforcement, public records, or certain clinical situations involving abuse, homicide, or suicide. When a site indicates that something is confidential, it means just that! However, sometimes students do not realize that this rule may also apply to their training and even classroom situations, especially when they are talking about their clinical experiences or hear others talk about theirs. Consequently, it is important to remember to “disguise” your training experience when talking about them. Common ways of protecting confidential information include omitting or substantially changing names and identifying information of clients, staff, and agencies – sometimes even your own site!

*Example:* One intern mentioned in the classroom portion of their practicum that a staff member at the site said that she had just found out she was pregnant at age 43. The intern mentioned the woman’s first name and added that the individual was distressed by the news and did not want to tell her family about it until she figured out what she was going to do. Unknown to the intern, the woman was the mother of one of the other students in the class, so that student had just found out -- a long with everyone else in the class -- that the student’s middle-aged mother was pregnant.

The same type of guidelines may apply to agency material, such as handbooks and policies. Caution is especially important when it comes to using social media because once something is online, it is impossible to fully erase it. If you must make a reference, say something such as, “at work.” It is also important to make sure not to gossip in the classroom about happenings at the site if they are not relevant to the course. After all, there is a difference between professional dialog and just spreading gossip. Confidentiality is so important that colleges may even dismiss students from an internship or even the program for sharing confidential information. Be sure to understand expectations concerning confidentiality with your instructor as well as your supervisor. Finding out what the rules are and adhering to them are part of what it means to be a professional.

## **Progress Not Perfection**

Although you may have years of schooling and other job training, they are not likely to have fully prepared you for your first internship. Your education has helped to develop ideas about how things work and armed you with information about effective approaches. However, many real-world problems that people face during their internships will not always fit textbook definitions. After all, there is a difference between theory and practice. Similarly, someone who has performed quite competently in previous jobs may find the tasks assigned and carried out during an internship significantly different.

In general, the process of acquiring new and complex skills moves slowly, which means you do not have to learn everything overnight. Instead, it is best to try to keep an open mind about your progress. For example, keep in mind that when your instructor or supervisor critiques your work, it is because they care about it and see potential in you. Similarly, it is just as important to acknowledge and accept positive feedback because this helps reinforce growth and build confidence. If a supervisor takes the time to tell you that you are doing a good job, it means you earned the compliment, so enjoy it!

### **Challenges Along the Way**

Along the way you will encounter obstacles that will make starting the internship seem difficult. One common problem is finding yourself in the situation where you must start at the internship site later than other students. This predicament is particularly frustrating because it forces you to get the required hours done in a shorter time period and puts you behind on gathering information for your presentation, paper, or whatever closing activities are required for the site or course.

Another example is that even if you find and start an internship early, not scheduling hours effectively can put pressure on you near the end of the semester when time is running out. Sometimes, students encounter problems because they complete the required hours at the site too soon in the course and then have nothing left to contribute to class discussions. Instead, it is best to try and space your internship hours out evenly during the semester, though it is also a good idea to finish at the site a little before the end of the semester so that you are not overburdened at the end. Pacing is important, as learning takes time, not just work.

Finally, it may be of value to try to schedule your days at the site when there are richer training opportunities. For example, a site may do individual work on one day, group work on another, and schedule team meetings or training on a third. Finding a way to be exposed to all three opportunities would create a more meaningful internship experience than just participating in one or two of them. Sometimes agencies offer special continuing education activities for staff or take them to local, regional, or even national conferences where major speakers present material. Talking with your supervisor about attending these higher-level professional opportunities is a good idea because what they offer can be added to your resume as additional forms of advanced training. Remember, no one will know that you are interested in attending such events unless you bring it up.

## Tools for Chapter 3

### Activity 1: What Would You Do?

While interacting with a client, they begin to ask questions that you are uncomfortable answering. The questions could be about your family, your school, or any other details about your personal life. You want to respond without being too rude or too revealing. There are four courses of action you can take. Think about or discuss the advantages and risks of each choice.

- Kindly let the client know that those are questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.
- Ask the client why those questions are important to them.
- Share what you are comfortable with if it will benefit the clinician-client relationship without oversharing.
- Talk with your supervisor about the interaction.

### Activity 2: Testing your knowledge (True or False)

- Since you are not an employee, it is unprofessional to offer a suggestion to the organization.
- If you are unsure of a task, you can always ask your supervisor.
- Bringing visual aids to a presentation is not a good use of your time and is, therefore, discouraged.
- Once you get familiar with your internship site, you are then allowed to work without supervision.
- It is your responsibility to track your hours.
- Wearing a smile is a good way to present yourself when meeting someone.

\*Answer key:

1. False 2. True 3. False 4. False 5. True 6. True



## Chapter 4: Using Supervision Effectively

### Introduction

This chapter provides a look at the relationship between you and your supervisor at the internship site. Along with their other professional responsibilities, this individual may be the director of the agency, a department head, or simply a staff member whose duties include helping interns learn about the work along with all their other professional responsibilities. For our purposes, the supervisor is the one who works with you the most at the agency and who usually is the one with whom the instructor communicates in terms of your performance or evaluations. During the internship, you will go through the different developmental stages of a professional supervisory relationship and how it pertains to your learning experience. This chapter will also discuss such things as setting goals for an internship, ideas on how to manage conflicting goals should they arise, and the purpose of assessment.

### Key Words

- **Style:** A particular way of perceiving, understanding, and expressing oneself that is characteristic of a person and the way they either react to or go about dealing with a situation, task, or activity. Everyone has a unique style and each one has a set of related strengths and weaknesses.
- **Supervision:** The process of observing, supporting, or directing what someone does or how something is done by another. May also be seen as a resource, especially in an internship.
- **Supervisor:** In the case of human services workers or interns, the individual at the site to whom one reports or who is responsible for one's work, or the course instructor.

### Supervision

What we call internships today have their historical roots in apprenticeships. These are teaching and learning relationships in which the student learns an art, trade, or job from a skilled professional. This type of learning environment usually takes many years. It begins with a selection process, such as having a certain ability or grade point average. It involves finding someone to guide you through the learning process (e.g. an experienced craftsman or instructor). The apprenticeship often concludes with some sort of “final examination” that ends in graduation and the apprentice's recognition as a professional. As with teaching relationships in general, this one can also be mutually beneficial as most people like to share their expertise with others, and teaching often “teaches” the teacher, as well as the student.

Supervision is at the heart of fieldwork. In this sense it is like an apprenticeship although you are likely to continue to have supervisors if you go on for a graduate degree or license. Learning how supervisors interact with coworkers and clients gives you an opportunity to observe and even model similar behaviors as you start to turn theory into practice. Supervisory insight, experience, and involvement with your education will help you develop a sense of what it means to be a professional in your field as well.

Occasionally, a supervisor can also become a mentor, which is a special type of teaching-learning relationship and can have a positive impact on one's career. Most times, a supervisor will schedule individual time with an intern to go over the student's duties, clients, and caseloads. However, sometimes supervisors are too busy to give interns as much direct supervision as interns would like. While disappointing, it might be helpful to remember that supervisors usually sacrifice productive work time and space to make room for interns. So even if your supervisor does not seem to meet your expectations, that does not mean they do not care. Similarly, not all supervisors have the same style or approach, so be prepared to be as flexible and realistic with your expectations as possible.

### **The Supervised Internship**

Internships are an efficient and effective way of learning because they provide professional guidance. Often, supervisors can work one-on-one with you in ways that are compatible with your learning style, which is more difficult to achieve in a classroom environment. Although course work gives you an idea of what to expect, it is the guided experience that turns theory into knowledge and knowledge into ability. This fieldwork setting is like a laboratory where you can test ideas and techniques without, hopefully, things "blowing up" in your or your client's face. Similarly, supervised experience allows you to test theoretical concepts and perspectives in a real-world environment and to find out which techniques work best in various situations. During this learning process, you are also beginning to develop your own style as a helping professional.

### **Knowing Your Role**

Beginning the internship can be stressful if you have not prepared for it. Researching the site and the kind of services it provides can prepare you and give you a sense of what to expect. By understanding your role as an intern, you also show the supervisor that you are a team player who will try to enact the supervisor's suggestions. Accordingly, it is important to respect the boundaries of being a student in training. Even if you think you know how to handle a situation, the supervisor ultimately makes the call as to whether you are ready to handle a client alone.

Paying attention to the daily activities in the office will help you anticipate tasks and make yourself more useful when the supervisor is busy. Offering to help with duties that are not defined on your list shows that you will be easy to work with. When the supervisor is overloaded with duties you cannot perform, you can still network at the facility. Asking questions is often a good way to interact with others and shows that you are interested in knowing what to do and how to do it.

### **Developmental Stages in Your Supervisory Relationship**

Like most relationships, the one that occurs between an intern and a supervisor is constantly evolving. Ideally, the quality of the relationship will improve as the degree of communication does because that allows both parties to better share information and develop interpersonal connections. Trust builds over time and helps you to talk more freely, examine your strengths and weaknesses, recognize your mistakes and achievements, and do the type of exploration that is necessary for professional development to occur. Unless the relationship is problematic for one person or the other, it usually goes through three stages: the novice stage, the learning stage, and the independent stage. Each one has its own distinct characteristics.

***Novice Stage***

This stage begins when the student and the supervisor first meet and start to form impressions of one another. First impressions do matter, so be sure to dress appropriately, be friendly, and try to conform to the role of an intern, which is somewhere between a student and a professional. This stage is a bit awkward at first for the intern because everything is so new, but the supervisor is likely to be aware of that and try to reduce your anxiety. The same type of exchange goes on in many types of relationships, such as with instructors or bosses in classes or jobs you have had, so you are not as ill-equipped as it might first seem. Of course, such factors as age, individual preferences, maturity level, personality, and interpersonal skill level also play active roles in the process of forming a relationship, so they are likely to be alive here as well. Also remember, in addition to what is said, how it is said also conveys information in a relationship. Your tone of voice and other nonverbal communication cues matter, too. Over time, you will both have a better understanding of how you work together in the roles you play as supervisor and intern.

Clear communication and goal setting are crucial parts of the novice stage. It is helpful to be prepared with questions prior to the beginning of a shift. For instance, you can ask about the day's responsibilities, which tasks need to be addressed, and what expectations people have for the projects that are assigned to you. It is also helpful if you communicate what you wish to learn at the site in terms of your goals and expectations.

***Learning Stage***

The next stage revolves around learning your roles, acquiring the skills necessary to fulfill them, and establishing relationships with your co-workers. Progress in these areas is usually accompanied by an increase in trust between you and your immediate supervisor, which is a two-way street. If things are going well, your development as an intern should include moving up to increasingly complex assignments or tasks and an increasing degree of responsibility or functional independence.

Supervisors usually encourage and welcome questions because they help them assess your progress and bring attention to areas that they can assist you with as you improve your abilities. Consequently, it is important that you realize it is a good idea to ask for help or at least clarification if you are unsure about how to proceed. This practice also reduces the need to have information repeated or doing an assignment poorly and then having to do it over again. Of course, timing is important when asking a question and so is the way it is framed. There may be no stupid questions, but there are poor ways to ask them!

In this stage, your ability to communicate with staff and clients improves as you learn your way around the agency and your duties. This growing sense of competence also increases learner confidence and is rewarding as well. Similarly, as you become more familiar with the agency's rules, functions, and interpersonal culture, you are likely to expand your role and make it more your own. Some indications of progress at this level are asking to or being asked to take on more responsibilities, being treated like a member of a team, and offering to help when you see something that needs to be done instead of waiting to be told to do it.

***Independent Stage***

This stage is characterized by having a more advanced set of skills, demonstrating a higher degree

of decision-making ability or autonomy, and having more comfortable or friendly interactions with your colleagues at the site. A good indicator of reaching this level is the quality of the communication between you and your supervisors, as well as other members of the staff. Another one is feeling less anxious about your place in the agency and your ability to complete jobs assigned to you. At this point, successful interns usually find themselves doing the duties of an entry-level employee at the agency.

Assuming your skills have progressed, the supervisor may offer opportunities for you to work more independently, which is to say with less supervision. You may find yourself, for instance, spontaneously asking for extra assignments, though it is important to make sure you are competent enough to succeed at them. Making sure that you have already demonstrated some of the skills necessary to succeed in those tasks helps both you and those you work with, including your supervisor, see that you are ready to take the next step. Finally, it is usually good to be flexible as an intern. Not only is flexibility an important asset in human services because it helps you “go with the flow” when the need arises, it also reduces tension.

## **The Dynamics of Dealing with a Supervisor**

### **Accommodating Supervisor Style**

Every supervisor is unique in that each has their own clinical and supervisory style. A skilled supervisor will teach, guide, and sometimes even mentor you in order to better prepare you for your future in the field. However, it is important to remember that even the best supervisors may not always be as accessible as you would like, so try to be patient when necessary. Remember, they have many responsibilities at the site, including overseeing your work. Supervising your growth is an additional duty, not one that replaces another.

While it is most desirable to have a supervisor with qualities and teaching methods that mesh well with your style, sometimes those styles may conflict with one another. In order to solve conflicts in general, it is important to have good communication skills and be willing to find common ground. In this situation, the same relational dynamics that you have experienced with differing supervisory styles in the past may help here. For example, if you find yourself in an internship site where there are difficulties with supervision, try not to get discouraged. Also, seeing things from different perspectives can help. Finally, your colleagues and instructors can help you during class meetings or office hours. You may find that you are not alone when facing such a challenge. Your peers may even help you understand the strengths and weaknesses of your style, as well as those of the supervisor. Your instructor and classmates can also help you come up with ideas on how to improve or at least better deal with the situation.

Keep in mind that your supervisor has their own personality and style, too. Generally, supervisors are happy to help because they want to see you succeed. After all, they became professionals for the same reason most of us do, which is to have the opportunity to help others. However, occasionally, a supervisor may have a difficult problem or be dealing with a stressful day and seem irritable or even short-tempered because of it. No matter what kind of day it is, do the best job you can. Remember, although your supervisor’s style may be irritating to you, it is not your role to change it.

It is, however, your job to learn how to deal with different styles, which means that this situation can be a learning opportunity. Although unpleasant, having a difficult supervisor is valuable because

learning about different styles, and how to cope with them, are likely to come in handy in the future. This type of awareness can be an essential skill that can be carried throughout your entire career, so even a poor supervisor may turn out to be a good one in the long run, even if it is only to show what not to do! After all, there is no guarantee that says you will always have a good supervisor or boss.

Everyone has communication and relational styles. Some common examples of how they appear in the supervisory relationship are provided below. Each one is accompanied by its strengths and weaknesses. It may be helpful to try to identify your style and that of your supervisor so that you are better equipped to make appropriate adjustments when necessary.

#### Examples of Supervisory Styles

- **Over-Involved Style:** Manifested by micromanaging or sometimes by being “buddies.”
- **Authoritarian (Controlling) Style:** Needing to demonstrate they are in charge, demanding perfection, having strict rules, showing a low tolerance for individuality
- **Laissez-Faire Style:** An attitude of letting things take their own course without interfering. May appear under involved, offering little direction.
- **Authoritative Style:** Knowledgeable, appropriately assertive, and open to suggestions when appropriate.

#### Examples of Student Styles

- **Passive Style:** Accepting or allowing what happens to happen. Tends to avoid active input, responses, or resistance.
- **Aggressive Style:** Pursuing one’s interests too forcefully, sometimes unduly so or without listening to others.
- **Assertive Style:** Having and showing a confident, energetic, goal-oriented approach.
- **Realistic Style:** A person who accepts a situation as it is and is prepared to make the best out of the circumstances.

### Preparing for Success

The site supervisor plays an essential role in the professional lives of internship students, so they can be one of the keys to having a successful internship experience. There are several things that can be done to increase the chances of a positive relationship. For example, simple things, such as being prepared and being courteous, can go a long way to help this process. Trying your best to stick to the established schedule is important because supervisors, and sometimes even clients, count on you being there at the appointed times.

Still, life is complicated and unexpected events, such as sudden illness, bad weather, family emergencies, and so on, may happen. Thus, it is best to establish procedures to follow and to avoid schedule changes or problems as much as possible. It is a good idea to have a backup plan in place. For instance, if

you have children or care-taker responsibilities, then having alternative arrangements made with someone in advance can help. If your work schedule changes, give the site or the supervisor as much advance notice as possible. Above all, avoid simply not showing up. While most supervisors are understanding, you alone are accountable for your decisions. Requesting a day off for an activity is significantly better than calling off at the last moment or just not showing up.

### **Staying on Track**

Some people look at time requirements of the internship and its schedule as an intrusion because of family, school, or employment responsibilities. However, sometimes it is possible to coordinate schedules in advance. For example, many schools have spring breaks that may make it possible for you to increase hours at the internship site, which reduces their impact on the rest of the semester. Working weekends may be possible at some sites, such as a residential program, if the time is supervised. This type of schedule balancing or time management also facilitates the development of a good working relationship with those at your site and fosters a sense of working with someone, as opposed to working for someone.

