

Social Work Interview Guide

Step-by-step guide for social work job applicants

*From **Ellen King**, Interviewer at specialized Social Work recruitment agency & Independent Career Coach*

Job of a social worker is one of the most rewarding, and most challenging roles you can have. A personal mission, a calling, a dream many of us follow. **Not every dream comes true, however...** Study conducted in the United States back in March 2016 showed that in average, **more than fifteen people with qualification applied for every single social worker job opening**, during the year of 2015. The popularity of this career is growing, and I do not see this trend changing anytime soon.

How to be the one of fifteen who gets the job? How to turn your dream to reality? I will try to answer this question on the pages of Social Work Interview Guide. I personally interviewed more than four hundred applicants for various social work positions, and therefore I know:

- Most people **focus on completely wrong things in their interview preparation.**
- Practically everyone can get this job, if they know what to do, and HOW to do it in an interview.
- The questions the interviewers typically use, how to answer them to their satisfaction, and what else one can do to **maximize their chances of getting a job.**

This eBook should help you to understand what to do from the very beginning of your job search, to the moment of signing a coveted job contract with an employer.

You can ask me right now:

Doesn't the social work recruitment differ from company to company, from country to country, from one social work position to another?

Certainly, some differences do exist. However, when you are interviewed for a job of a social worker, you can hardly expect to deal with interview questions for nurses, or competency test for nuclear scientists.

The principles of hiring, and the interview questions, are similar, every time an institution recruits for any position in the field of social work. Once you understand these principles and questions, and learn how to adapt to the specific conditions of your interview, you will be ready to make a **long-lasting unforgettable impression**, and get the job.

Enjoy your reading!

Ellen King,

Interviewer at Care Recruitment; Independent Career Coach

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I. Before The Interview

Chance favors the prepared mind.

Success in an interview does not depend only on your answers to interview questions. Your **non-verbal communication** matters, your **demeanor** counts. **What you wear and what you bring** with you is also important. Small details make a big difference in this world, and job interview is no different. After all, your success story starts in a moment of composing your resume, and it does continue with many other things you should take care of in the process of hiring. We will have a look at them in the first part of this book.

Social Worker Resume

It does not matter if you were already invited for an interview, or are just trying to secure an invitation. You should understand the crucial parts on your resume, and improve them, **because various people read your resume before, during, and after the interview with you**, while trying to decide whether they hire you.

Picture on resume

According to statistics collected in our recruitment agency over the years, candidates with picture on their resume are invited for an interview three times more often than candidates that decided to not use a picture.

One could say it is a coincidence, but I doubt it. Statistics based on hundreds of recruitment projects shouldn't be considered coincidental.

People are **visual beings**. A good picture can tell a lot about your personality, and motivation to do the job of a social worker. In fact, it sometimes tells more than the entire resume.

Therefore, you should definitely choose a good picture, and place it on your resume, ideally in a top right corner. Dressed in business-casual attire, with smile on your face, **showing positive emotions and enthusiasm** would be a great choice of a picture. Alternatively, you

can use a **photo of you working, ideally with the target group** (with people you'll work with in the job) if you have one.

This picture would send a clear sign to the minds of the hiring committee. They would feel that you're qualified to do the job, simply because they see you doing it already. Remember, our decisions are emotional, not rational—and the people in the hiring committee are no different! A great photo can do miracles for an average resume, and can lead to plethora of interview invitations.

Introduction and Resume Objective

Jeremy Miles, a former reputable career coach from Canada, wrote that **one decides in the first eight seconds of reading your resume, whether they invite you for an interview.** They may, as well as not, read your resume through, but the decision has already been taken in their head (in the first eight seconds).

For this reason, **the picture and the first few lines on your resume represent the most crucial part, and you need to pay close attention to them.**

Your objective, or introduction if you want—simply the first few sentences on your resume, **should be short, to the point, and somehow unique.** Inspire yourself with the following examples:

- *Empathic and goal-oriented social worker seeking work in similar capacity. Well versed in creating solutions for the target group, and in working with young people, with a broader aim of bringing progressive innovation to the sphere of social work.*

- *Dedicated and experienced social worker, eager to utilize passion for work and great communication skills, while bringing value to both his employer and clients, following a meaningful purpose in job.*

- *Seeking the position of Social Worker with XY Hospital; to advocate for those who are having medical or legal difficulties; to look for best recovery choices for those in need and ensure efficient care is delivered.*

Note: As you could see, clever job applicants **do not write only about their own goals**. In each of these objectives you can find **something meaningful for the employer**, for example *bringing value to the hospital, bringing innovation, making a positive difference in lives of people*. That is an employer oriented approach, a broader perspective an applicant presents on their resume. Hiring managers love job applicants with this attitude, and you should keep it on your mind while composing, or changing your resume.

Other Sections on a Social Worker Resume

Other sections on your resume, such as education and working experience, are pretty straightforward. However, you should not forget that anyone can read the paper. It can be a professional in social work, as well as someone with no idea about the job (think HR generalist, CEO, etc). Therefore I suggest you to use rather simple language. You should mention **also your achievements and working duties**, not only the job titles you held in the past (if you had any jobs before).

Keep it clear, and simple. Choose good picture; start with an excellent objective, get their attention! Follow with a decent list of experience, stressing **what you have learned, and achieved on your way**. Your resume should not exceed two pages in length.

I suggest you to improve **your resume**, even if you were already invited for an interview. Many people will see the copy of it again and again, in the process of decision making. Some of these people may never talk to you—all they will see is your resume, and the report from the hiring committee, or HR manager. Yet they may have their word, or even make a final decision. Therefore it is important to bring few copies of your better resume to the interview with you.

Issue of Correspondence

Your resume has its own “non-verbal communication”. Let me explain on two examples. One job applicant sent his CV to our agency, claiming to be a detail oriented social worker. Yet he did not include dates on employment history. He included years only (e.g. XY Position, from 2007 to 20011).

Another young man wrote on his social worker resume that he had excellent computer skills. At the same time, however, his resume was poorly formatted, and he did not even know how to align the picture to the page properly.

In both cases, **things written on a resume did not correspond with the layout and format of it.** Said in other words, verbal and non-verbal communication of their resume did not correspond. As you can guess, we doubted the trustworthiness of these applicants, and we did not invite them for an interview in our agency.

Have a look at your resume, and think about the issue of correspondence. Every good recruiter checks it (and some average recruiters do so as well). It is always better to **write less, leaving some room for positive surprises in your interview,** than to describe yourself as a superb candidate, but disappoint the interviewers on a big day. This happens way too often, and the candidates we expect the most from (because of their resume) typically disappoint us and do not get a job.

Diplomas, Certifications and Recommendations

Master’s degree has never made a good social worker of anyone. It is the same with every single role in human society, isn’t it? However, for recruiters and hiring managers, diplomas, degrees, and certifications matter.

Therefore you should definitely make at least **several copies of the documents, and bring them to the interview with you.**

Even if they did not take the documents, or did not look at them at all, it would still help you. The fact that you brought them with you **shows how important the particular job is for**

you. It shows the interviewers that you really care. Most job applicants bring only their resume. Try to be better, try to do more. Interviewers will always appreciate the “**do more**” **approach.**

The same applies to **personal recommendations.** **If you can get a written recommendation from your former boss, or professor at school if you apply for a first job, bring it to the interview.** The employers may make their own background checks anyway, so why not to help them to choose the right person to contact, when they will seek feedback on your skills? A signed recommendation from someone they'd respect can boost your chances of getting a job. Try to get it, if you still have time. And if your interview is tomorrow, get the recommendations later. You will certainly use it one day.

