

# Instructor's Guide

# Why Am I Here?

## Engaging the Reluctant Client



A Video Presentation  
of **New York University**  
and the **Council on  
Social Work Education**

Executive Producers  
**Caroline Rosenthal, PhD**  
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New York University

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## *Why Am I Here? Engaging The Reluctant Client*

*Why Am I Here?* is a 44-minute video with 6 segments:

1. A short introduction by Carol Tosone, associate professor of social work and recipient of the New York University Distinguished Teaching Award.
2. A vignette of a first-year MSW student's initial encounter with a client, a 44-year-old woman with a history of major mental illness who has been hard to diagnose and who is reluctant to work with an intern. The vignette is based on a process recording of an actual session between a student and client; details have been changed to maintain confidentiality.
3. A supervisory session between the student and Prof. Tosone.
4. A vignette of a second-year MSW student's first encounter with a difficult-to-engage adolescent brought in by his aunt. This vignette depicts the importance of being attentive to developmental and cross-cultural issues in the worker-client relationship.
5. A supervisory session with the second student and Dr. Tosone.
6. Major teaching points at the conclusion.

The vignettes are realistic portrayals of the difficulties that social work students encounter in working with new clients who resist their interventions. The supervisory sessions present key practice issues and their connections to general theories of clinical social work. These difficult encounters, selected to reflect students' actual experiences in the field, cause the students to question their respective roles as social workers; hence the title, *Why Am I Here?* This is a question clients frequently ask themselves, as well.

This video can be shown in parts or in its entirety to a classroom of students. We recommend using the video to stimulate a structured class discussion. This booklet contains ideas for involving students as active participants.

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## Using the Video in Class

This video developed from our students' desire to "see" what social work looks like and their criticism that many of the available films are unrealistic. The vignettes in this video feature characters they can identify with and directly address students' insecurities about becoming mental health professionals and authority figures.

The main obstacles the producers envision possibly hindering students' involvement with the scenes arise from lifelong television-watching habits—that is, consuming and evaluating the dramas as entertainment. We want to change these habits in two ways. First, students should *study* the scenes rather than simply watch them. Second, they should focus their critical skills on the *actions* of the social work students in the video, not on its qualities as a staged drama.

## Suggested Class Plan

1. Show Dr. Tosone's introduction and prepare the class for the vignette. Give each student a copy the worksheet (pp. 7–8) for that vignette.
2. Show the vignette. The students will be taking notes on their worksheets. Consider alerting them to aspects of the interview you want to cover in the class discussion.
3. Lead a class discussion based on the questions from the first part of the worksheet (or questions and observations that arise as a result of watching the film). Rewind the tape if necessary to go over any key points in the session. Let the students contribute their own ideas.
4. Have students write a list of the areas they would expect to be covered in a supervisory session devoted to this interchange before viewing the supervisory vignette.
5. Show the supervisory session. The students will be taking notes on the second part of their worksheets. Have them compare this list to the one prepared prior to viewing the supervisory session.
6. Lead a class discussion based on the second part of the worksheet.
7. Ask the students what they have learned. Have they had similar experiences in their own practical training? What advice might they give to the social work student in the video or to students in similar settings?
8. Have students role-play what might happen if the social work intern had another meeting with the client later that day.
9. Reiterate the teaching points addressed in the video.

## Teaching Points

1. *Empathy* is a core social work skill used to understand the client's subjective experience.
2. *Explain your role and the purpose of the interview.*
3. *Start where the client is.* Be respectful of the client's defenses and the client's right to self-determination.
4. Be attentive to the *affective climate of the interview* and the client's *nonverbal communication*.
5. Distinguish between the *manifest* and *latent content* of the client's communication.
6. *Assessment is an ongoing process* that goes beyond the initial interview.
7. Be aware of your *countertransference reactions*, particularly in regard to cross-cultural issues and the client's age, presenting problems or disability, and socioeconomic status.
8. Whenever relevant, *establish a follow-up plan*.
9. In working with children and adolescents, consider:
  - The importance of *confidentiality* and its potential limits.
  - The importance of *collateral contacts* with the parents of guardians.
10. Finally, in all clinical work keep in mind the importance of *self-awareness* and *self-assessment* of one's work.

## Further Reading on Work With Mandated and Reluctant Clients

- Baker, K. A. (1999). The importance of cultural sensitivity and therapist self-awareness when working with mandatory clients. *Family Process, 1*, 55-65.
- Cullari, S. (1996). *Treatment resistance: A guide for practitioners*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- O'Hare, T. (1996). Court-ordered versus voluntary clients: Problem differences and readiness for change. *Social Work, 41*, 417-422.
- Regehr, C., & Antle, B. (1997). Coercive influences: Informed consent in court-mandated social work practice. *Social Work, 42*, 300-306.
- Weakland, J., & Jordan, L. (1992). Working briefly with reluctant clients: Child protective services as an example. *Journal of Family Therapy, 14*, 231-254.

