Gain hands-on experience in the essential skills of social work practice

Cournoyer's experiential workbook acquaints you with the fundamentals of social work practice. The skill-building materials and exercises take you through the processes of generalist practice: beginning, exploring, assessing, contracting, working, evaluating, and ending—helping to prepare you for the challenging, real-world situations you will face during the course of your career as a professional social worker.

Features of this workbook include:

■ A description and case example of each skill, an exercise that gives you practice in using the skill, and summary exercises that help you use several skills together.

■ Exercises that help you apply ethical and legal principles, interact with individuals, work with couples and families, and interact with other systems, such as referral sources and community resources.

■ New and current information on court decisions regarding acts that affect practice, including the ADA and HIPAA.

■ A complete, current chapter that guides you in making ethical decisions.

■ Internet and InfoTrac® College Edition research exercises that give you experience in using technology as a resource.

■ A Book Companion Web Site (accessible at http://socialwork.wadsworth.com) that offers chapter outlines, chapter quiz questions, InfoTrac® College Edition and Web exercises, and more.

"The strengths of this text are its organization; its clarity and thoroughness regarding the specific skills that all social workers must be trained in and should aspire to; its numerous practice exercises; its current literature base; its attention to ethics, including legal definitions/issues; its continued emphasis on professional use of self issues and their impact on social work practice; and the deep level of skill and wisdom that the author obviously possesses and infuses throughout the text."

—Tammy Linseisen, University of Texas, Austin

Packaged free with each new copy of this book: InfoTrac® College Edition

With each new copy of this text, you receive four months of FREE access to InfoTrac® College Edition, a world-class, online university library that offers the full text of articles from hundreds of scholarly and popular publications, such as the Journal of Social Work Education, Social Work, Social Work Research, and Social Policy.

Look for other Brooks/Cole titles at

www.wadsworth.com
PHASE-SPECIFIC SKILLS
(most applicable during specific phases or processes)
**Generic Social Work Skills**
*(apply throughout all phases and processes)*

**Professionalism**
- Integrity
- Professional Knowledge and Self-Efficacy
- Critical Thinking and Lifelong Learning
- Self-Understanding and Self-Control
- Cultural Competence and Acceptance of Others
- Social Support

**Ethical Decision Making**
- Identify Applicable Legal Duties and Professional Ethics
- Explore Motives, Means, Ends, and Effects
- Decide and Plan Ethical Action; Record
- Implement Plan; Record
- Monitor Effects and Outcomes; Record

**The Basic Interpersonal Skills: Talking and Listening**
- Talking: Using Speech, Language, and Body Language
- Listening: Hearing, Observing, Encouraging, and Remembering
- Active Listening: Combining Talking and Listening to Promote Understanding
Welcome to the exciting and challenging profession of social work! As a social worker, you will serve people in all walks of life and in all kinds of situations. The range of settings in which you might serve is wide and varied. The contexts for social work practice are often complex, usually demanding, and always challenging. To serve competently in such circumstances, social workers today need to be knowledgeable, ethical, accountable, and proficient. This chapter (see Box 1.1) introduces the social work skills, qualities, and characteristics needed for ethical, effective social work practice in contemporary society.

**BOX 1.1**

**Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce learners to the social work skills, qualities, and characteristics needed for ethical, effective social work practice in contemporary society.

**Goals**

Following completion of this chapter, learners should be able to

- Understand the breadth and complexity of contemporary social work practice
- Define social work skill

(continued)
At some point in your career as a social worker, you might serve in a child-protection capacity, responding to indications that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect. You may help families improve their child-caring capabilities or serve in the emergency room of a hospital, intervening with persons and families in crises. You may lead therapy groups for children who have been sexually victimized or provide education and counseling to abusive adults.

You may aid couples whose relationships are faltering or help single parents who seek guidance and support in rearing their children. You may serve persons who abuse alcohol and drugs or help family members who have been affected by the substance abuse of a parent, child, spouse, or sibling. You might work in a residential setting for youthful offenders, a prison for adults, or a psychiatric institution. You might serve in a University counseling center, working with college students, faculty members, and other campus employees. You could help people who are in some way physically or mentally challenged. You might serve in a school system or perhaps as a consultant to a police department. You could work in a mayor’s office, serve on the staff of a state legislator, or perhaps even become a member of Congress yourself.