Personality Tests

Interviewers use various tests while trying to assess the capacities of job applicants. For a job of a social worker, however, they typically use only particular personality test. Interviewers may rarely use an IQ test (especially in agencies), but **for a good social worker, emotional intelligence is more important** than their IQ (anything above 95 is OK for a social worker, if they are not supposed to work with gifted children, or work in social research).

Without any doubt, however, one needs right personality to do this job, and to do it for a long time, without suffering from disappointment, or burnout syndrome. For this reason, hiring managers and people in HR agencies will quite often ask you to complete a personality test in an interview.

Many job seekers are afraid of the tests. However, once you **understand the logic behind the questions, and know how to approach the test,** it will become your favorite part of any interview.

And even if you don't need to deal with it in your next interview, you will surely remember the lesson one day you encounter a similar test, in another hiring process, perhaps for a completely different role 😊.

Form of a test

The most common personality tests consist of thirty to fifty **statements you should give your opinion to**. You should *strongly agree* with a statement, *agree with it*, *disagree with it* or *strongly disagree with it*.

Let me pick five random statements from a personality test for social work job applicants that we use in our recruitment agency.

- *It is easy for you to feel what others are feeling.*
- *When your friends need help, they call you first.*
- *It is hard to really care about work when the job is boring.*
- *You are proud of the work you do.*
- *There are some people you really can't stand.*

These are five statements from a fifty statements-long test that we use in our agency. Job applicants should choose if they *strongly agreed*, *agreed*, *disagreed*, or *strongly disagreed* with every statement.

To make a right choice, you should always ask yourself the following question: **What would a great social worker do?**

Would a great social worker agree, or disagree with the statement? That should be on your mind while completing the test. Let's analyze it one by one.

1. *It is easy for you to feel what others are feeling.*

A great social worker is **empathic**. They recognize the feelings of the people they work with, and they act accordingly in their job. So, from a point of view of the interviewers, the answer "*strongly agree*" is the correct one.

2. *When your friends need help, they call you first.*

You should use the same logic. An ideal applicant for a job of a social worker loves to help people, and they should also be able to solve problems. Therefore, the right answer is “*strongly agree*”.

3. *It is hard to really care about work when the job is boring.*

The job of a social worker can sometimes become boring, especially if you work with the same target group all time, or sit in the office. However, **ideal employee should really care about work, even if the job is boring**. So, next to this statement, you should tick “*strongly disagree*”, because every great social worker would make that choice.

4. *You are proud of the work you do.*

Ideal employee (and a good too) **should be proud of their work**. When one is proud, they are **happy and motivated** to work hard, day in day out. Clinics, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, care centers, orphanages, and other social work institutions want to employ people that are happy, and motivated in work. Logically, the right answer is “*strongly agree*”.

5. *There are some people you really can't stand.*

Social workers meet with all kinds of people, and often they can not choose their clients. As a good candidate for this role, however, **you should be able to stand everyone; you should actually enjoy the diversity your job offers**. Therefore the right answer is “*strongly disagree*”. You should strongly disagree with the statement, because a good social worker can not only stand everyone, but they can actually love and respect them.

As you can see, it is easy to complete the test. All you have to do is to ask yourself the following question: ***What would a great social worker answer?***

And then you should choose the same option.

*Note: I always chose **strongly agree** or **strongly disagree** for my answers. To only agree or disagree with something shows hesitation. You should not hesitate. You should have clear vision of your job and life, and know what you want. That is why you should choose “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” in the vast majority of cases. However, if you are not sure*

about an answer, you can choose the “mild option”, ticking that you just agree or disagree with a statement.

Here are five other statements from the test. Would you agree, or disagree with them?

1. *You have confidence in yourself.*
2. *You like to be in the middle of a big crowd.*
3. *There's no use having close friends; they always let you down.*
4. *You always try not to hurt people's feelings.*
5. *You'd rather not compete very much.*

(Right answers: 1. SA, 2. A, 3. SD, 4. SA, 5. SA)

Do not be afraid of a personality test. You should have enough time to think about the right answers, from a point of view of a great social worker. In general, great social workers are positive about themselves and the others, empathic, and they look for the good in every person. They are motivated and upbeat, team players, and they do not get offended easily. They like to be active and they “live for their job”.

Note: The same technique can be applied on every other “normal” personality testing. However, if you have to deal with strange tests, e.g. test consisting of questions such as “which of these circles is angry”, or “which of these colors is the most blue”, there is not much you can do to prepare for it in advance. Just follow your heart, and choose an answer, if you are confronted with this test...

The good news is that recruiters are ceasing to use weird forms of personality testing. After all, the interpretation of them has always been questionable.

If there is a test in your interview, it will be most likely the one with agree-disagree options described in the paragraphs above. Get ready according to the instructions, and **impress the interviewers with your answers.**

Interview Attire

In an ideal world, personal preferences, physical appearance, and attire of job applicants, would have no effect on the final decision of the interviewing panel.

But **we do not live in an ideal world**. Personal preferences, as well as your physical appearance, can make a difference.

While it is naive to believe that good attire (or physical beauty) can win you a social worker job contract, **it is also foolish to think that wrongly chosen attire can not ruin your chances of succeeding**.

So, what to wear?

From my experience, business casual outfit is a best choice for this type of interviews. Do not put on anything expensive, or something that would make you stand out from common people. Your clothes should reflect your humble personality, and your goal to get close to the target groups of social work.

Subconscious game

A scientific study proved that once job seekers adhered to the dress code of the institution, the interviewers had better feelings about them. Once again, **it isn't rational, but emotional, and subconscious**. Recruiters saw someone as a good adept to join the company, **just because the colors and style of their dress matched with the dress code of the institution, with their corporate identity**.

Most social work institutions do not belong to the commercial sector, but nevertheless, they have many things in common with institutions from the commercial world.

In a world of business, every company has their identity. Colors belong to the identity. IBM has the blue, Target red, and STARBUCKS their beautiful green. We can continue for hours... But many clinics, rehabs, nursing homes, and care centers have their characteristic colors as well.

Clever job seekers choose the color of their attire (shirt, blouse, t-shirt) that matches the colors of the institution, trying to **send some positive signals to the minds of the interviewers.**

Try to not downplay the importance of your attire. Show them that you are a detail oriented social worker. Show them that **you care about every little thing, because getting the job matters to you.** The final decision of the interviewers is from 80% emotional, not rational. Don't forget on that fact, and always **focus on creating the right impression and atmosphere in the meetings with the hiring committee.**

Do Not Forget to Do Your Homework

Responsible job seekers do some research prior to their interview.

The recruiters expect **you to know something about their institution, and the nature of the job.** At least they expect it from an ideal candidate—and you should try getting as close as possible to the profile of an ideal candidate for the job of your choice.

