

Clarification

Clarification is a skill that allows the social worker to identify more fully what a client is thinking, feeling, and experiencing. When the client's messages are too abstract or long, the social worker may ask for the client to be more specific about the meaning of words or the frequency and duration of problems. Clients may assume that the social worker understands their messages and therefore may not fully explain their meaning unless the social worker asks for clarification. Watch the segments below as the instructor defines a clarification. How is it used to clear up any vague or confusing messages between the social worker and the client?

Clarification

Now watch this video as Anthony states that he hangs out with his boys, James, the social worker, clarifies who the boys are, and Anthony discloses that his boys are his associates in his gang.

Be sure to clarify what a client means when referring to "they," "them," "us," "my friends," and so on. It is important to know all the important players. A client may use qualifiers such as "always," "sometimes," or "kinda." The astute social worker will want to determine exactly what these qualifiers mean (Cormier et al., 2011). To further clarify, the social worker can check the client's understanding of what was just said; for example, "You are saying that nothing is going well in your life right now. Am I hearing you correctly?" This gives the client an opportunity to confirm, disagree, or clear up any misunderstanding the social worker might have.

Engagement
Behavior. Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

Critical Thinking Question: Using the example in Box 5.10, how would you intervene with Kyle using at least three of the skills presented in the chapter?

Clarification should be used when a client is discussing a situation that the social worker does not fully understand. It can be used as a tool to help the client comprehend or explain the details of the situation. For example, Brent is a 68-year-old client seeking the services of an in-home counseling program. The social worker may have a series of questions related to his needs, his expectations with

respect to the agency, others living in the home, and his present health status. All of these questions help to clarify for both of them the issues surrounding Brent's self-referral and the services he may be eligible for through the program.

In turn, the social worker must make responses as clear as possible so that the client understands the true meaning of the social worker's words. Clarification thus becomes a reciprocal process between the social worker and the client (Heppworth et al., 2013). The social worker may misinterpret the client's messages and develop incorrect perceptions or assumptions about the client's situation. Therefore, it is essential that the social worker clarify when she or he is uncertain about the client's message, asking, for example, "Is this what you mean?" or "Is this what you're saying?" Additionally, the social worker may want the client to elaborate on a particular topic or to give specific examples regarding the situation, behavior, or feeling (Cormier et al., 2011). Box 5.11 provides an example of the social worker using clarification to better understand the client's point of view.

In the example in Box 5.11, the social worker attempts to gain an understanding of Brittany's point of view on her troubles at school. The social worker wants to be certain that they are "speaking the same language" (i.e., "What does that mean, exactly?"). If Brittany is given the opportunity to present and clarify her position without feeling blamed or accused, she is likely to contribute more to the session. Practice using the clarification skill in the example in Box 5.1E.

Assess your understanding of interviewing skills by taking this brief quiz.

Box 5.11 Brittany—Clarification

Brittany is a 16-year-old female attending sessions with a social worker because of her repeated fighting with other students. She has a history of behavioral disruptions at school and is in danger of being expelled.

Brittany: It's not fair. The teachers are always busting me for fighting. They have it in for me.

Social Worker: You think that's the reason you're here, because of all the fighting? (Lead-in response/clarification)

Brittany: Yeah, I was sent to your office because the teachers are definitely out to get me.

Social Worker: When you say the teachers are out to get you, what does that mean, exactly? (Clarification)

Box 5.1E Now You Try It . . . Clarification

A 13-year-old male talking to his foster care caseworker:

"I've never lived living with this foster family. They just seem to 'put up' with me. My foster brother, Jimmy, is picking on me all the time, and he makes fun of me, especially at school. Could you please find me a new family? I don't think I can take it anymore."

A. What information needs to be clearer from the client?

1. _____
2. _____
8. Your clarifying response: _____
1. _____