A unique first stage of the planned change process is self-reflection. Self-reflection builds on the topics presented in Chapter 3, including diversity and professional use of self. Self-reflection as a stage in the planned change process allows students to become more intentional about the need to work with themselves before they work with clients. Students begin to understand how they can develop empathy and cultural humility through a concrete introspective process. They expand on their understanding of how their thoughts, feelings, and experiences may affect practice. In addition, they will discover the importance of self-care for the prevention of compassion fatigue.

Learning Objectives

4.1 Articulate the meaning of self-reflection in work with systems of all sizes.
4.2 Practice the development of cultural humility through self-reflection.
4.3 Appraise the scientific support for the practice of mindfulness for self-reflection.
4.4 Practice the process of developing empathy.
4.5 Identify aspects of supervision that facilitate self-reflection and professional use of self.
4.6 Explore potential barriers to productive supervision.

Case Study: Fund-Raising for Organizations

Amy was ecstatic to be offered a position at an adoption agency. She was adopted herself, so she could relate to the adopted children. And she was considering adopting a child herself, so she was experiencing the issues that families face from both sides. She was excited to help the children and families and sat right down to work. But Amy’s fingers were very cold as they rested on the keyboard. Her supervisor had suggested that she rely on the Microsoft Office program Excel to help make her event planning easy. She knew she should know how to use Excel, but she had never used it before. It seemed to her to be a computer thing...
about numbers, and Amy avoided numbers whenever possible. So when her supervisor asked her to create an Excel file of all of the donations she accepted for Chinese New Year, she felt her head begin to pound. How could she make all of the phone calls she had to make to get gift donations and plan the event for adoptive families while learning a new computer program as well? She wouldn’t do it, she decided. She’d keep careful records on paper and then when her supervisor asked about her progress, she’d just get the answers from her notes. Amy could have spent time exploring her feelings about the new software, and she could have identified the beliefs that kept her from learning. But that took time, it was hard, and Amy wanted to get right to the task. She didn’t want to get in touch with any negative feelings like anxiety. A successful program was the purpose of her work, after all. So Amy set to work and spent the whole week phoning potential donors and planning the event. She was good at her job. When she contacted a corporation, she thought carefully about the corporation and about her feelings asking for donations. She discovered she was nervous asking for donations, but she knew to display confidence, and she was careful to begin to build a relationship with the person on the other end of the phone by taking time to describe her agency. Eventually, she was able to collect gifts that conveyed a connection to Chinese culture. She was able to do this over and over. There were nearly 100 potential donors on her list, and she succeeded more often than not. She had done well at her task and couldn’t wait for her next supervisory meeting so she could announce her triumph. Her bubble was burst, though, when her supervisor reminded her that she would need to send thank-you notes out to all of the donors. “Don’t worry,” her supervisor said. “You have all of their addresses in Excel and can easily do to a mail merge to get a letter printed for every donor. It will only take you a few minutes.”

Section 4.1: Self-Reflection

This section begins the discussion of the first stage of the planned change process: self-reflection.

Self-Reflection

As we’ve discussed in Chapter 3, self-reflection is necessary to develop a professional use of self. Since self-reflection reveals different aspects of you for every different case, it begins every planned change process. Every case touches us in unique ways, so we have to do self-reflection over and over again. Workers consider themselves first. In self-reflection, workers practice thinking about their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. During planned change, the social worker begins an intersection between themselves and another—be it an individual client, a client system representative or a client system itself. In systems terms, the worker’s system begins to exchange energy with the client system. Information will be exchanged. Feelings will be shared. Secrets may be shared. Vulnerability will happen on both sides. When a social worker thinks about a new client, the sense of intersection or energy exchange can sometimes feel overwhelming. This is appropriate, as the connection is one of great intimacy. Amy felt that intimacy as she worked with the donors. She was fund-raising for an agency, but she had to develop relationships with each of the potential donors.

Achieving Awareness

Because of the intimacy of the connection between social worker and client system, it is important that the worker be available emotionally and intellectually for the client or client system representative. It is also important for the worker to be resilient in the face of the client’s distressing life circumstances. In addition, self-reflection is necessary to generate awareness on the part of the social worker. The awareness of behavior is at the core of the social work professional use of self.
As we’ve seen, self-reflection is a process of bringing feelings, thoughts, and behaviors into awareness, and it is central to developing helping relationships with others. You might say that self-reflection is a worker’s process of becoming intentional. The social worker strives to be intentional in all of their professional actions. Self-reflection is a way to get there (see Figure 4.1).

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Did Amy have an ethical responsibility to learn about new technologies that might benefit her clients? Read the Preamble of the NASW Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2018) to find out.

Most important to the self-reflection stage in planned change is the worker’s recognition of his or her own feelings. The intentional social worker must be aware of their own emotional reactions to each case. Remember that the critical thinking process related to self-reflection—“What do I feel/believe/know/do?” (Hanna, 2013)—begins with an identification of the worker’s feelings. It is important to begin the critical thinking process by identifying emotions as they appear during each case. Self-reflection is the first stage in the planned change process, but it is also an action word. Self-reflection facilitates the worker’s identification of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors through self-awareness. In other words, self-reflection serves to develop the awareness of thoughts, beliefs, and behavior and ultimately the conscious, or professional, use of self. Remember that when we start something new we often have feelings that are associated with beginnings. Since self-reflection is stressed at the beginning of the planned change process, it carries with it the characteristics of beginnings: anxiety and hope. Self-reflection, then, should begin with a search for those feelings.

Amy’s situation is a good example of a need for self-reflection about feelings, because she was facing challenges on the macro level of practice. She was reaching out to large systems through client system representatives to get donations, and she was planning a program for
a large number of individuals and families. Fund-raising and program planning are usually considered macro practice. Social workers don’t always think about identifying feelings and beliefs as a necessary part of practice with large systems. In this case, though, Amy was challenged by her feelings and her thoughts about the Excel software. At this point, Amy should have identified her strong feelings and physical reactions to the case. For Amy, a red flag was her anxiety. The moment her supervisor mentioned Excel, Amy began to feel anxious. Then she got a headache, and her fingers were ice cold. That was her second red flag. At that point, Amy could have engaged in self-reflection and identified her feelings. She could have stopped what she was doing and start the “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” process we’ve begun to consider in Chapter 3. More details on this process appear later on in this chapter. In the meantime, consider that Amy probably had another level of anxiety to deal with. Remember that she was adopted herself and had brought a Chinese culture into a middle-class American culture. She was the only Asian at her school, and many people found it easier to ignore that she was “different.” While Amy was proud of her heritage, she learned that it was more comfortable around schoolmates and their parents if she pretended to be the same as everyone else. As a result, she wasn’t used to recognizing difference and she wasn’t comfortable bringing the topic into the conversations. In the next section, we’ll consider managing culture in the planned change process.

CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 4.1

1. Talk with a partner about your feelings of anxiety and hope related to beginning any new experience. Consider your feelings before the process began and what they are now. If your feelings changed, talk about how that happened.

2. Here is an example of general systems theory in action. Working with a partner, answer the following simple question: How did your studying go last night? After you have had the discussion, consider the types of energy that were exchanged between you and your partner. Information? Empathy? Others? How would you describe the boundary that existed between your two systems?

Section 4.2: Developing Cultural Humility

This section expands on the discussion of self-reflection: the development of cultural humility and sensitivity.