I suggest you to conduct a detailed research, focusing mainly on the following areas:

- The vision and goals of the social work institution (why do they exist, what they try to achieve with their daily activity)
- Major achievements of the institution (in terms of recognition by city or state council, prizes they were awarded, tangible results they achieved with their target groups, etc.)
- Things that make the institution a unique place to stay at, or visit, and to work at, simply the reasons why people (both clients and social workers) should prefer it to other institutions from the same sector.
- Problems and challenges they face
- History of the institution (when they were established, how they progressed over the years)
- Their main scope of work (what exactly the social workers do, on a daily basis)

You can learn a lot about these things on their website. However, you should not end your research on the website. I suggest you to type the name of institution to Google (or Yahoo), opt to show just the latest results (Search tools => Time => Past month) and read what the

results have to offer. **You should do the same thing with the name of their director, or CEO.** Read everything, make notes, print it, and get ready. Social media profiles of the leading figures can also tell a lot about the people you'll meet in the interview...

Good research will help you in many ways. It will help you **to find good answers to particular interview questions** (that relate to the social work institution), to **calm down before your interview** (since it is always easier if we feel familiar with the place and the people we'd meet), and to **come up with a good question**, once there's an opportunity, or an obligation to ask something. When you know a lot about them, you will always find something to start a discussion about.

Everyone loves when people are interested in them, in a good way. **Be interested in them, and they will be interested in you—in hiring you.** Interview can be a simple game, once we understand the basic desires and needs people have...

On the other hand, ignorant candidates who rely only on their qualifications, and do not even bother looking at the website of the social work institution prior to their interview, are never hired for the job.

Note:** Before you progress to reading the second part of Social Work Interview Guide, I would like to stress one thing: You can learn a lot from this book. You can learn the winning interview strategies and brilliant answers to interview questions. We offer you a detailed **look into the minds of the recruiters and interviewers, information you won't find in any other publication of this kind.

*However, **this guide is practical, and your work does not end with reading.** You should improve your resume, do some additional research, and prepare things before your interview. Reading is not enough. **The key is to take action according to the suggestions from the guide.***

Let's progress to the second part!

II. In an Interview

There are a few more things you should know before you start answering the interview questions. The interview strategies and techniques, a certain scope that encompasses the way you approach your interview. We will have a look at it in this part of Social Work Interview Guide.

1. Act, as an ideal social worker would act in their daily job.

Following this single advice will win you many job interviews in your life, not only in the field of social work.

Most job seekers believe that their answers to interview questions decide about success or failure. But this is just partially true... If you asked HR managers about **the real decisive factors in an interview**, they would tell you exactly the same thing I am going to tell you right now:

Your presence, non-verbal communication, your overall demeanor, they are even more important than your answers to interview questions. Success is about presenting yourself as a great candidate for the job, with everything that belongs to such a candidate.

Let's have a closer look at the ideal personality of a social worker.

An ideal candidate for this job sees social work as their personal mission, the calling they want to follow. They **like to interact with all kinds of people**, and to help them. Helping is the mantra of their everyday existence.

Excellent communication skills, empathy, and conflict solving abilities are also essential for ideal social worker. The right job applicant is a **good listener**, and they actually want to listen to the needs and desires of other people. A great social worker has the **goals and needs of the clients always on their mind**, and prioritizes them to their own goals, moods and preferences.

And you should act in the same way in your interview. Easy to say, hard to do, right? 😊
Actually, it is not very difficult. You just need to reflect these characteristics with your behavior. It means:

- *Keep an eye contact with your interviewers.*
- *Show enthusiasm and passion for social work and the target group (in your voice, in your answers).*
- *Stay friendly and humble, showing in your answers that you do not seek major achievements.*
- *Stay calm and focused, doesn't matter how long they let you wait, or what happens in an interview.*
- *Talk more about the people and their goals (and your role in helping them to achieve those goals), not only about your own career ambitions and preferences.*
- *Be positive about people, about the future, and also about yourself, and your role in the life of the people you'd work with.*
- *Listen carefully all time.*
- *Ask relevant questions.*

If you follow this advice, interviewers will get the feeling that you have a **great personality for a social worker**. And that is a priceless information for every employer...

People in hiring committees realize that you can always get used to their working environment, or learn some special working methods they apply. However, **once you do not have the right personality for this job, you will never become an excellent social worker**, either at their institution, or anywhere else (unless you change, of course, because people do change in the course of their lives).

Keep it on your mind, and **try to present yourself as a great social worker in every moment of the interviewing process.**

2. On the same wavelength

To act, as a great social worker would act in their daily job, is an interview strategy everyone can follow. However, there is one other technique that **can bring even better results**, if you manage to apply it correctly in your interview.

It consists in **tuning yourself on the “wavelength of the interviewers”**. What does it mean? It means using the same form of communication as they use (*brief sentences if they do so, or long compounds with terminology if they prefer them*), having the same opinions about important issues (*e.g. about challenges in social work, the target group, the working methods, etc.*), being serious, or easy going in an interview (*depends on how the interviewers act, how they approach the meeting with you—if they are serious, or oppositely, easy going*), and so on.

Said in simple words, it means to **think as they think, act as they act, talk as they talk**.

We always like to be around likeminded people, those with similar behavior and opinions.

That isn't a secret, but the reason for this preference is a little secret... It is our selfish love.

Liking their behavior, opinions and personality, we in fact take pleasure in our own behavior, opinions and character, and doing so, we convince ourselves about the rightness of our own actions, and attitudes.

Interviewers enjoy talking to people who have the same communication, share the same opinions, and approach the meeting in the same way as they do.

If you possess decent emotional intelligence, and can “read” the interviewers and tune yourself on their wavelength, you should try this technique.

People will really enjoy the time spent with you in such a case. What is more, they will consider you *highly qualified for the job*, because it means they are highly qualified themselves. 😊 (Remember, you act and talk as they do.)

They will feel good with you, and will **incline to offering you a job**. And that is the perfect position for you at the end of the interview!

Tuning on the wavelength of the interviewers is a powerful technique. When my students tested it in variety of social work interviews, they achieved amazing results.

On the other hand, **not everyone can apply this technique properly, especially in the course of a difficult and possibly also stressful interview** (though it shouldn't be a nerve-racking experience for you, after you finished reading this book).

Anyway, if you consider it difficult (nothing wrong with that, it's difficult for most people), you'd better stick to the strategy of playing (or being) *an ideal social worker*.

Choose the suitable technique, improve your demeanor, and make a perfect impression on your interviewers.

Perspective of an employer

Many job seekers think only about themselves. Let me show you an example.

When asked about a reason of their job application, they refer to *personal fulfillment, a dream they follow, a good salary social workers earn (on certain positions), etc.* However, **this is a perspective of an employee.**

Non-profit organizations, community agencies, correctional facilities and all other social work institutions are not exactly interested in your personal fulfillment, good salary, and your dreams. Why it is perfectly all right to have these goals—and we won't be great social workers if we did not have them, **the social work institutions care for their own business, or their mission, not for yours.**

Small group of job seekers (and we can certainly call them successful) **look at things from a perspective of an employer.** They use different answers to the question about applying for social work career.

They believe to bring certain value to the institution, and to the life of every single person they come to contact with in their job. That's the reason why they apply—or at least the reason they claim.

