

Phase 2 of the Cycle of Caring, active involvement, focuses on the most intimate part of the relationship. The central idea of this phase is to share a vision together of a future state of the client's life and work toward that vision (Skowholt, 2007). A shared vision may include the client's lifelong goal of getting a college education or committing to marrying a high school sweetheart. Whatever the shared vision, having a caring social worker to appreciate and share the trials and tribulations of these important markers in the client's life is an essential part of the helping process. This phase demands the continuous attachment of the social worker to the client. The support-challenge balance is a critical dimension. These two components, support and challenge (or a gentle confrontation), are keys to the development of a relationship. Support means some encouragement and enthusiasm for the other, whereas challenge means the pushing and demanding of performance or readiness to change within the client's capabilities (Sullivan, Skowholt, & Jennings, 2007).



### Engagement

**Behaviors:** Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

**Critical Thinking Question:** What are the ways to demonstrate empathy and authentic understanding toward your clients? Identify and explain at least five specific ways to show genuine care and concern.

### Understanding Empathy and Rapport Building

Rapport building and empathy go hand in hand. You may establish rapport with your client in a relatively short period of time, but it is the conveying of empathy, through the repeated application of basic interviewing skills such as paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, furthering responses, and attending behaviors, on which you ultimately build the helping relationship over time.

According to Ragg (2011), the elements of empathic response are the following:

- Client disclosure—The social worker listens, hears, and observes a client disclose by their questions or reactions about some event, person, or situation. (What did the client say?)

### Policy to Practice Education for Homeless Children and Youth

**P**ublic Law 100-77, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, was passed into law in 1986. Prior to its final passage, there were various forms of policies and procedures impacting children who did not have fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residences. These children were considered homeless. Because of this, each state must now have an educational agency that ensures that a child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, such as Head Start, as provided to other children and youth. The act stipulates that homelessness alone is not reason enough to separate children

from their home school. Efforts must be made to provide services such as transportation, school meals, and special education and gifted student services. School personnel must assist families with gaining access to the child's school records, birth certificate, immunization records, and so on, and while this documentation is being obtained, the student will be in full attendance. Social workers typically serve in the role of the liaison, the person who assists families in finding resources that can lead to housing stability. As a social worker working with a student who is homeless, how might you begin a conversation with him or her? Looking long term, what are some of your concerns regarding this student?

**Example:** As a court service social worker, you are meeting with Yvonne, a 22-year-old female client who was recently released from prison after a 24-month sentence. Prior to her incarceration, Yvonne was selling drugs and working as a prostitute. The social worker will need to consider the obstacles the client may face, such as living arrangements, job opportunities (or lack thereof), and relationships with family members and other people inside and outside of prison. Ask questions about training and opportunities provided while she was incarcerated and how she coped and managed to live day to day (assessing her strengths throughout the session). In addition, it is important to understand where the client is at the moment and what issues are relevant to her. Pay attention to her nonverbal body language, for example, how she is sitting (erect, slumped, not facing you), her verbal tone, and her choice of words.

- Identification of action element—The social worker listens to the client's statements and identifies what contributes to the disclosing feeling. (What are people saying and doing?)

**Example continued:** Yvonne discloses that she has become very religious while incarcerated. She attends prayer meeting daily (including Alcoholics Anonymous meetings) and feels a strong pull toward her faith. Yvonne will disclose more about her religious experiences and what is important to her if the social worker attends to the significance of her new discovery and the strength it provides to her on the outside. She shares with the social worker that her family and friends never attended church and have been making very negative comments about her newfound religion. Yvonne has maintained close telephone contact with the prison chaplain since her release.

- Identification of processing elements—While listening and observing, the social worker reflects on the client's statements and mentally labels the important thinking and feeling themes. (What are the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings that seem to be important?)

**Example continued:** As you listen to Yvonne talking about her faith, you begin to realize that she is worried about her family's negative reactions. She begins to distance herself from her family by stating, "They don't get me anymore, and I can't count on them. I knew this was going to be a problem; they are a bunch of heathens. But God will take care of them and me. If they don't start going to church and praying, they will pay the price." Yvonne also had indicated that she wants to start over and maybe get her GED.

- Core concerns—From the action and processing elements of the client statement, the social worker identifies what appears to be most important to the client. (What are the critical concerns?)

**Example continued:** As the social worker, you understand that Yvonne's family has been a very important part of her life. Her experiences in prison have changed her in significant ways. Yvonne is determined to make a new life for herself, even if it means no longer maintaining as close a relationship with her family. You also want to attend to Yvonne's goal of getting her GED. A high school education will open up more job and training possibilities for her.