Introduction
A key element of the social work process is the selection of intervention methods, informed by psychological and sociological theories, and social work assessments. Through skills of observation and assessment, social workers are able to analyse and explain situations, develop hypotheses about potential outcomes, and select intervention methods to achieve desired outcomes. Implementing intervention methods requires skills in communication and knowledge in building, maintaining and sustaining relationships, as well as critical reflection and analysis in order to evaluate the intervention’s effectiveness (whether through formal or informal evaluative methods). Initial qualifying programmes can provide the foundational knowledge of social work intervention methods, although opportunities to practise a range of methods may be limited. A more complete and effective integration of theory and intervention methods can evolve with professional practice and CPD.

Terminology
Terms such as ‘intervention’, ‘methods’ and ‘theories’ are often used interchangeably to describe the specific tools of social work practice. Although a theory and a method are independent concepts, they influence one another. ‘Theory’ is synonymous with hypothesis, idea or explanation where it is a tool to help predict or explain why something has happened or might happen in the future. ‘Method’ is synonymous with process, technique and mode and depicts the actual activities that a social worker does when working with a client. The selection of a method, or the actions the social worker will take, is dependent on the social worker’s use of theory to help make sense of a current situation or behaviour. ‘Method’ can also be replaced with terms such as ‘intervention’, ‘approach’, or ‘practice’ (Teater, 2010).

Key curriculum issues
Social work students should have a foundational knowledge of the key psychological, physical, physiological and sociological perspectives, which inform the selection of intervention methods. Implementing the method within the social work context will require communication, interviewing and relationship-building skills.

Key issues and topics to address include:
- Ensuring students are introduced to communication and interviewing skills as well as relationship-based social work.
- Exploring the extent to which intervention methods adhere to social work values and ethics and considering situations when there are conflicts.
- Considering the processes and effects of termination or endings.
- Exploring how to choose an intervention method with a clear rationale, based on theory, research and assessment.
- Considering how models of assessment can both inform the selection of an intervention method and serve as an intervention method.
- Critiquing the strengths and weaknesses of theories and intervention methods.
- Analysing how appropriate the intervention method is for use in different contexts and with service users with diverse need by paying particular attention to the evidence base.
- Critically analysing and reflecting upon the implementation of the theories and methods by asking, ‘what worked and how do you know?’; ‘what will you do the same or different in the future?’ The reflection and evaluation should be informed from multiple sources of knowledge, including service user and carer perspectives and the evidence base. Evaluation may also include the use of, for example, single case experimental designs, which often accompany interventions where behaviours can be measured pre and post intervention.
- Considering what intervention methods as well as communication and relationship-building skills might be appropriate when working with aggression and resistance.

• Exploring the appropriateness of using a single intervention method or taking an integrative/eclectic approach.
• Identifying the users and/or carers with whom it is most appropriate to work, for example an individual, an individual and his or her carer, parents, a family (co-resident or extended), a group or neighbourhood network.

Intervention methods can be taught in a single module or integrated across several modules, which might include communication or relationship-building skills, or modules focused on working with specific populations or areas of work, such as children, adults, families, communities, mental health, substance misuse or disability. Recall days and/or modules between placements can also serve as valuable environments for students to link learning and their practice experiences. It is equally important to work with practice educators on the methods students might be supported to observe and use while on placement. Teaching methods should enable students to observe and practise applying the intervention methods. Particular learning activities could consist of large group discussion, small group exercises, case examples, peer feedback, use of videos/novels to identify skills and techniques or to apply the theories/methods to characters, role-plays, and the use of actors/drama students (Teater, 2011ii).

**Key content areas**

1. **Basic knowledge of a theory and intervention method**
   - Identify the difference between a theory and a method and describe how the two concepts influence one another.
   - Establish a rationale for the use of theories and intervention methods within social work practice.
   - Define and describe the basic premises/characteristics/assumptions of commonly used social work theories and intervention methods.

2. **Application of theories and intervention methods**
   - Demonstrate application of theories and intervention methods to example practice situations from the viewpoint of a social worker while paying particular attention to the various non-therapeutic settings in which social workers can practise.
   - Examine the research and evidence base to determine the effectiveness of such interventions in particular settings with particular populations.
   - Critique how the theories and intervention methods either help or hinder in practising anti-oppressively.
   - Consider the cultural and ethical issues in implementing the intervention methods in different situations (e.g. substance abuse; mental health; caring roles) with different populations, ethnicities and cultures.

3. **Skills necessary to implement and evaluate intervention methods**
   - Combine communication skills and relationship-based social work skills with the intervention method.
   - Critically analyse the usefulness of applying the theories and methods to social work practice with individuals, families, groups or communities, particularly in regard to empowerment and anti-discriminatory practice.
   - Critically assess the strengths and limitations of social work theories and methods.
   - Engage in critical reflection to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention methods, which will include asking the following questions: ‘What happened?; How did it compare with previous experiences?; How did I do?; How well did I do?; What could I have done better?; What could I have done differently?’ (Adams, 2009iii) alongside obtaining service user and carer feedback.

---


Produced in partnership to support curriculum development in initial social work education (2012)
4. Commonly used theories and intervention methods
Theories and intervention methods can be incorporated into the curriculum by either covering a selection within a social work methods module, and/or incorporating a selection across the curriculum in subject-specific modules (i.e. attachment theory in a human growth and development module; advocacy and community work in a community social work module). Half- and full-day workshops may also assist students in becoming more competent and confident in implementing particular intervention methods. By the end of the initial qualifying programme, students should have an awareness of a wide range of intervention methods and have had an opportunity to develop a good understanding and practise experience of using at least two or three.

- Theories and methods for intervention: Systems theory; ecological perspective/person-in-environment; psychosocial; psychodynamic/psychoanalytic; attachment theory; attachment-based interventions; social constructivism; feminist theory and practice; critical social work; radical social work; groupwork theory and practice; anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive theory and practice; power and empowerment; the strengths perspective; behavioural theory; cognitive theory; cognitive behavioural therapy; assessment (see below); advocacy; community work/development; person-centred approach; relationship-based social work; narrative practice/therapy; life story work and life review; art and/or play therapy; mediation approaches; family therapy/systemic practice; task-centred social work; motivational interviewing; solution-focused practice; crisis theory and intervention.

Links to other curriculum areas including other guides (⊗)
- Assessment (⊗): how assessments inform the type of intervention method selected for a particular situation and setting; how the different models of assessment can serve as an intervention method.
- Communication skills (⊗): developing the communication skills necessary to implement intervention methods; how communication skills can impact the implementation of the intervention methods.
- Human growth and development (⊗): how the selection of intervention methods needs to be appropriate for a particular developmental stage.
- Mental health (⊗): particular intervention methods most commonly used in mental health services (i.e. cognitive behavioural therapy; crisis intervention).
- Substance use (⊗): particular intervention methods most commonly used in substance misuse treatment (e.g. motivational interviewing).
- Children’s behaviour and parenting (⊗): particular theories and methods most commonly used in children and family settings (i.e. attachment theory; family therapy/systemic practice).
- Relationships (⊗): how relationships can influence the effectiveness of the intervention method.

Key resources
6. SWAPBox: http://www.swapbox.ac.uk Search terms: interventions, social work theories, methods; interviews.