Simply they do not speak only about what they want to gain as social workers, but also about **things the employer can gain from starting the employment relationship with them.**

Our answers to the most common social work interview questions (next chapter of the book) **correspond with the perspective of an employer**. It is important to understand this perspective before you start practicing your interview answers. To think about an employer is a winning state of mind. And to think only about you is a losing one.

How to answer behavioral questions?

Behavioral interviewing is typical in most European countries, and is becoming popular also in the US. Interviewers ask the candidates about their behavior in various work-related situations from the past, trying to foresee their behavior in their own institution. Let's have a look at one question, to understand it better.

*“Think of an aggressive/angry client from the **past**. How **did** you deal with the situation?”*

Note: If you apply for your first job, you will most likely not get these questions. Still, I suggest you to read this short section and think about it for a while. If they conduct an interview according to the template, they will give you behavioral questions, doesn't matter if you have previous experience. If they do it according to the template, all candidates will answer the same questions, regardless of their employment history.

Many job applicants (especially fresh graduates) respond to behavioral questions in a following way:

- *I do not have such an experience.*
- *This is my first application for a job at hospital.*
- *I can not recall such situation at the moment.*

These are bad answers. Candidates can hardly get any positive points for them, **because they do not answer the question at all**.

Never say that you cannot answer a question. If you really haven't experienced certain situation yet, I suggest you to use the following formulation:

- *I have not been in that situation before. However, if it happened, I would do the following: ...*

Behavioral questions are not difficult. Use your creativity, prepare a good answer, and **demonstrate that you know how to act in various situations** that happen in a daily job of a social worker, regardless of your experience (or the lack of it).

I suggest you to think about all behavioral questions from my guide (analyzed in the next chapter), and **prepare your own answers**, or if you want, your stories.

Clarify the problem, analyze it, explain the solution, and tell the hiring committee the lessons you learned in the process of solving the problem. **Problem – Analysis – Solution – Application – Lesson Learned**. This is an excellent answer to any behavioral question. Word PASAL will help you to remember the way.

III. Twenty-five Most Common Social Work Interview Questions

Based on my experience, I chose and analyzed twenty-five most common interview questions for social workers.

We will have a look at **some personal, behavioral and technical questions.**

Short hint explains **why the interviewers use the question, and it shows you what to focus on in your answer.** Several sample answers follow the hint. Feel free to use them as an inspiration for your own interview answers.

1. **Why do you want to work on this position?**
2. **What do you hope to accomplish as a social worker?**
3. **Why did you decide for this specific field of social work, and not for another one?**
4. **Why should we hire you for this position?**
5. **What characterize a good social worker from your point of view?**
6. **What do you consider your strengths and weaknesses as a social worker?**
7. **Why do you want to work here, and not at another, competing institution?**
8. **What do you consider to be your major successes and accomplishments in your last job? Who did help you the most to achieve them?**
9. **What was your biggest failure in social work so far?**
10. **Where do you see social work (or a particular field of it) heading in the future?**
11. **What would your former colleagues say about you?**
12. **Think of an aggressive/angry client from the past. How did you deal with the situation?**
13. **Think about conflict situation from your last job. How did you solve the conflict?**
14. **Describe a situation when you did something more than expected from you in job.**
15. **There are always cases we can do nothing about. Describe such a case from your experience. What have you tried before giving up on the case?**
16. **What is your opinion about young generation?**
17. **What do you consider good topics for a talk with seniors?**
18. **How would you get closer to our target group?**

19. If a client did not understand a simple language you used, what would you do?
20. Are you ready to make home visits?
21. Are you prepared to work overtime?
22. Here is a problem we have. Prepare a solution and describe it to us. You have ten minutes for preparation.
23. What are your salary expectations?
24. When are you able to start?
25. Do you have any questions?

1. Why do you want to work on this position?

Hint: Motivation of job candidates is one of **the decisive factors in every interview**.

The interviewers want to hear that **you care for their institution, and for the target group**. I suggest you to talk about your desire to help people—the particular group of people you'd work with in your job.

On the top of that, you should **not connect your job choice to the past**, saying that you want to work as a social worker because it was a field of your study. That answer would **sound like a must, not a desire**. Speak with enthusiasm about your mission, and show them that your intentions are correct.

Sample answers

- I have always felt for homeless. The position you offer will allow me to spend time with them, so perhaps I can understand them better, and do even more to help them to resocialize, and to possibly return back to normal way of life. On the top of that, the values of your organization resonate with my personal values, so this seems like a perfect position for me.
- I believe I can bring some value to this community, in which many young people struggle. I want to encourage them to ask themselves the right question, and to see the

bright side of life again. On the top of that, I am really good in working with young people, so this position feels like a perfect match to me.

- I've always worked as a care giver for the elderly. This time around, in this stage of my life, the position you advertise feels like the right choice. I believe to have the qualification, the desire, and the right attitude to work for you. I want to offer your clients all they need, not only in terms of physical and material support, but also in terms of understanding and companionship.

2. What do you want to accomplish as a social worker?

Hint: You should always **have a goal on your mind**. *Why do you want this job? Why did you decide for social sphere? What do you want to accomplish in your work?*

I am very proud of all people who decide to work in social sphere. You should be proud of yourself as well—of your goals and good intentions you have in your life. **Do not be afraid to talk about them in an interview.** Show the interviewing panel that your heart is in a right place, and that you believe in a vital role of social work. You want to help the others, day in day out. That is a reason for your choice (or at least one you should talk about in the interviews).

I suggest you to not refer to personal accomplishments, such as promotion, prizes, accolades. Focus on the people you work with, and on the organization you work for, not on yourself. HR managers seek selfless attitude in the best candidates for this job.

Sample answers

- I believe the young generation faces many problems right now. Children struggle to find their place in life, and the increasing divorce rate does not help the issue. I want to improve this situation, at least in my city. I want to help children to find right direction in life. That is what I want to accomplish as a social worker.

- My dreams are not big. All I want to accomplish is to help individuals who weren't lucky as lucky as I have been in their lives. I want to do this on a daily basis and that is the reason why I chose social work for my field of study, and hopefully also for my field of work.
- I hope to throw some light into current problems of modern society. I want to find out why so many people feel unhappy. I hope to accomplish good results in the field of research, and provide expert opinion to help practical social workers in their daily job.

3. Why did you decide for this specific field of social work, and not for another one?

Hint: Everyone has some preferences. Someone likes vanilla ice cream, while someone else prefers strawberry sorbet. It is the same with people. Some of us like to work with children, while some of us prefer to work with alcoholics. Some individuals with special motivation even choose groups such as drug addicts, or homeless.

Recruiters try to find out why you are interested in the particular field of social work. In a good answer, you should simply mention that you feel **close to the target group, or to the job itself** (to the nature of the job). Alternatively you can **point to personal experience with the target group**.

Anyway, it does not matter what group of people you choose, you should always **speak with love and compassion**, as it reflects your feelings for these people.

Sample answers

- I want to work with the orphans, as I believe children need role models in their life. What is more, nearly all addictions have roots in childhood. I believe that I can change a lot in the world working with orphans, and that is why I chose this field.
- I was homeless myself four years ago, when I got into serious financial problems. It was the most difficult period of my life. I tried it on my own skin, so I know how

these people feel, what they think, and most importantly, what they need. That is the reason for my preference.