You may function in a crisis intervention capacity for a suicide prevention service. You could work for a health maintenance organization (HMO), a managed health care system, or an employee assistance program (EAP). As a social worker, you might act as an advocate for persons who have experienced discrimination, oppression, or exploitation, perhaps because of racism, sexism, or ageism. You might work with homeless persons, runaway youth, or with street people struggling to survive through panhandling or prostitution. You might work with people victimized by crime, or perhaps with those who engaged in criminal activity. You might serve in a domestic violence program, providing social services to people affected by child abuse, spouse abuse, or elder abuse. You could provide psychosocial services to persons dealing with a physical illness, such as cancer, kidney failure, Alzheimer’s disease, or AIDS, and help their families cope with the myriad psychosocial effects of such an illness. You might work in a hospice, helping people prepare for their own deaths or that of a family member from a terminal illness. You could help persons locate needed services or resources by providing information and arranging referrals. You might serve immigrants, refugees, transients, or
migrant workers. You might counsel individuals suffering from a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, and provide support and education to their families. You could work in an assisted-care facility for aged persons, leading groups or counseling family members. You might serve in a halfway house, work with foster parents, or perhaps provide information and support to teenage parents. Or, as an increasing number of social workers do, you might serve in industry, consulting with employers and employees about problems and issues that affect their well-being and productivity.

The range of settings in which you could practice your profession and the variety of functions that you could serve as a social worker are immense indeed. Such breadth, diversity, and complexity can be overwhelming. You may ask yourself, “Can I possibly learn what I need to so that I can serve competently as a social worker in all those places, serving such different people, and helping them to address such complex issues?” The answer to that question is certainly No! You could never become truly competent in all the arenas where social workers practice because it would require a greater breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise than any one person could ever acquire. Indeed, a specialized body of knowledge and skill is needed for each practice setting, each special population group, and each psychosocial issue. You cannot know everything, do everything, or be competent in helping people struggling with every one of the enormous array of social problems. However, you can acquire expertise in those skills that are common to social work practice with all population groups and all psychosocial issues in all settings. These common social work skills bring coherence to the profession, despite its extraordinary variety.

In addition to applying certain common skills, social workers tend to approach clients from a similar perspective—one that is reflected in a distinct professional language. For example, when referring to the people they serve, most social workers prefer the term client, person, or consumer, rather than patient, subject, or case. Social workers also favor the word assessment rather than diagnosis, study, examination, or investigation. Furthermore, they tend to look for strengths, assets, resources, resiliencies, competencies, and abilities rather than attending exclusively to problems, obstacles, deficiencies, or pathologies. Reflected by this distinctive use of professional language, such a common perspective is characteristic of most contemporary social workers, regardless of their particular practice settings.

Professional social workers have earned a baccalaureate, master’s, or doctoral degree in social work. They are licensed or certified to practice social work in their locale. They adopt certain common professional values that pervade all aspects of their helping activities, pledge adherence to a social work code of ethics, and usually view social work in a manner similar to that reflected in the International Federation of Social Workers’ (IFSW) definition of social work:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW, 2000, Definition section, para. 1)
Social workers, regardless of setting or function, tend to view the person-and-situation (PAS), person-in-environment (PIE), or person-issue-situation as the basic unit of attention. In addition, they consider the enhancement of social functioning and the promotion or restoration of “a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society to improve the quality of life for everyone” (National Association of Social Workers, 1981c) as the overriding purpose of practice. This dual focus on people and society leads social workers to consider multiple systems—even when an individual person is formally the “client.” Indeed, most social workers always consider and regularly involve other people or other social systems in the helping process.

Social workers tend to conceive of people and situations as continually changing and as having the potential for planned change. They view professional practice as predominantly for clients, the community, and society. Whatever personal benefits might accrue to them personally are secondary; the notion of service to others is foremost. The primacy of service in social work is reflected through a special sensitivity to those living in poverty and other at-risk individuals, vulnerable populations, and oppressed peoples. Indeed, people with the lowest status and the least power constitute social work’s primary constituency.

Social workers recognize that professional service to others often involves powerful interpersonal processes that have considerable potential for harm as well as for good. They realize that competent practice requires exceptional personal and professional integrity. Each social worker needs a highly developed understanding of oneself and extraordinary personal discipline and self-control. A great deal more than good intentions, admirable personal qualities, and compassionate feelings are required. Social workers’ words and actions should be based on professional knowledge, informed by critical thought, and guided by social work values, ethics, and obligations.