The ability to settle into a routine quickly helps facilitate movement through the developmental stages of the internships. Supervisors and other coworkers know that you are there to learn. They want you to feel included and part of the agency or team. If you are shy, keep in mind that many others have been through the same experience, including the people you work with. After all, they were interns or beginners at one time, just like you!

### **Contracting to Meet Student Needs**

It is important to have an idea about what you would like to achieve during the internship because it will help you focus your time in those directions. You should, for instance, be able to describe what your goals are so that others can help you identify opportunities or assignments that will help you reach them. This type of planning and prioritizing allows you to play an active role in your education and helps others know what to do to help make the internship a good one for you.

### **Internship Forms**

Your college, the placement site, or both may have certain legal obligations or routine requirements that must be met. One of them, for example, may be the need for a formal legal agreement between your educational institution and the placement site. Another one could be a written plan detailing such things as who you will be working with, what duties you will be performing while at the site, and the educational objectives you, the site, and your instructor feel are important for you to master. One of the most empowering ways to achieve your goals is to draw up an internship or educational “agreement.”

This type of agreement is often developed in written form so that the college, agency, supervisor, and student are all quite literally on the same page in regard to expected duties, requirements, and objectives. Another benefit of a written agreement is that it allows you to track progress and provides you standing if the agency points you in directions you did not intend or agree to go.

In other words, these agreements are better handled by spelling them out on paper so that they can be used as a guide to help create a good internship plan and to maintain this focus throughout the internship experience. In this sense, the internship agreement is like a contract that you may refer to throughout the process. It should also include such information as to what your expected duties will be, the number

of hours you will work, and who will supervise your time and work at the placement. Most colleges do not permit students to drive clients in their own or even the agency's vehicles because of liability issues. However, some colleges will provide professional liability insurance to cover your interactions with clients. If these matters are not spelled out, you should talk to both the supervisor and your instructor about them.

Sometimes, especially when things are busy for everyone at the site, it may seem as though the supervisor or the staff does not care about what happens to the intern because they are a lower priority. However, you have some responsibility for making the internship a good training experience as well. So instead of showing up and simply following someone around, you may need to be flexible and even creative. For example, if you spot something that needs to be addressed and feel doing so is within your range of abilities, you might volunteer to take on the project. In addition to filling in hours that otherwise might go unused or be less than educational, you will also show that you have initiative and the willingness to help where you can.

Good contracts provide the foundations for a good internship experience. Consequently, your goals will also be reviewed by supervisors and agencies who will have some sound ideas and suggestions regarding your expectations and limitations. Sometimes they even see more potential in an intern than the student does. This situation can create the opportunity to grow beyond your expectations. Accordingly, sometimes it is best to modify an agreement. In that case, changes should be approved by the intern, the supervisor, and the instructor. Occasionally, a college or site will not use a contract but have only a verbal agreement with the intern. Although this isn't the best situation, at least you can document what you agree to do, and not do, and then discuss that with your instructor.

Although rare, sometimes an internship does not work out well for a variety of reasons. For example, there may be a sudden change in supervisors or insurmountable interpersonal conflicts. Though no one wants to see things go in this direction, the clinical editor of this book has found that it is always possible to find alternatives, sometimes including finding a new site, without penalizing the student, unless they are responsible for the conflict. Your instructor may also find helpful ways of dealing with this situation if you bring it up to them.

### **The Classroom and Classroom Discussion**

Most internships are accompanied by a regular group meeting, class, or some other type of regular gathering. That practice is important because it is a conducive environment where students can describe their learning experiences, express how they feel about something connected to the internships, ask questions, seek help, as well as offer and receive support to and from their colleagues. This part of the internship is valuable because it is part of what case management theory calls "monitoring" (Moxely, 1989). The purpose of monitoring involves gathering information and receiving feedback about what is going on for students and how they are progressing through the stages of the internship process. This information, in turn, allows the instructor to assess the development of the intern, offer helpful guidance when needed, spot problems early on, and intervene when necessary. Even internships that do not have a regular classroom component have some sort of monitoring built into them at the site or with the instructor of the course.

Consequently, it is beneficial to attend classroom discussions as that is where people hear about, reflect on, and offer ideas to each other concerning the experiences they are having at their individual sites. Not talking about the positive and negative experiences of interning may even hinder your development and interfere with your ability to grow as a professional, not to mention limiting your ability to help your colleagues. In addition, class discussions or conferences with your instructor (if you do not have a class meeting associated with your internship) act as a support group where you can talk about your experiences--good or bad--and the group can help you effectively work through them. Talking through certain scenarios will also show the instructor signs of your growth.

Similarly, there may be times when you feel stuck, are uncertain, or face a problem at your site. Your classroom colleagues can be an important resource for such things as brainstorming solutions and suggesting different approaches to the problem. This aspect of the internship also gives you an opportunity to see the growth process from different perspectives as everyone goes through it a little differently. Sometimes just knowing that others are dealing with the same issue is helpful all by itself.

*Example:* You have a question about your site that could not be addressed on the day you were there. One thing you can do is to remember that you will have time to discuss these uncertainties with your classmates and your professor. Furthermore, it is important that you share your questions and concerns so that your professor can make suggestions and offer you guidance. Of course, it is also important to realize and honor the confidential nature of these discussions.

## **Goals and Obstacles**

You may encounter problems reaching some of your goals during the internship. Typical issues include not feeling you are learning as much as you expected, feeling lost, or feeling like a burden. Such problems can be discussed with the supervisor, with the professor, and with classmates. Classmates and professors are an outstanding resource and can be used as an information tool for self-monitoring and reflection during the internship and may help you find ways to make the experience more satisfying. Often, people use role-playing scenarios in the classroom to help deal with a problem concerning one's supervisor or a given staff worker. The goal of a good "working alliance" with your supervisor is to create an atmosphere where both of you feel free to talk to one another honestly.

### **Being Under-Challenged**

Sometimes students find themselves feeling like they are not getting the type of experience they expected. For instance, it may be that their priorities or goals have been pushed aside or their work at the agency has become routine. These situations arise for several reasons, most of which are not the students' fault. For example, it could be that the agency's busy season is at another time of the year or that the funding streams have changed in ways that make original agreements untenable. In general, the agency's priorities come first, so the intern needs to adjust, not the other way around.

The professor and your peers can help you adjust your goals or find new ways of meeting them during the remainder of the internship. Brainstorming ideas may help you know how to approach the supervisor, find other alternatives to meet your goals, and restructure your goals.

*Example:* Jane is interning at a crisis center and has the goal of working face-to-face with clients in crisis. Unfortunately, since starting her internship, she has been unable to sit in on an intake session for



various reasons not of her making. Instead, Jane's work has been focused on organizing paperwork and making copies for her supervisor. While Jane understands the importance of the work she is doing, she fears she will go through the entire internship missing out on other valuable experiences. Jane discusses her concerns in the classroom, and classmates encourage her to have a discussion with her supervisor. Jane then makes some suggestions to the supervisor about how to include more client contact into her routine without dumping all the paperwork on someone else. The supervisor tweaks the suggestions a bit and together they find a strategy that meets Jane's goal of increasing her clinical skills with clients in crisis while still meeting the clerical needs of the agency.

### **Setting up Self-Directed Goals**

Often, a supervisor will help set up a work schedule but then become too busy to adjust it in ways that lead to increasing degrees of training and skill acquisition. At that point, it may seem like they are just keeping you busy with mundane tasks to simply fill up your time to meet the hours. If you feel that the internship has lost its sense of direction or that you are not progressing any further, it is important to think proactively. Instead of complaining to the supervisor, you might consider presenting them with a plan that would move you toward your goals or increase your level of responsibility or involvement. If you have trouble formulating one, it might be a good idea to share your situation with your instructor or classmates since they are part of your network and can act as resources who can help you generate possible solutions.

Example: Mohamed is working at a busy mental health facility and found himself underutilized. Since he is interested in doing community work, he proposes to create a book of community services that can identify resources people can use to find assistance with housing, transportation, utility services, job training, food, childcare, and so on. The result of his efforts is a set of Facebook pages that list basic human services, names to contact, phone numbers to use, and active links to click on that can put clients in touch with those who can help them. The supervisor valued his contribution enough to assign someone to maintain the site even after Mohamed graduated.

### **Developing More Challenging Goals**

Sometimes interns reach the point where they feel they have met the goals that were set down in the original educational agreement and have time to do more. Of course, it is wise to make sure you have met those goals before discussing the situation with your supervisor. Take a moment to make sure that all expectations have been met and then try creating a goal or set of them that you think would help you grow while also offering something of value to the agency. Next, approach the supervisor with a tentative plan. If the supervisor feels that you are ready, and if there is no longer a need for you to continue to perform your current duties, you may be able to take the next step in your professional development.

Every person with whom you have contact may be a source of education and opportunity. Getting to know others within the agency allows you to discuss career interests with them and learn about career possibilities associated with their roles at the agency. Offering to help others in their work and creating new tasks are just a few ways to take things into your own hands when there is nothing to do or when your jobs have become routine. Taking the initiative in learning about the agency and the services it provides often makes a good impression and opens new doors.

*Example:* Rosetta works at a center that focuses on dealing with substance abuse. In her down-

time, she did research on other agencies in surrounding counties because she saw that clients often move from county to county. Consequently, Rosetta identified, compiled, and printed out a list of AA/NA meeting schedules for each county so that clients would have the opportunity to continue to attend meetings after they moved.

## **Evaluations**

A good supervisor will regularly assess your ability to take on new tasks. However, it is important for interns to evaluate themselves from time to time as well. Most interns will want to review their objectives periodically and conduct reflective self-assessments. This process can be done informally, or through keeping a journal, a file on a computer or phone, and so on. Near the end of the internship, the instructor often requests that the supervisor do a final report, evaluation, or summary of the student and their performance at the site. Of course, you are likely to have a general feel about how things are going based on the supervisor's reactions or meetings regarding your work performance. So, if the internship does not seem to be allowing yours goals to be met, requesting time for a meeting before the semester is over can prevent problems.

Regardless of how challenging the tasks may be, always do your best work. If you take pride in your work, coworkers and supervisors will notice. Remember, these people are now in your network. When it comes to future jobs, they could be potential references.

## **Handling the Discomfort of Negative Feedback**

It is also important to keep in mind that no two interns will progress at the same rate. Sometimes interns feel that they are not given the freedom to develop more fully. Other times they may feel they were asked to do too much. You may look at the situation and feel discouraged or lose confidence in your abilities. It is important to discuss this reaction with your supervisor and ask for suggestions for improvement. Learning how to accept constructive criticism is a crucial component of this process, especially if you are a beginner. Try your best to listen, but also realize that the supervisor is looking at the bigger agency picture that you cannot see.

In situations where it seems that the supervisor and staff are talking about you in a way that does not feel good, be sure to avoid forming any cognitive distortions or irrational thoughts about it. Avoid overgeneralizing, personalizing, and surrendering to emotional reasoning. Be sure to look those terms up if they are unfamiliar to you (Mruk, 2013). After all, they may be discussing progress as well as the lack of it and your potential rather than your limitations. If you feel that the discussions are taking place in a negative way, or if it seems that the problem is a personality conflict you are having with the supervisor or their style, it is advisable to talk with your instructor about it. After all, the instructor is the individual who oversees your internship and who has the responsibility to make sure it is progressing properly. It is also likely that the instructor is more interested in your professional development than anything else.

## **Embrace Learning Opportunities**

It is a good practice to experience as many dimensions of the internship and agency as possible. In addition to the supervisor, other staff members and your duties are opportunities for you to learn something new.

## **Learning from Co-workers and Supervisors**

Talking with co-workers at the internship site is a good way to build rapport and to network. They can teach you about diverse community resources. Office staff also tend to have the benefit of direct contact, can offer insights, and have more time for you than supervisors. They might even take a liking to you and become an informal mentor. This person might be able to teach you many aspects of the job that your supervisor does not have the time to do. Consequently, make sure you ask to be introduced to other co-workers. Often, they know more about “office politics” than anyone else and can offer insights or support about this more subtle and informal dimension of the agency. Talking with people in the break room or at lunch can be instructional if you approach it as a potential learning opportunity!

*Example:* A supervisor was constantly busy dealing with different departments but made time to have the intern attend a professional team meeting. The intern watched how co-workers conversed with each other about different cases. They were able to support one another in finding solutions for different situations when dealing with clients and found the experience of working with others beneficial. One staff member at the meeting with whom the intern had little previous contact seemed to respond very positively when the intern volunteered additional information about the client. After this meeting, the intern made it a point to seek out that staff member and began an amicable, professional relationship that blossomed over time.

## **Learning from Clients**

The clients at the site can also be a source of learning, perhaps even the greatest one in the long run as they should be the focus of your work. Clients usually have their own perspective about the site and how it works. Learning about how someone else experiences the process is another opportunity to gain insight. In fact, client perspectives are necessary to appreciate if you truly want to grasp the whole picture. Positive and negative client-related experiences can be some of the most instructional ones you have as you learn how to become a professional. Most of us in the field, including the clinical editor of this book, still remember what we learned from clients many years after the interaction or relationship ended.

## **Observing and Modeling Others**

Being a student in the internship course offers an opportunity to observe the instructor, supervisor, and the staff around you. The internship gives you a chance to see first-hand how people in the field dress, greet people, comport themselves with colleagues, contact other agencies, as well as their clients. You will also have the chance to form interpersonal relationships with staff at the facility during your lunch and break periods. Reflecting on what you observe is a good source of insight or learning that cannot be found in classrooms or textbooks. If you happen to find yourself admiring someone’s professional capabilities, interpersonal style, and ways of approaching the work, you can experiment with modeling your own behavior after theirs. Learning what feels good to you, what is compatible with your style, and then trying it out can be a great way of increasing your skill set and confidence.

## **Challenges Along the Way**

Often unexpected circumstances and events happen when working with the public. Although they may cause anxiety in the beginning, these are times when you can start relying on your developing profes-

sional skills. Observing how your supervisor handles delicate situations, for example, may help you navigate your way through a similar situation or task. Seeing how someone handles an irate, sad, frustrated, or anxious client effectively gives you a larger range of possible responses when you encounter similar situations. Therefore, part of the learning process involves noting good professional skills in action, including such things as the individual's mannerisms, tone of voice, non-verbal behaviors, and so on. Observing and reflecting on this type of information may help prepare you for the unexpected situations you encounter at your site and later in your career.

*Example:* When the family of a client demands information and answers to questions that they are not privileged to, the family member may become demanding or agitated toward you. In this case, if possible, you might remember how someone else at the agency handled the situation effectively. For example, listening intently and responding in a calm, clear manner is often helpful. Be sure to report such situations to staff or your supervisor and document everything that transpired. Then reflect on what you learned from the experience.

## Tools for Chapter 4

### General Suggestions

- Be prepared before meeting with your supervisor by making a list of personal goals you want to achieve at the site.
- Ask to be introduced to other co-workers who can provide information and support when needed. Be sure to note their names and titles for future use.
- Listen for new learning opportunities and experiences.
- Learn to speak up when appropriate so others know you want to be involved at the site.
- Feel free to ask questions when needed.
- Be sure you understand what is required before you take on a task.
- Try to have patience and understanding with others.
- NEVER put yourself in danger or in a situation that feels threatening.
- ALWAYS try do the best you can. Do not just put forth the minimum effort required to get the job done.

Going above and beyond the minimum effort and taking pride in your work is noticed by others. If possible, find time to talk with your supervisor, instructors, and colleagues about the positive and negative events that stood out to you in the last week or so. This type of “debriefing” allows you to examine the experience, reflect on it, make observations, and consolidate your learning. It also helps to review the objectives of the internship every so often and evaluate your progress.

### Activity 1: What would you do?

You have been at your internship site for a few weeks now. You and your supervisor have a good working alliance, and she is entrusting you with a small set of duties each week. As you are reporting to your supervisor, she seems almost annoyed if not angry that you are telling her about your day-to-day experiences at the agency. Your supervisor did not finish listening to you before she gathered a stack of papers from their desk and told you they had to go. These are the courses of action you can take:

- Follow her out of the room and demand an explanation.
- Talk to her about it when you come back next time.
- Talk to co-workers about your supervisor.
- Do not let it get to you; she is a busy lady, and she could just be running late.

What do you do? Why? Discuss the options with your classmates.

### Activity 2: True or False?

- You should be angry when your supervisor is too busy to help you.
- You should meet with your professor and go to the classroom session if you have any problems at your internship site.

- You can discuss case information with a client without supervision because you are providing the service.
- You should not talk to your supervisor about future career plans.