- The population of old people in our country is growing every year. I believe there is nothing worse than solitude, especially when one is old. I want to help the old people to find new challenges and purpose in life, and I believe I am good in communication with them.
- I am not a practical person. I would love to go out and help, but my social skills are not good enough for doing it. However, the inner calling is strong, and I want to help the weak. I believe that my place is in a sphere of social research. I can satisfy my inner calling to help the others while working in this field.

4. Why should we hire you?

Hint: Most applicants say that they have the best qualification, experience, or predispositions. That isn't a good answer....

First of all, all interviewed applicants met the criteria on experience and qualification. **They would not be invited for an interview if they did not meet them...**

And secondly, you do not know the other applicants personally, so you can't really tell if someone is better than you or not.

Other job seekers have a tendency to use one of the following answers:

- **Because I am the best candidate for this job.** *This is too general. Tell us in which way you are the best.*
- **Because I need this job badly (because of my financial problems).** *Interviewers are not concerned about your personal problems.*
- **Because I fulfill the requirements.** *All applicants fulfill the requirements, at least most of them. Meeting the requirements is not a reason why we should prioritize you, and not someone else for the job.*
- **I have no idea.** *If you have no idea, how can we know?*

There are **many bad answers to this question**. What is the right one though?

The right way is to talk about something **unique, about the value** you can bring to the institution, you and only you, something that differentiates you from other applicants for the job, in a positive way.

While it is difficult to list sample answer suitable for you (each of us is unique and can bring different form of value as a social worker), I will list couple of good answers from other applicants, as an inspiration for your own thoughts.

Sample answers

- *I have been always close to old people. My own mother has died recently, and I spent the last three months of her life taking care of her, and talking with her. This helped me greatly to understand what dying people go through, what they feel and experience. I believe to know not only what these people need, but also what they desire. I know how to make their last moments better, and meaningful—for them. That's a good reason to hire me for this job, at least I believe so.*
- *I've experienced addiction before. I know the withdrawal symptoms, and how to fight them. I can use the right words when working with drug addicts, plus I can serve as a role model for them—talking about my own experience of addiction, and how I overcame it. What is more, my experience, and all things the addiction took from my life, serves as a strong motivation to, and I am not going to quit the job if facing some difficulties, or disappointments.*

5. What characterize a good social worker from your point of view?

Hint: You can use our description of an ideal social worker (page 15). Good social workers are passionate about their jobs, do them with love, and care for the needs of the people, and for the goals of the institution they work for. They are empathic, good listener, etc (see page 15 for broader characteristic).

Even if you do not meet the characteristics, it's still good to mention them. **We all strive to improve in life (at least we should)**. Therefore it is good if they see that you understand what makes a good social worker, and that you try to become one.

Sample answer

- Good social worker is passionate about their job, they do it with love, care for the needs of the clients, and for the goals of their employer. They are empathic, good listener, and they always try to improve on their job. They pay attention to individual needs of each client. I think I do not fulfill some of these characteristics right now, but I try my best to improve every day, and become a better social worker. It's a fascinating journey.

6. What do you consider your strengths and weaknesses as a social worker?

Hint: The same ability can **represent strength for one job, and a weakness for another one**. To abilities that characterize a good employee in social work field belong:

- Good communication skills
- Understanding for the problems and needs of others
- Ability to solve conflicts
- Passion for work
- Creative personality
- Courage, no fear
- High level of responsibility
- Detail oriented personality
- Good listening skills

Think about the list, and pick the strengths that you really have (or at least you try your best to have them) for your interview answer.

What isn't your strength, however, doesn't necessarily have to be a weakness. While some of us have excellent communication skills, many of us are simply average in communication. **But it is still enough for a job in social sphere.**

Having said that, you should rather choose a weakness that is not important in social work, or one that can be considered strength by some interviewers:

- Being over-friendly to clients
- Being impatient
- Being punctual
- Inability to make decisions on your own

Every job candidate has some weaknesses. However, the difference between average and exceptional people is an effort to improve on their weaknesses. If you honestly describe your weaknesses and explain the recruiters **how you try to improve on them**, you will tell them what they really want to hear.

Sample answers

- Passion for work and creativity help me to stay motivated, and to correctly address various situations that may arise in job. On the other hand, my computer skills are below par. I try to learn to work with computers, attending evening classes, and practicing at home.
- I have good communication skills, and I am not afraid to talk to anyone, or go anywhere. But I would say I am over-friendly to clients sometimes, which is risky in this job. But I am aware of this, and I try to control myself, to avoid misunderstanding of my behavior.

7. Why do you want to work here, and not at another, competing institution?

Hint: You should focus on **personal preferences to the institution**, their goals and vision that resonate with your values, or the methods of work they use, the working environment, etc. You should simply focus on something that distinguishes them from their competitors, something the hiring managers are proud of, and happy to hear about again and again.

Interviewers are not stupid. They understand that a typical job seeker would be happy to get a social work position in any institution that somehow resonates with their values. However, you should do your best to **convince them that their place is your first choice**.

If you can not come up with anything better, you can always say that the location is perfect for you.

Sample answers

- I have been reading about you in news for many years, and I have been watching your campaigns closely on social media. You are my favorite NGO, since I like your vision, and the way you work with the budget, and allocate the resources. When I spotted the job offer, I didn't hesitate for a second.
- I personally knew a few people who spent here their last years of life, and all of them had only the best words for the care givers. It seems you have a great team of people here, which is not always the case in similar institutions, according to my experience. That's why I'd love to work here, and become one of the care givers.
- Your rehab facility is just ten minutes away from my apartment. This is the main reason for my preference. I believe it is good for you as well, since if there was a need for a last minute replacement, I could easily come to work.

8. What do you consider your major successes and accomplishments in your last job? Who did help you the most to achieve them?

Hint: Try to focus on the successes from **the perspective of helping your clients** (to solve their problems, to take next step in life, to feel better about themselves), or **helping your employer** (to improve their reputation, to strengthen their position on the market).

Great social work is always a **teamwork**. HR managers want to hire people who understand that, and can acknowledge their colleagues who helped them. Praise your past colleagues, or anyone else who played the vital role on your successes. Show the right attitude—the team player attitude.

And if this is your first job application, you can talk about **volunteering experience** (if you have any), or about the situation when you helped someone in your civil life—a situation that is at least somehow relevant for the job you want to get.

Sample answers

- Our team succeeded to resocialize ten homeless women from the city, in the age group of 25-40 years. I believe it is a great success, considering how difficult it is to resocialize just one person. My colleagues had great ideas, and they always went above and beyond for the people. It really helped us to gain their trust, so they'd follow our guidelines, and cooperated. And I hope that I also played a part on this achievement, with my enthusiasm and passion for the goal we had, though I worked mostly from the office.
- I would say that our entire work was a success. When you give care to dying people, you can't expect miracles. But you can make their last hours and days more convenient and pleasant experience, and help them on their transition to another world. I believe we have done that day in day out, and I consider it a success, something I am proud of. I do not seek any accolades or prizes—I just want to do a good job, with a good team of people around me.

- This is my first job application, so I can speak only about my studies, and volunteering experience. I helped out in an organization that dealt with women protection rights, answering calls from women who sought help. Mostly they wanted to consult us regarding their rights and legal options. While I was just a first point of contact, I always tried to help them to feel secure, and give them some courage before they talked to my colleagues, the real social workers. But just the fact that I helped them to relax, and to feel secure and welcome, is something I consider a success, and something that made me happy in that job. I had great colleagues at this place, and without them instructing me on what to do, and mocking phone calls with me, I would not be able to achieve that. It was a team effort.