Social Work Skills

The term skill has become extremely popular in social work and other helping professions during the past half-century. Several social work textbooks incorporate skill or skills in their titles (Freeman, 1998; Henry, 1981, 1992; Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 2002; Middleman & Goldberg, 1990; Phillips, 1957; Shulman, 1999; Vass, 1996; Yuen, 2002). The term skill, however, is not always used in exactly the same way. It means different things to different authors.

For example, skill has been described as “the practice component that brings knowledge and values together and converts them to action as a response to concern and need” (Johnson, 1995, p. 55), “a complex organization of behavior directed toward a particular goal or activity” (Johnson, 1995, p. 431), and a “social worker’s capacity to use a method in order to further a process directed toward the accomplishment of a social work purpose as that purpose finds expression in a specific program or service” (Smalley, 1967, p. 17). And skill has also been described as “the production of specific behaviors under the precise conditions designated for their use” (Middleman & Goldberg, 1990, p. 12).

Henry (1981, p. vii) suggested that skills are “finite and discrete sets of behaviors or tasks employed by a worker at a given time, for a given purpose, in a given manner.”
She (Henry, 1992, p. 20) also cited Phillips (1957), who characterized skill as “knowledge in action.” Morales and Sheafor described skills as the “ability to use knowledge and intervention techniques effectively” (Morales & Sheafor, 1998, p. 140).

These various definitions are extremely useful. They provide context for the way skills have been selected and addressed here. The following definition has been adopted for use in this workbook:

A social work skill is a circumscribed set of discrete cognitive and behavioral actions that (1) derive from social work knowledge and from social work values, ethics, and obligations, (2) are consistent with the essential facilitative qualities, (3) reflect the characteristics of professionalism, and (4) comport with a social work purpose within the context of a phase or process of practice.

Although they are usually associated with particular phases or processes of practice, social work skills should never be viewed as technical activities to be carried out, robot-like, at the same relative time and in the same way with all clients and all situations. Rather, the social worker selects, combines, and adapts specific social work skills to suit the particular needs and characteristics of the person-and-situation.

The range and scope of skills that effective social workers might use in the context of their service are wide and varied. A “social worker’s skills include being proficient in communication, assessing problems and client workability, matching needs with resources, developing resources, and changing social structures” (Barker, 1995). More than 20 years ago, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) outlined 12 skills (1981b, pp. 17-18, used with permission):

1. Listen to others with understanding and purpose.
2. Elicit information and assemble relevant facts to prepare a social history, assessment, and report.
3. Create and maintain professional helping relationships.
4. Observe and interpret verbal and nonverbal behavior and use knowledge of personality theory and diagnostic methods.
5. Engage clients (including individuals, families, groups, and communities) in efforts to resolve their own problems and to gain trust.
6. Discuss sensitive emotional subjects supportively and without being threatening.
7. Create innovative solutions to clients’ needs.
8. Determine the need to terminate the therapeutic relationship.
9. Conduct research, or interpret the findings of research and professional literature.
10. Mediate and negotiate between conflicting parties.
11. Provide inter-organizational liaison services.
12. Interpret and communicate social needs to funding sources, the public, or legislators.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2001) also identified 12 abilities that professional social workers should reflect. Several refer specifically to selected
skills. Among other abilities, graduates of CSWE accredited social work programs are expected to be able to “apply critical thinking skills,” practice according to “the value base of the profession and its ethical standards and principles,” “practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills related to clients’ age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation,” “apply the knowledge and skills of generalist social work practice with systems of all sizes,” “evaluate their own practice interventions,” and “use communication skills differentially across client populations, colleagues, and communities” (CSWE, 2001).

The skills chosen for inclusion in this workbook are compatible with those identified by the NASW and the abilities described in the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) of the CSWE. More specifically, however, the skills addressed here are derived from the tasks associated with commonly identified phases or processes of social work practice, the essential facilitative qualities exhibited by most effective professional helpers, and the fundamental characteristics of professionalism. In this context, the phases or processes of social work practice include the following:

- Preparing
- Beginning
- Exploring
- Assessing
- Contracting
- Working and evaluating
- Ending

Effective social workers consistently demonstrate the following essential facilitative qualities in their work with clients:

- Empathy
- Respect
- Authenticity

Finally, competent social workers integrate the following characteristics of professionalism throughout all aspects of their service:

- Integrity
- Professional knowledge
- Critical thinking and lifelong learning
- Ethical decision making
- Self-understanding and self-control
- Cultural competence and acceptance of others
- Social support and self-efficacy

The tasks associated with each phase are organized into small, manageable units of thought and action that are consistent with the essential facilitative qualities and compatible with the central characteristics of professionalism. Integrated and synthesized in this fashion, they form the social work skills.
Common Factors and Essential Facilitative Qualities

During the second half of the 20th century, findings from research studies (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff & Anthony, 1979; Lambert, 1976, 1982, 1983; Lambert & Bergin, 1994; Lambert, Christensen, & DeJulio, 1983; Rogers, 1951, 1957; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967; Weinberger, 1993) suggested that certain common conditions present in most counseling and psychotherapeutic approaches accounted for much of the beneficial outcomes.

As early as the 1930s, helping professionals (Rosenzweig, 1936) discussed the presence of implicit common factors in diverse therapeutic approaches. Recent analyses of the research yielded four general categories of common nonspecific factors associated with client outcomes in counseling and psychotherapy (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Lambert, 1992, 2003; Lambert & Bergin, 1994; Lambert & Cattani-Thompson, 1996):

1. **Client and Situational Factors**: Strengths, assets, resources, challenges, and limitations within the client and client's external situation. These extra-therapeutic factors—what clients bring with them to the relationship with the helping professional—may have the most powerful impact on client outcomes (Lambert, 1992). Social work’s emphasis on the person-and-situation corresponds to this finding.

2. **Relationship Factors**: Qualities of the helping professional and the resulting relationship between the client and helper. The nature of the client-worker relationship may have the second most significant effect on client outcomes (Lambert, 1992). Social workers have long recognized the importance of the relationship. Proficiency in the social work skills addressed in this book will help you establish and maintain positive working relationships with clients and others with whom you interact as part of your professional activities.

3. **Expectancy Factors**: Hopefulness, optimism, and expectations that the helping encounter will be beneficial are important dimensions. Such “placebo effects” significantly affect client outcomes (Lambert, 1992). Social workers commonly encourage hope and serve as examples to others through their positive attitudes and enthusiasm.

4. **Model and Technique Factors**: The models, strategies, techniques, and protocols adopted in the process of helping also affect outcomes. When combined, expectancy and model/technique factors may account for about the same amount of client outcome impact as do relationship factors (Lambert, 1992).

Other scholars reached similar conclusions about categories of common factors. In addition to the important dimensions of the nature and quality of the working relationship and client expectancies, one researcher also included (1) exposure to and exploration of problem issues, (2) practice in coping with or mastering aspects of the problematic issues, and (3) a conceptual means to understand and explain why and how the problems occur and how they can be managed (Weinberger, 1993, 1995, 2003).

Recognition of the importance of relationship factors encouraged researchers to explore qualities exhibited by helpers that might be associated with better client
outcomes. Qualities such as empathy, caring, nonpossessive warmth, acceptance, affirmation, sincerity, and encouragement are frequently included among the characteristics of effective helpers (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999). When professionals reflect these qualities, they “result in a cooperative working endeavor in which the client’s increased sense of trust, security, and safety, along with decreases in tension, threat, and anxiety, lead to changes in conceptualizing his or her problems and ultimately in acting differently by reframing fears, taking risks, and working through problems in interpersonal relationships (i.e., clients confront and cope with reality in more effective ways)” (Lambert & Cattani-Thompson, 1996, p. 603).

Identifying and measuring all the potential factors that affect the outcome of helping processes are enormously complicated undertakings. The picture is especially complex for social workers who fulfill disparate professional functions in extremely varied settings with a wide range of populations and extremely challenging psychosocial issues. Different social workers in different contexts assume quite different roles and responsibilities. Indeed, a single social worker may emphasize certain characteristics at various times. The social worker serving parents and siblings of babies in neonatal care in a children’s hospital emphasizes different qualities than does one serving persons addicted to heroin or crack cocaine. Similarly the social worker “engaged in advocacy may need a more aggressive, directive, dominant approach to the interview” (Kadushin, 1983, p. 84).

Despite the breadth and diversity inherent in social work and the evolutionary nature of the relevant research findings, certain aspects of the worker-client experience are clearly related to client satisfaction and effective outcomes. Krill (1986, p. xi) suggested that the relationship between a social worker and a client is more likely to be productive if

- The participants like and respect each other.
- The client is clearly told what to expect and how to contribute to the helping process.
- The worker is warm, genuine, and sincere and regularly expresses empathy about the client’s experience.
- The worker and client engage in goal-directed activities such as practice, in-session tasks, or between-session action steps.
- The social worker actively seeks to involve significant persons in the client’s life in the helping process.

