

- Validation and exploration—When the worker has tuned into the concerns and questions that might be evident for the client, the challenge is to get the concern out in the open and address it. (How can I validate this concern? Where do I take this to explore the experience of the client?)

Example continued: You can explore with Yvonne ways that she can still maintain a relationship with her family. As a social worker, you can confirm and need and value of support, be it financial or emotional. You can confirm and acknowledge her choices and beliefs but also validate the value of her family. Be careful not to judge her past experiences and troubles. At the same time, provide a sense of hope and certainty that she can use those strengths and skills to turn her life around while also maintaining a belief in her family. The struggles to stay clean and off the streets may be a challenge for Yvonne. Help her to anticipate some of the obstacles and barriers she may face.

▶ Watch this clip as James and Anthony begin the early steps of the helping process. James puts Anthony at ease as he shares his role and desire to help.

By the time clients come to seek the services of a social worker, often they have exhausted other sources of help and have experienced considerable emotional pain (Kortler, 2010). As the social worker listens to the client's story, typically it becomes apparent that the client has given quite a bit of consideration to the problem prior to your first session with him or her. It is important to listen to his or her story as relevant pieces of information come to light. You can ask questions that relate to your understanding of the situation, gaining insight into the client's perceptions. As the social worker begins this helping process, it is imperative to understand the client from his or her unique vantage point, taking into account his or her personal and family background, culture, education, developmental stage, environmental factors, and health status. Egan (2014) suggests understanding clients in three ways: 1) understand clients from their point of view, including feelings surrounding this point of view; 2) understand them through the context of their lives; and 3) make a commitment to understand the dissonance between clients' points of view and objective reality.

Social workers are equipped to deal with many different challenges on the client's journey toward self-determination, but a road map can be helpful. This map consists of the profession's knowledge, information, and skills (Egan, 2014). We are called on to assist our clients in problem solving, resource acquisition and management, and advocacy. The social worker's ability to use basic interviewing and assessment skills is an important aspect of conveying competency. As the helping relationship evolves, the responsibility is clearly more shared, and the collaborative nature of the relationship becomes an essential building block.

Box 8.D asks three questions regarding a time in your life when you asked for help. Think about what it felt like to be the receiver rather than the giver of assistance.

Countertransference

Social workers can feel very strongly about a situation, client, or circumstance. We may find ourselves experiencing a personal or emotional reaction to a situation. This is referred

Box 8.D Now You Try It... Self-Reflection

Identify a time in your life when you asked someone for help. How did you feel, knowing that you were understood and cared for?
 What convinced you the person was really listening and being cared for?

to as countertransference. Countertransference is an emotional reaction to clients where the social worker is overly involved in the client's life, seeing the client as a sexual object, a friend, an adversary, or even an extension of themselves (Shebb, 2010). It is important to respond to our clients in a nondefensive manner, meaning being able to respond to the client without feeling a need to guard or justify your decisions, positions, actions, feelings, or perceptions. Box 8.2 has some warning signs that countertransference is occurring (Milroy, O'Melia, & Dubois, 2010; Timberlake, Farber, & Sabatino, 2002).

As a social worker, you will be exposed to many details and facets of your client's life. You are sanctioned as a professional to provide services to clients via your position within an agency or mandated by law. Because of this power differential between the client and the social worker, we must always be mindful of the power we hold—not only sanctioned power through the positions we hold within our society, such as reporting a suspected case of child abuse or determining services and benefits, but also the power within the relationship. Clients will look to the social worker as the expert and may feel intimidated by their perceptions or beliefs of who you are. These perceptions can be based on the reality of the relationship as well as subjectively viewed by the client, commonly known as transference.

Clients may respond differently, depending on the social worker's age, gender, socioeconomic status, marital status, position within the agency, experience, gender, physical appearance, intelligence, social demeanor and attitude, ethnicity, race, or religion (Shebb, 2010). Some clients will wait for the social worker to assume leadership or power within the relationship based on their perceptions of the worker and the worker's role. For example, clients may be used to having others do things for them or may see themselves as victims with no power to change anything in their lives. In this instance, the social worker must "start where the client is" and should focus on the client's needs by imparting information and knowledge to assist in confidence and self-esteem building.

Box 8.2 Signs of Countertransference

- Having intense feelings (e.g., irritation, anger, boredom, sexual attraction)
- Feeling of attraction or repulsion
- Being reluctant to confront or tending to avoid sensitive issues or feelings
- Continually running over time with certain clients and wishing that other clients would not show up for appointments
- Acting with rescuing behaviors, such as lending money, adopting abused children, or protecting clients
- Being reminded by clients of other people you know as yours
- Dealing with clients who have similar histories or problems
- Employing unnecessary or excessive self-disclosure
- Feeling reluctant to end the helping relationship

Source: Shebb (2010), p. 87.