9. What was your biggest failure in social work?

Hint: It is easier to talk about successes than about failures. But HR managers and people leading various correctional, health care, non-profit and social planning institutions know very well, that social workers **experience failures and disappointments**, sometimes on a daily basis.

It is a tough job, and you should try to show them that the failures will not steal wind from your sails. Failures and disappointments simply belong to social work. Try to convince the recruiters that you count with them, and that **you take each failure as a lesson** that helps you to become better in your job.

And if it is your first job application, speak about your attitude to failure. Let's have a look at some good answers.

Sample answers

- Once I failed to connect with the target group. I just did many mistakes—with my choice of clothes, with the first words I said when I met the teenagers, with my

authoritative approach. I completely failed to gain their trust, and the work with them did not bring any results—they didn't improve their behavior, they stayed on the fringe of their classes. However, I spent a lot of time analyzing what had happened, and where I had made a mistake. It was a great lesson for me, and because of it I can do my job better now.

- One time a woman called, seeking protection from her husband. But she lacked the confidence to talk openly, and I misunderstood her situation and I took it lightly. Later I found out that her husband had severely beaten her. It took some toll on me, for a day or two, but then I just got over it and took it as a lesson. After all, we can't help and save everyone, it's just impossible in social work. But we should strive to improve, and never take anything lightly when woman or child rights are endangered.
- This is my first job application, so I have no experience with failures in work. But I understand that we won't help most people, or at least not to their satisfaction. I have to count with disappointment, and I should not take that personally. It's just about trying our best, and taking everything negative as a learning experience.

10. Where do you see social work (or a particular field of it) heading in the future?

Hint: This is a question they often use in interviewers for jobs in social research, but you can get it also in other social work interviews.

The interviewers try to find out two things:

- If you have **serious interest in social work**, watching trends, reading journals, and trying to see the bigger picture
- If you are rather positive, or negative, about the future, and about things that await humanity in the years to come.

Needless to say, hiring managers look for people with **positive attitude**, and a **proactive approach**. Therefore you should refer to good things, and say that you hope to actively participate on the better future, either with your research, or with practical social work.

Sample answers

- I see the growing population of old people who struggle with obesity and various diseases. But I also see better care facilities and better educational programs for the youngsters, so they understand the importance of healthy lifestyle, and I believe that in a decade the trend will reverse, and we will have a healthier population in the US. And I hope to help to achieve this goal, with my work in social research.
- Since I read the journals and watch the numbers, I can not say I see a very bright future for children. The divorce rates and other statistics do not play in their favor. However, that's exactly the reason why I applied for this job, as I believe to change something for them. Better future is in our hands. If not the better future of entire generation, than at least the future of particular children we work with.

11. What would your former colleagues say about you?

Hint: Interviewers ask this question for several reasons. First of all, they try to find out **what you would say about your former colleagues**. Many times, I heard a job applicant answer: *“My colleagues? Well, they were not qualified for their jobs, so I do not know if their feedback would be relevant.”*

This is actually a **bad attitude**. Social worker is always a part of a team, and you should talk nicely about your former colleagues (and bosses, and clients).

The hiring managers try to **verify your trustworthiness**. Most of the times they will do the background check, and they will **compare the feedback they get from your past employer with your own words**.

If you presented yourself in a great shape, but your past colleagues said something different, it would not help your chances of getting a job.

Therefore I suggest you to be **humble**, to say that they perhaps considered you just an average social worker, or someone who tried to get better in their job, and had some weaknesses, just like any other person.

Sample answers

- My former colleagues were nice people, and they did a good job. I do not know if they had enough time to think about me, because they concentrated mostly on their own working duties, and so did I. But maybe they would say that I was a responsible colleague, and that I never started conflicts with anyone.
- It is difficult to say what my former colleagues would say about me. I hope I helped them in their job, since I supported them with my research, and I always tried my best to create a good atmosphere on the workplace once we met. But if they would see it in the same way is hard to say, because each of us perceives the world in their own way.

12. Think about an aggressive/angry client from the past. How did you deal with the situation?

Hint: Social workers meet with all kinds of people. Their clients often struggle in their lives, facing problems, and finding fault with everything and everyone around them (that is the reason why they need our help).

Being overwhelmed with their own problems, they can be aggressive, angry, sad, irate, or whatever else comes to your mind. Some clients are nice, but many are not. As a social worker you need to deal with that, **and recruiters want to know if you have such an experience from the past.**

As a good social worker you should stay calm and relaxed, you should keep your focus and goal on your mind, and you should not let their behavior to distract you in work. Remember, **your goal is to build bridges, not fences.**

If you have no working experience, say what you would do if you had to deal with an angry client.

Sample answers

- I prepare for each meeting in advance, to ensure I did my best to not upset the client. I try to be friendly and I listen and ask a lot of questions before suggesting anything. However, once I was doing sensitive questionnaire with a group of divorced women. They got angry at some point. What I did was that I stayed calm and told them that they can refuse to answer any questions, and I stressed once again that the questionnaire was anonymous. I also apologized for any inappropriate questions in the document. It helped, and we finished the work without further problems.
- I had to deal with angry children regularly, in my previous job at school. I never argued with them, never punished them directly. I just talked to them, listened, paid attention to their needs, and I did what I could to change their point of view. Most of the time I succeeded, and if I did not, I got over it and continued my job. I believe we should not take things personally in social work.

13. Think about conflict situation from your last job. How did you solve the conflict?

Hint: Conflicts belong to every workplace. With this behavioral question, interviewers try to understand **your attitude to conflict situations**.

You should not blame the others, but rather say what you could do better. I suggest you to speak about a conflict situation you managed to solve. And if it is your first job application, stress that you will do your best to prevent conflicts with your colleagues, sticking to a honest, friendly, and professional approach in work.

Sample answers

The biggest conflict I had in my last job was with a colleague from the same working group. They had a different opinion on the methodology of work, and they blamed me for the results we had achieved, which had not matched the expectations. I tried to stay calm and explain them that we agreed on the methodology together, and I also admitted that they might be right, and we might try a different approach next time with the same target group. I didn't go into an argument with them, and I didn't take their accusations personally. Conflicts belong to every workplace, and I count with experiencing them.

It's my first job application, but I understand that people may argue, from different reasons—personal problems they face at home, lack of motivation, disappointment with the results, trying to stand out from the crowd, etc. But I would do my best to build friendly relationships on the workplace, and I hope to help to minimize the number of conflict situations we experience with the colleagues.

14. Describe a situation when you did something more than expected from you in job.

Hint: This is a tricky question, and to find the answer, you firstly need to ask yourself another question: **What was expected from me in the last job?**

To work overtime is considered something special in most jobs. In social work, however, this doesn't necessarily have to be true. Some positions simply demand working overtime... So what can be labeled as "something extra", if we speak about social work? Let me try to give you some good suggestions.

- Helping someone who is not your client, but needs qualified assistance from someone like you.
- Offer and deliver a service that is outside of your working duties (for example shopping for someone, taking someone to their GP, going for a vacation with someone, etc, depends a lot on the position you have).