\*A. False, B. True, C. False, D. False

## Chapter 5: The Importance of Ethics

### Introduction

Chapter 5 discusses ethics in the human services setting. It is likely that the topic and importance of ethics were mentioned in several of your classes. The internship involves working with other people who are being offered a service of one type or another, so ethical principles and practices must be a focus of the experience. It is your responsibility as a human services intern to uphold them in everything you do and say.

### Key Words

- **Code of Ethics:** A group of principles that guide an individual or organization and their practices. The principles act as guidelines or rules based on the values of an organization or individual that set the limits for such things as how to identify conflict, how to avoid, or how to deal with problems.
- **Competence:** Possessing the skills, knowledge, or abilities necessary to successfully or efficiently form various tasks associated with a discipline or position.
- **Conflict of Interest:** A relationship or situation where one's own activities or interests can be advanced at the expense of another who has less power, authority, or resources. Often associated with an imbalance of equity.
- **Cultural Diversity/Multiculturalism:** The variety of different values, preferences, practices, and behaviors that exist between groups. Multiculturalism is an alternative, more inclusive term.
- **Dual Relationship:** A relationship between a human services worker and another person or group that involves a conflict of interest. Common examples include dating a client or using a client for the clinician's own personal or financial gain.
- **Ethics:** A system of moral principles to guide behavior.
- **Ethnocentric:** A conscious or unconscious belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is inherently superior to another. An inclination toward viewing others from one's own cultural or ethnic perspective. Extreme forms include such things believing that one's own group is better than others and acting on this position, such as in the case of racism.

### Ethics and Laws

Ethics are the rules of conduct. Often, they are recognized as the best practices based on the underlying principles of a given profession. Ethics are not laws, which are actual regulations one must comply with because they are established by an authority with judicial responsibility and the power of enforcement. In the most basic sense, ethics are principles, and laws are requirements.

At many internship sites, one may see dedicated people working in ways that are consistent with

a code of ethics that they take seriously. Typically, their mission is to ensure that people are treated fairly, equally, and respectfully. It is easy to understand how ethics and laws, such as licensing laws, protect clients as they help ensure clients of reasonable treatment.

However, it is almost equally important to realize that ethics and laws also protect the workers. They provide rules that may be helpful in guiding us through difficult or risky professional situations. In addition, new circumstances are constantly emerging and must be examined by the professions and courts, sometimes resulting in revised or new codes of conduct, laws, and regulations. Understanding these issues ensures the clients' safety and keeps a worker out of future legal trouble. Staying up to date and adhering to the standards of practice might be the only defense from a lawsuit. Most professions will offer classes or continuing education that focus on existing ethics and laws, particularly those that require credentialing. Students should ask instructors and supervisors about the practices that apply to their profession and their placement site and what the laws are and why they are in place. Moreover, the instructors and supervisors should advise students on how to handle ethical issues when the students encounter them.

### **Codes of Ethics and Human Services**

Each human services discipline has its own code of ethics and some of them have licensing laws as well. Ethics are usually specified by the profession and based on professional values while laws are made by states, although there is often overlap between the two. For instance, the National Association of Social Workers (National Association of Social Workers, 2019) offers a code of ethics summarizing ethical principles that reflect the profession's core values and uses them to establish a set of specific standards that should be used to guide social work practice based on the identified value. Some examples include:

- **Value:** *Service*  
**Ethical Principle:** *A social worker's primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.*
- **Value:** *Social Justice*  
**Ethical Principle:** *A social worker challenges social injustice.*
- **Value:** *Dignity and Worth of the Person*  
**Ethical Principle:** *A social worker respects the inherent dignity and worth of the person.*

Again, each discipline will have its own professional code of ethics that embodies the values the discipline embraces and includes a set of behavioral guidelines as well. They can be found in counseling, criminal justice, psychology, social work, as well as in other areas. It is incumbent upon the intern to know about them. Your instructor and supervisor should make a point of helping you know where to look.

### **Agency Ethics**

Ethical codes and licensing laws are intended to protect the client, the practitioner, and the agency by ensuring that clients receive the best treatment within a set of behavioral boundaries. Sometimes the ethics of two professions or agencies may conflict. For example, Catholic Charities offers behavioral and mental health services that do not include abortion, while Planned Parenthood provides women's wellness programs that emphasize choice. If you find that the views of an agency conflict with yours, it is



important to think seriously about those conflicts, perhaps even re-evaluate the selection of that site if the conflicts seem to be insurmountable. In general, if you agree to be an intern at a site, you have also agreed to act in ways that do not contradict its prevailing values and standards unless they are illegal. Should you decide you cannot do that, then you should discuss the problem with your supervisor. If a compromise is not possible, then the ethical path for all concerned may be for you to consider another type of agency.

### **Personal Codes of Ethics**

In addition to having a thorough understanding of the ethical code in your profession and the facility in which you work, it is important to become aware of and develop your personal code of ethics. Professionally, a major reason for this general rule is that, in practice, your ethical principles might be challenged or come into play, often quite unexpectedly.

The more you know about what you believe and value in advance, the better prepared you may be when this time arises. Consequently, self-awareness is helpful in these situations. After all, people are rarely simple, and a client's behavior may evoke conscious or unconscious feelings or reactions based on your experiences and background. Though this process is mostly an introspective one, it is often helpful to discuss these issues with others, such as your colleagues, instructor, and supervisor. Taking the time to develop a clear and reasonably articulate ethical foundation will help you face challenging situations in the future, and often will provide a sense of direction. Having a firm grasp of your personal beliefs may also be of value when making rapid decisions, such as in a critical relational moment or when dealing with a crisis.

*Example:* You are a social worker at your local agency and someone you dislike walks through the door looking for help. Perhaps you are a criminal justice major who has just found out that you will be dealing with someone you grew up with but have not seen in years. Maybe you are a case manager driving a client to their medication appointment and you think you smell marijuana coming out of the apartment when the individual opens the door. Perhaps your next client is accused of child, spousal, or elder abuse. All these situations are examples that are likely to stir up conscious and unconscious reactions that challenge your ability to conduct yourself in a professional manner. The more you know about your personal values and ethics, the better able you will be to conduct yourself in accordance with your professional ethics and obligations without being overly judgmental or jumping to premature conclusions.

### **General Ethical Guidelines**

There are many ethical concerns when it comes to clients. A few things to keep in mind are listed below:

- Be committed to helping people at the site, regardless of your personal preferences, no matter who the client may be. It may be helpful to keep in mind Carl Roger's notion of unconditional positive regard, which means that you value everyone's essential humanity, though you may not necessarily agree with or approve of their behavior.
- Having cultural awareness is necessary. Always remember that every culture handles situations differently. Educate yourself on the different cultures that the agency will be working with as that type of information will give you better insight, understanding, and direction on how to proceed with a client. Similarly, educating yourself about a client's respective culture before meeting with them can help you achieve a rapport with the client and avoid creating

- unnecessary obstacles in your work.
- Conflicts can and will arise. Some of them might be unethical or even illegal to engage in. If a situation presents itself and you begin feeling uncertain, make sure to inform a supervisor and instructor as soon as you can to examine possible responses before making any decisions.
  - Always be as proper and respectful as possible. Choose your written and oral words responsibly. Be aware of facial expressions and other non-verbal signals you may be conveying to your client. If non-verbal signals do not match what and how you are saying something, it may be more difficult for the client to believe what you are saying is true.
  - Pay attention to ethical and legal mandates. Most human services professionals are mandated-reporter occupations. States have laws concerning when and under what circumstances situations need to be reported. Suspensions can be based on circumstances that would cause a reasonable person in a similar position to suspect that a client has suffered or faces a threat of physical or mental harm. This practice is especially necessary if the situation involves a child under the age of 18 or an intellectually challenged, developmentally disabled, or physically impaired person under the age of 21. It also may apply to suspected spousal or elder abuse. Suicidality and homicidality are other possibilities to be aware of. If such situations arise at the site, they must be taken seriously and should be discussed immediately with your supervisor.
  - A good ethical and professional guideline is to remember The Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated.

### **Practicing Ethics at the Site**

Maintaining professional ethics is not always easy. For example, it is important to remember that although you may not agree with all your workplace's codes, you are usually obliged to abide by them. Learning how to integrate the ethics of the workplace and profession with your own is helpful and could enhance your professional image. For instance, you can fulfill your corporate social responsibility by recycling goods on site. Embodying ethics in this way may also serve as a role model for clients, especially children, who often look to you for guidance.

### **Dual Relationships**

Part of a professional code of ethics and law that can cause people considerable trouble concerns avoiding dual relationships, especially if one is living or working in a small town. Dual or multiple relationships occur when a professional has more than one type of relationship with a client. More specifically, the relationship must be such that there is an unequal distribution of influence or power between the provider and the recipient of the services. For example, having a friendship is usually based on an equal distribution of influence, but having a professional relationship with a friend is not. What makes dual or multiple relationships unethical is the chance that the client might be exploited, and, as a result, potentially harmed. One clear violation of the code of ethics in most disciplines is that a provider and a recipient of services *cannot* have a sexual or financial relationship with one another.

### **Countertransference**

Countertransference, or the professional's conscious and especially unconscious reactions to

the client, should be something you learned about in other classes or coursework related to your major. Risks of countertransference are especially high when the clinician projects their unresolved conflicts and interpersonal issues onto the client. At times, for instance, a client might remind you of a person who you are close to, such as a parent, sibling, partner or ex-partner. Depending on your degree of self-awareness, sometimes you might not even be aware of it as the process often happens unconsciously. That is what makes the situation especially difficult or even dangerous. Self-awareness helps spot these possibilities before they become a problem, but general awareness of them helps too. One way to increase this ability to spot these problems is to ask yourself if the person you are working with reminds you of anyone else in your earlier or current life. If the answer is “yes,” then countertransference is likely to be a part of the situation. As you continue the internship, keep in mind that your job is to help the client in an appropriate way, with the emphasis on appropriate.

Even though you may believe you have a clear understanding of what countertransference is and how it works, it remains tricky because countertransference always happens in our psychological blind spots. While working with the elderly, for example, it is very easy to find yourself responding too much to a client, until you realize that they remind you of your own grandparent. Once again, if someone really irritates you, it may help to ask yourself who else have you responded to in this way from your childhood or from a current relationship. While such self-awareness might seem simple, it is difficult to achieve when countertransference is occurring.

*Example:* An older person you are working with reminds you of someone you once knew and always makes you smile. They seem so “nice” and need a little money for rent or medications. You think nothing of offering to “lend” them some or even pay for it because you are supposed to help those in trouble, and, after all, it isn’t that much money. To do so, of course, would cross ethical lines. Once that happens, it is easy to form an attachment that could lead to other things, such as dependency, unrealistic expectations, and problematic behaviors that compromise your position when your behavior becomes known to others. In this way, a well-intentioned, but ill-considered action may lead to an ethical mess.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality, as most interns know, is a key ethical responsibility. There are many dimensions to this issue, such as keeping client and staff information confidential, as well as conversations and observations made at the site and in classroom discussions. Another dimension of confidentiality to consider is outside of your work and academic environments.

Most people have a natural desire to talk about their experiences, particularly meaningful ones, with others. Always check with the supervisor to find out the limitations as to what can and cannot be discussed within and outside of the workplace. Keep in mind that when talking outside of the workplace, a person’s real name and identifying information (information that can be used to identify someone such as gender, age, physical characteristics, behavioral history, place of residence, occupation, and so on) should never be used. The same rules apply to journals, notes, and, of course, social media. In fact, it is probably best not to even think about “discussing” anything from your practicum using social media as that record never goes away.

*Example:* You are in your practicum class and say, “I was taken by surprise at my internship site

when Suzie, my best friend from high school, came out of the therapist's office who treats only opioid addicts." It may seem like you have "permission" to share this information at your classroom meeting because there are many Suzies in the world, and you did not mention a last name.

However, that would be a mistake because you have revealed what is called personally identifying information, in fact, quite a bit of it. For example, you identified the person as having a common name. Furthermore, you also specified a location and a relationship. Together, these three bits of information are more than enough to identify someone. In this case, someone in the class may have known a Suzie in your high school and that she had a best friend who had your first name! Or, perhaps the school's social media pages showed a picture of you and Suzie together at an event.

HIPPA regulations concerning client confidentiality often apply to human services settings, too. HIPAA is an acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act that Congress passed in 1996 and is a compliance requirement for any health professional or setting. Most human services professionals talk about these requirements when discussing ethics, but it is also the law, which makes honoring these rules more than just an ethical obligation. These rules apply to all forms of information, including paper, oral, and electronic forms. Furthermore, only the minimum health information necessary to conduct business is to be used or shared. Criminal justice settings may have different rules concerning confidentiality because some records are open to the public for the asking, such as crime reports, so it is always advisable to discuss the rules with your supervisor early in your internship.

### **Dependency vs. Empowerment**

One of the more challenging ethical issues that many interns in the helping professions face is the tendency or inclination to do too much for clients. In the extreme form, such practices involve going far beyond what is required to help the individual such that the client becomes dependent on you and expects you to do the work for them. This is a common ethical dilemma because the helping profession tends to hire workers who genuinely want to help the lives of others, and the clients generally do need help. However, crossing this line may lead to major problems, such as loaning people money, buying them things, and, on rare occasions, even taking them home, which usually leads to people being fired!

One way of preventing this type of ethical dilemma is to constantly involve the clients in the helping process as active participants so that they may learn to help themselves. For instance, if a client is looking for housing, you can involve them in the process of finding a home, which includes learning how to find advertisements, make calls, get references in order, have a bank account, and so forth. The proverbial Biblical story that discusses the difference between giving a person a fish and teaching them how to fish comes to mind here: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for life." Even though well intended, doing too much for a client is unethical or at least detrimental.

If you find yourself in a situation where the client has become dependent, then appropriate action needs to be taken. You can help the client to recognize and rely on their own strengths thereby fostering their independence. Encouraging clients to develop their own plans, getting them to identify goals, and directing them to the appropriate resources is a win-win for both of you in the long run.

Sometimes you and your client will disagree on a plan, goal, or resource. Try to be profession-

al when these situations come up and remember that often people learn by making mistakes. If they are small ones, you can think about stepping back a bit and allowing the client to figure out what happened in order to avoid the error in the future. Small mistakes can be used as learning tools and build up confidence, if you continue to be supportive. Supervisors, of course, may sometimes take the same approach with you!

### **Client Resistance**

Sometimes you may encounter a client who seems unwilling to help themselves. This situation may be especially frustrating to interns because we all want to demonstrate that we do care, are competent, and can do the work. Before doing anything, be sure to reflect on whether there is a cultural issue involved. It may be that the client is doing what they think they should be doing from their cultural perspective. For instance, most Americans expect eye contact and plenty of dialogue to occur when interacting with other people. However, in another culture, maintaining eye contact with a person in authority or speaking up is considered impolite or even rude. So, if an American is dealing with someone from that culture who appears politely reserved, we might regard them as depressed, bored, or resistant when they are not. Cultural competence is important in the human services field because we deal with human diversity all the time in our work.

However, sometimes the client is just not prepared for change or really does not know how to start the process. It is important to do your best in these situations and offer support and guidance to the individual even though the person may not accept it until later. Of course, there are other types of resistance, some of which concern personality conflicts, differences in individual styles, and mental health issues, all of which should be brought up to your supervisor when they occur.

### **Referrals**

Sometimes referring the client to a different case manager or specialist is what the client may need. For instance, if you are working in the area of domestic violence and find that a client is an alcoholic, it helps to refer the individual to someone who specializes in doing therapy with people who suffer from addictions. There are several other reasons a referral may be necessary, such as having to end the internship experience before the client's needs are completely met, a therapist changing jobs, or taking Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leaves, to name a few.

One of the most delicate situations is when you and the client come to an impasse. Massive transference or countertransference problems, a lack of training and skills in an area that must be addressed in order to move forward, or a client's resistance to change all create special problems in treatment. In general, it is important to realize that the client should never be abandoned. Instead, you, the supervisor, or the site should set up an alternative pathway to get clients the help they need and deserve.

Sometimes clients may also ask to be referred to someone else. Try not to be offended if that happens. There are plenty of reasons why a client may ask to be referred to another professional and not many of them have to do with you or your style, though that can happen, too. Be sure to discuss the issue with your supervisor. That way you may be able to find out what went wrong, if anything, and gain knowledge.

### **Asking for Help**

If you ever find yourself in a position that you are not sure how to handle, ask the supervisor or your instructor for guidance. If you are at the site and the supervisor is not available, it may be possible to check with one of the other staff members. If no one is available and you must act quickly, you will probably have to make the best decision you can based on your training and individual principles. These situations may be intimidating, but they can also be great learning opportunities. Afterward, you should process the experience with the supervisor and ask questions. Although there may be dumb questions somewhere in the universe, it is not during the internship.

