

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of
Social Workers

**Complementary & Adjunct
Therapies & Techniques:
A Guide for Registered Social Workers**

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INTRODUCTION

Complementary Therapy is defined by Barker (1995) as

An additional type of intervention that the social worker or other psychotherapist provides for certain clients occurring along with individual therapy....It is important that the two forms of therapy are well integrated so that the goals of the different procedures are consistent. (p. 71-72)

Henderson (2000) refers to alternative and holistic helping strategies as techniques that are variously termed non-traditional, complementary or alternative techniques that are not taught in schools of social work but are learned before or after professional training. She refers to yoga, dance, art therapies and self help support groups as included in this definition.

For the purpose of this document, complementary and adjunct therapies and techniques refer to intervention by a registered social worker within the context of the social work relationship which is outside of the conventional practice of social work and is not the primary modality of treatment. Consistent with the definition by Henderson (2000) these complementary or adjunct therapies are not generally taught in schools of social work but social workers acquire the knowledge, skill and ability to practice through other training or education. Social workers utilize these therapies and techniques as additional tools to enhance a service offered to a client. Complementary therapies recognize that different modalities of intervention are in the best interest of clients. Complementary therapies are well integrated into social work practice and are utilized with the written informed consent of the client.

Social workers who use complementary and adjunct therapies and techniques within the context of social work practice have access to current information including the risks and benefits of the specific therapy and share this information with the client as a component of the informed consent process.

Examples of complementary or adjunct therapies and techniques may include but are not limited to relaxation therapy, play therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), faith based counselling.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended to assist registered social workers to:

- Review professional responsibilities in relation to the use of complementary and adjunct therapies and techniques.
- Make ethical decisions about the use of complementary therapies within the context of social work practice.
- Highlight areas for consideration when utilizing complementary or adjunct therapies and techniques.

DEFINITIONS

Social Work

“social work” means the assessment, remediation and prevention of psycho-social problems and the enhancement of the social, psycho-social functioning and well being of individuals, families, groups and communities by

- (i) Providing direct counselling and therapy services to a client,
- (ii) Developing, promoting and delivering human service programs, including those done in association with other professions,
- (iii) Contributing to the development and improvement of social policy, and
- (iv) Conducting research in the science, technique and practice of social workⁱ

Registered Social Workers

In order to refer to oneself as a social worker or to practice within the scope of practice of the social work profession in Newfoundland and Labrador, an individual must meet the criteria for registration as outlined in Section 18 of the Social Workers Act 2010. Registered social workers are granted the RSW designation. Use of the RSW designation affirms that the individual has met the criteria for registration and has been granted use of the title and right to practice social work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

USE OF COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES BY REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics 2005. As with any form of social work intervention, when choosing to utilize complementary or adjunct therapies and techniques within the context of social work practice, social workers need to:

- engage in a process of clear informed consent with the client
- determine that the form of intervention is in the best interest of the client
- clearly assess personal competence to engage in the use of the specific therapy or technique
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

These points are addressed by the following sections of the Code of Ethics and Ethical Guidelines for the profession

Informed Consent

The Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2005) defines informed consent as:

a voluntary agreement reached by a capable client based on information about foreseeable risks and benefits associated with the agreement.

Informed consent ensures that a client's right to self determination is upheld. It recognizes that the process of consent is ongoing. Valid informed consent requires that the mental and legal capacity to give consent is confirmed by the social worker.

Competence

Value 6 as outlined in the CASW Code of Ethics requires social workers to continually assess their own level of knowledge and competence to engage in an intervention with a client and states:

*Social workers respect a client's right to competent social worker services. Social workers analyze the nature of social needs and problems and encourage innovative, effective strategies and techniques to meet both new and existing needs and, where possible, contribute to the knowledge base of the profession. **Social workers have a responsibility to maintain professional proficiency, to continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills, and to apply new knowledge in practice (emphasis added)** commensurate with their level of professional education, skill, competency, seeking consultation and supervision as appropriate. (p.8)*

Principles to be considered include:

- *Social workers uphold the right of clients to be offered the highest quality of service possible.*
- *Social workers strive to maintain and increase their professional knowledge and skill.*
- *Social workers demonstrate due care for client's interest and safety by limiting professional practice to areas of demonstrated competence. (p.8)*

Rights of the client

Social workers engage in the use of any intervention following an assessment which determines that the proposed form of intervention is in the best interest of the client and with the written informed consent of the client.

The CASW Ethical Guidelines(2005) state:

- 1.1.1 Social workers maintain the best interests of clients as a priority with due regard to the respective interests of others.
- 1.3.4 Social workers, at the earliest opportunity, discuss with clients their rights and responsibilities and provide them with honest and accurate information regarding....:
 - The nature of the social work service being offered
 - The purpose, nature, extent and known implications of the options open to them
 - The potential risk and benefits of proposed social work interventions...

Professional Boundaries

Social workers are responsible for establishing appropriate boundaries with clients and ensuring that all interventions serve the needs of clients. This relates to considerations such as conflict of interest, personal or professional gain, dual relationships and any physical contact with clients.

The CASW Ethical Guidelines (2005) state:

2.2.2 Social workers do not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political or business interests.

2.5.1 Social workers avoid engaging in physical contact with clients when there is a possibility of harm to the client as a result of the contact. Social workers who engage in appropriate physical contact with clients are responsible for setting clear, appropriate and culturally sensitive boundaries to govern such contact.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

A range of therapies and techniques can be included within the scope of practice of the profession. The following are questions and considerations for social workers.

1) Do I have the appropriate education and competence to perform the intervention?

Social workers must be well informed about the therapy or technique including the risks, benefits and must possess the appropriate skills and judgment.

Registered social workers should have proof of certification/registration in the use of the complementary/adjunct therapy if available.

Social workers need to consider the continuing education requirements to maintain competency to utilize the intervention

2) Is there a credible body of knowledge to support use of this intervention with this client?

3) Has the client been provided with sufficient and clear information about the risks and benefits of the intervention?

4) Has the client given written informed consent for the use of the therapy?

5) Do I have access to other care providers in the event of unexpected outcomes?

6) Do I have access to consultation regarding the use of the therapy or technique?

7) Are there issues pertaining to appropriate boundaries with the client that I need to consider?

8) If the complementary therapy is practiced within the context of an employment agency..... Is my employer aware of the use of and support the use of this therapy or technique in practice?

9) How will I document the use of the intervention in accordance with the standards for documentation?

SUMMARY

Social workers may offer a range of therapies and techniques to clients within the scope of practice of the profession. Incorporating these approaches may be quite beneficial for clients however risks and benefits should be carefully assessed. This document offers a series of general ethical and practice considerations for social workers deciding to integrate complementary and adjunct therapies and techniques within practice. There may be other factors to be considered on a case by case basis and social workers should seek additional consultation for specific interventions and situations as required.

REFERENCES

AN ACT RESPECTING THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL WORK (Social Workers Act) SNL 2010
CHAPTER S-17.2

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ⁱ The legislative definition of the profession differs from the scope of practice of social work. More information about the scope of practice of the profession can be found in the Canadian Association of Social Workers Scope of Practice document.