- Meeting with clients in your free time, in order to strengthen mutual relationships.
- Helping new colleagues to find their ground in work.
- ...

If you have no experience, you can talk about volunteering or about any situation when you did something for free for a stranger, not expecting any reward for your action.

Do not forget **that for the hiring managers, your attitude and personality matters**. The key is to show the hiring managers that you have what it takes to be a great social worker, regardless of your previous experience.

Sample answers

- I always try to be more than just a social worker. A friend they can confide to, a companion—if they need one, a person who cares not only about their job, but also about the person and their feelings. I believe that my attitude helped me to deliver more than they expected, and that’s one of the reasons why I got such a great recommendation from the last elderly couple I stayed with and cared for.
- In my last counseling job, we offered a free 60-minuter consultation to people who could not afford to pay for the services of a lawyer. When I met a client who found themselves in a tricky situation, and the free hour didn’t suffice, I often suggested them to come once our official working hours ended, and I stayed in my office to consult them further, free of charge.
- This is my first job application, but I look at social work as my mission. I do not consider it just another job with a list of duties and responsibilities. I plan to do my best for every client, and I have been following this attitude in my college life as well, helping students with their preparation for exams, and taking part in various non-profit activities.

15. There are always cases we can do nothing about. Describe me such a case from your experience. What have you tried before giving up on the case?

Hint: Each social worker experiences setbacks, and **it doesn't matter how qualified they are, or how hard they try in their daily job.** This is the nature of the job—even if we do our best, we often fail to help some people. At the end of the day, whether we help someone or not depends also on their approach, and there are many things we just **can't control.**

The interviewers are aware of that, and they ask you this question (or a similar one) to see your attitude to work.

Have you tried various things before giving up? Did the negative experience affect you in your job? Did you blame the client, or your colleague, or yourself for not succeeding? Do you count with setbacks, or do you wear pink glasses, ignoring the reality of this job?

Interviewers can understand many things from your answer to this question, and your goal should be to present yourself as a **responsible social worker who try their best, but are not disappointed if things do not go their way.**

Sample answers

- I experienced many similar cases, though I do not consider any case hopeless, and do not approach any client with such a prejudice. I have worked with alcoholics, in a rehab, and many of them kept coming back. We often tried everything we could—group therapy, medication, gradual decrease of alcohol consumption, one to one consultations, wok therapy, and other approaches. Sometimes, however, nothing worked. But it did not discourage me to continue trying in other cases, because I understand that the success or failure of the therapy depends also on the client, their family (if they have any), and on many other things besides.

- I worked in a fund raising department of a local NGO. I remember a great project, that would help many members from local community, but we had to raise twenty thousand dollars in a relatively short time to make it happen. I did all I could—addressing sponsors, paying them visits, trying online fundraising campaign, going out to people, visiting public institutions and so on. At the end of the day, we did not manage to collect the money, and my efforts ended in vain. But I know that I tried my best, and I didn't feel discouraged in the next campaigns.

16. What is your opinion about young generation?

Hint: In most cases, **social work is connected to a particular demographic group of people**. You may work with orphans, problematic youngsters, old people, homeless people, immigrants... There are numerous social groups that need our help.

Interviewers may give you several questions related to the particular group of people you'd deal with in your job. They do so to see your attitudes and opinions, whether you have understanding for the group, and they try to assess your readiness for the job.

Try to stay positive in your answer. Talk nicely about people, about the options to help, about your own role in their life.

One can hardly do this job well, if they do not believe they can do it well, or if they do not have **respect and understanding for the people** they work with.

It is all right to show some compassion and feelings for the others, especially those you will work with, if they hire you for the job.

Sample answers

- I love to be around young people. But they face a lot of problems and they struggle to find the right path in their life. Broken families and lack of funds just add to the

burden they carry on their shoulders. That is the reason why I chose this field of social work, as I believe I can make a difference in their lives.

- Young people represent the most vulnerable demographic group. I really feel for them, especially for orphans, as there is often nobody to show them what is good and wrong, and as soon as they start to follow the guidance of the media, or the example of their peers, they lose their way completely. I hope to help to change this trend with my everyday work.

17. What do you consider good topics for a talk with seniors?

Hint: See hint for the previous question

Sample answers

- Not all seniors are the same. Some people like to recall old memories, some unlucky, who suffer from dementia, talk about the same things every day. But I also had experience with intelligent seniors, with people interested in what was going on in the world. We had great discussions together. So I would say that something like a good topic does not exist, speaking in general. I try to approach each client individually.
- It's not about talking in this job. It's about listening. Old people need to feel that someone is still interested in them, in their lives, and in their world, though their living space may be limited to a single room, or even just a bed. I always try to listen, showing them that I care, and asking questions to encourage them to talk more.

18. How would you get closer to our target group?

Hint: Social work is not something one can do effectively while keeping distance. As a good candidate for this job, you should always try to get as close to the people as possible. **Close to their bodies, close to their hearts, close to their problems...**

You should mention that you understand **the importance proximity**. Doesn't matter if you work with orphans, drug addicts, epileptics, or seniors, you should say that you are not afraid to come to them, and to **spend quality time with them**.

The problem of some social workers is that they stand out too much... If you come among poor children wearing a shirt and tie, telling them what they should do, you will hardly get any results. You may get attention, but that isn't really what you seek as a social worker. **They will feel the distance.**

Sample answers

- I would go to their habitat, I would try to understand their language, think on the same wavelength as they do. I wouldn't try to present myself as someone clever, but rather act as one of them, wear things they wear, and speak the way they do. That is how I would try to get close to them, before trying to change anything in their lives to better.
- I would not come among them to give advice, or to persuade them to do anything. I would just listen to their needs, to their problems, and offer a helping hand and a shoulder they can cry on. Doing this, I believe I can get close to them and build a good foundation stone for further social work.

19. If a client did not understand your language, what would you do?

Hint: Hiring managers use this question mostly when interviewing applicants for jobs that deal with old people, young children, or patients suffering mental disorders.

It is a technical question, referring to a situation from the job. You can expect several questions of this type, mostly related to the particular group of people you will work with.

In this particular case, you should say that you'd stay calm and try to find an alternative way of transmitting your message. One way of doing that is **going by an example**. If you want your client to do something, but they do not understand your verbal instructions, demonstrate the action. Show them what you expect them to do.

To use pictures, gestures, and other forms of getting your message over is also something you can mention in your interview answer. However, the most important thing is your attitude. Say that you would stay calm and try all possible means of getting the message over.

Sample answer

I typically carry a drawing board with me, and also a tablet. If a client did not understand my message, I would try to use pictures, or videos, or I would draw something on the board. I have this experience from the past, and most of the time it worked. I have also good experience with demonstrating the action I expect from them. Sometimes it is enough to repeat the same thing several times, talking slowly, keeping an eye contact with the client. Eventually they will understand.

20. Are you ready to make home visits?

Hint: Some interview questions are not difficult, because **you can find right answer directly in the questions**. If the recruiter asks if you are willing to make home visits, if you are prepared to work overtime, if you are ready to travel a lot, the right answer is **yes**.

If there was no need to make home visits, or to work overtime, they would not inquire about it in your interview.