### **Documentation**

Documentation, or an approved way to record events and transactions with a client(s) is extremely important in most human services settings. From mental health to criminal justice settings, documentation is valuable in at least two ways. First, it lets others know what transpired if you are not available. Imagine what being in a hospital would be like for nurses if there were no charts on the patients to turn to as you come on your shift! Second, documentation often has legal standing. It is a record of what you saw and did in response to a client. Good documentation not only protects the well-being of the client, but it protects you as well, as it can show that you followed appropriate procedures in your work with the individual.

Some people like to say, “If it is not on paper, then it didn’t happen.” Although that may be an exaggeration, the concept is a good one. Always follow agency policy on taking detailed notes and on documentation. Also, if a situation with a client occurs, or if you are injured in any way, tell the supervisor, and keep clear documentation of the incident. These are standards of practice at most agencies. Your internship site and your role there will determine such things as how to record information, what to write, how detailed it should be, and which format to use. Be sure to ask about these things if you are not told about them.

Depending on the agency, you should be cautious about signing documentation. After all, if you do sign something, it can be understood to mean that you agree with what is written. Therefore, if you must sign a document, make sure that it is accurate or that you agree with it. If you do not agree, it is important to see your supervisor and discuss this problem with them before signing.

### **Identifying and Dealing with Dilemmas**

Being able to identify legal or ethical dilemmas is the first step toward properly handling them. Most likely you have already heard of some potential issues and some examples which have occurred with other interns or professionals. You should expect to experience dilemmas as well. One of the more common ones occurs when witnessing someone else doing something that you feel is wrong. Like it or not, once you have knowledge of the issue, an ethical burden lands on your shoulders. Since these situations are often difficult, it might be a good idea to spend some time considering how you might handle them in advance. For example, you may want to explore ethical dilemmas in the classroom component of the internship. It is also possible to review some hypothetical situations with your supervisor at the site. Such “imaginal variation,” as it is called, may help you handle yourself in a professional manner when such situations arise.

If something like this does come up, remember to pause and take a deep breath before responding

to a situation. Self-monitoring is important, as sometimes the first thing out of one's mouth does not necessarily come out as intended. It is also always important to protect the interests of the client. While you never want to act without thinking things through, choosing to do nothing is still a choice. Failure to act is a decision, and, like all decisions, it has its own consequences.

### **Critical Thinking and Decision Making**

Knowledge of ethical standards only goes so far. Sometimes, you will have to rely on your own ability to deal with dilemmas that are not always clear-cut. Making an ethical decision is complex and difficult, but sometimes it simply must be done. As with any type of problem-solving, it is a good idea to view it from multiple perspectives because different points of view reflect different interests and priorities. Ideally, of course, you should discuss the situation with your supervisor or coworkers and take time to come up with the best solution. Keep in mind, though, that there will be times when you must act immediately and use your best judgment.

As discussed earlier, reflecting on your own code of ethics as well as knowing those of the agency and profession in advance helps. Staying calm is usually beneficial in these situations as well. Having a realistic view of yourself will help, too, as well as being aware of such factors as tone of voice, timing, non-verbal expression, and word choice. Once you successfully face a few of these situations, your confidence in your professional decision-making process is likely to increase.

### **After the Decision**

It is not unusual to dwell on a difficult decision you made after the event is over. Having a good working alliance with your supervisor, colleagues, and instructor are especially helpful. These relationships can allow you to talk through issues and gain different perspectives on them. You may receive some constructive criticism about your decisions from time to time. After all, no one is perfect; otherwise, if you were, why would you even be in an internship? Try to understand this feedback as a part of the learning process that is concerned with helping you become better prepared for future situations. Learning this way may also help reduce second guessing yourself. While difficult, partial successes and failures can be the most valuable parts of an internship because they show you some of the more complicated facets of working with human experiences before you are accountable in the way that a full-time employee would be.

### **Self-Care**

Self-care is essential in all helping professions due to the possibility of burnout. Burnout is a type of exhaustion that has a negative impact on physical, mental, and emotional health because it saps your energies in all three areas. It is easier to fall prey to burnout if you are not routinely trying to take care of yourself in these ways. Luckily, the reality of burnout is becoming more and more recognized every day, but you still must be active in identifying your own vulnerabilities. Though you may feel that you are "just an intern," the need for self-care is still essential because your clients depend on you, and this level of responsibility should be treated respectfully. Also, interns are regularly juggling many demands while serving internships, such as class, family, and job obligations.

### **Ethics and Continuing Education**

From social work to police work, human services usually require professionals to stay informed

about up-to-date practices in order to deliver better service. Though each career has its own standards, keep in mind that it is your responsibility to understand and fulfill requirements and that those requirements frequently change. That is the reason that most human services professions, as a rule, offer and require continuing education credit. Most internship sites will have some of these professional educational opportunities, and it is a good idea to at least sit in on them. Another advantage is that sometimes sites offer access to high-level seminars, workshops, and programs. All can add to your growth and knowledge as a human services professional.

Some of these events may include the opportunity to learn from outstanding experts in your field. If your agency is offering one of these events or sending people to a regional or national convention or workshop, try to be included. Sometimes training certifications are awarded, and each one of the higher-level events can become a resume item, not to mention a wonderful networking opportunity.

## **Challenges Along the Way**

### **Asking for and Giving Help**

It is important to remember that while at your practicum site, you can be an asset to the team. First, remember to always ask for help if you need it. This could be asking for help from your supervisor, coworkers, or any colleagues with whom you have worked. Second, remember you are at your site to gain knowledge and experience as a helping professional. Third, try to move toward increasing degrees of reasonable independence as your internship progresses. Finally, take advantage of any downtime to do or learn something new. Nonprofit internship sites always have work that needs to be done and showing initiative in this way is usually a win-win for all concerned.



## Tools for Chapter 5

### Activity 1: What Would You Do?

In the helping professions, you will often face problems without clear-cut solutions. Consider the following scenario:

Funding sources have recently changed at the non-profit organization where you are employed. You are the one responsible for telling a few fellow employees that if they wish to continue in their positions, they must accept a significant pay cut. You are close with these individuals and you know some have families and that others are already struggling financially. There are four courses of action you can take:

- Look into transferring the employees. (The closest opening is 100 miles away).
- Ask for additional funding. (Grant writing takes time and is usually is competitive)
- Choose who goes and who stays.
- Hold a staff meeting to discuss funding cuts.

Now, what do you do? Why? With your classmates, discuss all the options provided. Did you or any classmates include standards for ethical practice?

### Activity 2: Caring for Your Most Valuable “Tool”

Believe it or not, you are your most valuable tool in any human services field because all of them require that you rely on your ability to understand people and respond to them appropriately. Just like any other tool that is important for your work, you must take advantage of it, which is why self-care is important. It is also different for everyone and what works for you can change day to day. Here are some practical strategies you can use to reduce stress:

- Recognize stress: Identify those situations that make you most vulnerable to stress so that you may minimize them or at least anticipate them and act to lessen any negative impact.
- Try to get more or better sleep: It is no secret that as you try to juggle your personal and professional life, you will find yourself growing busier by the second, so getting enough sleep is key for overall work productivity.
- Talk it out: Your site supervisor and professor overseeing your internship are also valuable tools for you. Good mentors will understand your stress and be patient with it. Also, remember that asking for assistance when you are struggling is not a setback, but a way to be better in the future.
- Try mindfulness meditation: A lot of research supports the idea that mindfulness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2019), when done on a regular basis, is a low-cost and effective way of reducing or at least managing stress. There are many online videos and phone applications to guide you through 10- to 15-minute sessions of mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation is simple yet powerful. The more you practice it the more effective it is at reducing stress.

**Activity 3: Exploring Ethics**

Make a list of your personal ethics. Next, compare them with the standards offered by your profession or internship site. Note any similarities and discrepancies. The similarities may help give you more confidence when dealing with an ethical dilemma, and the discrepancies will give you something to think more about. Either way, you gain something.

## Chapter 6: Appreciating Cultural Diversity (Multiculturalism)

### Introduction

This chapter discusses how to become more culturally aware and inclusive in our work. As a human services professional, you will interact with clients who come from a myriad of backgrounds, so it is important to be knowledgeable about such differences. Physical challenges, educational backgrounds, criminal histories, as well as citizenship status, can also contribute to differences, which can make interactions between human services workers and clients more complex.

#### Key Words

- **Cultural Diversity/Multiculturalism:** The variety of different values, preferences, practices, and behaviors that exist between groups. Multiculturalism is an alternative, more inclusive term.
- **Ethnocentric:** A conscious or unconscious belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is inherently superior to another. An inclination toward viewing others from one's own cultural or ethnic perspective. Extreme forms include such things as believing that one's own group is better than others and acting on this position, such as in the case of racism.
- **Self-Monitoring:** The process by which an individual becomes sensitive to, reflects upon, and analyzes one's own behavior and actions. Involves self-awareness, introspection, and reflection or contemplation.

### Developing Cultural Sensitivity in the Internship

During the internship, you will have an opportunity to interact with clients who have different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Consequently, it is important to be able to demonstrate culturally competent and appropriately inclusive behavior when interacting with people from cultures and backgrounds different from your own. Utilizing your internship site to appreciate the types of diversity that are present in your community may help you determine what type of cultural skills you need to develop. For instance, if your site assists the Amish and Mennonite communities, you may wish to learn the differences between the two groups to better tailor your approach and services.

Of course, knowing all the nuances for every culture is impossible. However, familiarizing yourself with those cultures you are most likely to encounter is a reasonable expectation for interns, agencies, and clients to have. If the type of internship you select is like your own cultural background, you may want to consider volunteering at an agency that is more diverse.

Keep in mind that you are still in a learning process, which means it is appropriate to ask the supervisor about the suitable methods of interaction with various types of people or groups. The willingness to understand, appreciate, and experience cultural diversity will help you develop greater communication skills and cultural competency. Your internship may even be a platform for expanding your

cultural awareness and ability to work with people of different perspectives and orientations. Indeed, the experience may even help you identify personal biases. Becoming aware of them is often the first step in overcoming and preventing the types of countertransference that can arise based on such things as how one sees gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and so forth.

## **The Reality of Cultural Differences**

Cultural diversity is a much broader concept than just differences based on race or ethnicity, as it may also include equally powerful and important differences in gender, religion, and socioeconomic status. Sometimes these differences are obvious and can even be expressed by the type of clothing that is worn. At other times, the differences may be far more subtle, such as in the way conversations are held, how frequently people touch others, or how much interpersonal space they prefer.

*Example:* In Western culture, patting a child on the head can simply mean “Atta boy” or “What a sweetheart,” whereas, in some tribal cultures, touching a child’s head signifies that you have a negative or even evil wish for that child.

Preparing for and gaining knowledge of cultural norms prepares you to notice important differences, increases your understanding of those you work with, and helps you to communicate more effectively. What human services worker would not want those types of skills in their work with others? Cultivating a culturally sensitive approach is vital to having a successful client-human services worker relationship and benefits both professionals as well as the clients they serve.

## **Developing Cultural Awareness**

When experiencing cultural differences at the practicum site, you may come to have new or uncomfortable emotions. As a human services worker, one way to prepare yourself for these new experiences is to become more aware of your own cultural preferences and habits, both positive and negative ones. Knowing your cultural practices better helps you assess whether they are appropriate in a situation and better enables you to adjust, if necessary. Otherwise, you may appear naive, underprepared, insensitive, or even ignorant.

Each one of us is a partial product of our biology, gender, age, and social class. If all we had to do in life is interact with people who have the same backgrounds, there would be little need for cultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence because we would all reflect similar environments and could take them for granted. However, that is hardly ever the case in the real world. Instead, one thing all of us can do is to become aware of, and learn how to recognize, our own culturally-based perceptions, expectations, and reactions and then make appropriate adjustments when dealing with others from different backgrounds.

Learning about the various cultural differences of the people you are likely to encounter or work with will assist you as an intern. Becoming more culturally competent will also help you in your career. After all, consciously or unconsciously holding on to thoughts, ideas, jargon, or mannerisms that one’s culture is superior to another will certainly be noticeable to clients. Such narrow views may create unnecessary barriers in your work that only make it harder for both parties.

## **Self-Awareness**

In order to appreciate cultural differences, it is often necessary to enhance your own self-aware-

ness. To be effective in the field of human services, professionals need to be aware of the dynamics of power that are associated with privileges that you may have based on your race, ethnicity, gender, age, or social class, including education and income. The first step in that process may be to recognize that historical inequality does exist in these areas. Every culture has a hierarchy of power and privilege. Awareness of your own biases, power, and preconceived ideas of various populations is essential to be an effective culturally-competent worker. By recognizing your privileges, you can begin to understand the disadvantages other cultures experience.

*Example:* In Western cultures, privilege is often given to people who are heterosexual, white, young, tall, Christian, wealthy, educated, healthy, and male. Conversely, any person who does not fall into one of the favored or privileged categories may suffer some type of social, emotional, or economic disadvantage. It is also important to realize as a human services worker that even if a client does fit into a “privileged” category, it is still necessary to treat that person as an individual and not as though they are “privileged.”

*Activity:* At this point, it might be worth reflecting on what you have experienced that could be a privilege in your life, stemming from such things as your race, ethnicity, gender, or age. What about your socioeconomic status, including that of your family, your current social class, level of education, and so on might be important to know? Do you have any privilege based on these factors? What are your feelings about these factors in relation to others, especially the client population you are working with? Remember, you also can have unconscious feelings and beliefs about these things. Knowing about them is important because they can give rise to both transference and countertransference when dealing with others. If you like, make a list of those you are likely to encounter in your internship and what you feel or believe about them, and then reflect on that list.

### **Personal Style**

Everyone deals with cultural diversity differently. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to one’s verbal and nonverbal ways of reacting and communicating. Personal style, or the way you characteristically perceive, react to, and attempt to deal with the world, is going to affect how you comport yourself in cultural situations. If you find yourself reacting or acting uncomfortably or anxiously in a situation that has strong cultural undertones and do not feel able to navigate this territory appropriately, then talking to co-workers, teachers, or a supervisor may be the best course of action. After all, they might have experience in that area and could make helpful suggestions. It may seem as though these encounters are uncomfortable at first, but the reason for doing an internship is to gain knowledge. Part of that process involves finding one’s own strengths and weaknesses so that you can maximize the former and minimize the latter.

An ethnocentric individual often judges other people and groups by comparing them to the culture that the person grew up in or favors. Fortunately, this type of bias can be moderated by increasing self-awareness, avoiding stereotypes, and being open minded, all of which help a person to step out of their cultural box and see people as individuals instead. Appreciating diversity in this way can benefit any agency, organization, or nation. Hence, it is best to try to respect and appreciate the diversity in one’s immediate environment. After all, every culture is unique and has its own strengths.

It does take time and effort to gain a deeper understanding of other cultures. Yet, the more you learn about clients and their cultures, the better able you are to help them. Probably the most effective way to increase your awareness and appreciation of other cultures is through direct experience and observation. However, indirect methods help as well. For instance, reading books or articles, watching movies, viewing internet videos, listening to TED talks, and so forth are effective ways of accessing cultural information. In addition, your practicum supervisor may have some suggestions about expanding your awareness while at the site. You may find it useful researching certain cultures to avoid the uncomfortable feeling of offending someone by unintentionally saying the wrong thing or acting inappropriately.

### **Relating to Other Cultures**

As an intern, you are likely to meet people who are different from you every day. There are many ways to react to these differences, and your ability to display a non-defensive posture, to learn about the client, and to become aware of your own reactions will need to be developed. Most human services workers will try to learn about the client population in a variety of ways to improve the quality of the services they provide. The better the intern can relate to the client, the more likely the client is to develop trust in the intern and share their concerns and problems. Continuing Education programs often help professionals learn more about how to effectively deal with cultural diversity and inclusion or multiculturalism. Once a professional relationship begins to form, some clients are willing to discuss their culture and belief systems, especially if you have expressed interest in learning about them.

### **Acceptance and Cultural Competence**

Successful internships usually require developing some degree of skill in cultural competence. After all, one mission of human services is to empower the client, so knowing how that works in each individual's environment is important. Each discipline, from social work to law enforcement, will require its own set of skills. However, some things are important for all of them. In general, the principle of acceptance is part of a foundation for building a working relationship between the client and the human services worker. Although it is not necessary to agree with any given practice, acceptance usually involves some degree of empathy or concern. Mutual respect is also established as a result of affirming someone's individuality and recognizing the strengths of the person, including those of their cultural background. In a sense, successful human services workers embrace each person's unique contribution to humanity.