Developing Cultural Humility

In addition to bringing feelings, thoughts, and behaviors to awareness, another benefit of self-reflection is the development of cultural humility. Remember that social workers place a focus on the strengths inherent in diversity. Cultural humility includes self-reflection aimed at recognizing unintentional and intentional racism and other aspects of harmful prejudice (Ross, 2010). Cultural humility is working hard to recognize that others have values, behaviors, beliefs, and experiences that may be very different from yours but not less valuable or important. When you identify your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors you are likely to recognize that you think of your own culture as being the center of the world while other cultures are different. In other words, self-reflection leads to a process toward cultural humility, and cultural humility leads to an appreciation of the strengths
and challenges of diversity. Here’s an example of how self-reflection can lead to an understanding that others see the world differently than you: Most people who own German shepherd dogs have animals (and furniture) covered with black-and-tan hair. Some German shepherds, though, are white. If you own a white German shepherd, white is the center of your perception of your dog. You may get so used to your white German shepherd that you think of it as “normal” and you start telling people you have a German shepherd without saying white. In that case, you might look at other dogs and think of them as “shepherds of color.” In the same way, the owner of a black-and-tan shepherd is likely to always call your shepherd white and think of their black-and-tan shepherd as normal. It takes work to think about other perceptions as people’s experiences that are very different from yours and no less valuable. The way you see the world is the way you see it. Most people don’t have to bother thinking of the world in any different way, but social workers do.

Social workers require cultural humility. Cultural humility is a prerequisite to cultural sensitivity and responsiveness. Cultural humility is dynamic in that it requires constant self-reflection (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Remember that being culturally responsive means that a social worker is working toward being able to act and maybe even think like a member of a different culture (see Figure 4.2). This competency requires knowledge of the different cultures, but it is not limited to knowledge. It also requires self-reflection: the self-reflection needed to identify the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors about a culture that exist outside of the worker’s awareness. These feelings, thoughts, and behaviors include bias and stereotyping that are outside of awareness as well as a worker’s recognition of their own possible areas of privilege or oppression. It includes an understanding about community mistrust, where diverse people may mistrust the majority culture due to historical practices (Ross, 2010). Again, to be culturally responsive is to engage in a process where you exercise cultural humility, or the recognition of how your own values and behaviors differ from, but are not superior to, the values and behaviors of other cultures. Cultural humility is needed to become culturally responsive. It is important to note that the practice of becoming culturally responsive by recognizing values of self and others means that the work of individuals can assure that organizations and communities can become culturally responsive.

**Tasks for Developing Cultural Humility for Cultural Responsiveness**

The foundation for cultural humility is knowledge. The worker has to be fully aware of aspects of their own culture. Even though yours is the culture you live in, you may need to do some research to be better informed. For example, let’s say your grandparents emigrated here from Greece. You consider yourself to be American. You seldom stop and think that not everyone knows how to make baklava just the way they like it without a recipe. It’s
something to be proud of. You also seldom stop and think about how friendly almost all of your family members are and how they frequently welcome others into their family gatherings. The friendly, gregarious culture that you live in is also something to be proud of. It’s possible to have **ethnic identity**, or the recognition of membership in a particular group, for more than one group. You may think of yourself as Greek American and American at the same time. In that case, your **total identity** includes more than one component of ethnicity (Tajfel, 1981). It is essential that you recognize your own identity so that you can recognize difference in others. Once you recognize difference, you can learn about it. It is essential for you to gain knowledge about the way other cultures experience their ethnicity. In your case, you need to know how others reach out to those who are not part of their group. Every culture is not gregarious, and a quieter, more passive approach to life and family is neither better nor worse than what you’re used to. Constantly seeking knowledge about the lives of others as well as your own is the first step toward cultural humility.

Paine, Jankowski, and Sandage (2016) have outlined the dimensions of cultural humility:

- **Self-awareness**: The understanding of the worker’s own limitations related to cultural understanding
- **Low self-focus**: The focus is on the other
- **Interpersonal receptivity**: Openness to difference
- **The ability to regulate emotions**
- **The appreciation of value in others**

In other words, the social worker who hopes to develop cultural humility needs to know themselves and their limitations about diversity and cultural understanding. When faced with the client, the worker has to let go of their own cultural beliefs and allow the client to be the expert of their own culture. The culturally humble worker is curious and thinks about feelings before expressing them. Overall, cultural humility requires the social work value in which we respect the dignity and worth of the person. Cultural humility is the beginning of developing cultural responsiveness (see Figure 4.3).
When Amy began to work at her agency, she had experience in fund-raising, but she hadn’t worked at an adoption agency. At first, she thought she could contact businesses to ask for donations without a problem. Then she learned that the gifts were supposed to have a Chinese cultural relevance. Next, she found out that most of the businesses she would be contacting were Chinese-owned. She immediately became uncomfortable, since her own experience of adoption was through assimilation, where the adopted child succeeds by fitting into the culture of their adoptive parents. When Amy thought about her Chinese identity, she almost felt as if she were keeping a secret. What she didn’t know is that in some families, adoption does not lead to the loss of the child’s cultural heritage. Sometimes the adoptive parents assimilate into practices of the child’s native culture while the child is assimilating into the parents’ culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2010). If Amy had thought about her feelings, she might have recognized that they were getting in the way of explaining to donors that she wanted donations that were connected to Chinese culture. She needed to become aware of her own anxiety so that she could think about her relationship with the donors in a different way. She needed to develop empathy for them and their views on their ethnic heritage, so she needed to accept her own. As she made the phone calls, she eventually became comfortable talking about the Chinese theme to the donors, but it took a while. It would have happened more quickly if she had engaged in self-reflection and become culturally sensitive to her own experiences as well as the donors’ point of view.

The outcome of self-reflection should be a worker who might be called culturally sensitive (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013). The culturally sensitive worker has cultural humility as well as the following characteristics:

1. Approaches clients with respect, warmth, acceptance, and empathy
2. Understands that groups have their own characteristics (intergroup differences) but all individuals are different as well (intragroup differences)

In addition, the culturally sensitive worker recognizes that organizations and communities have their own cultures (see Figure 4.4). For example, they are able to identify

![FIGURE 4.4 Marks of the Culturally Sensitive Worker](https://www.sagepub.com/images/9781506378235/4.4_marks_of_the_culturally_sensitive_worker.png)
unequal distribution of power within communities and facilitate fair decision-making processes among community partners (Ross, 2010). Other elements of diversity that you may not have considered include differences for people who live in rural, urban, and suburban neighborhoods. Cultural responsiveness is never achieved—it is always sought. For this reason, it is easy to see that self-reflection not only begins the planned change process but is a dynamic part of every stage of planned change.

**Cultural Responsiveness in Practice**

Further direction on how social workers can work toward cultural responsiveness comes from NASW in its “Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice” (2015). A series of standards points to ways all of us can practice and reflect our respect for difference. Some of the standards reflect topics we’ve already discussed and are worth repeating:

**Standard 1: Ethics and Values.** Workers who are culturally responsive respect the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2018) and work to achieve self-awareness; cultural humility; and, most importantly, a lifelong commitment to understanding and valuing cultural difference.

**Standard 2: Self-Awareness.** Culturally responsive workers appreciate their own culture. They recognize that as professionals their own culture may include power over their clients and client system representatives. They work to understand the way power dynamics affect the helping relationship.

