

This handout provides challenging situations in social services to help you reflect on how you would respond to the psychological demands in social services. Foster mutual understanding by asking your co-workers how they would approach each situation.

Situation 1: Emotional Labour

You are supporting Brenda, an Indigenous woman whose daughter has been missing for two years. Brenda is opening up to you about her anxiety and anguish, as well as her feelings of loneliness and the overwhelming emotional strain she is experiencing. Having lived through many years of intergenerational trauma, Brenda has shared that she feels disconnected from her cultural roots and turns to heavy drinking to cope with the absence of cultural teachings in her life.

Reflection

- Reflect on how you would respond to Brenda's emotional distress and how her circumstances affect you emotionally.
- How can you provide culturally sensitive support while managing your emotional energy?
- What strategies can you use to establish a strong, empathetic relationship while maintaining professional boundaries?

Situation 2: Cognitive Load

As a case manager that provides services to immigrants and refugees, Ahmed, one of your clients, is a Syrian refugee who has been living in Canada for six months. He moved here on his own, leaving his family behind. He has many pressing needs, including learning the language, securing permanent housing, accessing mental health services for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and learning about Canadian cultural norms. Recently, Ahmed's application for housing was delayed due to missing documents, and he is experiencing high levels of stress.

Reflection

- Reflect on how you would prioritize Ahmed's needs and how you would navigate a complex system.
- What steps would you take to balance Ahmed's needs and uncertainties?
- How will you provide support while navigating processes that are beyond your control?

Situation 3: Behavioural Management

You are working with Dexter who has completed treatment a month ago and has made significant progress. Unfortunately, he relapsed after he found out that he lost one of his closest friends to overdose. Dexter has expressed feelings of shame and disappointment, and although he wants to continue working toward sobriety, he is struggling with the urge to use substances again.

Reflection

- Reflect on how you would guide Dexter to engage in positive and healthy coping strategies.
- What strategies would you use to help Dexter re-establish his commitment to sobriety and cope with difficult emotions?
- How can you empower Dexter to recognize behaviours and triggers that contribute to his substance use and to choose healthier alternatives?

Situation 4: Ethical Dilemmas

In an emergency shelter, David, who is currently unhoused after being repeatedly evicted, asked you to write him a letter of recommendation for housing. David has a history of violent outbursts, including an incident where he physically attacked a staff member after being triggered by them. He is also diagnosed with substance-induced psychotic disorder which sometimes leads to aggressive behaviour.

Reflection

- Reflect on how you would approach writing the letter of recommendation given David's history and the potential risks to other staff members.
- What ethical considerations should guide your response and how can you balance advocacy for David's housing with the safety and well-being of others?
- What supports can you provide David to help him build safer relationships and manage his emotions?

Situation 5: Crisis Management

You received a call from Jessica, a woman who has just escaped an abusive relationship and is in immediate danger. She is in a panic, saying her partner is searching for her and that she has nowhere to go. Jessica is in severe emotional distress, and you can hear her sobbing uncontrollably over the phone.

Reflection

- Reflect on how you would respond to Jessica while assessing risks and providing emotional support.
- What immediate steps would you take to ensure Jessica's safety?
- How would you support Jessica emotionally while coordinating the necessary resources such as police involvement and emergency housing?