Practice Concepts

Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) social work licensing examinations

9 knowledge statements · ASWB 2026 content outline

This competency covers the concepts that frame intervention: building the helping relationship, the worker's roles in the problem-solving process, strengths and empowerment, teamwork, end-of-life practice, parenting, permanency planning, the policies that govern practice, community organizing and, at the Advanced Generalist and Clinical levels, writing formal documents. The exam tests whether you engage before you intervene, keep the client in charge of their own change, and choose the role the situation calls for.

You should be able to: You should be able to build and repair a helping relationship, pick the worker role a situation needs, use strengths-based techniques, work in teams, support clients at the end of life and with parenting and permanency, and, at advanced levels, write sound formal documents.

Every knowledge statement and its key point

Principles and techniques for building and maintaining a helping relationship (e.g., acceptance, empathy, rapport)

Rogers's core conditions are empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness (congruence); empathy means understanding the client's world from inside and showing it, which differs from sympathy or agreement.

The social worker's role in the problem-solving process

The planned change process runs through engagement, assessment, planning, intervention (implementation), evaluation, termination and follow-up; the phases overlap and repeat.

Strengths-based and empowerment strategies and interventions

Saleebey's strengths principles: every person, group, family and community has strengths; trauma and struggle can also be sources of challenge and opportunity; do not assume the upper limits of a person's capacity; collaborate; every environment holds resources.

Interdisciplinary and intra-disciplinary team collaboration (e.g., co-therapy, care conference, IEP)

Multidisciplinary teams work in parallel with separate goals; interdisciplinary teams share goals and one integrated plan; transdisciplinary teams cross roles deliberately. Intradisciplinary means within one profession, such as several social workers.

End of life practice (e.g., continuity of care, hospice, palliative care, stages of death and dying)

Palliative care relieves suffering at any stage of serious illness, alongside curative treatment; hospice is palliative care for the last phase of life (under the US Medicare benefit, a prognosis of six months or less) when curative treatment stops.

Permanency planning (e.g., child welfare)

Permanency is a safe, lasting family for every child: reunification first where safe, then adoption, legal guardianship or permanent placement with relatives; in the US, another planned permanent living arrangement is limited to youth 16 and older.

Policies, procedures, regulations, and legislation and their impact on social work practice and service delivery

Legislation (statutes) sets broad rules; regulations made by government agencies set details; agency policies interpret them; procedures say how to carry them out.

Community organizing, development, and mobilizing community participation

Rothman's models: locality development (consensus, self-help, broad participation), social planning (expert, data-driven problem solving) and social action (organizing the disadvantaged to shift power and resources, as in Alinsky's tradition).

Developing formal documents (e.g., grants, proposals, reports, evaluations)

A grant proposal usually includes a statement of need supported by data, goals and measurable objectives, methods, an evaluation plan, a budget with justification, organizational capacity and sustainability.

Common pitfalls

- Jumping to intervention before engagement and rapport, especially with an angry or involuntary client.
- Choosing advocacy when the client can act for themselves with information, or brokering when a system is blocking access.
- Treating Kübler-Ross's stages as a required sequence.
- Confusing palliative care with hospice.
- Ignoring an agency policy that harms clients instead of raising it through proper channels.

Key terms

Working alliance: Agreement on goals and tasks plus the emotional bond between worker and client.

Broker: The role of linking clients to the resources they need.

Mediator: The role of helping parties in conflict reach agreement.

Interdisciplinary team: Professionals from several disciplines working toward shared goals with one plan.

Palliative care: Care that relieves suffering in serious illness, at any stage.

Concurrent planning: Pursuing reunification and an alternative permanent plan at the same time.

Logic model: A diagram linking a program's inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

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