

# Social Work Interviews

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Congratulations. If you received a call for a job interview that means your resume got your foot in the door. The interview is important for two reasons: 1) this is your chance to convince the agency that you are the best social worker for the job; 2) this is the time to learn more about whether the agency and position are a good fit for *you*.

Here are ten tips to help you stand out from the pack and make a good choice for your career.

## 1 DO YOUR PREP WORK.

- Ask peers, professors, and colleagues if they have any direct experience with the agency or know someone who does. Through a direct resource, you can get to know the kind of person that does well there and let them know of your sincere interest.
- Use the website to better understand the work and the mission of the agency. Who do they serve? Whom do they partner with in the community? Are people on their management team social workers? Identify specific questions about the work that you can ask in the interview; this will show your investment.
- From the website or a contact, you might recognize someone you know or find that you are the alumni from the same school. It shows you've done your homework if you can say to the person who interviews you, "I saw you attended UCLA School of Social Welfare; how did you like the program?"
- Make sure to contact your references to let them know you are applying for the job and ask them if they are still comfortable giving you a reference. You should also email them a description of the job before they are called to give a reference.

## 2 BE FRIENDLY AND INTERESTED.

- You're not just being hired to do a job, you are also joining a team. Use your social work relationship-building skills from the time you're first called and in the interview itself.
- Learn people's names. Even the person at the front desk. You never know who is going to have the ear of the person who hires. When you meet people, ask them their names and what they are responsible for at the agency. Make sure to repeat their name at least one time, even if it is to say, "It was so great to meet you, Donna."

## 3 DRESS PROFESSIONALLY.

- Even if the job you're interviewing for or the agency itself is casual, showing up for the interview looking professional shows you're taking the interview seriously.
- Business casual is your best bet. This means nice slacks and a button down shirt. Wear something you would wear in the job you are going to do. People make the mistake of being too dressy. Women—avoid low cut tops or skirts

above the knee. Flashy jewelry should also be avoided, especially if the job is for the underprivileged.

**4 ARRIVE EARLY.**

- This is another way to communicate your interest and professionalism. You're showing them what they can expect from you if they hire you.
- If you get there more than 10 minutes early, wait in your car until 10 minutes before your time.
- Call ahead of time and find out about the best place to park.
- Do not talk on your cell phone in the lobby while you are waiting or outside the main entrance. You never know who is listening and what impression you may be making.

**5 BE CLEAR WHY YOU WANT THE JOB.**

- You will stand out if you can articulate your interest in specific aspects of the job and agency and connect your work experience to your ability to meet their needs. They want to know that you want the job, too!
- Indicate why you are passionate about working with the population the job serves. Think through your reasons before you go to the interview. Write those reasons down and practice explaining them to yourself or your friends. The first time you talk about it should not be during the interview.

**6 PRACTICE ANSWERING QUESTIONS.**

- They will want to know how well-equipped you are to handle the job. Be prepared to answer questions about your internships and work history, as well as how you would address challenges presented in the job for which you are interviewing.
- The best way to be prepared is to have someone give you a mock interview and give you feedback on your answers. Interviewing well is a skill that can be developed with practice and feedback.

**7 BE PREPARED TO GIVE A CLINICAL EXAMPLE.**

- Take some time to prepare beforehand. Think about a case that you can use to highlight your skills.
- Your presentation should be organized and include: referral source, presenting issues, treatment plan, agency policy where the treatment took place, diagnosis if applicable, your impressions of the client, what was most challenging, what was most rewarding, and what you learned.

**8 DO NOT ASK ABOUT SALARY. YOU CAN NEGOTIATE AFTER YOU GET THE JOB.**

- Employers want to know you are interested in the job and not after a certain salary. Once they're convinced you are the right person for the job, you have stronger footing with which to negotiate.
- Most non-profits don't have much room to negotiate with salary. It's best to get your foot in the door then move up to a high paying position.
- Make sure to find out about other benefits including vacation and sick days, professional development expenses, and 401K options.

**9 PREPARE QUESTIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK TO HELP ASSESS WHETHER THE JOB IS A GOOD FIT FOR YOU.**

- You may be interested in such issues as: the number of clinical hours you can expect to earn towards licensure or how much support is available or in-service training.
- Asking “what kind of person does well in this environment” can tell you a lot about what they expect. Is it someone who never says no? Is it someone who can participate effectively on a team? Think about how the answer fits with what you want and need in this next step.
- Another great question to ask your potential supervisor is: “what are you most proud of in your time here?” The answer will give you good information about the supervisor’s priorities and values.
- Lastly, “When do you plan to make your hiring decision and how can I expect to hear from you?”

### 10 **WRITE A THANK YOU NOTE.**

- You can also send an email, but a THANK YOU note is a must. You need to mail it the day of the interview to ensure it gets there in time to influence the hiring process. People really appreciate the thoughtfulness of a Thank You note.
- Be gracious even if you do not get the job. Make sure to let them know that you’d be interested in other jobs if they become available.