Class Activities for **Chapter 3: Generalist Social Work Practice**

**Class activity #1**

Break the class into groups and provide them with the following vignette and the questions accompanying it. This is an opportunity for them to take a realistic problem and apply the change process to it. After they have completed their group discussions, have them share both their definitions of the problem and their approach to that problem with the rest of the class. Compare and contrast.

Twenty-five girls at the local public high school (enrollment 800) have come up pregnant this school year, much more than the previous high of 11. The school has a sex education program that focuses primarily on abstinence and includes little information on STIs or contraception use. The school social worker contacted the parents of the twenty-five pregnant girls to offer support services but found herself met with resistance and requests for privacy. The school board wants the social worker to be part of an interdisciplinary team aimed at addressing this situation and reducing the number of student pregnancies in the next year.

Keeping in mind you can look at this problem from a micro, mezzo, or macro perspective, answer the following questions:

1. With whom would you engage to get an idea of the true extent of the problem?
2. What do you believe are the possible causes of this problem?
3. What possible strategies could you follow to combat this problem?
4. What do you see as the merits and shortcomings of each of these strategies? What will be the challenges you may face with particular plans you have devised?
5. Which of these strategies would you select to combat the problem you have identified? Why?

**Class activity #2**

Break your class into groups and have them read the following vignette. Ask them to discuss what the appropriate actions are for the social worker to take. Listen in on their discussions to get an idea of the ideas being expressed. It’s likely some will want to try to convince Jenna that she needs to get an abortion for the good of her other kids. It’s also likely that some students will agree with Jenna’s stance on abortion. The key point, of course, is that the social worker’s view on abortion and morality in this situation is irrelevant. Can they help Jenna to come to a decision without trying to influence her toward their preferred outcome?

Jenna is a single mother of 6 (ages 10, 8, 5, 4-year-old twins, 18 months). She is pregnant with her 7th child and none of the fathers of her six children (nor the father of the 7th) are in the picture financially or otherwise. She has no family to speak of. Her doctors have told her she has a medical complication that will likely result in her death if she goes through with this pregnancy. Jenna is strongly opposed to abortion. She believes it is murder. You recognize that she is likely to die in childbirth if she goes through with her pregnancy, leaving 6 parentless children to the system. As her social worker, what is the best course of action for you to take?

**Class activity #3**

Break your class into groups and have them read the following vignette. They will use this to practice the strengths perspective. Note that when they come up with Jim’s list of problems and strengths, they are likely to have some parallel concepts on each list (e.g. manipulative and persuasive, obsessed and determined, survivor and victim). This can lead to a valuable discussion of how the strengths perspective is just a way to recognize someone’s skills, even if those skills might be used in unhealthy ways. If the client can learn to use those skills to improve their lives instead of using them to stay entrenched in unhealthy patterns, that will be quite empowering.

After the individual groups come up with their answers, list the strengths and weaknesses on the board. Have them look at the list of strengths apart from the list of weaknesses. What kind of person have they described? Those strengths are real, despite the unsettling nature of some of Jim’s behavior. He has a lot to work with, even though many people likely judged him immediately in a strongly negative way.

Vignette:

Jim is a resident at a treatment facility for adolescent sex offenders. He has been a resident for the last eighteen months. You are his newly assigned clinical social worker/case manager. Jim has a history of severe physical and mental abuse suffered at the hands of family members. He was repeatedly beaten with objects and locked in closets for hours when he was young, even for the slightest infraction. He began stalking young girls in his early teens and was charged on three separate occasions with sexual assault, spending time in juvenile detention. He’s never raped anyone—his sexual assault charges were for walking up to these girls, touching them inappropriately, and trying to kiss them. He ended up at the facility after he was discovered in the bushes outside a neighborhood girl’s home looking in her window. This was considered a violation of his probation, the terms of which mandated Jim’s relocation to the facility until he finished high school.

When Jim selects an individual to stalk, he carefully observes their day-to-day behavior from a safe distance, recording their activities in great detail in a spiral notebook. Only after significant time has passed may he make an effort to approach them. Jim’s notebook was not discovered until after the arrest that led him to his current placement.

Tendencies toward some of these behaviors have been observed at the facility as well, as he has become fixated on particular female staff members. Jim is often able to gain his information through talking to other residents and getting them to report things back to him about his chosen individual. At times he does this through offers of material goods, promises of returned favors, or even blackmail about reporting inappropriate behavior he has observed on the part of other residents. He has also, in the past, been able to blackmail staff members of the agency using information he gathered about them, giving him the opportunity to break certain rules while staff looked the other way. (Those staff members were, of course, fired upon discovery of this.)

Jim does not have very good hygiene. He tends to wear the same shirt for several days consecutively. These are usually shirts featuring classic rock bands such as Led Zeppelin and the Moody Blues. Jim can eagerly speak at length about his musical tastes.

Jim’s parents have attempted to get involved in his treatment at the facility but Jim has consistently refused their visits and phone calls.

* What can you identify as Jim’s problems?
* What can you identify as Jim’s strengths?
* Would you struggle to use the strengths perspective in working with Jim?
* What problems would be caused if Jim's worker did not operate from the strengths perspective?