**Standard 3: Cross-Cultural Knowledge.** The specialized knowledge that social workers need to continually develop includes understanding cultures relative to their history, tradition, values, family systems, artistic expressions, immigration and refugee status, tribal groups, religion and spirituality, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social class, and mental and physical abilities.

**Standard 4: Cross-Cultural Skills.** Social workers must consider the ways culture affects and is affected by micro, mezzo, and macro practice, including policy practice and research.

**Standard 5: Service Delivery.** Social workers should be aware of the culturally appropriate services that exist in their communities so that they can connect clients to those services appropriately. They should also recognize gaps in existing culturally appropriate services so that they can advocate for their development.

**Standard 6: Empowerment and Advocacy.** Advocacy should be carried out with, and on behalf of, multicultural groups.

**Standard 7: Diverse Workforce.** Another area for advocacy is for social workers to strive to have a diverse staff of social work providers. A comment that you make to your supervisor may ultimately affect the hiring process at your agency.

**Standard 8: Professional Education.** Social workers are responsible to share their cultural knowledge and awareness with other workers. It is also important for social workers to share this information with other professionals, like doctors, nurses, psychologists, teachers, and counselors. When sharing your cross-cultural knowledge, consider the culture of the professionals you’re addressing. You don’t want to come off as a self-righteous person who is lecturing others.

**Standard 9: Language and Communication.** Effective communication should be foremost as workers consider that clients may not be proficient in English, may not be literate, and may
communicate through technology or sign language. A diverse staff or professional training may be necessary for workers.

**Standard 10: Leadership to Advance Cultural Competence in the Community.** Social workers should take their understanding and celebration of diversity into their community as well as into their agencies.

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**CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 4.2**

1. Find a reading about the people of your own ethnic heritage. See whether you can find characteristics of your own culture: foods, ceremonies, music, etc. Are these expressions of culture part of your life experiences? Share what you find with a group.

2. Make a note of your feelings as you shared the information about your ethnicity with the group and heard about the ethnicities of others. What do you think your feelings mean?

3. Join a group, and research another culture including their history, traditions, values, family systems, artistic expressions, foods, immigration and refugee status, tribal groups, religion and spirituality, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, social class, and mental and physical abilities. Note that a culture may be the expression of an ethnic group, like Colombian Americans or another type of group, like people who identify as LGBTQ.

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**Section 4.3: The Method of Self-Reflection**

This section begins the discussion of a process for carrying out self-reflection. The practice of mindfulness is useful.

**The Method of Self-Reflection**

We have seen that bringing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors into awareness is a critical part of a worker’s professional use of self. It is not always simple to do this. Remember that beginnings often include feelings of anxiety because they are not known. For that reason, self-reflection as the first stage of planned change can be particularly anxiety-producing. This is especially true when the reflection includes feelings that may be painful. No one likes to experience painful emotions, so most people try to put them out of their minds. Social workers need to reach out to them instead. Social workers constantly search for their feelings to figure out how they influence their beliefs and behavior. To do this, they need a process to identify feelings that they know about and those that are out of awareness.

**The Science of Mindfulness**

One method of identifying feelings is the practice of **mindfulness**. Overall, mindfulness is an idea that is often received with skepticism. Since mindfulness is similar to meditation and is often misunderstood, it is sometimes seen as a spiritual practice that has little or no basis in science. In social work, it may be considered to be “mystical” or “New Age” (Garland, 2013). Since we are most concerned with evidence-based social work practice, it is important to explore and critique the available scientific literature on the topic.
Operationalization

In any kind of scientific inquiry, we recognize attributes that things have in common and think about the ways that they are different. In this way, we conceptualize what we are looking at. Next, we define terms precisely, or operationalize them, so that research can be conducted consistently over time (Rubin & Babbie, 2015). Unfortunately, mindfulness has suffered from a lack of clarity in the scientific literature. This lack of clarity can undermine even the best scientific inquiry and has been stressed as a need in social work research on mindfulness (Garland, 2013). Probably the simplest definition of mindfulness is a “moment-to-moment awareness or paying attention to the moment without judgment” (Lynn, 2010, p. 290). In a review of current literature, Turner (2008) found a definition of mindfulness that included three building blocks:

- **Attention**—In mindfulness practice, attention refers to a clear focus on your own experience in the present. This means paying attention to your breathing, your body as it is still or as it moves through space, any aches or pains you may have, and so forth. Here is where you begin to identify feelings that you may have outside of your awareness.

- **Intention**—Intention refers to the fact that mindfulness is achieved through practice.

- **Attitude**—Attitude reflects an acceptance and non-judgmental approach to the practice of mindfulness. In other words, you don’t evaluate your thoughts and feelings as you experience them, you simply note that you are experiencing them (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006).

For the purpose of scientific research in social work, consideration should be given to Garland’s (2013) broad definition of mindfulness. This definition was derived from an in-depth review of scientific literature and is part of a discussion about how mindfulness can be researched. This composite, measurable definition of mindfulness as it has been published by the journal *Social Work Research* (Garland, 2013) states that mindfulness is the following:

- **State**—A condition where a person “monitors the content of consciousness” (Garland, 2013, p. 440). In other words, mindfulness is what you are doing when you think about what you are thinking and feeling.

- **Practice**—A repeated attention on one thing, such as breathing, while letting go any distracting thoughts as they come.

- **Trait**—A characteristic that can be developed over time. The trait of mindfulness includes “exhibiting nonjudgmental, nonreactive awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, experiences, and actions in everyday life” (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006/2013, p. 440). It refers to the development of the characteristic states of mindfulness that may lead to durable, or lasting, changes in traits (Garland, 2013; Garland, Farb, Goldin, & Fredrickson, 2015). Researchers (Hölzel et al., 2011) have said that the development of traits related to mindfulness practices increases brain tissue density in parts of the brain that are related to emotion regulation, learning, memory, and the ability to shift perspective. Emotional regulation or self-regulation means to be in a state of nonreactivity. This term describes the lack of a strong, usually negative, emotional response. It’s a letting go of the tension that is associated with strong feelings and it is a significant part of the professional use of self.
Empirical Support

Using this definition of mindfulness, a review of literature suggested that mindfulness is useful for relaxation but also for much more. Randomized controlled research studies have shown that mindfulness practice helps workers to develop a kind of regulation of the self, or the ability to control emotions, to enhance coping, and to promote workers’ resiliency (Garland, 2013). It is well demonstrated that the practice of mindfulness can ease stress as it is measured by physical responses like heart rate and neurological changes (Gotink et al., 2016). Previous research found mindfulness significantly increased positive affect; self-compassion (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007); overall well-being (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Grepmair et al., 2007); and decreased anxiety, depression, and stress (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Grepmair et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2007). All of these could be good at strengthening workers against the stress that is part of social work. Finally, it has been shown that changes in brain activity that result in higher self-compassion occur with the practice of mindfulness (Lutz et al., 2016). In fact, the practice of mindfulness has been shown to facilitate healthy coping specifically in social workers (Decker, Brown, Ong, & Stiney-Ziskind, 2015), and a study that reviewed research on mindfulness and stress concluded that mindfulness helps combat compassion fatigue among health care workers (Westphal et al., 2015). (There will be more on compassion fatigue later.) In addition, mindfulness has been shown to help people focus more and be more satisfied at work (Good et al., 2016).

To review, mindfulness is . . .

