

what is traditional or mainstream in society (Allen-Meares & Garvin, 2000). For example, the social worker should ask a child to identify the key people in his or her life and allow the child to define family.



EP 2c

The respect given to families should also be given to children. Studies have identified the trauma experienced by children and teenagers as a result of discrimination (Córdova & Cervantes, 2010; Miliora, 2000) and have questioned the effect of being marginalized through racism and heterosexism on a child's development (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Social workers must become knowledgeable about the effects of discrimination on child well-being and must be comfortable working with children from a variety of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. Social workers commonly work with children from backgrounds different from their own; therefore, they need to become especially sensitive to and respectful of differences. Children and families should be treated in ways that model acceptance, not judgment.

Respect for Self-Determination

Another social work value that is important in relation to children and families is self-determination—respect for a client's own choices (discussed earlier). Many problems in our society stem from lack of access to resources or opportunities, which inhibits people from achieving their goals. Therefore, social workers seek to increase the opportunities for children and families so that they will have more choices in their efforts to address problems.

The emphasis on self-determination reflects the strengths perspective. By encouraging an individual, even a child, to focus on his or her own choices for behavior and treatment, the social worker emphasizes the person's resources and skills and encourages building on them. However, the goal of self-determination is complicated in working with children and families. As discussed earlier, children and families are often referred or mandated into treatment, and they may not perceive a problem or desire change. It is possible to work to achieve the goals of the referral source while overlooking the choices of the child. For example, when parents bring a child in for counseling because of a lack of compliance with parental authority, it is challenging to meet their goal while also supporting the child's right to self-determination. In addition, different family members often have different perspectives and varying goals. Negotiating the self-determination of each individual in a family system is difficult, yet essential. In court-ordered child welfare cases, it can be problematic, especially in the beginning phases, but it is paramount to include the families' choices when creating their case plan.

Respect for Confidentiality

Another important value in the field of social work, confidentiality, can also be complicated when working with children and families. Social workers sometimes hear about the physical or sexual abuse of a child. As mandated reporters of abuse, they are required to break confidentiality for the purpose

of keeping a child safe, regardless of the wishes of the child (Pecora et al., 1992; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2016). In such a situation, the social worker must make it clear to the child that safety overrides not telling and that telling is in the child's best interest, even if it seems like a betrayal of trust. The social worker must continue to work with the child to protect him or her and build a trusting relationship. The social worker strives to help the child understand his or her rights, including the right not to be violated by an adult.

Maintaining confidentiality is also complicated when parents want to know all the details of social workers' sessions with their children. Parents generally want to protect and remain informed about their children, but children need to feel that they can talk openly with social workers. In some cases, a social worker does need to inform the parents, as when a client is suicidal or is being abused. In both such cases, the social worker is mandated to inform others as well, such as Child Protective Services in the case of abuse. The issue of teenage pregnancy and abortion is another area of difficulty for social workers pledged to keep confidentiality. There is no mandate for disclosure unless the young person is in danger or a victim of abuse, but there are laws in most states that a minor cannot have an abortion without parental permission. Social workers who work with teenagers must know the law regarding the rights for termination of a pregnancy and be sensitive to the wishes of both children and their parents. It can be difficult to navigate between the confidences of a child and what is in his or her best interest to disclose to parents. To the extent possible, much of what is discussed by children can and should remain confidential. Children need a safe place to express themselves. Respecting a child's right to confidentiality helps create that sense of safety. However, parents' rights and their need to know about the well-being of their children must also be respected.

Critical Issues Facing Children and Families

Several areas critical to children and families present challenges to social workers, program planners, and policy makers (see Box 7.6). This section covers some of them, including child maltreatment, foster care, substance abuse, sexual behavior, trauma, delinquency, and poverty.

Child Maltreatment

One serious issue that continues to confront children and families today is child maltreatment. The effects of child maltreatment reach beyond physical damage (Corcoran, 2000): children who endure maltreatment also develop

Box 7.6 Ethical Practice...Child Welfare

The child protective services agency in your state is underfunded. There are too few caseworkers to respond to reported cases of abuse or neglect in a timely fashion. You

believe this puts children at increased risk. Do you have an ethical obligation to do something to address this problem? What can you do?