### **Self-Monitoring**

It is important to be aware that your personal views and beliefs may have an impact on your client's life. Consequently, it behooves you to practice monitoring your own reactions while interacting with them. After all, you will probably express your own beliefs nonverbally through such things as facial expressions, speech patterns, and the like. People pay a lot of attention to nonverbal signs, so it is important to self-monitor (the process by which an individual analyzes their own behavior and actions). This activity involves self-reflection so that you can identify times when you are either helps or hurts your work. Such awareness increases your chances of responding more effectively in the future. Self-monitoring, then, is an important skill to have, and your internship is an excellent place to begin to acquire this ability or improve it.

### **Dealing with Mistakes**

Mistakes are inevitable. However, each one is also an opportunity to learn. As a student, you are in a unique situation to take advantage of this possibility because you are under an umbrella of protections provided by your professor, supervisor, and your role of being a learner, and not a professional yet. This status allows you some room to stumble as you learn to walk, so-to-speak. Indeed, the internship may be the last time in your career you have this much room to learn without suffering serious consequences.

As an intern, if you find yourself in an awkward situation you do not know how to handle, it is not the end of the world. This status also permits you to be honest about mistakes, apologize for them if necessary, and then discuss them with your supervisor or instructor so that you can move forward by learning from the situation. Dwelling on the mistake is not going to change it, so it is helpful to focus on how it can be handled better next time.

Doing a little homework is another way to deal with being new or inexperienced. For instance, if you know that some duty or interaction is likely to be challenging for you, then it may help to prepare for it. Role-playing is often helpful because it allows you to practice alternate ways to deal with such situations and learn what feels most comfortable or compatible with your personality and style. A colleague or coworker may be willing to assist with this role-playing activity. It also helps to know that interns are seldom in situations where what they do can result in serious damage or harm, providing they pay attention to safety.

## **Typical Examples of Diverse Human Phenomena**

There are many cultural, racial, and ethnic differences to appreciate in understanding human behavior – far too many to consider in any book, let alone one this size. Fortunately, your other classes should have discussed many of these issues as they affect people’s perception, experience, and behavior. In addition, it is important to remember what we said about the four great “isms” that we are all prone to, consciously and unconsciously: racism, sexism, ageism, and classism. Your internship is likely to be focused on or deal with certain groups more than others. However, there are some general forms of diversity we can at least point out here. Before you read through some of the possibilities that follow, it might be a good idea to reflect on your own conscious and unconscious views and feelings about each one. That way, you may also gain some insight into your worldview.

### **Differing Age-Related Perspectives**

Age is something we all deal with when it comes to diversity since each developmental stage involves facing its own challenges. Further, as we move through the life cycle, our perspectives change. For example, a child sees things differently than an adult and an older adult may see things differently than a younger one. These are age-related factors you may encounter in your internship, which create a diversity of perception and experience. Many internships involve working with just a portion of the life cycle, such as agencies that specialize in various age-related populations ranging from children’s services through geriatric services. Other internships involve a wide range of ages. Whichever the case, this aspect of the internship becomes more complex when there is a significant gap in the age of the intern and the clientele the agency serves.

### **Working with Children**

Agencies that provide services primarily to children, such as those in daycare or educational

settings, are the most likely to have clear guidelines and rules governing internship behavior. As a group, children share more similarities than adolescents, adults, or the aged because they have not had as much time to differentiate themselves. Still, depending on how diverse the center's clientele is, there may be many differences you encounter because parenting expectations and practices reflect cultures as well as backgrounds.

Because children are a vulnerable population, you are likely to encounter such things as background checks, state rules, specific agency requirements, and close supervision in these settings. In addition, most students who intern at these sites either have experience with children or a strong interest in them. If sitting on the floor, getting down on your hands and knees, participating in spontaneous play, and dealing with rapid changes in behavior are not a part of your personal style, then this type of setting may not be for you.

### **Working with Adolescents**

Adolescence is often a time when young adults struggle to do well in a given area or areas, and the clinician can point them in a positive direction. However, working with adolescents is sometimes said to be similar to walking a tight rope: If a professional leans too much in one direction, they risk appearing authoritarian, which may lead to a loss of trust or even rebellion by the adolescent. If the professional leans too far toward being a buddy, then they will likely lose their authority, which means they may not be taken seriously. Effectively dealing with age-related diversity requires keeping a good balance between what is needed for the client to succeed and helping that adolescent take the necessary steps they need to get there without doing it for the individual. Walking this tight rope can be difficult and exhausting at first, but like many things, ability comes with practice.

When working with adolescents, it may help to think back to your adolescent years, especially if they were challenging. For example, it might be a good idea to remember what it was like to make decisions on your own for the first time. Sometimes adolescents feel that they know what is best for them, and they perceive everyone else as stupid, especially adults – which can include you! In this case, telling someone what to do is unlikely to be helpful.

Simply asking questions to ensure that adolescents have thought things through fully might be more effective. Sometimes, of course, the decisions adolescents make are not the best choices. When that happens, be careful not to be quick to judge but instead to view this development as an opportunity to talk to them about what they have learned from the decision. When working with adolescents, it is easy to feel like your work does not matter because no one is even listening. However, it is often the case that they may be paying more attention than meets the eye through such processes as observational learning or modeling!

Working with adolescents is a skill that comes with education, practice, and field experience because, in part, different cultures expect different types of interactions with adolescents. Are you a human services worker aiding a family that expects children to be seen and not heard? Or, are you working with a family that gives children and adolescents free reign to express themselves in whatever manner they choose? In either instance, it may be helpful to realize these cultural and socioeconomic differences are active in each family or social situation. Similarly, it is important to know about and to recognize adoles-



cent subcultures that affect your client. Learning subculture and counterculture behaviors may assist with better understanding and provide more accurate and appropriate methods of helping the client.

### **Working with the Elderly**

There are at least two important factors related to age to keep in mind when working with older populations. One is that people become increasingly diverse in terms of their background and preferences as they age. After all, they have had more time to experience the possibilities life has to offer! Everyone has their own story that they have played an active role in creating. The other dimension to consider is that for the most part, the intern is much younger than the client in this setting. That difference creates special challenges. The greater the age gap, the more drastic the differences can be. Some cultures genuinely appreciate the elderly. In general, however, ours tends to value youth more than the aged. Like any other challenge, differences in age can be worked through. In addition, working with a population that is further along on life's timeline than you are can be viewed as an important learning opportunity. If the human services worker is considerably younger than the client, the client may have difficulty seeing the intern as credible. How could the client trust what the human services worker is telling them if that person has not lived as long and experienced what they have? Sometimes an interesting reversal occurs when an intern happens to be older than the supervisor or instructor. In either case, the general guidelines are the same: Be respectful, keep an open mind, and focus on the matter at hand. Sometimes it is helpful to acknowledge the age difference and talk about it as a way of bridging these gaps.

### **Differing Socioeconomic Perspectives**

Socioeconomic status includes such factors as the income level and social class in which clients are raised, their educational level, their occupation (or the lack of one), etc. All these phenomena can affect an individual's perspective on the world, how they view others, their personal and social expectations, mannerisms, language, and more. For example, a client who is constantly dipping below the poverty line will have problems and face decisions that more economically-secure clients may never face. Understanding the reality of a client's life will help you to establish greater credibility and rapport. Maintaining an open mind by discarding preconceived notions you may have about people in various socioeconomic situations will help.

Of course, social interaction always goes two ways. Thus, you may want to be aware of how the client views you in terms of differences as well. For example, a struggling client may resent a human services worker who seems to be living a more "luxurious" lifestyle. Someone else might "fall between the cracks," meaning they make too much money to qualify for a program but still need help. A wealthy client may become uncomfortable about working with someone who makes much less money than they do. Right or wrong, these reactions happen all the time and will need to be addressed. These situations and many others may make it difficult for clients to open up to you.

### **Differing Gender Perspectives**

The roles of men and women have changed over time, but there have always been distinct differences between the two. People are trained in their gender roles from birth, and gender role expectations are reinforced throughout one's life. This gender training eventually results in a personal view of masculinity or femininity and an idea of where the individual and others fit within that framework. Sometimes

people develop certain ideas about what jobs men do and what jobs women do, especially those who come from a traditional background or culture. Thus, they may be surprised when they encounter people working in fields that challenge these fixed notions of gender roles.

Marital therapists often deal with differences between the communication styles of men and women. For example, men are often found to focus more on concrete issues, problem-solving, and action. Women tend to place a greater emphasis on interaction and on the emotional aspects of a situation. These differences in both verbal and nonverbal communication styles can also influence even the way men and women explain a given situation. Because of these differences, each member of a partnership may describe the same incident in an entirely different way.

*Example:* When behaving similarly in identical situations, a man may be described as assertive, whereas a woman might be described as aggressive. Similarly, behavior seen as sensitive or nurturing when carried out by a woman may be perceived as weak or effeminate when carried out by a man.

### **Differing Religious Perspectives**

The religious beliefs of a client population can vary tremendously and may range from outright fanaticism to complete atheism. This type of diversity often reflects the nature of the community an individual inhabits and ties into ethnicity as well. Many, if not most, clients rely on their religiosity to guide them through difficult times or when making important decisions. Sometimes, this dimension of their lives involves groups or community, such a church, synagogue, or mosque. Though it is often best not to pry, human services workers should try to develop a basic understanding of a client's religious views. Not only can doing so demonstrate interest and respect, but it can also help one develop a better sense of who a person is, what their social resources are, and how they cope with problems. Ignoring one's religious beliefs may also seem offensive to some.

As a human services professional, you'll want to understand how spirituality is formed. Some people are born into a faith and are immersed in it from a young age. Others may develop a connection with a religion later in their lives. Often, people start off in a certain religious direction but later in life move away from it. Occasionally, people have conversion experiences, which are very powerful and often transformative. The bottom line, then, is that it is important to work within a client's own belief system rather than ignoring or "fighting" with it.

*Example:* In some cultures, a female has little "voice," meaning that many decisions are made for her in life, often by a male figure, whether it be a husband, a father, a grandfather, or an uncle. Although acceptance does not necessarily mean agreement, not understanding or appreciating these cultural practices may make work very difficult for the human services professional and could even be destructive to the relationship.

### **Differences in Family Perspectives**

Human services workers of all types, including interns, may encounter ways of viewing the family that are unfamiliar to them. Every family unit is unique and not all relationships within families have the same type of impact on their family structure. Someone who is married may have a very different expectation about their personal relationships than someone who is single. Divorce is becoming more prevalent today but there are also some groups and individuals who look down on it. Part of our responsi-

bility is to become familiar with individuals and not stereotypes.

Each family is unique and can be its own “mini culture.” Since family plays such a large role in forming an individual’s personality, worldview, values, and behaviors, understanding a client’s family of origin can help you to understand the client. The same holds true, of course, for the individual’s current family situation. Therefore, knowing about the role the family plays in a person’s life is important.

If, for example, a client is close with their family, they are more likely to have a strong support system behind them. Sometimes, however, the client has no family and their only support is their case worker. Frequently, the family is the source of many of the client’s current problems. In small towns, even the family’s reputation may be important to know about, as others often make assumptions and treat people based on that reputation, for good and for ill.

### **The Single “Family”**

A single person is not, by definition, a “family.” However, they do come from families. They often see friends as family and the “single experience” is becoming far more common as a preferred choice. Often, being single means having to deal with other people’s biases about families. For example, a single person’s family of origin may exert pressure on them to have a family. Friends and family often ask single people when they are going to get married. Married people all too often think that everyone wants to be married just like them. Including a single friend in group activities can make the friend feel like the odd person out. In addition, employers may “expect” more from them because they do not have a spouse, partner, or child to take care of after work. The result for the single person may be working longer hours, more evenings, on more holidays or weekends than those who are married and have families.

Single people must deal with both positive and negative perceptions. For example, people only see their freedom or think that single people are lonely, sad, or that there is something “wrong” with them for following this lifestyle. The fact of the matter is that some people just do not want to get married. In other instances, single people see marriage as a possibility but not a priority as their careers or personal interests might be more important to them.

### **Couples Without Children**

Approximately 10 percent of married couples do not have children. About half of those cannot have them biologically. Some who want children, then, may adopt while others do not. Either way, other people may judge these couples as having a deep flaw in their biological makeup or character. However, not all individuals or couples are ready or interested in becoming parents. In fact, many couples who choose not to adopt or have children of their own are quite happy, even happier than couples who do have children because children often decrease marital satisfaction for a good number of years. In addition, times are changing, and it is becoming more common to be unmarried or even un-partnered. Some people are dedicated to their work. Others are involved in meaningful activities that tie up much of their time. Some couples are simply happy with one another and do not feel that they need anything else in their relationship. It is important to be free of pre-judgments when assessing any families. There are so many factors that influence the life decisions we make, and it is our job to be open and understanding to these varying conditions.

### **The Single Parent**

There are also single parents who are judged in negative ways by others. It is interesting when some people see or hear about a single dad; they think that the man must be a good dad for stepping in and taking care of his child. Yet, when they see a single mom, often society looks at her very differently. The fact that moms do not get as much credit as single dads do is a problem. Sometimes they are often seen as women just wanting to get money from the government, and, at other times, single moms are pitied for having a child with a “father who does not have any involvement with the child/children.” Of course, many people also look down on “deadbeat dads,” who fail to live up to their parental responsibilities.

The fact of the matter children constitute the largest number of poor people in America and most of them live with single parents. Most single parents are younger, poorly educated or trained women. It does not take much thought to realize under these conditions that being a single parent is incredibly difficult, especially if you are among the so-called working poor who earn too much money and do not qualify for welfare or childcare benefits. Imagine how hard it would be to take care of small children, survive on a minimum wage without health care benefits, and try to better yourself all at the same time!

### **The Blended Family and “Nonstandard” Parents**

Blended families come in all shapes and sizes. In fact, they may even become the norm soon as the nuclear family declines. Blended families include divorced and remarried parents, homes that care for foster children, as well as situations where relatives are raising another family member’s child(ren), such as grandparents parenting their grandchildren. In addition, many couples today live together without being married, but still have children. No matter how blended families are put together, they face the same challenges that other families do and often even more.

### **Same Sex Couples**

People hold different views on same sex marriages. Some accept same-sex marriages (and parenthood), believing that you fall in love with who you fall in love with. Others believe that same sex relationships are wrong based on religious beliefs. However, it is important to realize that same sex couples may face the same interpersonal, financial, and social problems so-called “straight” couples and parents do, and sometimes even more.

### **Differing Gender Orientations**

Sexual values and orientations are based on the personal beliefs of an individual, and one’s attitudes or feelings about sex and sexuality. People hold different beliefs about sexual values and practices based on such things as their backgrounds. No matter what one’s sexual values may be, unless they involve abuse, a human services worker should keep an open mind on the matter. It is not up to the human services worker to judge the client but to help the client to the best of the worker’s ability. If an intern is not able to separate their values from those of the client when it comes to sexual values and orientations, then they should discuss the matter with the instructor or supervisor.

Issues involving sexual orientation can be intense and emotionally driven. Sexual orientation does, however, have a great impact on an individual’s life and how they experience the world. As a society, the United States does not uniformly accept homosexuality. Because views on homosexuality are strongly influenced by family and religion, it is difficult to alter these perceptions. Some sex researchers

use the term non-heterosexual rather than homosexual because that term is more inclusive. For instance, non-heterosexual includes transgender and non-binary persons as well. Regardless of one's opinion, a human services worker must do their best to treat everyone equally. Even though same sex marriage is legal in an increasing number of countries, including the United States, there is still discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community.

Sexual identity, orientation, and behavior are sensitive topics at the personal, interpersonal, and social levels. Therefore, you may want to think about how you would respond if a client shared this kind of information with you. Reacting negatively or carelessly may irreparably damage your relationship with a client.

### **Geographic Perspectives**

Like many countries, the United States has several regional cultures. Typically, they include New England, the South, the Midwest, and Southwest, and the West and East coasts, though it is possible to break the country into even smaller geographic regions if desired. Typically, they include historical, socio-economic, cultural, political, and linguistic or "accent" differences. People are heavily influenced by their environments, especially their places of origin. Even when we move to a different geographical region, we often retain the values and ways of life that we are accustomed to after even becoming "acculturated" to the new region. For example, people from the North, especially New York City, usually talk, walk, and live life "faster" than those from the South, particularly the Deep South. American Indians have several geographic tribal regions, each of which has its own customs.

There are at least two good reasons to do some research on your client's geographic background. First, if you are not familiar with their customs, you may strongly offend them and damage any future relationship. Second, by becoming familiar with their customs, the human services worker will build rapport with clients, who, in turn, may become more likely to trust the worker and be more open to assistance.

### **Physically Challenged Perspectives**

When encountering someone who is physically or mentally challenged, people often react with a sense of pity, superiority, or ignorance. Sometimes people even feel frightened or worry that something similar could happen to them and pull away from those who are challenged. The most common reaction, though, is feeling awkward and uncomfortable. It can be difficult to know how to act or what to say when you encounter clients with these challenges.

