Watch as Diane walks Mrs. Kita through the intake process.

When discussing the release-of-information form, be sure to include why it is needed, who will have access to the information obtained through the release, and how long the release will be valid. You may need a third party to witness all required signatures, including the social worker's. In addition, let the client know that your intention is to be helpful, that favorable outcomes are possible (with a commitment on the part of the client as well), and that the his or her needs will be addressed.

It is important to view this step as an opportunity to learn about what has brought the client into care. The process of an intake interview can be done in person, on the telephone, or even over the Internet. Always ask clients how they would like you to address them. Also, be sure to let the client know how you would prefer to be addressed.

The kind of information gathered during the intake process is then used as the foundation for the next phase of the helping process: the assessment. Part of the intake process requires understanding what event(s) motivated the client to seek help (including whether the client was mandated to see a social worker) and some general history of the problem and previous circumstances. Specific information, such as address, date of birth, number of children, race, identified disabilities, medical conditions, employment and school history, languages spoken in the home, marital status, and criminal background are standard questions on most intake forms. Typically, there are questions related to what steps the client has taken to resolve the presenting issues and identification of informal and formal support networks. The goal of an intake interview is to develop a foundation or composite of the client's worldview (Carpetto, 2008).

It is essential to discuss your role and that of the agency in addressing the needs of the client. The social worker in Video Case #5, identifies her role and ways in which she hopes to be of assistance. She refers to the intake form, which Mrs. Kita had filled out a few weeks earlier, as a good starting point. In the first session, Diane states, "Although we talked on the phone last week, I wanted to reintroduce myself and tell you a little bit about why I am here. I have been with the housing program for three years. Our program offers a lot of services that I think will be helpful to you. The goal is to provide families with financial resources, specialized trainings, and encouragement. If you need help with child care or finances that is something I can assist you with." Diane is clearly stating the parameters of the relationship and ways the agency and she can be helpful.

The intake interview is primarily a question-and-answer session. Typically, intake questions are considered rudimentary and simple (Carpetto, 2008). Agencies use the intake interview as a screening tool to determine whether services offered fit the needs of the client. It is possible that an intake worker will complete the form and then pass along the information to the appropriate person, such as a caseworker, a therapist, or an in-home counselor. Depending on the intake process, the client may have already completed the forms independently, and therefore you can review the paperwork and move right into the assessment itself. When working with a client who may have a cognitive disability, a language barrier because English is not his or her first language, or limited reading skill, you can offer to complete the intake form, read the form, or paraphrase the questions. If this is offered, try to approach this as though it is common practice so as not

to make the client feel inadequate. It is good practice to have forms available in a variety of languages, as it makes this process less cumbersome.

Intake forms typically have questions that relate to the client's culture, religion, and ethnicity. Understanding how the client makes decisions and where the client is situated relative to his or her culture can give the worker a beginning knowledge of the systems involved and insights into systems that may need to be involved to fully address the client's needs and circumstances.

Never underestimate the toll that oppression or prejudice can take on a person. A general lack of trust for "mainstream workers" or institutions is understandable given past negative and unjust experiences that clients may have experienced directly or indirectly with various societal institutions and systems. Such experiences can cause clients to feel as though they are entering a hostile environment when they seek assistance (voluntarily or by court mandate) from a social service agency. In this case, there is all the more reason to be respectful, thoughtful, and genuine. If you and your client speak different languages, find out whether your agency provides translators (or an interpreter in the case of a person who is deaf). If not, this may be an important service that you can advocate for on behalf of diverse clients that the agency serves.

No matter who completes the intake form, it will be used as the entry point into the problem-solving process. There are probably as many different types of intake forms as there are service providers. It is most important to familiarize yourself with the form used in your agency. The more familiar you are with the questions, the less likely you are to read them one by one, making the intake process feel more like an interrogation than a safe welcoming into the helping process. The best intake interviews are those conducted as a conversation. Tryon's (2003) research concludes that the more positive and collaborative the relationship, the more likely the client will return for a second session. Following this line of thinking, if the client feels heard, valued, and a part of the process, his or her commitment is greater, with a higher likelihood of success. The intake phase is a time to be accepting and respectful. Realize that asking personal questions can cause a client to feel embarrassed, nervous, or anxious. Posing thoughtful, mindful, and tactful questions without appearing to be over solicitous is an essential interviewing skill. The initial interview sets the stage for further or future contact and the development of the helping relationship. Putting the client at ease and explaining the intake process and what the client can expect can be very helpful in ensuring the client's return. It invites clients to be open and encourages him or her to trust and to engage with the social worker. Asking questions that cause the client to really think about the issue at hand can lead to deepening of the relationship and set the stage for all future contacts. (See Appendix C for examples of intake forms.)

Sometimes the situation that brings a client into your care is an immediate crisis, and there is no time to complete a formal intake. In the case of a suicidal client calling a hotline, just getting the person's first name may be all you can ascertain. As you develop a rapport with the client, you may be able to negotiate getting more descriptive information, including support networks, other professionals involved with the caller, contact information, and history of suicidal thoughts and attempts. It is important to be able to switch gears quickly should the client reveal information that is unexpected. For example, during an intake interview in which a client reveals that he is having an affair with a coworker, it is imperative not to appear