

Box 6.5 Ethical Practice...Doing Two Things at Once?

According to the Code of Ethics (see Appendix A), a social worker's primary goal is to help people in need. The code also tells us that social workers are supposed to "challenge social

injustice." Can you describe ways in which you would primarily work with individual clients but at the same time address social problems and challenge social injustices? Can you do both?

- systems. For example, what if the social worker and the client go to the same church? The social worker should initiate an open discussion about chance encounters there. And the worker must reassure the client that he or she will not break confidentiality or privacy by sharing information or mentioning the client's situation with other people at church.
3. Conduct periodic evaluations of how the dual relationships and privacy issues are being handled.

One of the strongest criticisms of individual practice is that it strives to change the individual rather than the social environment. Critics argue that it provides symptom relief and does not solve social problems. For example, should a social worker try to help a person deal with personal stress that results from poverty or should the social worker try to end poverty? The demands of individual work often take precedence over working to change the environment. Ethically, social workers have a mandate to concern themselves with both (see Box 6.5).

Ethical good conduct is also the foundation of being aware of one's own practice limitations. In this section, we have briefly described numerous modes of intervention that require extensive training. Insight-oriented therapies rely on sophisticated understandings of psychology and human behavior, and hours of specialized supervised instruction. Although BSW and MSW programs provide quality training and education, additional postgraduate training is essential for advanced clinical interventions. Social workers have an ethical obligation to practice within their abilities and not to try techniques in which they are not fully trained.



EP 1c

Generalist Social Work Practice with Groups

Group membership is part of most people's lives. Children are socialized early in life to participate in groups. Some groups are informal; others have rules, regulations, and membership criteria.

Social work practice often utilizes groups to provide services and assist people in their day-to-day living. These groups tend to be formal and are created for a specific purpose. Formal groups can provide opportunities for socialization, serve numerous clients simultaneously, and expand insight as people reflect on their interactions with others. Therefore, part of social work training involves understanding the functions and processes of various kinds of groups and learning to work with them.

Most social workers are not like Chikae. Her primary role is to facilitate and teach educational and training groups to help potential foster parents

learn new information and skills. Chikae's groups go through a 12-week training course that meets once a week for two hours. Chikae usually facilitates three to four different groups during the same 12-week period, with no more than eight people in a group. She uses learning materials that are prepared specifically to impart information about foster parenting. Chikae's roles include group leader, teacher, facilitator, and advocate.

More often, social workers incorporate group work into their practice, but it is not their main function. For example, Emma, in her role as a rural school social worker, started a group for homeless youths. Emma spends most of her time working with individual students and their families, but once a week she holds a group session in the county seat. The group's purpose is twofold:

1. **Socialization:** Emma helps participants learn interpersonal and social skills and behavior patterns that will help them function effectively in the community. **Socialization groups** can also help reduce social isolation by bringing people together for a shared purpose. This is particularly important in a rural area, where homeless youths are especially isolated. Emma uses informal recreation to help with skill-building. While the youth are playing basketball or volleyball, she guides them through interactions with one another, mediates differences and conflicts, and encourages cooperation.
2. **Support and Counseling:** The underlying goal of the group is to help homeless youths to support one another and to help participants overcome the problems of daily living. Emma's participants discuss their feelings about their families and the impact of their upbringing on their current lives; they also share ideas about how to find resources. The youths' lives begin to improve because of their insights and the empowering experiences they share. It is important to emphasize that Emma's group is not a therapeutic group. She is not a clinical social worker, and she is not trained or licensed to facilitate group therapy.

The Unique Challenges of Rural Social Work

Rural areas face the same problems as large urban areas, including drugs, gang activity, racism, and homelessness. However, most rural areas do not have adequate resources to address these problems, and require social workers to have a wide range of knowledge and skills to fill multiple roles (Humble, Lewis, Scott, & Herzog, 2013). Emma works in a rural county in the Southeast. The largest town in the county has a population of 5,000; fewer than 10,000 people live inside the county lines. The people in this county are more politically and religiously conservative than the average American, and they highly value self-sufficiency and privacy (Edwards, Torgerson, & Sateen, 2009). These values can lead to criticism of homeless youths, but they can also inspire people to reach out to the youth, especially if the problem is seen as a "small" and manageable one. Emma will need to educate the people in the county about youth homelessness and provide members of the town with opportunities to help.