

Specialization Level: Clinical Social Work (CSW)

Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

Practitioners in clinical social work recognize the importance of the therapeutic relationship, person-in-environment and strengths perspectives, professional use of self, and adherence to ethical-and value-guidelines for professional practice. Clinical social workers differentially utilize theories, research, and their clinical skills to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities in an ethical manner. Clinical social work practitioners acknowledge the complexities involved in their practice, including the need to navigate ethical issues in an organizational context, and they use clinical supervision to ensure that their practices are congruent with social work values and ethics. Extending and enhancing ethical and professional practice from the foundation level requires that clinical social workers reflect on their own family of origin to assess how it impacts their clinical work. Advanced-level practitioners must manage complex systems while understanding how cultural and developmental aspects of self and their clients influence their work. Clinical social workers recognize their own strengths and weaknesses in developing, managing and maintaining therapeutic relationships. Practitioners of clinical social work must continually adapt to rapidly changing technology in an ethical and professional manner. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Use clinical supervision and consultation to continuously examine professional roles and boundaries, engage in ongoing self-correction, and ensure that practice is congruent with social work ethics and values.
- Apply ethical decision-making skills and frameworks to clinical material, while complying with the NASW Code of Ethics and local, state, and federal regulations.
- Utilize clinical theories, practice models, and research findings appropriate to client systems and circumstances.
- Demonstrate knowledge of one's family of origin's cultural, psychodynamic and behavioral patterns and reflect on how that history impacts one's ability to differentially use one's professional self in service for clients.
- Exhibit an anti-oppressive stance incorporating social work values of social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, confidentiality, the value of human relationships and integrity in all discussions of clinical case material.

Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice

Clinical social work practitioners are knowledgeable about many forms of diversity and difference (e.g., culture, age, health/mental health functioning, educational attainment, sexual orientation/gender identity socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity etc.) and how these components influence the therapeutic relationship and clients' presenting concerns. Clinical social workers understand how various dimensions of diversity affect explanations of health/mental health and well-being, as well as help-seeking behaviors. Practitioners in clinical social work value cultural strengths and recognize the importance of tailoring their engagement strategies, assessment tools, and interventions to meet the diverse needs of their clients. Practitioners in clinical social work monitor their biases, reflect on their own cultural beliefs, and use and apply knowledge of diverse populations and complex health/mental health delivery systems to enhance client well-being. Clinical social workers recognize the need to conceptualize cases using an intersectional perspective and to identify their clients' strengths and resiliencies, while learning to critically evaluate their own family history, privileges, and characteristics. In presenting case material, clinical social work practitioners integrate anti-oppressive stances and attend to clients' experiences of oppression and marginalization while also working to avoid undue pressure or use of power over clients. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Demonstrate awareness of one's intersectionality and cultural background and how these factors may impact one's practice.
- Use clinical supervision to address personal and cultural biases and increase self-awareness.
- Apply the various models of clinical practice in ways that are culturally relevant to diverse and oppressed groups.
- Acknowledge the impact of client's intersectional issues—race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, immigration status, religion, and age—on clients' emotional and physical well-being.

Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice

Clinical social workers are fully grounded in the ethics of the profession, recognizing the dignity and worth of all individuals and the need to advocate for social, economic and environmental justice. Clinical social workers recognize the need to assess clients' physical environment for the availability of safe shelter, food, water, and air. Clinical social workers are adept at recognizing where social and structural forces marginalize people and thus work to advocate for policies that promote justice, advance human rights, and promote environments in which all individuals can thrive. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Contextualize all client conceptualizations (assessments) utilizing lenses of social justice, including aspects of identity and social location that may marginalize clients and/or contribute to their inequitable distribution of social and economic resources.
- Assess the availability of clean and safe shelter, water, food, air, and other environmental resources and help individuals, families, groups and communities to develop mechanisms to advocate for and maintain these environmental resources.
- Advocate for equitable distribution of all social, economic, and practical resources, including the availability of a competent clinical social worker with commitments to anti-oppressive, justice-oriented clinical practice.