However, I suggest you to use longer answers, elaborating on your ability (or willingness) to do what they expect from you.

Sample answers

- I am prepared to make home visits. I understand the importance of getting close to the client. I have experience with home visits from the past, and you should also know that I have a car, and can use it in work.
- Yes, I am ready for that. I have read your job description carefully, and I have also researched about your NGO. I believe to understand what your social workers do on a daily basis, and I am ready and eager to take care of those duties, including home visits.

21. Are you prepared to work overtime?

Hint: See hint for the previous question.

Sample answers

- I understand that one can not choose the end of their shift every day. We need to sacrifice something for the good of the client, and sometimes we have to sacrifice our free time. I do not mind working overtime, if it is for the sake of the client.
- Yes, I am prepared for that. I read the job description carefully, and understand that the nature of this job does not allow for regular working hours. But I do not have a family yet, so I am flexible, and I can work overtime.

22. Here is a problem. Think about it for a while, and tell us what you'd do. You have ten minutes for preparation.

Hint: Some HR managers love to use **short case studies in the interviews**. They will describe a simple problem, or situation, or task (missing person, your colleague did not come to work, a client refuses to talk, a senior you gave care to died during your shift and you do not know the reason of their death, collecting feedback from clients, etc.), and they ask you to tell them what you'd do in a given scenario.

They typically allow you some time for preparation, or thinking, but no more than ten minutes. This simple interview exercise helps the HR managers to see various things:

- if you work systematically
- what is your methodology of work
- if you can work independently and make decisions
- how do you present a solution of a problem (and if you'd be able to lead a team, or instruct other people from the team on what to do)
- if you have a realistic idea about a job of a social worker

Your goal is to convince them that **you can work independently**, and that you are ready for various situations social worker experiences. Ask them for a sheet of paper and pen, and make a few bullet points, a basic synopsis. This shows that you work methodologically, and keep track of your work. Then explain clearly what you would do in given situation. Don't forget to keep an eye contact while explaining what you would do.

And even if you do not find a solution, you can still walk away a winner from this exercise. Show some humility and say that for the first time you'd consult one of your colleagues, **someone who had the job longer, and likely solved similar problems before**.

Tell that you'd learn from their suggestions, and next time **you'd able to handle the situation on your own without consulting anyone**.

23. What are your salary expectations?

Hint: It is important to stress that you do not go to work just to get a paycheck at the end of the month.

And if you have to say a number, I suggest you to pick median salary for social worker (or for the particular position in social sector) in your country/county/district. You will find the recent data online, for example on salary.com website.

After all, we should not forget that many social work institutions belong to public sector, or non profit. They may use salary tables, and in such a case there isn't any room for salary negotiation. Having said that, if you say a number, you should **never say less than you would actually accept**.

Sample answer:

- Salary is not the decisive factor for me. I would be very happy earning an average salary for a care giver in this area, and that is about \$34,000, according to the statistics from indeed.com website.

24. When are you able to start?

Hint: You should be happy to hear this question in your interview. If they ask when you can start, **it means that they realistically consider hiring you**.

If you can start ASAP, you should say so. But if you have to adhere to a notice period with your current employer, or have to delay your start for some other reason, you can still turn this disadvantage to your advantage.

Say that it would be irresponsible and unprofessional to leave your current job from day to day.

Sample answers

- I can start tomorrow. I want to have this job, so the earlier we start the better for me.
- I have to adhere to the notice period requirements, and it would be irresponsible to leave my job from day to day, without instructing my colleagues and a person who'd take care of my working duties. Officially I have to stay there for two more months, but I can try to negotiate the terms with my boss, and perhaps I can leave in a month.

25. Do you have any questions?

Hint: Asking questions shows that you care about the opportunity, want to know more, and are motivated to get the job.

However, you should not ask about something that was clearly explained on the job description, or said in an interview. Good things to inquire about are the working environment, challenges the social workers face, next steps of recruitment process, their goals for the next year, etc.

Sample answers

- *What goals have you set for the upcoming year?*
- *What are the next steps of recruitment process?*
- *Can you tell me something more about the team of people working here?*

Right preparation for the interview questions

As you can imagine, there are dozens if not **hundreds of possible questions one can get in a social work interview**. We tried to cover all important subjects in our short selection, but interviewers can use different wording, or completely different questions, to assess the same capacities of the job candidates.

However, it is impossible to list, and to prepare for, all possible questions. If you tried to do so, it would only stress you out, and at the end of the day you would hardly remember a single answer you prepared upfront.

The key to job interview success lies in **mastering the right principles and attitudes, those interviewers seek in the best applicant for the job (and in their answers)**. We outlined it in detail in our answers to twenty-five common social work interview questions, as well as in other sections of this book.

That's the only possible way to prepare for everything that can happen in your interview, because after all, nobody can tell the exact questions they will ask you.

IV. Last Impression and Interview Follow-up

Most job applicants do not use the opportunity to leave a good last impression. It is a pity.

Once your interview finished, you should **thank the interviewers** for their time, **praise them for their efforts**, and simply **leave a room in a positive and friendly manner**. That is called *leaving a good last impression*.

Even if you do not have a good feeling from the interview, you should control your emotions, and leave a room with a smile on your face.

Last look into the eyes, firm hand shake, and good words can do a lot, especially if the interview is “undecided” (they are deciding between two or three best candidates, and you are one of them), and personal preferences of the interviewers will have a final word in this small selection. This happens quite often.

What is more, I suggest you **to send a follow up letter** one day after your interview. You can inspire yourself with a following letter, or look for good samples on the internet. Just do not forget to modify it a little, according to the situation, and to your own style of writing.

Dear Mr. Abc,

I want to thank you for giving me a chance to present myself in the interview for care giver position at XYZ Nursing Home.

After the interview with you, I am really motivated to work on this position. I like the way you treat the clients, as well as the working environment in the place. I believe I can fit well into your team, and bring value.

I hope you will make a right decision and I wish you all the best in your job.

Best Regards

Your name

Your phone number

Your email

It is always good **to send at least a short thank you note** (you can find countless examples online), in order to demonstrate that your interest for the job lasts after the interview.

Follow up letter can not win you a job contract, but it can help you to get one, or to open some doors that lead to other job contracts. It is easy to send a letter and you should send it after every interview. **Build bridges, not fences.**

Final Word

Interview for a position of a social worker belongs to difficult job interviews.

One competes against **many other job seekers**, most of them having similar qualification and experience. What is more, interviewers use different forms of questions, such as personal, situational and technical, and they often use a personality test.

They do it to get a complete picture of your abilities, and to **uncover some important and some minor differences** between you and other people who apply for the same job.

However, men and women sitting in the interviewing panel are only people, like I and you... They have their desires, they like to be praised for their work, and they can not resist hiring an applicant who presents themselves as a great applicant for a job of a social worker. That's how it really works in every interview.

If you use the knowledge from this book, and put it to practice, if you present yourself in a right way, bring everything with you, and offer good answers to their questions—having on your mind the things you learned from this book, **they will have no other option to hiring you.**

I recommend you to read the entire eBook once again, mock the answers to interview questions couple of times, practice with a friend (if possible), and follow the suggestions. Doing so, you can be sure you did your best to prepare for your interview.

Thank you for reading, and see you in an interview!

Ellen King,

Your Personal Interview Coach