

Steps in EBP:

1. Convert information needed for practice decisions into answerable questions.
2. Search for the best evidence with which to answer the questions.
3. Critically appraise the information in terms of its impact, validity, reliability, and applicability.
4. Consider the evidence given one's expertise, client values, and preferences; integrate the information to make a practice decision.
5. Evaluate the practice decision. (Gambrill, 2008)

WHY IS EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE ESSENTIAL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS?

EBP is not a passing fad. It is already informing practice in the helping professions. There are several reasons why social work is adopting it.

1. Throughout the history of social work, we have sought a place alongside the established professions. We have come a long way but the need to enhance our public credibility is stronger than ever. EBP will substantially help in this regard.
2. EBP will force social work professional organizations, educational institutions, and individual practitioners to accelerate the work on creating, testing, communicating, and utilizing knowledge, which makes our interventions the best possible response to micro and macro social problems. It will also help us move away from an authority-based practice.
3. Several sections of the NASW Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 1999) point to the moral duty of social work professionals to provide clients their best practice efforts. The content and message of those sections are illustrated in the following excerpts from the Code.
 - 1.01 The social worker's primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients.
 - 1.02 Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals.
 - 1.04 (a) Social workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.
 - 4.01 (a) Social workers should accept responsibility or employment only on the basis of existing competence or the intention to acquire the necessary competence.
 - (b) Social workers should strive to become and remain proficient in professional practice and the performance of professional functions. Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work. Social workers should routinely review the professional literature and participate in continuing education relevant to social work practice and social work ethics.

- (c) Social workers should base practice on recognized knowledge, including empirically based knowledge, relevant to social work and social work ethics.
- 5.01 (b) Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession.
- (d) Social workers should contribute to the knowledge base of social work and share with colleagues their knowledge related to practice, research and ethics.
- 5.02 (a) Social workers should monitor and evaluate policies, the implementation of programs, and practice interventions.
- 4.01 (c) Social workers should critically examine and keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to social work and fully use evaluation and research evidence in their professional practice.

Hence, it is clear that engaging in EBP is an ethical obligation of social workers.

4. We live in an age of accountability. Societal expectations of helping professions have changed markedly in recent times. Social work is no exception. Sources of funds for human services are requiring service agencies to show that their programs and activities are effective. Professional programs and practices are being transformed by managed care and its influence toward time-limited and rational models of care (Pollio, 2002). Social workers as professionals are accountable to our clients, societal institutions that sanction our practice, professional and service organizations under whose auspices we function, our colleagues, and ourselves. We must show that our activities are in the client's best interest—that they are ethical, goal-directed, effective, and efficient (Rosen, 2003).

Thus, accountability is an obligation of our profession—we must clearly reveal our functions and methods and assure our clients and communities that we are not only competent but also utilizing interventions based on the best information available. "Social work needs to showcase what it routinely does well by developing evidence of best practice on which to base learning and positive growth by making this visible both within the profession and to the public" (Ferguson, 2003, p. 1008).

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN MY OWN WORK?

Because you are new to social work, it may be easier for you to appreciate, learn, and master EBP than for those who have relied primarily on wisdom arising from their own practice. You will find the following suggestions helpful in learning how to incorporate EBP into your work with clients.

1. Make conscious efforts to become a *life-long learner*. That will ensure that you stay abreast of the latest professional knowledge, approaches, and technologies.
2. Browse the table of contents of professional journals in your field, and regularly read articles reporting research on interventions. Skim the Campbell and Cochrane Collaboration Web sites frequently for new studies. Form a group in your agency to discuss interesting findings, or consult with a colleague for another perspective on the article.



Human Rights & Justice

Critical Thinking Question:

How does the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) protect human rights?