- a state, or way of being;
- a practice, or way of behaving; and
- a trait, or a fixed characteristic of a person (Garland, 2013).

That is, you can be in a state of mindfulness when you focus on sensations that are within you. Mindfulness is a way of creating silence by becoming aware of things that we usually ignore, like breathing. In fact, the practice of mindfulness can begin with a simple focus on your breathing. It is a peaceful way of getting in tune with yourself and your feelings. For this reason, it is an effective way to begin the process of self-reflection that is needed for the planned change stage of self-reflection.

The exercise below helps to understand the practice of mindfulness:

Bring your attention to the places where your body makes contact with the chair in which you are sitting. . . . Notice your legs . . . Notice your back . . . Notice the borders between where your body makes contact and stops making contact . . . Hold that awareness for a few moments . . . Now, have some thoughts about chairs . . . Think about your favorite chair. What is it like? . . . Remember some of the worst chairs you have had the displeasure of sitting in . . . What were they like? . . . How would you describe the chair you are sitting in right now? What do you think of it? (Boone, 2014, p. 11)

If you didn’t carry out the previously given exercise while you were reading, go back and do it. Spend a few moments on each ellipsis ( . . . ), and focus on the exercise. It is inevitable that you will have distracting thoughts. In that case, “the distraction may be visualized as a fluffy cloud, floating into and out of the practitioner’s awareness” (Turner, 2008, p. 97). You won’t understand mindfulness until you try it.
Mindfulness can become a trait in that you can practice it, develop it as a way of being, and enhance your ability to achieve the state again and again. It has been said that with practice mindfulness is an “orientation we can return to in any given moment” (Boone, 2014, p. x).

Usefulness in Planned Change

Recall that culturally responsive practice requires cultural humility and critical thinking. Managing emotional reactivity, or self-regulation, as well as identifying your own thoughts and feelings are essential to critically evaluating your own thinking. In the critical thinking exercise “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” it is essential to begin with a recognition of feelings that are specific to a specific case. When contemplating your feelings about a case, you may have to confront your own biases related to the diverse characteristics of your clients. In this case, to achieve the cultural humility necessary for culturally competent practice, you will be facing uncomfortable emotions that you’d rather ignore. To reach for these feelings and identify them, consider the following exercise:

Mindfulness of Painful Emotions

1. Feel the emotion (when considering a case). Take a moment to get in touch with the emotion. Don't choose an emotion that is too overwhelming when you first do this exercise. Now, imagine the emotion as a wave in the ocean. It comes toward you, like a wave coming toward the shore, and then recedes. Follow the flow of the waves as they rise to a peak and then recede and finally break.

2. Next, imagine that you are on a warm beach, the sun warming your face and a cool breeze blowing on your face. Imagine that the emotion is a wave on the ocean and the cool breeze blowing on your face makes the emotion a little lighter and less intense.

3. Imagine yourself at the beach, where the water is so blue that you can see the crystal-white water as the waves come toward the shore—flowing, rising, and then receding and breaking.

4. Imagine that the emotion is intense but only when you look at it from a distance—as you would look at the ocean from a distance. As you get closer, just as the waves become less intense as they reach the shore, so, too, do your emotions. Imagine that the sun warms your body and the cool breeze cools your face; observe the emotion as small and less intense.

5. Go back and forth between the image of the ocean, which allows you to feel comfortable and steady, and the emotion, which makes you feel tense and afraid. As you go back and forth, notice the breath as you inhale and exhale. Feel the rhythmic flow of the breath.

6. Notice the flow of the breath in and out and the waves flowing toward and away from the shore. Paying close attention to the emotion, notice how you can increase and decrease its intensity—how it can flow in and out like the waves of the ocean.

7. Notice how you can influence your feelings as you pay attention to them in this way. Notice how going back and forth between the comforting experience of being on the beach and the mindfulness of an emotion changes your experience of the emotion (adapted from Marra, 2004, cited in Hick, 2009).
Section 4.4: Developing Empathy

This section considers how mindfulness practice can facilitate the development of empathy.

The Meaning of Empathy

Empathy is the bedrock of social work practice. Empathy allows connection. It is the ability to take on the worldview of another person, to understand their perspective. If you are to stand inside another person and look out with their eyes, you would need to know something about their culture, something about their experiences, something about the things that bring them joy and the things that give them pain. You will begin to understand their thoughts, their feelings, and their actions (Grant, 2014). If you can do that, you can develop the ability to show it. You’ll do this through the things you say that seem to fit the situation. Your client or client system representative will feel a connection. Once you display empathy, you can begin to build a relationship. Developing and showing empathy is probably the most important skill you will use as a social worker. In fact, workers’ empathy has been found to have strong effects on clients’ physical, mental, and social well-being (Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011).

Developing Empathy

Many social work students can develop empathy pretty well naturally. Probably you are the kind of person that others often reach out to for some kind of assistance. It may seem like everywhere you go, you are being asked for help. People are likely to connect with you because you are talented at developing empathy for a broad range of people. For this reason, many talented people feel that they don’t need formal education. After all, they don’t find it difficult to build helping relationships. The assumption that you don’t need education because you find it easy to help others is a big mistake for several reasons. First, if you rely on instinct someday you will find yourself against a wall when it comes to developing empathy. For example, you may have to work with a parent who has abused their child. Just try to understand that person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions without training. It is really hard. Second, someone who develops empathy without training is likely to go too far. When you create empathy, you can easily become overinvolved, resulting in a terrible toll on your own well-being. You are likely to burn out and go become an accountant when you really want to be a social worker! Thomas and Otis (2010) found that burnout is not necessarily caused by seeing distressful events or hearing people talk about distressful events. It is not even caused by showing empathy or care to suffering people. Instead, it is caused by an inadequate boundary that the worker maintains around their professional self. For this reason, it is important to develop what Gerdes et al. (2011) has called **accurate empathy**.

1. Working with a partner, explain how mindfulness is practiced to each other. Discuss how you feel about practicing mindfulness.

2. Conduct the mindfulness exercise about painful emotions with a partner. Take turns reading the exercise for each other. Once you have identified an emotion, carry out the “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” exercise.
Accurate empathy has several features (Grant, 2014, p. 341):

- **Affective sharing**—Being mindful of the client’s experience; being self-reflective about the worker’s barriers to understanding
- **Self–other awareness**—A worker’s sense of self separate from the client
- **Self-emotion**—The conscious effort to control personal emotional reactions

### SELF-REFLECTION 4: FIVE FACET MINDFULNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

The practice of mindfulness has five aspects:

1. **Observing**—Attending to inner and outer experiences
2. **Describing**—Labeling those experiences
3. **Awareness**—Attending to the here and now
4. **Nonjudgmentalness**—Accepting inner experiences
5. **Nonreactivity**—Allowing thoughts, emotions, and experiences to come and go; not getting carried away by experience

Test your own mindfulness state with the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) from the academic journal *Assessment*. In which states of mindfulness are you most proficient? Think about what area of mindfulness you could practice to improve your ability to engage in cultural humility and empathy for client systems. What are some activities you can engage in to improve your mindfulness traits?

In other words, as you think about meeting a new client, you engage in **preparatory empathy** (Shulman, 1992). You think about them, and you reflect on how much you can’t possibly understand due to your own experiences (more on preparatory empathy below). You keep a clear identity separate from the client and from the client’s distress. Finally, for your own sake as well as the client’s, you identify your feelings and determine which of those should be expressed in the client’s best interest. You also use your identification of feelings to engage in the “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” exercise to help you manage diversity (Hanna, 2013). In this process, you’ll determine whether you need to display absent attributes. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of absent attributes.)