People with physical and mental challenges are often labeled. If they have a physical or mental handicap, they are sometimes seen as incompetent or even dangerous as in the case of an intellectual disability (formerly known as retardation) or schizophrenia. Seeing these possibilities instead of the individual is likely to cause unnecessary problems for the intern and the client. One of the key things to remember when you encounter someone with a physical or mental disability is that the disability is only one aspect of the person's life. Each person with a disability is a distinct individual with a unique personality and set of life circumstances.

It is also important to realize that a disability affects each client differently depending on a variety of factors, including how long the person has dealt with the disability, the severity of the disability, and

the individual's personality and coping style. Keep in mind that people with physical and/or mental problems and disabilities are fully human: We all have dreams, fears, challenges, and hopes that puts us in the same boat. Though they may look or act differently, each client has their own thoughts, feelings, issues, strengths, and ideas to bring to the table, just like any other person. Sometimes the client's ideas, adjustments, and solutions may be better than yours!

## **Unique Circumstances**

### **Persons with a Criminal Background**

Some internship sites focus on working with people who have criminal backgrounds. In some agency settings, you may encounter clients who also have a criminal background even though your work focuses on helping them in other areas. Some clients may have committed crimes for typically criminal reasons like greed. Others may have done so in relation to a mental health problem like addiction or poverty. People who have a criminal past but have reformed oftentimes still carry the stigma and bear the prejudice of being an "ex-con." Sometimes interns need to "get used" to these kinds of criminal backgrounds if they have never encountered them before. Still, all human services workers must still see these individuals for who, not what, they are if they come to you for help.

It may help to remember that prison is not a nice place. Sometimes crimes are committed there as well, which means that your client may have suffered in some terrible ways, such as being raped, but did not report it. Regardless, trauma is trauma and will have deleterious effects on whomever suffers it. For the most part, clients with criminal records need to be treated as just another person who needs assistance, unless, of course, they pose a risk to one's safety.

*Example:* An intern is working at a place such as Job and Family Services. The intern feels that since they follow the law, it is unfair to get an ex-con a job while there are people on the caseload with no criminal records who need the same help. In this case, the intern may need to examine their values and look for the possibility of countertransference, especially if the intern happened to be a victim of a crime. After all, someone with a criminal background who is trying to reform means fewer tax dollars spent on crime, and more tax revenues, which benefit society overall. In addition, many recovering addicts have a criminal past, and helping them become fully engaged citizens brings similar benefits.

### **Undocumented Persons**

Undocumented persons create a unique situation for some interns. If one comes across a client who is an undocumented person, the clinician should first make sure he or she is familiar with the agencies policies on that matter. If there is no policy, the clinician should then talk to the supervisor as to what to do about the situation. Remember, there are some legal and ethical issues associated with this area of human services work, such as the risk of deportation if authorities find the client is here illegally.

Be sure to consider your own views on these matters and do some research on the issues as some beliefs are not supported by facts. For example, sometimes people think that those who illegally enter this country are here to steal jobs or commit violent crimes. However, it turns out that most of the jobs that undocumented persons take are difficult, undesirable, and pay low wages, even below minimum wage. Moreover, illegal immigrants have a lower incidence of violent crime than legal citizens since they have much to lose if they become involved in the criminal justice system.

### **Challenges Along the Way**

*Scenario:* A young man, around 25-years-old, comes into the agency. He happens to be an immigrant from Iraq. The intern had a family member die in the 9/11 attacks and has strong anti-Muslim feelings. In this case, the intern should probably reflect on the situation. If they realize that their personal issues may have a negative impact on the work, then the individual should talk with the supervisor about the possibility of countertransference and how to handle it.

## Tools for Chapter 6

No matter what the person's life story may include, clients come from all sorts of perspectives and backgrounds. They come to see a professional because they need help, not to deal with someone else's biases. Having a strong sense of self-awareness is one way to make sure one provides equal service to culturally diverse clients. Take some time to reflect more on your own thoughts and beliefs about cultural diversity. It may be helpful to write down your self-reflections and even to compare them with those of a colleague or a friend. However, it is important to remember that no one likes to admit biases or prejudices. Though honesty is essential for self-awareness, it also helps to find someone who you trust to discuss sensitive issues.

### Activity 1: What Would You Do?

Today you are meeting a new client, and your job, according to your supervisor, is to help the man get a job. As you read over the file and all the information about the individual, you wonder why a man in his mid-thirties has had only two low-paying jobs before. Then you learn that the client has three criminal charges for a non-violent crime. As you talk to the client, you learn that he is a recovering addict and committed these crimes to support his drug habit.

There are four courses of action you can take:

- Tell your supervisor you refuse to take this case for “personal reasons.”
- Figure out how to get this man a job, so you can tell your boss this case is completed.
- Push this file to the back burner until you find a more deserving client a job first.
- Tell the client he is on his own and check in on his progress from week to week.

What would you do? Why? Discuss your thoughts on all the options with your classmates.

What would you do if the individual was convicted of a violent crime such as robbery, assault, or domestic violence?

### Activity 2: Self-Reflections

Go back through the various areas of diversity and identify which ones apply to you or your internship. Then reflect on your own views as well as reactions to them. It might be helpful to do this activity with a friend or in a supervised small group situation like your internship classroom.



# Chapter 7: Learning to Be Competent

## Introduction

Chapter 7 discusses the ability to continue improving and developing competence while facing challenges at the site and in the field. Further, we look at some of the other dimensions of human services work, particularly those that have an impact on the intern or workers and how to cope with them effectively. For example, the emphasis is placed on the importance of developing a protective barrier to insulate yourself against the difficulties that may affect the emotional or psychological well-being of those who work in these fields. This chapter also offers suggestions and tools that service professionals can use to encourage and maintain a consistent perspective.

### Key Words

- **Burnout:** Physical and/or mental fatigue resulting from excessive stress over time. Also known in human services as “compassion fatigue.”
- **Emotional “Heat” Shield:** A personal set of self-care techniques and practices aimed at protecting the individual from stress and preserving a sense of well-being concerning negative emotions.
- **Style:** A particular way of perceiving, understanding, and expressing oneself that is characteristic of a person and the way they either react to or go about dealing with a situation, task, or activity. Everyone has a unique style and each one has a set of related strengths and weaknesses.

Competence, of course, concerns the ability to face various challenges and to do something well. It is closely related to the developmental idea of mastery, which begins in the first moments of life and does not stop until death. In this sense, we all face the challenges of living and, hopefully, learn to increase our skills and abilities to deal with them.

Similarly, the internship and work in your field will present a never-ending series of challenges that you will be able to deal with effectively as you master your responsibilities. In other words, it is an environment that supports the development of the abilities and skills necessary to function competently in each domain of human services work. Because many of these skills are personal and interpersonal in character, the internship experience may also help you grow as an individual.

In addition to training you, the internship also offers other benefits. For example, it may provide opportunities to do work that you can add to your developing resume and present to future employers. If you conduct yourself wisely, some of the people you meet at the site may serve as future references. Each new duty at your internship is an opportunity to learn something new and to increase your skills. One small but important sign of increasing competence is not having to ask as many questions, because you already know what to do and that you can do it. Over time, this “I can do that” attitude often results in a feeling of self-confidence as well.

The internship is an excellent place to upgrade your interpersonal skills. The experiences you

have will help you ask increasingly sophisticated questions as you move to the next level. Your ability to observe how people respond to situations will also grow as you begin to understand why the agency, staff, and clients operate the way they do. Making sure that you do your best to act as a professional is also important, but do not attempt to do too much too soon. Although there may be important learning opportunities often described as “trials by fire,” it is best to take things one day at a time as developing competence in the workplace usually requires patience.

Your questions, observations, and discussions, will also help you gain insight, see things from different perspectives, and with practice, increase your ability to be tactful, all which comes with experience. New experiences will give you an opportunity to implement what you learn as you take up increasingly sophisticated duties. These developments are also indications of increasing competence.

### **Maintaining Perspective in Difficult Situations**

One thing many people in human services have in common is the desire to make a difference in their communities. At the same time, human nature is such that some areas will be more attractive to you than others. For instance, someone who has experienced a very painful loss may find working with survivors rewarding. If you choose to work in an area that is personally meaningful in this way, you will need to pay attention to the possibilities of countertransference a bit more than in other areas. However, your experience might also be an advantage as it gives you more credibility than someone without it.

Working in human services means helping people face a variety of difficult challenges. Some will be straightforward and have a relatively simple solution. Others may be far more complicated and difficult to solve. Occasionally you will also encounter situations that are genuinely heart wrenching. Many of these will be difficult to deal with, especially if they are new to you, and may create some stress.

Sometimes people have complicated problems that cannot be easily solved, so it is easy to feel overwhelmed at first. It helps to realize that change does not happen overnight, so developing patience is important when working in the field. It also helps to know about problem-solving, emotional coping, goal setting, and so on; all of which should have been taught in your coursework.

The internship is the time to apply theory to practice. If you feel insecure or overwhelmed, there are several things you can do to help make the situation more manageable.

- Self-awareness is the key: The more you are aware of your own reactions, tendencies, beliefs and style, the better able you will be to set limits, avoid traps, and hold a steady course at the internship and beyond.
- Stay calm and focused: An overwhelmed client may lead to an overwhelmed intern. You are usually not alone in the internship, so help is available – you do not have to do it all!
- Boundaries are important: Always maintain appropriate boundaries and try to avoid taking your work and emotions home. If your internship has a classroom component associated with it, that can be a good place to process your reactions and experiences.
- Utilize teamwork: You are part of a team and do not have to figure things out alone.
- Support is available: As an intern, you can readily turn to others for help.

### **Examples of Skill Development in Specific Areas**

Human services has many branches, and each one involves mastering a set of skills. Your in-

ternship will introduce you to them in appropriate ways. The next few pages present some personal and professional challenges that interns may face in different settings. However, the number of examples is far from exhaustive. Instead of trying to cover every area you might encounter at an internship, we focus on becoming more competent in areas that most interns are likely to face.

### **Staff Conflicts**

There are disagreements and sometimes even conflicts in every workplace. Stressful situations like these can bring out the worst in people, including staff as well as clients. Consequently, it is important to know about your conflict style, especially its strengths and weaknesses. Knowing how to talk about and deal with different points of view is an essential skill because it can help us de-escalate situations and reach reasonable solutions. However, acquiring this ability takes time. If a stressful situation occurs among coworkers, try to stay within your role as an intern. Doing so will help you remain neutral and reduce the risk of contributing to the situation.

### **Working with Abused or Neglected Children**

Child abuse and neglect is an area of human services that some professionals struggle with because the cases can be emotionally powerful. Protecting children is something that most professionals in this field see as a priority. Legally, a professional is obligated to report instances of child abuse. Yet, many professionals struggle with their own feelings when working in this area as they can range from outrage against the abuse to fear about some form of retribution by the alleged abuser. Consequently, it is important to remember that you are the voice of the child, perhaps the only one in this situation.

If you are working in a setting where you are likely to encounter abuse, it is important to develop some skill in detecting abuse and knowing how to handle or report it properly if it occurs. After all, children typically do not question the actions of adults, especially their parents, and child abuse occurs predominantly within the home. In addition, the children are often coached about what to say and how to answer in the event of an intervention. You need to be aware of this possibility and know how to address it. Fortunately, there are training sessions and continuing education courses where these skills can be developed, and you should be ready to take advantage of them.

### **Placing Children**

Working with children in your internship can be particularly painful because it often involves watching children experience the loss and separation of one or both parents. The child may even become a ward of the foster care system. To be effective in this area, you must develop some sense of clinical objectivity. If you find yourself getting angry with the parents of abused or neglected children, it is time to re-examine your perspective. Blaming behaviors will only make the situation worse. Instead, try to follow procedures, document events properly, and adhere to your role. After all, that is what you are there for. Of course, in these situations an intern is likely to be only an observer, so use the opportunity to see how clinicians respond so that you can decide which behaviors to model.

### **Adoption**

Some children are placed for adoption for a variety of reasons. One of the most common is that the birth parent(s) believe that it is the best way for the child to have a chance at a better life. Closed adoptions, which means that even as an adult the adopted child cannot learn about their biological parents,

were common at one time. However, that practice has been replaced by what is called open adoption. Open adoption allows the birthparents, the adoptive couple, and the child to know more about their genetic histories and have an ongoing relationship with each other if they choose.

Open adoption can also be done in a semi-open form, which allows for minimal contact between the child and biological parent(s). For example, letters and pictures may be shared through the adoption agency. In-person meetings are also scheduled if the birth parents agree to them. Of course, it is important to be able to maintain a professional demeanor and to follow the policies of the agency where you intern. Your role is to observe, learn, and model as you acquire the necessary skills to meet the needs of the clients.

### **Poverty and Homelessness**

When a family has little money, necessities such as food and temporary shelter often matter more than anything else, sometimes even more than a permanent home. The number of people living in poverty is constantly on the rise. Poverty often continues generation after generation and breaking the cycle can be very difficult. Poverty also tends to make dreams and aspirations seem unattainable. Some parents even discourage their children from having dreams of greater economic status to protect them from being disappointed.

Poverty is a major contributor to many of the problems that a human services professional will encounter when working with people in a mental health or juvenile justice setting. Many clients simply do not have the means to provide for certain basic needs. This situation is often complicated by the fact that many people hesitate to ask for help. This factor can be moderated by providing a more compassionate atmosphere for such clients and guiding them toward resources that are available to them.

Human services workers often work with the homeless, families in shelters, and outreach programs aimed at helping so-called “street-people.” Homelessness is a problem that most people do not want to think about. Having a primary residence is often taken for granted by most people and the thought of losing such a necessity is so frightening that many prefer to ignore it. People react differently to homelessness. Some even assume that homelessness is a choice or “deserved” when, in fact, it often is due to such misfortunes as fire, illness, or the loss of a job.

Many interns are poorly prepared for their first encounters with those who are genuinely homeless. That can be a very humbling experience and leave the intern feeling inadequate or incompetent. Even professionals working in this area may feel that their contributions are only drops in a great bucket. However, it is a growing problem that needs to be addressed with compassion, understanding, and dedication. Dealing with the homeless can be one of those opportunities to receive more than what you are giving, if you are willing to learn from the encounter. This population provides you with an excellent opportunity to see how harsh life can be, to learn how to respond compassionately, and to remember to treat people with dignity.

Part of becoming competent with this population is to learn about things like emergency shelters and transitional housing. Knowing what resources are available in your community and understanding how they work is a good way of increasing your competence. For example, many transitional homes include programs to help with finding employment, learning how to set up budgets, and finding a place to

live.

### **Mental Health Issues and Settings**

Many human services aim at helping with mental health issues. Typically, they offer outpatient services for children, adolescents, adults, and families. Often medications will be involved along with day-treatment and other wrap-around services. Sometimes more serious conditions, such as schizophrenia, also require agencies to work together. For example, many homeless people suffer from the debilitating effects of chronic schizophrenia. This problem was made worse by de-institutionalization, which you should have learned about in your other classes. As a result, it is not uncommon to find mental health agencies interfacing regularly with police departments.

It takes time for interns to become accustomed to dealing with those who suffer serious mental illness such as schizophrenia. However, learning how to see the person who has the disease, and not just its manifestations, can go a long way in getting past these initial barriers. Learning about the major mental illnesses, seeing how professionals relate to the people who suffer them, and modeling your interactions after those clinicians who seem to make a positive difference are steps you can take toward becoming more competent with this population.

If you have never taken a class in abnormal behavior, it will be more difficult for you to make connections, so be sure to either take such a course or do some intensive reading, including the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders or DSM 5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It may also help to watch videos and movies, especially those that show both the symptoms of mental disorders and stories of recovery. Remember, over the course of a lifetime, one in every two Americans will suffer a diagnosable mental health condition.

### **Criminal Justice Populations**

There are many types of criminal justice settings that employ human services workers. They include police work, probation services, victim rights advocates, and juvenile systems. Some involve counseling services or protective services as well. Many mental health and substance abuse centers will have clients and programs that serve people who are in or who have been through the criminal justice system. Ex-convicts are a particularly important population because we all have a stake in helping them complete their parole and become fully integrated citizens. Yet, these individuals have the odds stacked against them in terms of such things as obtaining decent housing, finding jobs, and so on. Sometimes communities establish community-based volunteer programs dedicated to supporting people in this situation. If one is connected to your internship, attending a few of these meetings can increase your understanding of this population and perhaps your competence.