Competency 4: Engage In Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice

Clinical social workers rely on the scholarly literature to guide their practice, and they are aware of the most current evidence-informed practices. Practitioners of clinical social work are able to identify the strengths and limitations of these practices and examine their applicability to marginalized populations. Clinical social workers can use their knowledge and skills to critically evaluate extant research and their interventions with clients. Clinical social workers elicit feedback from clients and value their perspectives; they use this knowledge to improve treatments outcomes and modify case theory. Practitioners of clinical social work select interventions informed by extant research, previous experience, client feedback, and practice wisdom. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Stay abreast of the most current advances in clinical theory, systemic approaches, and evidence-informed practice in social work and related helping professions.
- Engage in reasoned discernment to select, implement, and evaluate appropriate assessment, intervention, and evaluation tools for use with various target populations.
- Use one's practice experience and knowledge of the research literature and case theory to critically analyze the strengths and limitations of various direct practice interventions.
- Effectively communicate and disseminate practice evaluation results to an intended audience.

Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice

Clinical social workers recognize how policies and laws can constrain or enhance individuals' life opportunities. Clinical social workers understand that policies and laws can create movement toward equal distribution of social and economic resources or can work against such equity. Clinical assessments include attention to the constraining or privileging aspects of local, state, federal and international policies and laws, and these assessments consider how each may impact their clients' well-being. Clinical social workers recognize how their work with individuals, families and communities must inform policymakers and legislators. Practitioners of clinical social work monitor policies and laws for their unintended consequences and for their equitability. Clinical social workers understand their role in implementing social policy and recognize their professional responsibility in advocating for policy reform. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Identify policies/laws that impact client well-being, analyze their impact on client well-being, and advocate for change in policies/laws that harm clients.
- Attend to the unintended consequences of policies/laws and communicate with stakeholders, legislators, and policy-makers about the impact of such policies/laws as they evolve within agencies, communities, and in clients' lives.
- Engage in political action to inform legislators and policymakers of the ways in which unjust policies/laws affect marginalized and other populations whom they serve.

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Clinical social work practitioners recognize the importance of the engagement process and understand the importance of differential use of self in initial encounters. Practitioners in clinical social work rely on the ecological perspective to inform the therapeutic relationship; are aware of how interpersonal dynamics and cultural factors shape the therapeutic relationship; and use relational techniques to develop a therapeutic relationship. Clinical social workers recognize how engagement with couples, families and groups may differ from individual approaches, and they develop differential engagement skills accordingly. Clinical social workers value collaboration and thus recognize the importance of clients' input in the development of their treatment goals. Clinical social workers use the engagement process to help clients convey their thoughts and concerns within the therapeutic relationship as well as to other providers/stakeholders. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Demonstrate an ecological understanding of the transactional relationship between emotional/ behavioral difficulties and social problems (poverty, crime, social injustice, racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia) and incorporate this understanding into client engagement. Reflect upon the ways these aspects shape the manner in which one engages and works with the client.
- Understand how members of oppressed groups—people of color, people with varying sexual orientation and gender identities, people with different abilities, people with severe and persistent mental illness—may require different methods of engagement.
- Identify ways to enhance collaboration with clients and promote their empowerment, including seeking their input and feedback regarding the treatment process and fostering their capacity to provide feedback to other members of the treatment team.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Clinical social workers understand the importance of the assessment process and recognize that it is ongoing and that it directly informs their interventions. Clinical social workers value holistic assessment and therefore use the bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment process as well as analysis of clients' strengths and resiliencies, their coping skills, and their adaptation to traumatic and stressful life events in a full assessment. Practitioners of clinical social work understand how their personal experiences may impact the assessment process. Clinical social workers recognize the power of intergenerational family patterns on individuals and explain these to clients while avoiding deterministic approaches to identifying such patterns. When applicable, clinical social workers rely on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders to enhance their assessment, to conduct differential diagnosis, and to communicate with other healthcare providers about clients' presenting problems and symptomatology. Clinical social workers elicit client feedback about their experience of the assessment process, reflect upon varied meanings of the assessment, and share these assessment outcomes with clients. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Demonstrate an ecological understanding of the transactional relationship between emotional/ behavioral difficulties and social problems—poverty, crime, social injustice, institutional racism, sexism, religious and/or ideological bias, homophobia, and transphobia—and incorporate this understanding into their assessments.
- Select, modify and adapt, and evaluate clinical assessment tools and approaches depending on the needs and social characteristics of clients and current empirical evidence.
- Assess how issues of privilege, social injustice, and inequities in access to resources play a role in client difficulties and how they affect the assessment process, including assisting the client in voicing concerns to the entire treatment team.
- Reflect on their own issues of power and privilege and how they impact the therapeutic relationship.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Clinical social workers select effective modalities for intervention based on the extant research as well as the client's cultural background. Clinical social work practitioners integrate their knowledge of various individual, family, and group psychotherapeutic modalities, as well as crisis intervention techniques and community-wide referrals, to intervene effectively; demonstrate flexibility by tailoring interventions to suit the needs of multiple client populations; and understand the effects of the social environment on client well-being. Clinical social workers therefore recognize the need to intervene on mezzo and macro levels. Practitioners in clinical social work critically select, apply, and evaluate best practices and evidence-informed interventions; they value collaboration with the client and other professionals to coordinate treatment plans. Clinical social workers maintain knowledge of the communities they serve in order to ensure that clients are connected with relevant services and resources in an effective manner, while eliciting client feedback about how the interventions are impacting the client. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Select psychotherapeutic interventions based on a critical knowledge of theory, research, and practice experience.
- Exhibit flexibility by shifting perspectives and interventions to suit the needs of clients, while recognizing that the multi-faceted assessment drives the selection of appropriate interventions.
- Demonstrate an ecological understanding of the transactional relationship between emotional/ behavioral difficulties and social problems—poverty, crime, social inequality, institutional racism, sexism, religious and/or ideological bias, homophobia, and transphobia—and incorporate this understanding into their interventions.
- Intervene effectively with individuals, families and groups, while eliciting client feedback and knowing when to modify approaches.

