

# **PART ONE**

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**GENERAL ORIENTATION AND BASIC  
CONCEPTS OF INTERVIEWING  
AND COMMUNICATION**



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## DEFINING AND CHARACTERIZING THE SOCIAL WORK INTERVIEW

**ALTHOUGH SOCIAL WORK** involves a great deal more than interviewing, social workers spend more time conducting interviews than any other single activity. It is the most important and most frequently used social work skill. This is most clearly true for the direct service worker, but the group worker and community organizer also frequently participate in interviewing.

The human services literature describes an interview as “the most pervasive basic social work skill,” “a fundamental social work activity,” and “a primary social work tool-in-trade.” The interview is the context through which social workers offer and implement most human services. The interview is the primary instrument they use to obtain an understanding of clients and their situation and for helping clients deal with their problems.

Baldock and Prior (1981, 19–20) note that “the client interview, which lies at the heart of the social work process, is an event which is not merely the context of, but the basic resource for, social work practice.” Interviewing skills are the central skills on which all components of the social work process depend. The purpose of this chapter is to define the interview and make a distinction between it and another activity with which it is frequently confused: the conversation. Furthermore, the chapter distinguishes between social work interviews and other kinds of interviews and explicates the process of the interview.

### THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The primary purpose of the interview is to attempt to help the interviewee by implementation of a problem-solving process in the context of a positive relationship. This characterizes the general parameters of all social work