### **Chemical Dependency and Substance Abuse**

Chemical dependency and substance abuse are on the rise, especially regarding opioid use, though alcohol remains a chronic problem. Therefore, you are likely to encounter clients who deal with addiction in one way or another. These difficulties range from a client having a problem to having a family member who has a problem, which can occur in any type of human services setting where you are interning. Moreover, some engage in criminal activities to get drugs. Chemical dependency and substance abuse can affect anyone regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic standing, and can, of course, involve

criminal activity.

There are many types of treatment programs for such individuals, including Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous and support programs for family members, such as Al-Anon (support for families of alcoholics) and Nar-Anon (support for families of addicts) as well as professional programs. Our understanding of these issues has grown significantly over the years, but successful recovery is still difficult, and relapses are a part of the process. Human services workers in general should have some knowledge about addiction because the program affects so many, especially if families are included. Fortunately, most colleges have courses on addiction and recovery that are helpful in this regard.

If you are especially interested in this area, you should know that many if not most recovery programs have internships. Many states have lower-level chemical dependency counseling licensing based on academic and volunteer experiences. Substance abuse agencies that offer internships often hire as permanent or part-time employee students who are placed there once they graduate.

### **Death and the Process of Dying**

We do not usually like to think about the unpleasant reality of death. Losing a loved one can cause depression. Most people turn to their religious communities when dealing with these issues and hospices are now common. If you are interested in this type of work, these sites usually are cautious about taking on interns because the patients and families are having a difficult enough time. However, some facilities offer internships for especially mature students and usually have them go through a rigorous sensitivity training as a part of the process.

## **Special Issues Concerning the Development of Competence**

### **Countertransference (Again)**

Each one of the internship settings and occupations mentioned above can trigger countertransference for those who work in them, especially interns. For example, children are extremely vulnerable and innately appeal to our capacity for nurturing. If we have unresolved issues in that area, then it is easy to become over-involved. Dealing with child abuse invokes strong feelings of anger and disgust in most adults, but if you have been abused yourself, then the risk of living out unconscious issues and feelings is even higher. Many of us have mental health issues in our families and some of us have been in treatment ourselves. People who suffer from these conditions can affect us in many unconscious ways as we try to help them. Addiction, adolescence, crime, and death are all areas that effect our life experiences at deeper levels, especially if it is a part of our past or is a part of our current experience.

As mentioned earlier, increasing your self-awareness, especially your ability to monitor your reactions and responses is the key to dealing with countertransference. Knowing which types of personalities, issues, and populations “trigger” countertransference responses can help you avoid them. Talking with your supervisor or working through your own issues, which often means talking with a therapist, are usually helpful too. However, there are some other general behaviors to cultivate that will help you become more competent in this area as well, whether you have issues or not.

### **Establish and Maintain Clear Boundaries**

Most of us who work in these fields care about people enough to take the lower-than- deserved salaries that usually come with such work. We often see or feel ourselves called to the field, perhaps be-

cause in some ways we have been on the other side of these experiences. This combination of factors can create a situation where we are tempted to do as much as we can to help someone who is without a home, with little income, or in some other condition of need. Since we are human as well, it is easy to overextend ourselves, be too generous, offer to do too much, and so on. At other times, we can be tired, frustrated, or discouraged about a person's reaction, slow rate of progress, and so on. Both conditions make it easy to slide down the slippery slopes of countertransference, poor judgment, and mistakes.

One thing that helps to avoid this situation is to establish and maintain clear professional and personal boundaries. For example, you should not do "special favors" for a client, give them money, offer belongings, or take them into your home, all of which are ethically problematic behaviors that could lead to serious entanglements. Some situations encountered during an internship can be heart wrenching. You may even encounter a situation where you may be helping someone you know personally. Learning how to monitor yourself in such situations, especially for the possibility of countertransference or personal biases, is part of becoming more competent in terms of self-awareness. If you have difficulty maintaining a professional attitude and boundaries because of these or other factors, then it is important to talk with your supervisor or instructor about the situation.

### **Paying Attention to Safety**

Violence can occur anywhere and at any time. Even though most people do not encounter violence at the workplace, human services workers often deal with individuals who have cognitive and behavioral limitations, including poor impulse control or aggressiveness. Sometimes our clients are desperate, or our site is in an area that is economically distressed, even dangerous. And, of course, some sites deal with risky situations, such as those associated with taking children away from parents, home visits, or criminal justice settings.

There is always a possibility of encountering some form of danger in these and other situations. Therefore, it is imperative to follow the safety policies proscribed by your site, especially as an intern. Be aware of your environment, avoid potentially dangerous situations, and carry a cellphone. If you feel uncomfortable, remove yourself from the situation if possible and discuss it with the supervisor or instructor later. Remember, you are there to learn, not to put yourself in harm's way.

## **Your Professional Development**

### **Professional Style**

By now it should be clear that many human services professionals encounter a variety of difficult and complex situations. Each one is unique. As an intern, of course, no one would expect you to have a fully developed professional approach or even to have a clear idea as to what your general style might be. However, the internship gives you a chance to start discovering one, and it will be based on your personality, beliefs, experiences, attitudes, abilities, as well as experiences at the site. Developing your own style may seem awkward at first, but it will become more natural as your confidence in your professional work grows. It is also important to realize that every one's style has strengths and. Of course, it is best to be aware of both.

*Example:* The concept of style or approach is often difficult to understand because it is something we take for granted, that we automatically do, and are not necessarily aware of. Accordingly, we often use

metaphors to help people identify their style. For instance, the clinical editor of this book once described his style as like a dog at work. That may seem like a derogatory metaphor at first, but dogs have great abilities: They are loyal and have extremely sensitive noses that allow them to track scents no matter how subtle. Moreover, once on a scent trail, dogs are famous for being diligent in their untiring pursuit of the goal. Sometimes we even describe this behavior as “dogged” and may admire a person for their ability to focus on a goal until it is reached regardless of the obstacles they encounter along the way.

Being motivated, dedicated, diligent, and persevering or dogged are all positive qualities that can be helpful when dealing with problems, whether one’s own or someone else’s. Such strengths are desirable in most fields and many areas of life, including being a good student. However, each style also has weaknesses. For example, once a dog gets on a scent, it does not easily break off of it, which connotes a certain rigidity that is likely to cause difficulty from time to time since flexibility is important.

Animals, insects, trees, plants, historical figures, and other characters can be used as metaphors to help you cultivate self-awareness. For example, knowing your style can increase your awareness of your strengths, which may help you develop them further at your site. Since every style has weaknesses associated with it, too, knowing about those tendencies can help you minimize their impact on your work. If you cannot find a metaphor for your own style, ask someone who knows you well to come up with one to describe you.

### **Problem-Solving Skills**

Above all else, a human services professional is a problem solver. Therefore, becoming more competent at solving problems in your area is a primary goal of the internship, as well as a large part of your workday. The types of circumstances you may encounter could be difficult, which is why the experience provided by internships is so important. It allows you to test your wings and act on your own while still having the support and guidance of a professional. Consequently, it is a good idea to interact with as many people and experience as many situations as possible. They will help you understand the differences between theory and practice.

Knowledge, information, experience, flexibility, and creativity are all necessary for effective problem solving. Some of that can be learned in the classroom. However, the agency and clients will provide you with lessons about how to deal with real-world problems. Turning theory into practice increases both your competence (i.e., the ability to help) and confidence (i.e., the feeling that you are equipped to deal effectively with various possibilities). Flexibility helps you adjust when necessary, and creativity is oftentimes the only way to address an issue as there is no textbook or policy that always works.

In addition, there are some very good problem-solving techniques you can easily learn as well, such as one developed by D’Zurilla & Goldfried (1971). There is a 4-step easy-to-learn process that begins with making sure that you understand the real problem and thinking about possible solutions. Those two steps are followed by selecting the best solution and then developing a detailed step-by-step plan of action to reach the goal. Remember, having a clear plan is a good starting point and the steps you begin to take can be modified as new information emerges.

### **Developing an Emotional “Heat” Shield**

Most experienced human services workers will tell you that the work is very rewarding but stressful. Just



ask some of the people who work at your internship sites. The stress of the work comes in many forms: low wages, difficult clients, case overloads, lack of staff, high “failure” rates, agency turmoil, lack of appreciation, and more. These things can occur at the end of any day, build up over time, and eventually lead to a condition referred to as “burnout,” although compassion fatigue may be a more accurate description. In short, it is best to be proactive and develop some ways of dealing with stress in the near and long term.

One helpful tool is to create something akin to a “heat shield.” Among other things, a heat shield is a device that protects objects from damage or harm caused by heat from combustion, friction, or high temperatures. For example, the exhaust system of a car has a heat shield to protect passengers from hot fumes and the space shuttle had ceramic tiles on its underside to protect the crew from the heat caused by friction as the vehicle re-entered the earth’s atmosphere. The shield stands between something that is crucial in a system, in our case, the individual, and the source of the heat, in this situation, the stressors associated with working in human services.

An “emotional” heat shield (Murphy & Dillon, 2011) works in the same way. It is a behavioral and psychological set of practices that protects human services professionals from the everyday stress of the job and decreases the risk of negative consequences related to stress that could build up over time. After all, dealing with a steady flow of emergencies, child abuse, fear, loss, poverty, and so on can take a toll on anyone over time.

Of course, since everyone is unique, a person’s “heat shield” may take many forms. Some people are good at leaving work at the office. Others exercise, have hobbies, or belong to support groups. Many people meditate or have “me time,” and so on. The internship experience is a good place to figure out what elements may be helpful in the construction of your own heat shield. A personal heat shield will not only protect you from getting “burned” by the stress of the job but will also help prevent you from becoming too attached or connected with the clients. Each of the following can be a component of an effective “heat shield”:

- Maintaining a positive attitude by focusing on what is possible, not what is not.
- Count the positive more than the negative: Make a list (mental or written) of all the things you did to help someone that day or week, especially those that were successful.
- Cultivate and use positive relationships with co-workers to provide a good system of support, advice and a safe place to vent when needed.
- Keep things in perspective. Remember the internship (or job) is only one part of your life. Other parts can be important, too, and provide a sense of balance.
- Set aside time for yourself to recharge your batteries and prevent burn out. That is one reason clinicians have down time between appointments.
- Learning proper meditation or exercising can be a way of discharging stress daily.
- Do not let paperwork build up! Your supervisors depend on proper paperwork, such as intake information, case notes, documentation, and so on. Develop a system of getting it done before it becomes overwhelming. Make sure all the required documentation is done before you leave the office or, if that is not possible, arrive early to complete it the next day. These are excel-

lent habits to develop because they are proactive ways of reducing stress.

It is not always easy to deal with stress, but the attitude you bring to the internship is something that is completely within your control. By focusing on the positives, keeping goals in sight, trying to maintain an attitude of confidence and flexibility, and counting your successes more than failures can help make your experience a good one and that is what the internship is all about.

### **Practice Good Self-Care**

Interns generally do not have to worry about burnout or compassion fatigue because it usually takes many years of working in the field before that is a problem. However, you will be involved in stressful situations, or at least witness them, at the site. In addition, these days, many students are already dealing with some substantial stressors themselves, such as attending classes, raising a family, holding down a job, paying off loans, all while interning at a site for no pay. Therefore, you may want to start developing good self-care habits that reduce the buildup of stress on your physical and emotional well-being. Here are some of the more common self-care strategies professionals often use to get away from the stress of their job.

*Hobbies:* Having a hobby is a good way to relieve stress because it creates a positive state of well-being called flow which makes us feel good, alive, and competent. The hobby can be something as relaxing as knitting or as adrenaline pumping as racing. Whatever it is, it should be something you enjoy, that helps you unwind, and that may even give you what positive psychology calls a sense of “flow.”

*Taking Breaks (Pacing Yourself):* If you begin to feel like you are losing perspective during the internship or hating what seems like an endless amount of work, then it may be time to stop for a few minutes and regroup. Do something simple that you find relaxing and enjoyable. Perhaps you can catch a few minutes alone or take a walk. Some people like to have a snack, although you do have to watch that one for obvious reasons. Consider this time as an “earned” break and try to build it into your day.

*Meditation/Contemplative Prayer/Exercise:* Considerable research on such calming practices as meditation show that there are easy-to-learn techniques to reduce stress and improve well-being. Building such practices into your daily routine are all good ideas. Finding the one that works best for you and practicing it regularly is one of the best forms of good self-care.

*Staying Connected:* It is easy to feel lost when starting something new. Socializing and staying in contact with supportive and helpful people can create feelings of belonging, reduce stress, and increase self-confidence. Talking to other staff members when feeling stressed may help you feel connected, realize that you are not alone, understand these types of feelings as being normal in this line of work. Sharing experiences with your colleagues in the class (if there is one in conjunction with the internship), is an excellent way to find some relief by “sharing the burden.”

## Tools for Chapter 7

### Activity 1: What Would You Do?

A longtime client has asked you to buy a bottle of soda and a pack of cigarettes for her before you arrive for a home visit. You have formed a good rapport with the client, and you know she would not ask unless she really wanted them. You also know all the stress she is under with her health problems, lack of work, and custody issues. You have even witnessed that a bottle of soda helps with her migraine headaches.

There are several courses of action you can take:

- Buy the cola and cigarettes. It is only going to cost you \$5, and you know it will calm her for the visit.
- Empathize with her and politely tell her that the job will not permit you to do so; it is against policy, and you are prohibited from paying for a client's personal items.
- Just buy her the cola. You were craving one yourself anyhow, and you know a bottle of cola will help her get rid of the migraine she has and make her more cooperative during the visit.
- Just plan on telling her you forgot all about it when you arrive at her house. She will have to understand.

What do you do? Why? Discuss the options with your classmates.

**Activity 2: Matching**

Match the vocabulary word with the scenario that best matches it:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Competence
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Style
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Burnout
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Emotional “heat” shield
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Self-care
- A. A co-worker seems to be lacking motivation. She used to come in every day cheerful and ready to start the day. Now she comes into the office a little late and seems like she is ready to go home immediately.
  - B. You decide to take a moment to yourself and practice meditation or mindfulness, while on your break because you are stressed. You may even plan for a weekend out after your long week.
  - C. One of your peers seems to be able to handle most of the issues that come their way and has no trouble asking for help when something is beyond the person’s ability.
  - D. You have reached a point in your internship where you have found what your strengths and weakness are when it comes to different situations. You even found a metaphor that fits both your strengths and weaknesses.
  - E. You have learned that the next client you are to work with is often irritating, annoying, and critical. You do not enjoy dealing with these behaviors, but you know they are part of the job. Instead of taking the client’s complaints home with you, you decide to focus on the good things that happened at the internship that day because they reduce negative feelings.

Answer Key: 1C, 2D, 3A, 4E, 5B

## Chapter 8: Completing the Internship

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the processes that occur as your internship comes to a close. The focus is on ending well with your clients and colleagues, final evaluations, and dealing with separating from the site. The material also includes some tips on how to handle a critique of your work.

#### Key Words

- **Foreshadowing:** To suggest in advance or beforehand, such as providing a hint, suggestion, or intimation about a future event.
- **Assessments and Evaluations:** Assessments and evaluations are two ways of determining current status, especially the strengths and weaknesses, of an individual, process, or organization. They may take one of two forms. A formal assessment is often used at the site or by the instructor as a way of determining one's degree of progress or overall performance at the site. An informal evaluation involves a more qualitative evaluation, such as a discussion or interview.

### The Process of Ending an Internship

Ending an internship is a process, not just a single event that happens on the final day. The process of completing an internship can be both exciting and sad, meaning you may have mixed feelings about leaving. If so, that is known as “separation anxiety” and is entirely normal. In fact, having mixed feelings is often a sign of a good internship because, in that case, one is happy to move on but sad that many positive relationships may be ending. In this sense, the ending of an internship is more than just an end date.

Typically, interns experience four major transitions when ending an internship: foreshadowing the end, assessment and evaluation, saying goodbye, and moving forward.

#### Foreshadowing the End

Even though you knew at the start that the internship must end, you may find yourself handling this transition differently from what you anticipated. For example, while your supervisor and co-workers will likely be aware of your end date at the internship site, your clients may not. Depending on the level of involvement you had with them, the clients must be made aware of your temporary position as a student intern. This awareness may have an impact on the short-term nature of your relationship with them, but providing clients with this information may help them prepare for this inevitable event.

People often do not realize that for many clients, the agency is a significant part of their social life and not just a place to get help. For some, it may be the safest place they know, as in the case of the homeless. For others who live alone and have few close friends or relatives, your relationship may be the only bright spot in the week, and they look forward to it, perhaps even count on it, between appointments. The fact that people may be counting on you in this way is another reason regular attendance is so important.

The end of an internship usually occurs in one of two ways. Traditional endings are the most common. They typically involve a final evaluation of some sort, short good-byes, and little or no future contact with the agency as the contract period ends.

Non-traditional endings can take place in several ways. One is when a student is offered a job at the site after the internship ends. Another would be when a student is asked to volunteer after they complete their hours. Of course, an ending can occur when a student needs to change sites partway through the internship, although that situation is unusual.

