

Recording the work

MATTER OF FACT

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

There are many different purposes for recording in social work practice. This activity helps students to think critically about the language used in social work recording, to improve the meaning of their records and to consider writing records as an integral part of the work with people.

Method

This Activity can be done by a practice teacher and student together or by a group of practice teachers and students. A group of students who are placed in different kinds of setting produces a variety of perspectives.

No preparation needs to be done before the practice tutorial. Each person needs a copy of the *Matter of fact* page.

Each written statement, taken from actual files and records, should be addressed in turn, with suggestions about which of the client responses might fit best. Students and practice teachers should discuss what meaning is conveyed by the statement and what they think it says about the writer. Relate this discussion to the recording practices in your agency and the student's record writing so far. Allow about 30 minutes.

Variations

Matter of fact presents a Top 20 of cliches common to most social work settings; indeed, they have been taken from various case files and day books. You may wish to collect your agency's own Top 20 (for example, a medical or psychiatric social work placement will have its own brand of jargon to add to the set in *Matter of fact*). A list of acronyms would also be a useful way of demonstrating how professional language can exclude clients and obscure meanings.

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The comments in the left column have come from case files, reports or day books. They illustrate some of social work's favourite phrases. Perhaps you can add to this Top 20?

The comments to the right are responses as they might appear in the service user's own case books, if they were to keep them. Apart from the first four examples, the case records and the service users' responses are scrambled. Which service users' comments might you match to which social work records?

Shirley is very <i>manipulative</i>	I know how to play the system
Yusef is <i>easily led</i>	I don't know how to play the system
Julie indulges in <i>promiscuous behaviour</i>	I have a lot of sexual partners
Karl is <i>testing the boundaries</i>	I have a lot of sexual partners

Trisha is <i>aggressive and self-centred</i>	I don't know how to ask for what I want
Mrs Khan presents in a <i>hostile manner</i>	I don't know how to show my son, either
There is an ongoing <i>conflict situation</i>	We don't know what to do with him
He is an <i>inadequate</i>	I don't like your rules and I want out
He is an <i>inadequate role model</i> for his son	I feel racism a lot of the time
The family has a lot of <i>inner resources</i>	I don't like what you want me to do
They have <i>rejected</i> him	We fight like cat and dog
He is a difficult <i>problem case</i>	I don't trust you
Mr Davy is a <i>needy, dependent enuretic</i>	You don't know what to do with him
Samantha is an <i>acting-out attention seeker</i>	I wish I could do more for myself
Sean must prove he <i>responds to structure</i>	You don't have my taste in jokes or clothes
Winston is <i>over-sensitive</i> about colour	English is not my first language
George <i>represses his emotions</i>	I know how to ask for what I want
Mr Pradish is <i>uncommunicative</i>	We get through despite everything
Polly is very <i>demanding</i>	I know very well how to ask what I want
Claire laughs and dresses <i>inappropriately</i>	Nobody takes any notice of me

What meaning does each statement convey to you?

What kinds of knowledge, values and beliefs does it suggest the writer holds?