## Credits

### *Executive Producers*

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### *Produced and Directed by*

Lynne McVeigh

### *Written by*

Carol Tosone

Caroline Rosenthal

### *Cast (in order of appearance)*

Narrator and Discussion Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_ Carol Tosone, PhD

Alice McNeil, first client \_\_\_\_\_ Alice Hurwitz

Jennifer Adams, 1st year social work student \_\_\_\_\_ Jennifer Millich

Anthony Campbell, 2nd client \_\_\_\_\_ Marc Stewart

Anthony's Aunt \_\_\_\_\_ Renee Jackson

Kim Michele Thomas, 2nd year social work student \_\_\_\_\_ Kim Sarasohn

Assistant Director \_\_\_\_\_ Hillary Kolos

Production Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ Christina Ri

Directory of Videography \_\_\_\_\_ Lily Tillers

Sound Design \_\_\_\_\_ Leo Chen

Set & Lighting Design \_\_\_\_\_ James Barry

Editor \_\_\_\_\_ Corine Huq

Sound Editor \_\_\_\_\_ Carrie Treeful

### *Studio Unit*

Assistant Director \_\_\_\_\_ Hillary Kolos

Production Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_ Christina Ri

Technical Director \_\_\_\_\_ Christina Ri

Sound Design \_\_\_\_\_ Leo Chen

Set Design \_\_\_\_\_ James Barry

Lighting Design \_\_\_\_\_ James Barry

\_\_\_\_\_ Lily Tillers

Camera Operators \_\_\_\_\_ Lily Tillers

\_\_\_\_\_ James Barry

\_\_\_\_\_ Joon Park

Boom Operators \_\_\_\_\_ Kayte Boyne

\_\_\_\_\_ Justin Reid

Videotape Operator \_\_\_\_\_ Corine Huq

Production Assistants \_\_\_\_\_ Ashley Hernandez

\_\_\_\_\_ Sam Messman

*Location Unit*

Director _____	Hillary Kolos
Production Coordinator _____	Christina Ri
Director of Videography _____	Lily Tillers
Set & Lighting Design _____	James Barry
Sound Mixer _____	Leo Chen
Sound Recordist _____	Kayte Boyne

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*Principal Investigators*

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Carol Tosone

## Worksheet A: Alice McNeil (Hospital Setting)

1. What did the student do well in the interview?
2. What would you have done differently? Why?
3. Do you have any comments on how she began the interview?
4. How did the student respond to questions about her competence? How would you have responded?
5. How do you think Ms. McNeil was feeling during this interview? Did this change during the course of the interview?
6. How do you think Jennifer Adams was feeling during this interview? Did this change during the course of the interview?
7. How would you feel working with this client? (Keep in mind that your reaction may be a reflection of how the client is feeling.)
8. What could the student have said or done during the meeting with her client that could have better facilitated engagement?
9. Would you address Ms. McNeil's agitation during the interview? If so, what would you specifically say to her?
10. How would you have addressed Ms. McNeil's concerns regarding the care of her son?
11. Would you talk further to her about her religion?
12. Would you contact Ms. McNeil's estranged husband? If so, how would you address the topic with her?
13. Would you have asked Ms. McNeil questions regarding her psychosocial history (e.g. living arrangements, substance abuse)? If so, how would you phrase those questions?
14. Is there something the student could have said or done that would have truly constituted a mistake?
15. What do you think Jennifer Adams should do following this session? What would be the follow-up plan for working with Ms. McNeil?
16. What's a similar situation to the vignette that you've been in? How did you handle it then? How might you handle it now?

What if . . .

1. Ms. McNeil had refused to meet with the social work intern?
2. Ms. McNeil had refused to answer any questions?
3. Ms. McNeil had asked the social work intern if she was married or had any kids?
4. Ms. McNeil had started to cry?
5. Ms. McNeil had stated that she felt like hurting herself?

## **Worksheet B: Anthony Campbell (Outpatient Community Mental Health Center)**

1. How does the level of skill demonstrated by the student in this vignette differ from that of Jennifer Adams, the first-year social work intern?
2. What did the student do well in the interview?
3. What would you have done differently? Why?
4. Do you have any comments on how the student handled the aunt? What would you have done?
5. How do you think Anthony was feeling during this interview? Did this change as the session progressed? If so, why?
6. How do you think the intern was feeling during this interview? Did this change as the session progressed?
7. How would you feel working with this client? (Keep in mind that your reaction may be a reflection of how the client is feeling).
8. What could the student have said or done during the meeting with her client that could have better facilitated engagement?
9. Is there something the student could have said or done during the meeting with her client that would have truly constituted a mistake?
10. Would you address areas of difference (e.g. race, age, gender) in the client-worker relationship? If so, what would you specifically say to Anthony?
11. Would you have used role-play to engage this client? If so, would you have done anything differently?
12. What do you think the intern should do following this session? What would be the follow-up plan for working with Anthony?
13. How would you involve his aunt?
14. What's a similar situation to the vignette that you've been in? How did you handle it? How might you handle it now?

What if . . .

1. Anthony had refused to come into the room?
2. The aunt had insisted on speaking with the social work intern?
3. Anthony had refused to answer any questions?
4. Anthony had asked the student if she was married or had any kids?
5. Anthony had started to cry?
6. Anthony had started to yell?
7. Anthony had stated that he felt like hurting himself or hurting his aunt?
8. Anthony had refused to do the role-play?
9. Anthony had walked out of the room?