

shocked or disapproving. By assuring the client that you are listening without judging him, he will be more likely to continue with his story and continue to engage the helping process.

The intake process provides information in a way that is presented in an organized and straightforward fashion, and typically the questions are already prepared for the intake worker to ask. The type of agency and field of practice, such as gerontology, will predetermine the types of questions that are most helpful in the collection of information. When conducting an intake interview, it is best to ask a series of questions that allows the client to give a complete history of the problem and of all the systems involved. For example, you are a social worker in a nursing home. The intake interview may involve family members, friends, and the soon-to-be resident. Questions that would be covered in this early data collection process could relate to referral source, financial status, insurance coverage, medical conditions, independent living skills, orientation to time and place, physical status, chronic health concerns or an acute distress, cognitive functioning, safety issues, supports, and others involved in the care. Additionally, the type of care the client (or family) is requesting and whether the request fits with the services provided by the agency can be explored. Previous involvement with other health providers and social service providers can also be discussed.

After the social worker has completed the intake interview, the client is informed about the next step in the helping process. It is the social worker's ethical responsibility to keep clients fully informed. Having this information can put clients at ease and help to ensure their return for a second session. For example, there may be a waiting list for services, and therefore some time may pass before getting a social worker assigned. If this is the case, help the client identify some ways to cope, people to reach out to, or a support group or, if necessary, explore the possibility of a referral to another agency. During times of economic recession, it becomes more challenging to respond to client needs immediately because of the increase in the number of people seeking assistance and the need of social service agencies to stretch resources. Under these economic conditions, providing immediate assistance to clients may be difficult. Waiting lists for services and resources are fairly common. Unless the presenting client situation is determined to be a crisis that requires immediate intervention, there may be some delay in providing services. Sharing information about after-school programs, recreational centers, food pantries, and short-term shelter can be very reassuring and convey to the client that you can assist in very practical and immediate ways. Because each agency operates differently, it is hard to gauge how long it may take to confirm or deny services. It is good practice to "walk" the client through the process. Transparency is important; you want clients to know where their application is in the care needs of the client are such that waiting for services through your agency is not an option. Given the nature of the problem, a referral to a crisis center or another agency may be your best response.

Should your agency be unable to provide services in a timely manner or if the referral is not appropriate, it is important to have other referrals and options readily available to provide services decision was made can be helpful to the client. Providing this information conveys a sense of integrity and honesty on the part of the agency and

Box 8.A Now You Try It... Ethical Communication regarding Service Provision

You work with a job training program through the local community college. Mr. Oliver is in your office. You have completed the intake form with him and indicated that the decision to provide services is made by a committee.

You, the social worker, say, "It will be three days before I have an answer for you. I think you should go home and try to talk to family members about ways they can help you. Your income looks too high, and I am not optimistic that our program can help you. We normally work with really poor people."

Your corrected social worker response _____

A modeled social worker response: "It may be a few days before I have an answer for you. But in the meantime, here is a list of some other training programs in our area that may be an option for you."

Box 8.B Now You Try It... Intake Forms

The intake interview can be documented electronically on a computer system or handwritten. This is determined by the agency's standard operating practices. When doing handwritten documentation, be sure to write legibly, as this information becomes part of the permanent record and other workers may depend on the information if someone other than the intake worker is assigned the case. Know the process for completing the intake form and be sure that every question is answered. This is the only point into your agency, and the quality of this report sets the stage for all future interactions. (For documentation, see Appendix A.)

Now try your hand at completing an intake interview with a classmate. Use either version of the intake form found in Appendix C and then answer the following questions:

1. What did you find the most difficult about completing the intake form?
2. Where did you falter?
3. Where did you feel most confident?

social worker. The reasons for the denial of service may be as straightforward as the country where the client resides, income guidelines, or a very long waiting list. As an intake worker, the social worker becomes the advocate and broker of services for the client. It is through your report that an agency (or members of a review panel) decides whether to provide services to the client. If you believe your client is an appropriate candidate for the services offered by your agency, advocate for him or her. Use your voice to speak on your client's behalf.

Taking into consideration ethical communication in practice, provide a corrected response to the example in Box 8.A. Try your hand at completing an intake interview and answer the questions in Box 8.B.

Engagement and the Professional Relationship

When people experience difficulties in their lives, they can select from a wide variety of strategies to overcome them. Some turn to family and friends; others look within and draw on internal resources. When they choose to see a professional social worker, they are seeking specific knowledge and skills that are usually not available to them through informal helping relationships. Most likely, they have been unsuccessful in resolving