

Ten Tips for a Successful Field Placement

by Jan Ligon, MSW, Ph.D., and Jim Ward, MSW

Entering the field practicum is an exciting and important event for social work students. As a new experience, it is normal for some students to experience some degree of anxiety about the placement. As new relationships begin with your agency field instructor and your faculty liaison, it is important to clarify your role as a student. These suggestions are offered as a helpful guide as you move into your field experience.

- 1) Read the field manual or booklet provided by your program. It is important to become familiar with the many details and procedures associated with your field practicum.
- 2) Read the NASW *Code of Ethics* and become familiar with its contents. Students should pay particular attention to Section 1.03, Informed Consent; Section 1.04, Competence; and section 3.02, Education and Training.
- 3) Ask questions about information concerning the field manual or the *Code of Ethics* that may be confusing or unclear. Although reading the materials is an important first step, you will also want to learn when and how to use your field instructor and other social workers as resources to help answer questions or deal with issues that may not be adequately explained or covered by the content in your field manual, the *Code of Ethics*, or other documents.
- 4) Begin your placement with an adequate orientation of your agency. The orientation should include any policies, procedures, or forms that you will need to know about during your internship.
- 5) Take your learning plan or contract seriously. Make time to discuss what you want to learn and accomplish during your placement and then jointly write a clear and realistic learning plan with your field instructor and faculty liaison. It is essential that your learning objectives are written at the proper educational level; conversely, they should not be set at levels that are either above or below that of your program. A review of Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives (Pregent, 1994) may be helpful in finalizing learning objectives.
- 6) Address personal safety issues at your agency. Be sure that you are comfortable with all safety matters and with any emergency procedures that are relevant. These procedures may include evacuation plans in case of fire or other emergencies, personal safety in your agency, and safety procedures concerning such matters as parking or storage of personal valuables. Griffin (1995) provides a helpful overview of agency safety issues including a *Staff Safety Risk Scale*.
- 7) Familiarize yourself with liability issues or risks that may need to be addressed. For example, the use of your personal automobile during your placement could be a liability for you that needs to be covered. A thorough understanding of agency procedures to assure client confidentiality, including records, is essential. Additional readings concerning malpractice and liability (Kurzman, 1995; Reamer, 1994) and legal issues (Zakutansky and Sirles, 1993) are available.
- 8) Schedule supervision appointments with your field instructor and field visits with your faculty liaison. Uninterrupted individual supervision is essential to your field learning experience, and scheduled appointments are the best assurance that you will get the time that you need for supervision. Also, it is important to structure your supervision time around a planned written agenda to assure that essential issues are addressed during each session.
- 9) If you believe that you are not adequately prepared to provide a service or intervention, you should

address the concern with your agency field instructor, so that you can obtain any needed training or knowledge that is needed to be able to provide the service.

- 10) You need to be aware that many students may not have a "perfect" practicum experience. However, if you should experience significant problems, they should be discussed as soon as possible with your field instructor and faculty liaison.

Social workers often identify the field practicum experience as the single most important part of social work education. As the student, it is critical for you to do everything possible on your part to make your field experience a productive one. While our ten tips cannot include everything the student will need to know, they can help you get off to a good start as you begin this very exciting part of your social work education.

References

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- Jan Ligon, MSW, PhD is Assistant Professor and Jim Ward, MSW is Director of Field Instruction, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.