### FIGURE 4.5 ● Elements of Empathy

| Affective sharing | Self–other awareness | Emotional regulation |

#### Preparatory Empathy: How to Make It Happen

**Gaining Information**

Consciously planning to empathize with a person before meeting that person is preparatory empathy. To practice preparatory empathy, you begin by considering everything you know about a client or client system. Gain this information any way you can. For example, if the client used your agency’s services in the past, get ahold of the previous worker and get their impressions. (Be careful. Your colleague may have become too involved to be objective and may make negative comments: You’ll have to interpret them from a strengths perspective.) Say you ask a worker about a couple you’re going to work with dealing with marital issues.
A coworker may say “No wonder he wants to go out drinking with his friends all the time. She is so controlling.” This gives you information. Now frame it from a strengths perspective. In this case, it is likely that both husband and wife are lonely. They have both found ways to cope, but those ways are damaging their relationship. Another way of getting information is by reading a file if your client has received service from your agency in the past. You can also research anything you know about the client from the information you have. Maybe you need to research a mental or physical health problem or understand the side effects of medications. Use mindfulness practice to identify your feelings about the case. If you have strong feelings, you should engage in the “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” exercise.

Interpreting Diversity

Once you’ve gained information and reflected on your feelings about the case, you need to think about interpreting diversity. This kind of interpretation is sort of educated guessing. You will go back to what you know about diversity—how there are many types of diversity, how difference can result in oppression or power, how different experiences will affect the way difference plays out in people’s lives. You won’t have all of the information you need to fully develop empathy, but you’ll have some. Use the information you have to fill in as many blanks as you can. Once you make some guesses about the client’s elements of diversity, you have to again explore your own feelings. You will need to engage in mindfulness, identify your feelings, and engage your cultural humility. Try to understand what may be the person’s experiences of their different types of diversity.

Intelligent Guessing Example

Take a guess like this: You are going to work with an undergraduate freshman who needs help managing college. You think about their elements of diversity: You guess they will be in their late teens, and you’ll guess that they have just graduated from public high school. Here you are imagining concrete elements of diversity. Think about what you know about the client’s culture. What about their race and ethnicity? What about their gender expression? The type of neighborhood they come from? How about their family’s income? Now take a guess about affective elements of diversity. How is this person likely to be feeling about their struggles? How may they be feeling about asking for help? Perhaps they are missing their old friends and family. Perhaps they worry they will fail and be expelled. Of course, you can be wrong about this, but it’s a beginning. You’re beginning to take the other’s perspective.

Preparing to Feel

Now consider any experience you have had that is similar to your client’s. Chances are, you’ve had a similar experience beginning college or going to summer camp or even an extensive visit to relatives when you were young. You will use mindfulness and sit in silence to remember how you felt back then. This will take a few moments of time and silence. You should really try to reexperience your feelings. Go ahead and feel the discomfort. This practice marks the difference between a good and a great social worker: the willingness to feel the discomfort.

WHAT IF . . . FOCUS ON DIVERSITY

To what ethnic group did you assume Amy to belong? Think about why you made that assumption. Suppose Amy was African American with a particular accent that made her ethnicity obvious to people on the phone? Do you think her ethnicity may have an impact on her success in getting donations? Find out what kind of Chinese New Year gifts would be appropriate and culturally sensitive for adoptive families.
Experiences That Are Harder to Reach

It is often the case that your client is not of an age (either younger or older) that you can easily relate to. Suppose you are going to work with an aging woman who has just found herself in a long-term care facility against her will. You have not had that experience. But you might know someone who has had that experience—perhaps a parent or grandparent. It’s also very possible that you have had a similar experience in a different context. Here, for example, you may again touch base with your college experience. Remember your first night in the dorm with a stranger for a roommate and your parents heading back home. If you never stayed in a dorm, think about the first time you went to sleep in an empty house or apartment with no one else at home. It’s not the same experience the older woman is having, for sure, but it’s an emotional hook to grab hold of. Again, feel that feeling. Sit with it a bit. Be willing to experience the discomfort.

Experiencing and Releasing Distress

If you are true to the preparatory empathy process, you will spend some time feeling uncomfortable. Of course, you don’t want that to continue. You will store away that experience to be drawn out when you meet with your client. Again, it is possible that your educated guesses about diversity are not accurate. The client may have feelings much different than you imagined. Still, you have built a strong emotional connection with the client that is ready immediately.

Now it is time to get back to your everyday emotions. You have to let go of your old feelings. This is important so that your empathy can be accurate, or safe. Once you let go of the past feelings and experiences, you can get to the present and be more objective about your client’s concerns. You will need this separation to keep a boundary around yourself and to be nonreactive, or to practice self-regulation, about how you express your feelings. Practicing the mindfulness exercise above can help with this process. You may need to discuss your thoughts and feelings about your experience, so having a trusted supervisor is important. The point is to get in touch with your past, painful feelings and then let them go. At this point, you are ready to meet with your client.

CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 4.4

1. Identify a client situation that may seem foreign to you—for example, someone experiencing stress within their church council, someone experiencing substance abuse, someone considering an abortion, someone whose home improvement plans are stymied by a town ordinance, someone whose child has just died. Work with a partner to identify your feelings about that situation.

2. Once you have identified your feelings, try to identify some situation in your life that has some similarity to that hypothetical client’s situation.

3. Practice the mindfulness exercise about letting go of painful emotions.

Section 4.5: Supervision

Planned change is built on relationships between workers and their clients. In the same way, supervision between a social worker and their supervisor is built on a relationship...
of trust. Once that trust is established, the supervisory relationship serves to enhance a worker’s competency. No worker is so experienced that they don’t need supervision. This section continues the process of self-reflection through the use of supervision. It begins with a discussion about the development of the supervisory relationship and moves to the various purposes of supervision. You will need to know and build on the information in this section later: Supervision will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 13.

**Engaging in the Supervisory Relationship**

The supervisor–worker relationship is similar to the worker–client representative relationship. Supervisors and workers collaborate to engage in a process similar to the planned change process. In fact, the supervisory relationship is widely known to be a parallel process to that of the worker–client relationship (McMillin, 2012). To begin that process, supervisor and worker practice self-reflection to develop empathy for the other. Then, both the supervisor and the worker spend time engaging in relationship building. Each must trust the other for the planned supervisory change process to occur. In particular, trust between the two of them is needed for the worker to engage in the self-reflection needed to continuously improve their ability to facilitate planned change with their clients. On the other hand, both worker and supervisor must maintain boundaries, a concept that will be discussed later. First, consider the purposes of supervision.

**Purposes of Supervision**

Social work supervision has three purposes. The three purposes of supervision are administration, education, and support (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014).

**Administration**

The supervisor is first and foremost responsible to the agency. For that reason, supervisors must ask difficult questions about whether you’re getting your work done and what your relationship is with your colleagues. We’ll go into the details of the administrative aspects of supervision in Chapter 13, but for now know that it is critical. Unfortunately, sometimes supervision begins and ends with administration even though other purposes of supervision are just as important (Chapman, Oppenheim, Shibusawa, & Jackson, 2003).

