



EP 8c

There are many ways a social worker can affect policy making. One of the easiest and most common is to vote for candidates in general elections and for policy referendums in state and local elections. Because children cannot vote, adults must do so on their behalf. Lobbying public officials by means of telephone calls, emails, and visits is often an effective way to inform decision makers about an issue. Social workers can organize grassroots campaigns in which many people, including children, participate. Groups such as the Children's Defense Fund and the Child Welfare League advocate for policy changes on behalf of children.

The Intervention Process As outlined in Chapter 6, the term *intervention* refers to the actions taken by a client and a social worker to effect change in an area of the client's life. In many cases, a client is referred to a social worker to deal with a particular problem. The social worker often engages in a problem-solving process that includes engaging the client, assessing the problem area and situation, developing a list of potential solutions, coming up with an action plan, and supporting the client in implementing the plan. The social worker encourages the client to take ownership of and responsibility for the change process. Such efforts support the social work value of self-determination and emphasize the strengths perspective.



EP 6b

When social workers intervene with children and families, the process can be somewhat different. For example, children rarely bring themselves to the attention of a social worker; most do not receive services because they have identified a problem in their lives, but rather because someone else has decided that they need help. Also, self-determination can be difficult with children. By virtue of their age and abilities, children cannot be empowered the same way adults can. This brings about unique considerations that can affect all stages of intervention with children and families.

Referral Children and families are often referred to social workers by other professionals such as teachers, police officers, and health care professionals. In this context, a **referral** is an appeal or, in some cases, a demand that social work services be provided.

CASE EXAMPLE A

Thirteen-year-old Lyn was recently sent to meet with Roger, the school social worker. Lyn has always been quiet in class, but her teachers have known her to be a good student who is conscientious about her studies and seems to get along well with classmates. However, Lyn's math teacher has noticed that Lyn has been absent or tardy several times in the past month and that she has come to class unprepared and seems to have lost interest in school. Last week, the math teacher observed Lyn sitting alone during recess and became concerned about these sudden changes in Lyn's behavior. The teacher contacted the school social worker, who called Lyn in for a meeting.

CASE EXAMPLE B

The Jones family was recently referred to a family service agency after an investigation by Child Protective Services into allegations of abuse. The youngest son, a 5-year-old boy named Jaime, had been taken to the doctor for an ear infection, when the doctor noticed bruising on the child's neck. When Jaime's mother was asked about the bruises, she explained that she is a single mother raising five boys on her own and that she has to be strict to keep them in line. Sometimes she pinches their shoulders when they are misbehaving in public. The Child Protective Services worker who completed an assessment felt that the children were not at immediate risk of harm and therefore did not need to be removed from their mother. However, the worker did recommend parenting education and support for the mother. The Jones family was referred to the local family service agency for family counseling and for parent training for the mother. There, the family meets with another social work professional.

CASE EXAMPLE C

Kate is a social worker at a county hospital. A psychiatric nurse from the adolescent unit has asked Kate to help with the problem of insurance companies denying continued stay for adolescents admitted for suicide attempts and other self-injurious behaviors. The staff and many families were concerned that the children were being released without being stabilized; this increased the potential for future harm. In addition, the decreased time frame made it difficult to set up aftercare services to support the clients and their families. Kate must assess the policies on discharging youth.

These cases are just a few examples of the kinds of situations encountered by social workers who work with children and families. None of the clients initiated or requested social work services. These kinds of mandated or non-client-driven referrals are common in child and family services.

In such cases, the social worker must be respectful and understanding of the client and the client's view of the situation. For example, the social worker who counsels Ms. Jones and her sons must be open to hearing and understanding the perspective of each family member. Lyn's social worker must be patient, for Lyn may initially be uncomfortable meeting with him. Clients may not understand the referral or the purpose of social work intervention, so the social worker needs to explain. Gathering clear data from the referral source and from other systems is important as well. It is difficult to intervene effectively with a child or family without understanding the point of view of the referral source.