Positive non-traditional endings can make the ending process for the student intern even more rewarding. For instance, sometimes interns are offered an actual position at the site, which creates a pleasant transition rather than a definite ending. Those who end traditionally can also have a good experience even if there is no job offer. After all, a formal conclusion usually signals that you have done good work and taken another step toward your goals.

If you want to reinforce how the site is a part of your network, it is possible to make sure that the supervisor has an updated copy of your resume when you leave. After all, that individual will have contacts with other supervisors or agencies, and having a copy makes it easier to pass along when you are looking for jobs!

## **Assessments and Evaluations**

### **Self-Evaluation**

Self-evaluation is essential throughout an internship because this process allows you to notice your style, make adjustments, see your growth, and learn how to better take care of your most valuable tool in human services work, namely, yourself. However, this type of evaluation plays a more prominent role as the internship draws to a close. Naturally, endings invite people to reminisce, evaluate, and reflect on the experience. Hopefully, there were parts of the internship that were enjoyable. Perhaps you notice a substantial increase in both your competence and confidence. Of course, it is also likely that some awkward or unpleasant things happened as well. They are probably best understood as “side effects” of the learning process as they often involve making mistakes or working through a difficult period.

Useful self-assessments do require a certain degree of honesty about yourself and your contributions during the internship -- good, bad, and in between. Being honest in this way also helps one to discover new insights and learn from the success and mistakes made during the internship. This type of openness to your experience is also essential for identifying the skills you have, as well as those that you need to acquire or refine. Being honest with yourself, including not being overcritical, often helps people see and appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of their styles.

Accurate self-assessment can also provide paths to discovering your real interests, talents, values, and abilities. Even an unexciting and unsatisfying internship can be helpful in this regard because sometimes learning what you do not like is important, too. Both positive and negative internship experiences can help you find your way to a satisfying career path.

An excellent place to start in the self-evaluation process would be to reflect on the beginning of the internship, back when you are looking for a site. The internship site is supposed to allow you to start getting the experience you need to become a good human services professional. Looking back to the very

beginning of your internship experience, enables you to see how far you have come and reflect on what skills you have learned.

Another part of the process can be to identify significant events, interactions, and other “lessons” you experienced or learned at the agency. These types of phenomena are “teachable” (or more appropriately “learnable”) moments. Often, they are the times you discover some things of real value, such as a skill, a way of speaking or presenting yourself, or even clues that foreshadow something that is likely to occur.

Endings are also a good time for reflection. Everyone has a personal style when it comes to dealing with “termination,” as it is called in the psychodynamic literature, and saying goodbye, so it is important to recognize that. After all, you will have many of them in your career, especially with clients. Understanding how you respond to separation will help you deal with the inevitable conclusion of the internship. The most important thing is to deal with this part of the transition with a reasonable degree of tact, honesty, and optimism as these characteristics may make the transition easier for all parties.

Of course, people tend to handle emotions in their own ways. Some individuals may have a harder time leaving the internship site because of the bonds they have formed while working there. A positive way to view these feelings is to remember that you could be moving onto bigger and better things. There are other bonds to be made and more clients that need assistance from human services professionals. Recognizing your feelings allows you to be aware of your compassion as you work in that specialized field. A good self-assessment can help you discover your clinical interests, which can facilitate your professional development.

### **Formal Performance Evaluations**

Some internships include formal evaluations for your supervisor to fill out before you finish at the site. They may even play a part in the grade you will receive for the course. Few people like being assessed by others, so it is essential that during this process you remain flexible and open to the supervisor’s opinions. If the supervisor does not initiate a meeting to discuss the results, you may want to suggest one.

Whether you have a formal or informal performance evaluation, some disagreements at this point are common because no two people will see a situation in the same way. Understanding the reasoning behind the supervisor’s assessment of your performance will provide valuable information and probably a peace of mind as well. You should expect that criticisms are a part of the process, and knowing that possibility in advance can help.

Some individuals find it more difficult to deal with criticism than others. You might want to keep in mind that the site supervisor is trying to help you improve in the areas you are weak. Just remember that the evaluation is not the end of the world. Take a deep breath and listen to what the supervisor has to say. While being critiqued by others can be difficult, it is an effective way to gain insight about your strengths and weaknesses from the point of view of someone with significant field experience.

Seeing how others perceive you can be a valuable source of information, but it is important to remember that many outside factors can influence a supervisor’s evaluation, too. For example, supervisors may have a style that clashes with yours. Like you, they can have a busy or a bad day. Moreover, some students have “A-itis,” which is to say that they think they must always do exceptionally well or some-

thing is wrong with them.

## **Goodbyes**

The final stage of ending an internship is making the actual separation. Completing an internship can be accompanied by feelings of loss and sadness as well as satisfaction with a job well-done as you move closer to achieving your career goals. Ending relationships with clients may be more challenging because each client is different. Some may be more anxious about the separation and react more strongly to it than others. If you have any concerns about separating from the clients, bring it up with the supervisor as soon as possible. It could be helpful for you to tell the clients a few weeks before your departure to allow the clients more time to prepare for it. Sometimes, for instance, they may need to be referred to another worker or group to maintain continuity of care, and you can play a key role in that process for them.

It is also time to say goodbye to the colleagues with whom you have been working and learning from over the past few months. Goodbye does not necessarily mean “the end” because every relationship you establish can become a part of your network. However, endings do mean that interactions will likely be less frequent. Never forget to say “Thank you” to everyone who allowed you to shadow them and to those who supervised you throughout your internship time. You may want to send a thank you card to a few key people at the agency. This once common practice has declined in recent years but is still a powerful way of showing respect and leaving people with a positive reminder of you. Remember, the internship may be one of your most valuable learning experiences in the field of human services and can follow you into the future.

Just like ending the internship is a process, so is finishing the classroom part of it. Often, the class will include a final exam, paper, or project. The last meeting of the class may also signify a change in your relationships with your colleagues, especially if graduation follows. Everything we said about endings so far applies here as well. Indeed, you are likely to have spent meaningful time with your classmates and instructor, who are now your colleagues. Colleagues and instructors can be essential parts of your continuing network as you move forward. For example, you may need a recommendation from your instructor someday or perhaps one of your fellow students can alert you to a job possibility in the future. Consequently, it makes good sense to have meaningful and positive transitions here, as well.

## **Moving Forward**

It is natural to form connections and attachments with people and projects as you advance through various phases of life. As you leave behind rewarding experiences and valued relationships, it is well to remember that change is both natural and inevitable. Growing and evolving require moving on and attempting new things.

Remember that there are many new and exciting possibilities ahead, like chapters in a book. They offer different opportunities for positive involvement with new people and new paths for you to explore. With each step taken, you will continue to learn more about yourself and your unique style. As a part of this never-ending process, you will discover things to change or improve on. Your increased self-awareness will help you take the next step in your professional evolution as well. Over time, you will help make the world a better place, especially for your clients and the general public.



Throughout this internship, you may have had to overcome personal, economic, and professional challenges. No doubt you made some mistakes, but you learned a lot as well. It is important to remember the failures, or at least learn from them so that you do not repeat them. However, positive psychology indicates that there is value in focusing on success. It is also important to realize that with each step moving forward, you will encounter a new set of challenges and learn more advanced skills.

When you complete the hours necessary for your internship, it is often useful to look back again at the time you spent at your site. Think of the people you met and the things you learned. If you are not going on to a job, then you might consider volunteering to work at your site or in another part of the agency or field. Volunteering in a variety of settings that interest you might be an excellent way to develop a better sense of what you would like to do, while at the same time adding to your network and resume.

Now the formal evaluation is over, the goodbyes are done, and you have completed your class. No matter where you were at the beginning of the course, you have improved as a professional, and perhaps as a person. It is now time to reward yourself in whatever ways are meaningful to you.

### **Challenges Along the Way**

When you complete your internship, you could be offered a job. However, you have come to realize that this is not the area of human services in which you'd like to work. Of course, it's acceptable to decline politely. But, make sure that you thank the agency for the opportunity to learn there. You may explain that you wish to continue your education or that you prefer to find a job in a different area of human services. Although you are declining the offer, it does not have to mean you are ending your internship on a wrong note. In short, you want to make sure that you are on good terms with the people at your internship site. They can be a valuable part of your professional network.

## Tools for Chapter 8

### Activity 1: Self Assessments

Self-assessments come in different formats and styles. Here is an example of a self-assessment questionnaire that is helpful for doing a comprehensive review of your experience.

- **Place of internship/Type of organization?**  
Example: Criminal justice or health and human services.
- **Job responsibilities and observations at the site?**  
Example: Identify or list them.
- **Were you able to observe/apply theories and concepts from previous class instruction?**  
Example: Identify or list them.
- **How were you able to assist/benefit the organization?**  
Example: Describe them.
- **Accomplishments/new skills you learned and were able to apply?**  
Example: Identify, list, or describe them.
- **What areas/type of work were you most comfortable with?**  
Example: Identify or list them.
- **Were there any areas or aspects of the work you were not comfortable with?**  
Example: Identify or list them and then reflect on why they felt this way to you.
- **Did the type of work interest you in seeking employment in that area of Human Services?**  
Example: If so, why? If not, why not?
- **Did the internship experience make you want to learn and apply more skills?**  
Example: Identify and list them.
- **Did the internship experience make you interested in pursuing another area of human services?**  
Example: If so, what area(s), and why did it (they) appeal to you?
- **What were you especially satisfied with in terms of developing your professional abilities from this internship experience?**  
Example: Think about the real “takeaways” from your experience.
- **Were you able to create professional contacts and expand your network?**  
Example: Identify or describe new people or resources for the future.
- **Did you meet your personal or educational goals for the internship?**  
Example: What were they, and how did you reach them?
- **List new goals you may want to obtain after the internship experience.**  
Example: Reflect on future possibilities you now might have in the field.

**Activity 2: Separation**

Although you may be experiencing mixed emotions about leaving your site, there are many more opportunities in your future career as a human services professional. Right now, however, it is time to say goodbye, and you find yourself struggling with the whole idea of continuing your education and finding someplace to work. Perhaps, you may second guess yourself and wonder if this is the path for you. What can you do to help ease the anxiety you are feeling to carry through with your plans as you say your goodbyes? There are four courses of action you can take. Reflect on them and be sure to identify which one is likely to result in the least benefit.

- Take some time to think about other endings you have experienced (both good and bad) in life. Reflect on them and consider what parts made them difficult, and then realize that more exciting things are on the horizon.
- Think about the internship experience and all the positives you hope to take with you as you continue your education in that field.
- Share the good and bad moments from your internship with your colleagues who shared experiences with you along the way.
- Celebrate the ending, say your goodbyes, and leave.

**Activity 3: Dealing with Feedback**

Let us say your internship was the first real professional experience for you. Most of the time, you felt overwhelmed but did enjoy the learning experiences you gained and how you were able to apply some of the lessons and theories you have learned throughout your education so far. You found yourself asking lots of questions and took the time to document what you learned after you completed your hours. You were helpful and offered to do extra tasks to help the employees in whatever way you could. Your supervisor's final evaluation of you, however, left you feeling insecure about your abilities.

When going over the evaluation, you notice that it did not point out anything you specifically did wrong, but it did not offer any positive comments either. Your instructor told you it was not a bad evaluation, and that the site supervisor wants you to continue with your education to develop the necessary skills to be human services professional. You become disheartened. Ask yourself if you are being too sensitive about not receiving positive feedback. Discuss your thoughts with your classmates. What would they do differently? Were there any similarities between your views and theirs?

**Activity 4: Matching**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Traditional Ending
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Self-Evaluation
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Foreshadowing
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Traditional Ending
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Networking
  6. \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Style
- A. You must evaluate yourself and point out your good qualities and the qualities that you could improve on. This evaluation provides you with valuable feedback.
  - B. You are getting close to the end of your internship, and your supervisor asked you to apply for a part-time position the agency has available. You may be ending your internship hours, but you get to start a job that will help you with your human services career path.
  - C. This can affect how you say goodbye and the way you deal with endings in general.
  - D. You know that your time at the site is about halfway over. You also realize that some of the clients seem to have a hard time with endings. In response, you gently start to mention to them that the end of the semester is approaching in a few weeks.
  - E. You and your supervisor are anticipating your future departure from the agency. You both knew there would be an end and to prepare for it. You make sure they have a copy of your resume and ask the staff for their cards.
  - F. You finish your required internship hours and choose not to stay at the facility after completion. You say your goodbyes and do not return as you now focus on the next step in your career.

Answers: 1B, 2A, 3D, 4F, 5E, 6C

## Glossary

Note: The following definitions are based on student experiences and are tailored to the human services environment.

**Assessments and Evaluations:** Assessments and evaluations are two ways of determining current status, especially the strengths and weaknesses, of an individual, process, or organization. They may take one of two forms. A formal assessment is often used at the site or by the instructor as a way of determining one's degree of progress or overall performance at the site. An informal evaluation involves a more qualitative evaluation, such as a discussion or interview.

**Burnout:** Physical and/or mental fatigue resulting from excessive stress over time. Also known in human services as "compassion fatigue."

**Code of Ethics:** A group of principles that guide an individual or organization and their practices. The principles act as guidelines or rules based on the values of an organization or individual that set the limits for such things as how to identify conflict, how to avoid, or how to deal with problems.

**Competence:** Possessing the skills, knowledge, or abilities necessary to successfully or efficiently form various tasks associated with a discipline or position.

**Confidentiality:** Spoken, written, and behavioral communication practices designed to provide and maintain an individual's or group's privacy. Includes licensing and HIPPA requirements.

**Conflict of Interest:** A relationship or situation where one's own activities or interests can be advanced at the expense of another who has less power, authority, or resources. Often associated with an imbalance of equity.

**Countertransference:** A Freudian term used to describe a professional's unconscious feelings and behaviors aroused by a client, patient, consumer of services, or even a supervisor. Countertransference is natural and may be positive or negative in its tone.

**Cultural Diversity/Multiculturalism:** The variety of different values, preferences, practices, and behaviors that exist between groups. Multiculturalism is an alternative, more inclusive term.

**Dual Relationship:** A relationship between a human services worker and another person or group that involves a conflict of interest. Common examples include dating a client, or using a client for the clinician's own personal or financial gain.

**Emotional “Heat” Shield:** A personal set of self-care techniques and practices aimed at protecting the individual from stress or negative emotions that is aimed at preserving a sense of well-being.

**Ethnocentric:** A conscious or unconscious belief that one’s own ethnic group or culture is inherently superior to another. An inclination toward viewing others from one’s own cultural or ethnic perspective. Extreme forms include such things believing that one’s own group is better than others and acting on this position, such as in the case of racism.

**Foreshadowing:** To suggest in advance or beforehand, such as providing a hint, suggestion, or intimation about a future event.

**Human Services Worker:** A person who is trained to assist others to find appropriate and positive solutions to various life issues and problems. Their academic training varies widely.

**Internship:** An experientially-oriented course or learning situation aimed at providing students with real-life training and experience in a human service setting. Typically described as a practicum, internship, or service-learning experience.

**Network and Networking:** The continuous development of a supportive system of sharing information and connections between individuals and groups that share common interests.

**Professionalism:** Acting in a way that reflects the ethics, standards, and practices associated with a group recognized as providing a particular type of service. Professionalism in human services consists of such things as conforming to the ethical standards of a profession while exhibiting courteous but conscientious behavior in the workplace.

**Self-Monitoring:** The conscious process by which an individual becomes sensitive to, reflects upon, and analyzes their own behavior and actions with an eye toward improvement.

**Style:** A particular way of perceiving, understanding, and expressing oneself that is characteristic of a person and the way they either react to or go about dealing with a situation, task, or activity. Everyone has a unique style and each one has a set of related strengths and weaknesses.

**Supervision:** The process of observing, supporting, or directing what someone does or how something is done by another. May also be seen as a resource, especially in an internship.

**Supervisor:** In the case of human services workers or interns, the individual at the site to whom one reports or who is responsible for one’s work, or the course instructor.

**Transference:** A Freudian term used to describe a client's unconscious positive or negative feelings or behaviors triggered by another, often the therapist or clinician.

**Working Alliance:** A term used to describe a supportive relationship between two people, usually in a professional setting, that is necessary for a positive outcome. Such a relationship can occur between a worker and a client, a teacher and a student, or a supervisor and a supervisee.

## References

Note: Although the list of references may appear thin from a scholarly point of view, it is not. The book is based on student experiences and stories about them learning the tools of the trade and may be viewed as a road or cognitive map for those beginning their internship journeys. The practical orientation of the book limits its attention to theory, so references only occur where necessary to point readers in a specific direction, not simply to cite material-- although there is an important place for that as well.

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