The characteristics of effective helpers are often called the facilitative qualities or the core conditions (Carkhuff, 1969; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965; Ivey, 1971; Ivey & Authier, 1978; Ivey & Simek-Downing, 1980; Marshall, Charping, & Bell, 1979; Marshall et al., 1982; Rogers, 1951, 1957, 1961, 1975; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967) These qualities, when consistently demonstrated by professionals, aid in developing and maintaining a special rapport with their clients. This rapport is sometimes called the helping relationship, the working relationship, professional rapport, or the therapeutic alliance. Perlman suggested that the professional working relationship between social worker and client is distinguished from other relationships by the following characteristics (Perlman, 1979, pp. 48–77):

8 Chapter 1
It is formed for a recognized and agreed-upon purpose.
- It is time-bound.
- It is for the client.
- It carries authority.
- It is a controlled relationship.

Within the context of this special relationship, the essential facilitative qualities become critical. When social workers consistently reflect these qualities, the risk of harming the person-and-situation tends to decrease and the probability of helping usually increases. However, demonstrating these qualities alone is rarely enough to enable clients to reach their goals. Social workers nearly always need to add expert knowledge and skills to help clients progress toward goal attainment. Furthermore, the qualities must be applied differentially according to the individual and cultural characteristics of each client. Some clients feel quite uneasy when the worker is frequently and intensively empathic. They might prefer a formal encounter in which the worker provides direct advice and guidance in a business-like fashion. Others seem to benefit from an emotionally charged, close relationship where intimate thoughts and feelings are shared by both the client and the worker. Finally, client characteristics also play a very powerful role in both the process and outcomes of the working relationship. Motivated clients who expect favorable results and participate actively generally benefit more than do unmotivated, pessimistic, and inactive clients. Of course, the qualities of both social workers and clients may change, sometimes from moment to moment. A caring, involved, and encouraging worker may help increase a client's hope and optimism, and a motivated, energetic, hard-working client may encourage a social worker to become more understanding and supportive.

Regardless of theoretical orientation and choice of intervention approach, effective helpers tend to reflect common characteristics in their service to others. Helping professionals express those qualities differentially according to the individual client, the unique circumstances of the person-and-situation, the nature of the social worker's role, and the phase of service. Nonetheless, as a general guide, social workers should reflect the following essential qualities in relationships with others: (1) empathy, (2) regard, and (3) authenticity, and (4) professionalism.

Empathy

The term empathy (Altmann, 1973; Bohart & Greenberg, 1997; Bozarth, 1997; Keefe, 1976; Pinderhughes, 1979; Rogers, 1975) is widely used in social work and other helping professions. Derived from the Greek word empatheia, empathy may be described as a process of joining in the feelings of another, of feeling how and what another person experiences. Empathy is a process of feeling with another person. It is an understanding and appreciation of the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and circumstances of another human being.

Stotland and colleagues (Stotland, Mathews, Sherman, Hansson, & Richardson, 1978) concluded, “that the key antecedent condition for empathy appears to be the
empathizer’s imagining himself or herself as having the same experience as the other—
thus imaginatively taking the role of the other” (Stotland, 2003). In effect, empathy in-
volves the proverbial “putting oneself in another’s shoes.”

However, empathy is not an expression of feeling for or feeling toward, as in pity or
romantic love. Nor is it a “diagnostic or evaluative understanding of the client” (Ham-
mond, Hepworth, & Smith, 1977, p. 3). Rather, it is a conscious and intentional joining
with others in their subjective experience.

Of course, there are limits to anyone’s ability and willingness to feel with and feel
as another does. In fact, as a professional social worker, you must always retain a por-
tion of yourself for your professional responsibilities. Be careful not to over-identify
with clients by adopting their feelings as your own. After you feel clients’ feelings, you
need to be able to let them go. They remain the clients’. These feelings are not yours
to be taken or assumed.

Empathy helps you, the social worker, gain an understanding of, appreciation for,
and sensitivity to the people you serve. Through empathic connection with your
clients, you increase the probability of developing rapport and maintaining productive
working relationships.

