**Chapter 1: Evidence-based practice in social work**

- Students will learn that evidence-based practice (EBP) applies to all areas of social work practice.

Evidence-based practice is a process. It involves five steps. These steps are:

- **Formulate** an empirically answerable question from a practice situation
- **Locate** the best available evidence relating to the question
- **Assess** (critically evaluate) the evidence
- **Integrate** (1) the best available evidence with (2) practitioner judgment, (3) social context, and (4) an understanding of involved persons.
- **Review** how things went and learn from the process.

We must always recognize that sometimes the “best” evidence available today may not be of the highest quality. Other times (e.g., evidence regarding the effectiveness of behavioral treatments of phobias), the evidence will be very strong. More credence is given to better quality evidence.

Social work has never been about putting on blinders and dealing with the person sitting in front of you as an isolated entity. Evidence-based social work is not a “cookie cutter” or “apply this method in every instance” approach. When implementing the EBP process in social work, it is essential to weigh your professional judgment with the best evidence found in the current literature, while respecting your client, his or her culture, values and wants, and the circumstances (also known as social context).

Additionally, you need to consider the perspectives of other people who will implement and be affected by your decision. For example, as a school social worker, your resolutions should consider the parents (*What is acceptable to them? How can they help?*), the teacher (*Can he or she implement the plan?*), and the principal (*Will he or she allow this?*).
EBP requires considering research findings related to important practice/philosophy decisions and sharing what is found (including nothing) with clients. Transparency and honesty regarding the evidentiary status of services is a hallmark of this philosophy.

Why would we want to use the evidence-based practice process in social work? Evidence-based social work increases the likelihood of a better outcome for the client. It can be used to answer questions at any level of social work. It applies to all social work issues and levels of treatment.

- It is micro and macro
- It is domestic and international
- It is usable in direct practice, management, and policy making

Evidence based practice helps resolve some of the long standing social work problems:
  - Micro/macro conflict and discontinuity
  - Knowing what to do with diversity issues
  - Knowing how to use judgment, experience, or that old favorite “use of self”
  - Knowing how policies apply to the work of junior-psychologists
  - Knowing how to recall “researcher practitioner” skills that may have eroded over time