

Newfoundland & Labrador
**College of
Social Workers**

**Practice Guideline on the Use of Complementary &
Adjunct Interventions & Techniques
in Social Work Practice**

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INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this document, complementary and adjunct techniques refer to interventions by registered social workers within the context of the social work relationship which are outside of the conventional practice of social work and are not the primary modality of treatment. These interventions are not generally taught in schools of social work, rather social workers acquire the knowledge, skill, and ability to practice them through other training or education.

Social workers utilize these interventions as additional tools to enhance a service offered to a client with the written informed consent of the client.

Social workers who use complementary and adjunct interventions within the context of social work practice have access to current information including the risks and benefits of the specific intervention that is being used and share this information with the client as a component of the informed consent process.

Examples of complementary or adjunct interventions or techniques may include, but are not limited to, relaxation therapy, meditation, hypnotherapy, aromatherapy, faith-based counselling, nutrition counselling, therapeutic yoga, animal assisted interventions, and culturally based rituals.

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 interventions and techniques.
- Make ethical decisions about the use of complementary and adjunct interventions and techniques within the context of social work practice.
- Highlight areas for consideration when utilizing complementary or adjunct interventions and therapies and techniques.

DEFINITIONS

Social Work

The *Social Workers Act* (2010) of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) defines social work as: 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 using social work knowledge, theory and skills to

- (i) provide direct counselling and therapy services to a client,
- (ii) develop, implement, manage or deliver human service programs, including those done in collaboration with other professions,
- (iii) contribute to the development and advancement of health and social policy, and,

- (iv) conduct research in the science, technique and practice of social work.

Registered Social Worker

To refer to oneself as a social worker or to practice within the scope of practice of the social work profession in NL, an individual must meet the criteria for registration as outlined under 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 NL.

USE OF COMPLEMENTARY AND ADJUNCT INTERVENTIONS AND TECHNIQUES BY REGISTERED SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers in NL adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) (2005) Code of Ethics, CASW (2005) Guidelines for Ethical Practice and the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW) (2020) Standards of Practice for Social Workers in NL. As with any form of social work intervention, when choosing to utilize complementary or adjunct techniques within the context of social work practice, social workers need to:

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

The CASW (2005) Code of Ethics, CASW (2005) Guidelines for Ethical Practice and the NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice provide guidance.

Competence

Social workers must continually assess their level of knowledge and competence to engage in an intervention with a client. Value 6 of the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics 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 commensurate with their level of professional education, skill and 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)

As noted in the NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice “Social workers do not make false, misleading or exaggerated claims pertaining to practice or level of skill” (p. 4)

In providing competent services, social workers also practice the “disciplined use of scientific and professional knowledge” (CASW Code of Ethics, p. 3). It is therefore important that prior to the integration of complementary and adjunct interventions and techniques in social work practice, social workers ensure that there is empirical and validated evidence supporting their use, they have appropriate education, training, and certification if applicable, and the approach is in keeping with the ethics and values of the social work profession and the best interest of the client.

Social workers also need to consider the continuing education requirements to maintain competency to utilize the intervention or technique.

If a client is requesting a specific intervention or technique beyond that for which a social worker has received training, social workers provide clients with information on options for services and facilitate a referral where appropriate. As noted in the NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice “Social workers assess whether a client’s needs are outside the parameters of their expertise and provide clients with information pertaining to the option of a referral” (p. 4). Where in the professional judgement of the social worker the technique or intervention being requested by the client is not in keeping with the best interest of the client, social workers engage clients in a dialogue about their concerns and provide information on alternative options.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is defined as “a voluntary agreement reached by a capable client based on information about foreseeable risks and benefits associated with the agreement” (CASW, 2005, Code of Ethics, p. 10). Prior to the use of complementary or adjunct interventions or techniques with clients, it is important that clients are given information about the technique or intervention approach that is being proposed, the associated risks and benefits, the body of knowledge informing the intervention or technique, how it fits with treatment goals, the social worker’s training, education and expertise in the technique or intervention, and how it is being integrated into social work practice. Informed consent ensures that a client’s right to self-determination is upheld and recognizes that the process of consent is ongoing. Valid informed consent requires that client consent is confirmed by the social worker and that it is given voluntarily. The informed consent of clients should be documented in the client’s file.

Best Interest of the Client

As stated in the CASW (2005) Guidelines for Ethical Practice “Social workers maintain the best interests of clients as a priority with due regard to the respective interests of others” (p.3). Social workers only engage in the use of complementary or adjunct techniques or interventions following an assessment which determines that the proposed form of intervention is in the best interest of the client and is culturally appropriate.

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. As highlighted in the CASW (2005) Ethical Guidelines for Ethical Practice:

“Social workers do not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political or business interests” (p. 11).

“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” (p. 12).

Consultation and Supervision

When complementary and adjunct techniques and interventions are used in social work practice, social workers have reasonable access to consultation and supervision with professionals who have experience in the intervention or technique, and collaborate with other professionals in the best interest of clients. The following are important to consider:

“Social workers seek advice and the expertise of social work colleagues and colleagues from other professions in the best interests of clients...” (NLCSW, 2020, Standards of Practice, p. 8)

“Social workers collaborate with other professionals and service providers in the interests of clients with the client’s knowledge and consent” (CASW, 2005, Guidelines for Ethical Practice, p.3).

Documentation

As noted in the NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice “Social work documentation includes a clear assessment, intervention strategy and termination plan” (p. 6). When integrating complementary and adjunct interventions and techniques in social work practice, social workers clearly document the assessment of the client and the rationale for the use of the technique or intervention, how it fits with the client’s treatment goals, client informed consent, and therapeutic outcomes.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

A range of interventions and techniques are used by social workers in the delivery of services. Social workers should consider the following questions and use professional judgement in keeping with their ethical and professional responsibilities prior to incorporating a complementary or adjunct intervention or technique into their social work practice.

- 1) Do I have the appropriate education and competence to perform the intervention?
- 2) Is there a credible body of knowledge to support use of this intervention with this client?
- 3) Does the intervention or technique align with the values and ethics of social work?
- 4) Is the use of the intervention culturally appropriate for use with this client?
- 5) Is this technique or intervention widely used by social workers or other regulated professionals?
- 6) Has the client been provided with sufficient and clear information about the technique and intervention, including the risks and benefits?
- 7) Has the client given written informed consent for the use of the intervention?
- 8) Do I have access to other care providers in the event of unexpected outcomes?

- 9) Do I have access to consultation regarding the use of the intervention or technique?
- 10) Are there issues pertaining to appropriate boundaries with the client that I need to consider?
Could boundaries become blurred or crossed?
- 11) If I am using the intervention or technique within the context of an employment agency, is the employer aware of, and in support of its use in practice?
- 12) How will I document the use of the intervention in accordance with the standards for documentation?
- 13) Do I have the appropriate professional liability insurance that covers the use of the complementary/adjunct therapy or technique?

SUMMARY

Social workers may offer a range of complementary and adjunct interventions 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 highlights practice standards and offers a series of general ethical and practice considerations for social workers deciding to integrate complementary and adjunct interventions and techniques within their practice. There may be other factors to consider on a case-by-case basis, and social workers should seek additional consultation with the informed consent of clients from their supervisor, manager, or colleagues, or those with expertise in the technique or intervention, as required.

Regardless of the intervention or technique being used in social work practice, social workers ensure they are adhering to the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics, CASW (2005) Guidelines for Ethical Practice and NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice, and can articulate the appropriateness of use of these interventions with the client.

REFERENCES

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