**Education**

The second purpose of social work supervision is education. Often, supervisors educate workers based on their own experience, or practice wisdom (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015). Workers need to collaborate with supervisors to identify areas of growth that are required. The supervisor can recommend informed colleagues, readings, and workshops for the worker if the worker is able to allow the supervisor to see their challenges.

**Support**

The third component of supervision is support. Workers face troubling situations, and they need to be able to tell their stories and express their feelings. To get to the bottom of the situation, the worker will have to self-disclose information to their supervisor. This can become problematic if both worker and supervisor forget the purpose of the self-disclosure and make the connection deeper and beyond the purpose of support in supervision. At that point, a boundary violation may happen.
Boundaries in Supervision

Many times as a worker begins to trust their supervisor, they begin to share information about their domestic partner or intimate friend. This may begin in a very legitimate way. For example, the worker may have a very happy home life and have trouble understanding why an unhappy spouse does not leave a painful situation. If the worker does share some information about their relationship with their partner, a complicated situation occurs. The idea is that enough information should be shared but not too much. In this situation, both worker and supervisor should be aware (here is the importance of awareness again) that the personal information is being shared for a particular reason. It should be understood that the purpose of sharing information is always about intentionally improving service. For someone with a happy home life who is trying to develop empathy for an unhappy or abused person, it would be appropriate to share this situation with a supervisor to help get perspective.

While the supervisor–worker relationship is built on trust and is therefore similar to the worker–client relationship, it’s not identical. Once the trusting relationship is built, the worker and supervisor must together concentrate on maintaining boundaries around each other’s lives and experiences. Remember that a boundary may be thought of as the limit of a system (Carter, 2011). In other words, both supervisor and worker collaborate to share the aspects of themselves that are necessary for supervisory planned change to occur . . . and no more. In this way, supervisors can help workers to effectively use introspection in the self-reflection stage. If the worker shares too much information, they can easily get a helping relationship created with their supervisor. The result is that further administration and education in supervision is likely to fall by the wayside. It will grow increasingly difficult for the supervisor to ask the worker whether their paperwork is complete when they know that the worker has been up all night arguing with their partner about their partner’s controlling behavior. Ideally, the worker will share only what information is needed for the supervisor to help them identify barriers to their work.

CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 4.5

| Work in a large group: Discuss people’s experiences with supervision in their past jobs or volunteer experiences. |
| Were the experiences limited to administration? Which kinds of experiences were helpful? |

Section 4.6: Barriers to Supervision

This section will further explore the barriers that can occur in the supervisory relationship that make it harder for the worker to engage in meaningful self-reflection.

Why Barriers Develop in Supervision

Some time ago, Kadushin (1999) wrote about barriers that come between supervisors and workers. A major reason that barriers develop in supervision is role acceptance. For effective supervision to happen, the supervisor has to accept a role where they are the authority figure. They have to consistently stay in that role even when it becomes difficult to feel like they always have the answers. Likewise, the worker has to accept the role of learner. As an employee, that role is by its nature compliant. The worker has to accept direction
and advice from a supervisor even when they think the supervisor is wrong or when the worker is considerably older than the supervisor. There are a number of problems that can happen when either person is uncomfortable in their role. Kadushin (1999) has identified a number of specific relationship problems that can get in the way of good supervision and competent social work. Note that the following situations should be understood as interactions that happen outside of people's awareness. It is assumed that workers and supervisors do not try to avoid difficult situations just because they want their work to be easier. Instead, the interactions below occur outside of consciousness. Knowing about them can bring these barriers to awareness where they can be managed by both worker and supervisor. (Here is yet another time awareness is important.) As adapted from Kadushin (1999), four of these interactions consist of the following:

- Flattering the supervisor excessively
- Developing a friendship with the supervisor
- Sneakily pointing out a supervisor's lack of knowledge
- Continually asking simple questions to avoid uncomfortable situations

“You’re the Greatest”

This barrier often occurs when a worker has not been able to complete their work on time. They don't want to get to the part of supervision where administration takes place and the worker has to account for their incomplete work. Basically, the worker is unconsciously avoiding taking the compliant role of a supervisee. To avoid the administrative questions, the worker begins to flatter the supervisor. They tell their supervisor that they've never learned so much from a supervisor before, that the supervisor's practice wisdom is so great, that they look up to the supervisor as a mentor. Taken separately, these statements may be perfectly appropriate, but taken all at once they may result in a problem: After the worker has spent a significant amount of time flattering the supervisor, it is only human that the supervisor will find it difficult to make demands on the worker even if those demands are reasonable and based on agency policy. In this way, a barrier is placed in the supervisory relationship. Workers and supervisors alike should know to take a close look at themselves if they find themselves overly flattering the other person.

“Friends Don’t Let Friends Fail”

In this barrier to supervision, the supervisor is not comfortable maintaining distance in the authority role, and the worker is uncomfortable accepting direction and advice. Specifically, the worker is unconsciously trying to avoid being evaluated. A good performance evaluation is conducted collaboratively, with both parties stating their opinions and coming to agreement on what the evaluation says. Most importantly, a good evaluation will result in suggestions for further professional growth. Still, most people become anxious about their performance being assessed (think of your last exam), and they try to avoid it. In this barrier, good evaluation is hindered by a crossing of supervisor–worker boundaries. As workers share personal information and go too far, supervisors step into the role of helper: This is very comfortable for them. In and of itself, that is a serious problem. Next, it can get even worse. Both worker and supervisor can end up sharing personal stories and situations. They become more like peers or even friends, and it becomes more and more difficult for the supervisor to evaluate the worker's performance as anything but “wonderful.” Be cautious when you hear the word wonderful.
“I Just Have One Question”

Like most of the behaviors that cause barriers in supervision, “I just have one question” would be perfectly appropriate, even desirable, if it just happened once. But when a question turns into a long list of inquiries that occur at the beginning of the supervisory session, it can become a barrier by taking up all of the time. When a worker has trouble being compliant, they may ask question after question in each supervisory session. The questions serve the purpose of taking up time so that there is no chance for the supervisor to bring up administrative issues. In this way, the worker guarantees that there isn’t a chance for the supervisor to check on the worker’s late paperwork.

“What Was It Freud Said About That?”

This barrier to productive supervision occurs when a worker is not comfortable being compliant and a supervisor is not confident in the supervisory role. If the supervisor is not good at portraying the absent attribute of confidence, both worker and supervisor are vulnerable to this barrier. Here, the worker asks a question about a little known fact that is relevant to the agency. For example, the worker may ask the supervisor this: “What was that stage in Erikson’s developmental stages where adolescents are rebellious? You know, the fifth one? What’s it called?” Chances are, the new worker only knows this relatively trivial piece of information because they recently read about it in one of their college courses. Naturally, the supervisor cannot come up with identity vs. identity diffusion off the top of their head. The supervisor, not able to display confidence, mumbles some response. The worker knows very well that the supervisor does not know the answer, and the supervisor knows that the worker knows. Of course it will be difficult for the supervisor to then provide a critical evaluation or make a demand for work from the worker. An appropriate response for the supervisor to make is “I have no idea. Why don’t you look it up?”

Responses to Unconscious Barriers

Using mindfulness, workers and supervisors can recognize when they have anxiety about a supervisory session. This process will help them to identify what coping mechanisms they are using to avoid their anxiety. Once they are aware of the barrier, it can be removed. Most often, the best way to respond to these barriers is to remember to say “I don’t know” when you’re not sure of something. When workers and supervisors are comfortable admitting that they don’t know something, they have little need for unconscious coping mechanisms.