Regard

The facilitative quality of regard or respect (Hammond et al., 1977, pp. 170–203) sug-
gests an attitude of noncontrolling, warm, caring, nonpossessive acceptance of other
persons. It involves demonstrating unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957, 1961). In
cross- or inter-cultural contexts, regard also includes the genuine acceptance of differ-
ence. Respect of this nature goes well beyond basic tolerance to include appreciation
of the value of diversity in human communities.

There are very few relationships in which people are truly accepted as unique hu-
man beings with full rights, privileges, and responsibilities—without regard to their
views, actions, and circumstances. In most social contexts, people tend to spend time
with people like themselves who live and work in similar circumstances, hold views
that resemble their own, and are friendly toward them. Conversely, people are often
less affectionate toward persons unlike themselves who live and work in different cir-
cumstances, who espouse views that differ from their own, or who are unfriendly or
disinterested in them.

During your professional career, you are likely to work with many people who
differ from you in numerous ways. You may find that you do not personally like some
you serve and some clients will undoubtedly dislike you. Nonetheless, as a social
worker, you should maintain regard for and caring acceptance of all the clients you
serve. View each human being you meet as unique and inherently valuable. As a so-
cial worker, you convey regard by prizing and cherishing the personhood of all clients,
regardless of the nature of their racial or ethnic backgrounds, gender, age, ability, ap-
pearance, status, views, actions, or circumstances. Although you may personally dis-
agree with and perhaps even disapprove of a particular client’s words or actions, you
nonetheless continue to care about and accept that person as a unique individual of
dignity and worth. Furthermore, you recognize the fundamental right of clients to make their own decisions. This ability to respect clients neither because of nor in spite of their attributes, behaviors, or circumstances is an essential facilitative condition in social work practice.

Caring for clients as valuable human beings does not, however, preclude you from making professional judgments or from offering suggestions and advice. Respect for clients does not mean that you neglect other persons or groups as you attend to clients. Indeed, a person-and-situation perspective suggests that you always consider persons and social systems affecting and affected by the clients you serve.

**Authenticity**

Authenticity refers to the genuineness and sincerity of a person’s manner of relating. Reflecting fundamental honesty, an authentic social worker is natural, real, and personable. The presentation is congruent so that verbal, nonverbal, and behavioral expressions reflect synchronicity. Words and deeds match. The genuine social worker is nondefensive, open to the ideas of others, and forthright in sharing thoughts and feelings. “An authentic person relates to others personally, so that expressions do not seem rehearsed or contrived” (Hammond et al., 1977, p. 7). Genuineness, congruence, transparency, or authenticity (Rogers, 1961) may sometimes seem contrary to the notion of the professional social worker as cool, calm, and collected. However, professionalism in social work does not mean adopting a stiffly formal or overly controlled attitude. As a social worker, you need not and should not present yourself as an unfeeling, detached, computer-like technician. People seeking social services almost always prefer to talk with a knowledgeable and competent professional who comes across as a living, breathing, feeling human being—not as someone playing a canned role, spouting clichés, or repeating the same phrases again and again.

This emphasis on authenticity or genuineness in the working relationship, however, does not grant you license to say or do whatever you think or feel at the moment. Remember that the helping relationship is fundamentally for the client—not primarily for you, the social worker. Expression of your own thoughts and feelings for any purpose other than serving the client and working toward mutually agreed-upon goals is, at best, inefficient and, at worst, harmful.

**Professionalism**

Integral to the values and ethics of social work, and inherent in several aspects of the essential facilitative qualities, professionalism is so important to social workers individually and collectively that it requires special attention. Professionalism includes several characteristics: (1) integrity, (2) professional knowledge and self-efficacy, (3) ethical decision making, (4) critical thinking and lifelong learning, (5) self-understanding and self-control, (6) cultural competence and acceptance of others, and (7) social support. These will be explored in the next two chapters.
Summary

Effective social workers reflect empathy, regard, and authenticity as well as professionalism as they provide services to others. These characteristics and qualities are reflected throughout the entire helping process—from preparing for and beginning with clients through the conclusion of work. They are also apparent in your exchanges with friends, family members, colleagues, and others whom you encounter in your day-to-day lives.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY EXERCISES

Following completion of this first chapter, use the spaces provided to outline brief one-to-two paragraph responses to these questions:

1. As you reflect thoughtfully about the content and implications of this chapter, what are your initial reactions to the wide range of challenging roles, responsibilities, and functions undertaken by professional social workers?