

# The Client-Social Worker Relationship

Various definitions of the client-social worker relationship exist in best practice models. The most effective see the relationship as a two way process of communication empowering the client. The following are a few definitions to consider when working with clients—individuals and families:

Biestek (1957) defines this relationship as “The dynamic interaction of attitudes and emotions between the caseworker and client, with the purpose of helping the client achieve a better adjustment between himself and his environment.”

Salzberger-Wittenberg (1970) views the relationship as “a two-way process in which both parties affect each other and, ideally, where both parties learn and change within this process. Change is seen as a reciprocal, two way process where every experience influences the next stage in a person’s life.”

Kadushin (1990) theorizes that this relationship is “a communication bridge between two people” where empathy and self-knowledge act as central tools from which to read the similarities and differences that lie within and across these two worlds.

The quality of the client-social worker relationship is important in relation to 8 areas of social work practice:

1. assessment
2. as a foundation on which to build future work
3. as help for people experiencing difficulties relating to self, others, and their wider social environment
4. as help, support, and care for people who are vulnerable and reliant on particular services
5. as advocacy and mediation for people experiencing discrimination or difficulties accessing services and resources.
6. as an approach to hold and contain anxiety in times of transition or crisis
7. as a foundation for capacity building
8. as a practice that can bear witness and report on ‘social ills’

Trevithick, P. (2003). Effective relationship-based practice: A theoretical exploration. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 17(2), 163-176.