Competency 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Clinical social workers value empirically derived evaluation of practice and assure that it is an ongoing component of advanced practice with diverse individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Clinical social workers recognize the critical need to use client feedback to evaluate clinical processes and outcomes with diverse populations. Clinical social workers understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, the systematic effects of oppression and marginalization on the well-being of clients, and critically apply this knowledge in evaluating outcomes. Clinical social workers understand qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating outcomes and practice effectiveness, use appropriate methods for evaluating practice, and rely upon the scholarly literature to guide their evaluation processes. Clinical social workers also recognize that evaluating practice means examining barriers to effective treatment including but not limited to countertransference, systems- and community-knowledge, and client satisfaction. Practitioners in clinical social work:

- Select and use appropriate methods for evaluation of intervention outcomes;
- Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, quantitative and qualitative methods, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the evaluation of client and program outcomes;
- Critically analyze, monitor, and evaluate interventions, clinical processes, outcomes, and client satisfaction within a single case design;
- Evaluate programs to assess their effectiveness in meeting client and community needs; (F)
- Apply social work ethics in evaluating their own practice;
- Demonstrate culturally-responsive application when designing research projects or evaluation studies.

Competency 10: Develop Liberatory Consciousness

Clinical social workers will continually work toward recognizing and utilizing a liberatory consciousness framework which “requires every individual to not only notice what is going on in the world around [them], but to think about it and theorize about it—that is, to get information and develop [their]own explanation for what is happening, why it is happening and what needs to be done about it” (Love, 1980, p. 472). They understand and identify how racism and other forms of stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression intersect and contribute to various sources of stress. Clinical social workers continue to develop self-awareness of their intersectional identities recognizing how discrimination and structural inequities are compounded with multiple marginalized identities. They employ clinical interventions that appropriately account for power differentials and use culturally relevant interventions and consider how clients’ intersectional identities impact their lives. They promote equity and justice through collaborative healing relationships.

Clinical social workers will apply the four elements of developing a liberatory consciousness (*awareness, analysis, action, and accountability/allyship*) in order to challenge oppression and promote social, racial, and economic justice.

Clinical social workers will:

- **Practice Awareness** by recognizing how discrimination and structural inequities are compounded with multiple marginalized identities. They will practice reflexivity when in engaging clinical techniques and in supervisory processes.
- **Analyze** widely used clinical interventions to ensure they: recognize power differentials based on the intersection of social identities including race, class, age, gender, and ability status in the client-worker relationship are trauma and culturally-informed.
- **Act** by using culturally relevant assessment and interventions and by helping clients understand how their intersectional identities may affect various facets of their lives.
- Hold themselves **Accountable** and practice in **Allyship** by actively promoting equity and justice. This includes fostering collaborative healing relationships with clients, embracing client feedback, and ensuring clients play a key role in directing their treatment process.