Removing Barriers With Theory

To remove the barriers that occur in the supervisory process is to identify feelings and critically examine the thoughts that lie behind them, as in the “What do I feel/believe/know/do?” exercise. Another way to remove barriers is to be aware of the planned change process as it occurs in supervision. As mentioned above, the planned change process is a parallel process to supervision in that each stage occurs in a similar way in supervision and in work with clients and client system representatives. Since the process is similar to work with clients, the worker is empowered to play a role in the mutual change process. In this way, the worker can make suggestions about the process of supervision. The worker should keep the following stages in mind:

- **Self-reflection**—The worker identifies feelings related to supervision and thinks critically about them to engage in conscious, professional behavior. It is helpful for the worker to spend some time engaging in mindfulness practice so they can begin to identify their feelings about supervision.
- **Engagement**—The worker and supervisor build a professional relationship before beginning tasks; agency mission is clarified; job description is reviewed.

- **Assessment**—The worker and supervisor examine the worker’s strengths and challenges related to the job description, including their knowledge and skills, the worker’s relationship with the supervisor, and the agency atmosphere and policies.

- **Planning**—The worker and supervisor construct goals for the worker to achieve during supervision. Tasks related to worker’s lifelong learning may be identified.

- **Implementation**—Worker and supervisor meet weekly for a full supervisory session in which the goals and their achievement form part of the focus in addition to administration, education, and support.

- **Evaluation**—Worker’s performance evaluation is conducted by both worker and supervisor individually, and then they compare their thoughts. The worker’s evaluation is a combination of the thoughts and opinions of both the worker and the supervisor. At this time, the supervisor may be willing to think about the worker’s evaluation of the supervisory process itself.

- **Termination**—When the worker or supervisor is ready to leave, they share their thoughts and feelings about the supervisory process.

- **Follow-up**—The worker may ask the supervisor for an employment reference in the future.

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**Critical Thinking and Collaborative Learning Exercises 4.6**

Work with a partner. You and your partner should both evaluate your performance in the classroom. Share your impressions. How do you feel having a peer evaluate your performance?

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**Section 4.7: Self-Care**

Self-reflection has been explored for the purpose of bringing feelings, thoughts, and behaviors into awareness. It was noted that while this process can be extremely fulfilling, it can also be a painful experience. This section explores the potential of self-reflection for self-care.

**Compassion Fatigue**

It is well known that social workers engage in empathy for clients in terribly upsetting situations. On a positive note, developing empathy can help workers to better understand themselves and even build on their own coping skills. On the other hand, developing empathy, especially as it is described above, can be painful and can even drain a worker’s ability to continue in the job. Workers can easily experience troubling feelings as they try to stand in the shoes of people who are suffering. It is easy for them to get stress-related symptoms. The process of developing stress-related symptoms in the face of repeatedly developing empathy for people in painful situations is called **compassion fatigue** (Bush, 2009). Scientific research has shown that compassion fatigue can result in more than just
discomfort. Compassion fatigue can result in ongoing levels of stress, where people feel stressed about their jobs even when they are not working. It can cause physical and emotional exhaustion when people are at work, leaving them no energy to engage in recreation or relationships. At home, people may withdraw from significant relationships and experience irritability or depression. At work, they may even find that they are less able to do their jobs. They find it harder and harder to develop empathy (Bush 2009; Decker, Bailey, & Westergaard, 2002; Gough, 2007).

**Indicators of Compassion Fatigue**
- Inability to continue to develop empathy
- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Physical exhaustion
- Emotional exhaustion
- Feelings of stress
- Withdrawal
- Irritability

**Prevention**

Obviously it is essential to guard against compassion fatigue. Remember that mindfulness practice can help prevent compassion fatigue (Westphal et al., 2015). Another method of prevention is developing close relationships with your coworkers (Kanno, Kim, & Constance-Huggins, 2016). Next, it is important to develop the accurate empathy we’ve just discussed. Keep appropriate emotional boundaries between yourself and your clients. Maintain your general wellness too. Traditionally, strategies to maintain wellness have included socialization, recreation and leisure time, good nutrition, and exercise. That means don’t isolate yourself entirely even if you have a lot of schoolwork, remember to have fun even if you’re employed outside of school, take time to plan meals and eat right, and make sure you don’t sit more than you need to. Currently, most research focuses on mindfulness practice for stress reduction such as the exercise provided earlier. Keep in mind that the practice of self-reflection, the first stage in the helping process, is in and of itself potentially dangerous to workers in situations of inappropriate empathy and poor boundaries. Be sure to focus on the present, not on negative thoughts. We must take action to guard against compassion fatigue, perhaps using mindfulness techniques and certainly using the general wellness practices noted above. Also, it is important for workers to recognize that indicators of stress, including headaches, sleeping too much or too little, eating too much or too little, snapping at your friends, and having an inability to continue to develop empathy for clients are all red flags for compassion fatigue. Workers must respond immediately when it happens. Take care of yourself. As we’ve seen, mindfulness practice is a well-known method of relieving stress. Here is an example of the use of mindfulness for stress relief:

Do the exercise sitting or lying down. Follow the directions, taking time between each sentence. The exercise should last about 15 minutes:

Take a few moments to be still. Congratulate yourself for taking some time for meditation practice. Bring your awareness to your breath wherever you feel it most prominently in your body. It may be at the nose, neck, chest, belly, or somewhere
else. As you breathe in normally and naturally, be aware of breathing in, and as you breathe out, be aware of breathing out. Simply maintain this awareness of the breath, breathing in and breathing out. Be aware of breathing out. There is no need to visualize, count, or figure out the breath; just be mindful of breathing in and out. Without judgment, just watch the breath ebb and flow like waves in the sea. There’s no place to go and nothing else to do, just be in the here and now, noticing the breath—just living life one inhalation and one exhalation at a time. As you breathe in and out, be aware of the breath rising on the inhalation and falling on the exhalation. Just riding the waves of the breath, moment by moment, breathing in and breathing out. From time to time, attention may wander from the breath. When you notice this, simply acknowledge where you went and then gently bring your attention back to the breath. Breathing normally and naturally, without manipulating the breath in any way, just be aware of the breath as it comes and goes. As you come to the end of this meditation, congratulate yourself for taking this time to be present, realizing that this is an act of love. (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010, p. 57)

Along with all of these methods of stress relief and self-care, be sure to seek appropriate supervision. In the context of healthy boundaries, your supervisor is an important resource for stress relief (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). Overall, workers should prioritize meeting their own needs. It’s like what they tell you in an airplane: Put the oxygen mask on yourself first; then you can help others.

**Self-Reflection: The Fearful Worker**

Amy could do Internet searches, make PowerPoint presentations, and use social media. She didn’t know how to use Excel, though, and she found out the hard way that she shouldn’t have pretended she did. What Amy was using was a display of confidence, but supervision is not a place for a worker to display confidence; it is a place to ask questions. In Amy’s case, she didn’t want to appear stupid in front of her supervisor. She needed to identify her feelings of anxiety and shame and think about her belief that every person in her school and in the agency was proficient with Excel. If she had done some asking around, she could have used critical thinking and identified the fact that not everyone in the agency knew Excel. In fact, Amy’s supervisor was making the incorrect assumption that because Amy was a young adult she must know “everything” about computers. Once Amy recognized that she wasn’t alone, she could allow herself to be unsure. She could allow herself to say “I don’t know.”

**CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 4.7**

1. Work with a partner. Identify six activities that each of you do to take care of yourselves. How often do you do them? What are the times you are least likely to do them?

2. Make a plan for attending more to your needs. Share it with a friend.
**Ethical Decision-Making Challenge**

When Amy was first confronted with Excel, she thought she might get by without learning it. If she had paid attention to Standard 3 in the *NASW Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2018), she might have behaved differently. If you substitute the word *school* for *employer* in that section of the code, are you behaving ethically as a student?

**Managing Diversity**

Find out whether it is better for adopted children to be connected to their ethnicity of origin or whether it is better for them if their adoptive parents expect them to embrace their adoptive family’s ethnic group and family traditions.

**Human Rights**

Is anyone in this case being deprived of any fundamental human rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, an adequate standard of living, health care, and education? Think about the adoptive parents as well as those who would like to be adoptive parents.

**Evidence-Based Practice**

Amy’s agency was attempting to create support among the adoptive families by creating an event they would be happy to attend. Are there any activities that Amy should carry out during the event that would help the families connect with each other? Look in the scientific literature to see what activities might foster engagement among members of a support group. Can she just organize a party, or is there something specific that should happen at the party?

**Policies Impacting Practice**

Research the policies related to adoption in your state. What is the difference between public adoption and private adoption related to eligibility, cost, and family outcomes?

**Multisystem Practice**

Identify examples of Amy’s work on all levels.

- Micro:
- Mezzo:
- Macro:

**Dynamic and Interactive Planned Change Stages**

Identify aspects of Amy’s work where she worked in the following stages:

- Self-Reflection:
- Engagement:
- Assessment:
- Planning:
- Implementation:
- Evaluation:
- Termination and Follow-Up:

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**Chapter Summary**

**Section 4.1: Self-Reflection**

The first stage in the planned change process is self-reflection. Self-reflection is where the worker uses introspection to become aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal of self-reflection is for the worker to become intentional in what they do.
Section 4.2: Developing Cultural Humility

Another benefit of self-reflection is the development of cultural humility. Cultural humility is the worker’s self-awareness about their own prejudices so that they can fully understand the values of other cultures. Cultural humility is required for workers to become culturally sensitive.

Section 4.3: The Method of Self-Reflection

The process of developing cultural sensitivity can be carried out using mindfulness techniques. In mindfulness practice, a person becomes aware of their physical sensations. They also pay attention to their thoughts and accept them without judgment. Using mindfulness exercises can help workers to identify the negative feelings. This process helps workers to develop cultural responsiveness.

Section 4.4: Developing Empathy

Cultural sensitivity is necessary to develop empathy. Empathy is a way of getting in touch with another’s thoughts and feelings. Accurate empathy is developing empathy that is safe and not too painful for the worker. A process of the development of empathy can allow a worker to begin to develop empathy before meeting a client.

Section 4.5: Supervision

Developing empathy can be emotionally draining, so supportive supervision is an important aid to self-reflection. Social work supervision has three elements: (1) administration, (2) education, and (3) support. Appropriate boundaries are important to developing a trusting supervisory experience.

Section 4.6: Barriers to Supervision

Barriers can come between a worker and supervisor, often because one or the other is not comfortable in their role. These barriers can often be overcome with the recognition of feelings related to the supervisory process. Barriers can also be overcome by becoming aware of how supervision can be a planned change process.

Section 4.7: Self-Care

Self-reflection can also be useful to prevent and respond to compassion fatigue. It is important for workers to engage in self-care to provide the best service to clients and client systems.

SELF-REFLECTION 4: FIVE FACET MINDFULNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

AUTHORS: Ruth A. Baer, Gregory T. Smith, Emily Lykins, Daniel Button, Jennifer Krietemeyer; Sharon Sauer, Erin Walsh, Danielle Duggan, L. Toney, and J. Mark G. Williams

PURPOSE: To measure five aspects of mindfulness

DESCRIPTION: The 39-item instrument assesses five interrelated dimensions of mindfulness: observing; describing; acting with awareness; nonjudgmentalness; and nonreactivity. It is useful when evaluating a wellness and health promotion program. Since mindfulness is so highly associated with psychological well-being and the absence of mental health symptoms, it is a useful goal to monitor most implementations.
NORMS: The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) has been tested with a number of groups including college students. Average scores of the five facets among college students were as follows:

- Observe Score (OS): 24
- Describe Score (DS): 26
- Act Aware Score (AAS): 25
- Nonjudgmental Score (NJS): 28
- Nonreactive Score (NRS): 21

SCORING: Sum the following items to score each facet of mindfulness:

- OS: 1, 6, 11, 15, 20, 26, 31, 36
- DS: 2, 7, 12, 16, 22, 27, 32, 37 (reverse score 16 and 22—meaning a score of 5 = 1 and a score of 2 = 4, etc.)
- AAS: 5, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 34, 38 (reverse score all)
- NJS: 3, 10, 14, 17, 25, 30, 35, 39 (reverse score all)
- NRS: 4, 9, 19, 21, 24, 29, 33

RELIABILITY: The FFMQ has adequate to good reliability with alpha coefficients ranging from .72 to .91.

VALIDITY: The FFMQ has excellent evidence of validity. The five-facet structure was supported by factor analysis, with the scale scores having moderate correlations to suggest they are independent but are interrelated constructs. Meditation experiences are associated with each scale, except for AAs in a sample of 1,107.

PRIMARY REFERENCES:


FIVE FACET MINDFULNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate each of the following statements using the scale provided. Write the number in the blank that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.

1 = never or very rarely true
2 = rarely true
3 = sometimes true
4 = often true
5 = very often or always true

1. When I’m walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.
2. I’m good at finding words to describe my feelings.
3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.
4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.
5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I’m easily distracted.
6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.
7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words.
8. I don’t pay attention to what I’m doing because I’m daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.
9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.
Recommended Websites


“Microsoft Tech Support” from 24/7 Techies: www.247techies.com/ppc/microsoft-tech-support.php?gclid=CNGswu31h9ACFQhkgod2AEE6g
Critical Terms for Self-Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>self-reflection</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>macro</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural humility</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diversity</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culturally responsive</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic identity</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total identity</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culturally sensitive</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intergroup differences</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intragroup differences</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mindfulness</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>operationalize</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accurate empathy</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparatory empathy</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concrete elements of diversity</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affective elements of diversity</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parallel process</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice wisdom</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-disclose</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boundary</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role acceptance</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compassion fatigue</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix With 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

Chapter 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Content</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.1. Articulate the meaning of self-reflection in work with systems of all sizes.</td>
<td>Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5. Identify aspects of supervision that facilitate self-reflection and professional use of self.</td>
<td>Knowledge Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6. Explore potential barriers to productive supervision.</td>
<td>Knowledge Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feature 3: Self-Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feature 1: Focus on Diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Course Content</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 4: Engage In Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td>4.3. Appraise the scientific support for the practice of mindfulness for self-reflection.</td>
<td>Knowledge Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 6: Engage With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td>4.4. Practice the process of developing empathy. Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td>Cognitive–affective processes Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 8: Intervene With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency 9: Evaluate Practice With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities</td>
<td>Feature 4: Concurrent Considerations in Generalist Practice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Cognitive–affective processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**References**


### Recommended Readings


