

What Makes a Caseworker?

What makes a caseworker? Who is a caseworker?

As potentially one of the first points of contact with a survivor, caseworkers have a tremendous responsibility to create a safe, supportive and compassionate climate for people receiving services. Negative responses to survivors from those they turn to for help can lead to re-victimization, which is likely to exacerbate existing psychological distress and delay recovery. This major form of harm to a survivor is completely preventable. It should be a priority for all service providers and others to prevent re-victimization, and staffing your program with caseworkers that have the right qualities, knowledge and skills is a key way to do this.

Qualities of GBV Case Workers

The nature of the working relationship between a caseworker and a survivor largely determines whether or not the case management process and related services are effective in helping the survivor recover—in other words, a positive relationship is necessary for case management to be effective.²⁹ Research shows that the qualities of warmth, respect, genuineness, empathy and acceptance are most important to people seeking services and are considered necessary for developing trust and safety with survivors.

- Warmth. Helpers who are kind, accepting and non-judgmental are perceived as warm. Warmth can create a climate of safety and trust that encourages survivors to be open. Warmth can be expressed through appropriate facial expressions, giving one's full attention to the survivor, and using a calm, kind tone of voice.
- Empathy. 'Being empathic' or 'having empathy' is best described as being able to imagine oneself in another person's situation, including imagining their world views, assumptions and beliefs. You can be empathic by listening attentively to what survivors are telling you, making every effort to comprehend their experiences from their viewpoint and validating their feelings.
- Respect. Respect can be referred to as 'unconditional positive regard'. It is closely linked to acceptance, and as such involves being accepting and non-judgmental of the survivor and highlighting her/his strengths. Blaming, arguing, reacting defensively, and attempting to pressure survivors all indicate a lack of respect.
- Genuineness. Genuineness can be expressed by being sincere and authentic. Part of being genuine is accepting and admitting being

wrong or making mistakes. Helpers are human and therefore do not know all of the answers and do make mistakes from time to time.

- Self-awareness. Helpers are also individuals whose beliefs and values are impacted by culture, ethnicity, religion, gender (or gender identity), sexual orientation, socio-economic status and family and personal history. A caseworker needs to be aware of how her/his beliefs and values may bias her/him negatively towards a survivor. In many humanitarian contexts, social norms that lead to blaming, shaming and stigmatizing of survivors are prevalent. It is important that helpers, as organizations and individuals, reflect on their own potentially harmful beliefs and norms, examine how these influence their response to survivors, and recognize how this could deter survivors from coming forward for help.

Case Worker Knowledge

At a minimum, it is important that caseworkers have the following:

- Knowledge about GBV and its causes and consequences
- Knowledge and understanding of social norms and how they affect survivors' help-seeking and decision-making
- Knowledge of what services and supports are available and what survivors can expect from them, in particular, the health and justice systems
- Knowledge of a survivor-centered approach and the guiding principles that underpin this approach
- Knowledge of the steps and tasks involved in GBV case management.

Case Worker Skills

Skills represent the application of knowledge and the expression of qualities. GBV caseworkers should possess the following basic skills and should be given opportunities to refine these skills through ongoing training and supervision.

- Ability to use a survivor-centered approach in their interactions with survivors including following the guiding principles
- Ability to use active listening skills
- Ability to communicate non-judgmentally
- Ability to demonstrate empathy
- Ability to communicate essential information about care options to a survivor
- Ability to empower survivors to make their own decisions about what is best for them
- Ability to identify key issues and needs related to a survivor's care
- Ability to solve problems related to the survivor's care¹



¹ All content from the Inter-Agency Case Management Guidelines https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Interagency-GBV-Case-Management-Guidelines_Final_2017_Low-Res.pdf