

Beginnings, middles, ends

TREE

INTRODUCTION

Tree is a metaphor for the primary processes in direct practice. The ground level is the 'here and now', with the trunk representing the concerns which have brought the person into contact with the social work agency. The roots are the various causes which have been feeding the concern and which often lay hidden. The branches are the opportunities for change and growth, the options available to help address the concerns.

Purpose

This chapter looks at processes and outcomes in social work practice. The concept of a practice method is demystified by linking it to the generic processes of beginnings, middles and endings in work with clients. The chapter illustrates how students can learn to work in a systematic and methodical fashion.

Method

Tree should be used when practice teacher and student have had an opportunity to work together with a client (perhaps after an initial assessment or meeting).

Each person (practice teacher and student) should consider the three elements of the 'tree':

The trunk

This represents the concerns as seen by the practice teacher, student, client(s) and any other significant persons.

The roots

These represent the causes of the concerns.

The branches

These represent the aspirations and wants of the client, and the various options for achieving them.

Practice teacher and student compare their 'Trees'. How similar or different are their perceptions of the concerns, problems and difficulties which make up the trunk? How much attention would each pay to the root causes? What range of options were identified? Draw fruit on those branches which you think are likely to lead to a successful outcome. (About one hour total).

Variations

Although the concerns are represented by the one tree trunk, these are often perceived differently by the people involved (just as the trunk's colour, shape and texture varies from different angles).

It is important to think as widely as possible about the options available to help work with the concerns which have been identified, and ways of alleviating them. Do the client's aspirations differ from those of their carer, family or the agency?

When the student has gained more familiarity with the work, it helps to return to the *Tree* and discuss how far it is useful to dig for the causes of present problems and concerns.

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What are the options? (which are most likely to bear fruit?)

