

Empathic Communication

EMPATHIC RECOGNITION AND REFLECTION

What is Empathic Communication?

Perceiving and exploring the client's inner feelings accurately and sensitively, then communicating your understanding to the client in a language reflective of the client's experience of the moment

Why Empathic Communication is important?

- It nurtures and sustains the helping relationship
- It is the vehicle social workers use to become emotionally significant and influential
- It reduces the level of threat clients may feel
- It allows the social worker to retain separateness and objectivity in the helping process

EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION SCALE

LEVEL 5:

HIGH LEVEL OF EMPATHIC RESPONDING

- Reflecting each emotional nuance, and using voice and intensity of expressions finely attuned to the client's moment-by-moment experience, the social worker accurately responds to the full range and intensity of both surface and underlying feelings and meaning
- **Example:** able to distinguish when it is appropriate to draw a connection between current feelings and experiences to previous experience and feelings. Identifies patterns, themes, or purposes, implicit goals, and areas for personal growth. An ability to strategically use interpretation while still doing more listening

LEVEL 4:

MODERATELY HIGH LEVEL OF EMPATHIC RESPONDING

- Social worker's responses are additive, accurately identifying the client's implicit underlying feelings and/or aspects of the problem
- Social worker's responses illuminate subtle or veiled facets of the client's message, enabling the client to get in touch with somewhat deeper feelings and unexplored meanings and purposes of behavior
- **Example:** enhances self-awareness

*LEVEL 3:

INTERCHANGEABLE OR RECIPROCAL LEVEL OF EMPATHIC RESPONDING

- Social worker's verbal and nonverbal responses convey understanding and are essentially interchangeable with the client's obvious expressions, accurately reflecting factual aspects of the client's messages and surface feelings or state of being
- **Example:** expresses accurately the immediately apparent emotions in client's message but deeper feeling and meanings are not added

LEVEL 2:

MODERATELY LOW LEVEL OF EMPATHIC RESPONDING

- Social worker responds to the surface message of the client but erroneously omits feelings or factual aspects of the message. Also may inappropriately qualify feelings (e.g., "somewhat," "a little bit," "kind of") or inaccurately interpret feelings (e.g., "angry" for "hurt," or "tense" for "scared")
- **Example:** partially accurate and/or helpful messages but in some way also ignores or subtracts from the clients experience

LEVEL 1:

LOW LEVEL OF EMPATHIC RESPONDING

- Social worker communicates little or no awareness or understanding of even the most conspicuous of the client's feelings
- Social worker's responses are irrelevant and often abrasive, hindering rather than facilitating communication
- **Examples:** changes the subject, argues, gives advice prematurely, lectures, inappropriate nonverbal responses, etc.

**LEVEL 3: Expected empathic communication level of BSW and MSW foundation students.*

MSW Concentration students are expected to be able to move into Level 4 & 5, as appropriate after problem has been fully explored.