Our clients live complex lives with multiple layers of problems. This can make it seem impossible to wrap our minds around how we can best serve them and address their many issues. A thorough assessment and evaluation of these clients is a crucial skill in providing the best services possible. Rather than getting overwhelmed with where to start and how to address this individual, conducting a thorough and complete assessment can set you in the right direction to understanding the most fundamental needs and most crucial issues with which to work.

The assessment is an on-going process. We never can stop assessing, as many issues lie beneath the first impressions and arise when the client begins to feel safer with us. However, the first interview/intake is crucial in developing a safe relationship where a thorough assessment can be started. There are two vital skills in beginning of an assessment. First, allow the client to tell her own story, in her own words. Whether or not you agree or accept what she says does not matter at this stage; it is important you hear her story directly from her. The second skill is to convey understanding and empathy in that first interview. Be an interested listener and pay attention to subtle hints and the underlying storyline.

There are four categories to an assessment, which always need to be addressed. These include, **biological, psychological, social, and spiritual**. Sometimes an assessment is called the “Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Assessment”. When you think of an assessment as a Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual, it is a constant reminder to include all the aspects of a good assessment. In using this frame of reference, questions can flow more smoothly; and there is less of a chance that the information will be disorganized and confusing.

The **biological** aspect of an assessment is very important, as organicity (biological influences) can have a profound impact on the functional capacity of an individual. Be sure to ask about illnesses (past and present), disabilities, sleeping habits, eating habits, substance abuse, recent medical attention, dental needs, etc. Many times, the biological problems need to be addressed before more complex spiritual, emotional and psychological issues can be discovered. Listen carefully and ask many questions, as people are often embarrassed of their health problems and needs. Some of the information found in this section can shed light on other areas. This is called linking. For example, if a client tells you they never sleep and don’t feel like eating, remember this when you assess for psychological issues. Disturbances in sleeping and eating patterns are related to depression at times.

The **psychological** aspect of an assessment is also very important. Assess for red flags such as suicidal/homicidal ideations and be sure to get a clear understanding of any history of suicidal attempts or psychiatric hospitalization. This is a time to assess the client’s defense mechanisms and all processes central to thinking and reasoning. A
complete psychiatric evaluation is not within our scope of practice as mission workers, however, be sure to assess for as much psychiatric history and current status as possible.

The social aspect of the assessment can include many features of a client’s story. This includes employment history, educational background, family and friends, and legal issues. Be certain to ask whom the client views as their social support. Relationships are a key indicator into many other issues which will need to be addressed with the client. In the social portion of the assessment, a client’s stage in life, or age anchor, is also important to assess. Ask questions to discover if they are experiencing unique or typical challenges for their stage in life.

The spiritual portion of the assessment can reveal a great deal about a client. Spend time asking open ended questions to gather a history and an understanding of their religious/spiritual beliefs. This segment of the assessment will include their belief system, church affiliation, and recent changes in their spirituality. Also assess for any information on how their spiritual beliefs are manifested in their life, examples being bible study, prayer, meditation, etc. A key aspect of the spiritual assessment, beyond finding out about their beliefs, is to gain an understanding of where they find meaning in life.

There will be many linking aspects in the assessment, be careful to recognize the subtle interactions between factors. An assessment will need to be balanced, so be careful not to exclude relevant issues by overemphasizing a single aspect of the client’s situation. The Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual assessment is a map to help organize an approach in working with your client. Overall, remember that the assessment is a process.

Attached is a chart, which can be used as a reference tool, regarding what to assess in which category.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Social Condition</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
<th>Legal/Ethical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physiological processes</td>
<td>All processes central to thinking and reasoning</td>
<td>Family &amp; dynamics</td>
<td>Neighborhood</td>
<td>Belief system</td>
<td>CPS report?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illnesses</td>
<td>Thinking and reasoning</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Safety issues</td>
<td>Church affiliation</td>
<td>APS report?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidents</td>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Access to food</td>
<td>Spiritual values</td>
<td>How will you follow through?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumas</td>
<td>Reality testing</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Access to shelter</td>
<td>Meaning of life</td>
<td>Contract?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabilities</td>
<td>Intrapsychic conflict</td>
<td>Clubs/organizations</td>
<td>Quality of resources</td>
<td>Sense of family or origin</td>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic disease</td>
<td>Suicidal ideation &amp; attempts</td>
<td>Spousal relationship</td>
<td>Social support?</td>
<td>Participating member of a church or spiritual</td>
<td>5150 hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition issues</td>
<td>Homicidal ideation &amp; attempts</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>support group</td>
<td>Know the laws in your state and county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>DNS</td>
<td>Access to church/spiritual leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current state of health</td>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td>Military history</td>
<td>How is their religion/spirituality manifested?</td>
<td>How is their religion/spirituality manifested?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medications</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Changes in spiritual orientation/beliefs</td>
<td>Changes in spiritual orientation/beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep habits</td>
<td>Mental status</td>
<td>Immigrant/refugee status</td>
<td>Spiritual interventions used?</td>
<td>Spiritual interventions used?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating habits</td>
<td>Current problem?</td>
<td>Age anchor</td>
<td>- prayer-bible study-</td>
<td>- pray-er-bible study-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>Defense mechanisms</td>
<td>Current financial resources</td>
<td>meditation?</td>
<td>- meditation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous mental health history due to bio issues</td>
<td>Insight?</td>
<td>Life roles</td>
<td></td>
<td>- BOUNDARIES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Cultural health beliefs</td>
<td>Motivation?</td>
<td>Cultural background</td>
<td></td>
<td>(i.e. dual relationships)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>Legal issues/history</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Scope of practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development aspects of aging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Values/Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Neighborhood                                                              | Safety issues                                   | Access to food                                 | How will you follow through?                  |
|                                                                          | Access to shelter                               | Safety issues                                  | Contract?                                     |
|                                                                          | Quality of resources                            |                                             | Domestic Violence                             |
|                                                                          | Social support?                                 | DNS                                           | 5150 hold                                     |

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**Biological**

- Physiological processes
- Illnesses
- Accidents
- Traumas
- Disabilities
- Chronic disease
- Nutrition issues
- Exercise
- Current state of health
- Medications
- Sleep habits
- Eating habits
- Substance abuse
- Previous mental health history due to bio issues
- Family/Cultural health beliefs
- Age
- Developmental aspects of aging

**Psychological**

- All processes central to thinking and reasoning
- Judgment
- Reality testing
- Intrapsychic conflict
- Suicidal ideation & attempts
- Homicidal ideation & attempts
- Personality characteristics
- Mood
- Mental status
- Current problem?
- Defense mechanisms
- Insight?
- Motivation?
- Strengths and weaknesses

**Social**

- Family & dynamics
- Friends
- Peers
- Community
- Clubs/organizations
- Spousal relationship
- Education
- Employment
- Military history
- Socioeconomic status
- Immigrant/refugee status
- Age anchor
- Current financial resources
- Life roles
- Cultural background
- Legal issues/history

**Social Condition**

- Neighborhood
- Safety issues
- Access to food
- Access to shelter
- Quality of resources
- Social support?

**Spiritual**

- Belief system
- Church affiliation
- Spiritual values
- Meaning of life
- Sense of family or origin
- Participating member of a church or spiritual support group
- Access to church/spiritual leaders
- How is their religion/spirituality manifested?
- Changes in spiritual orientation/beliefs
- Spiritual interventions used?

**Legal/Ethical**

- CPS report?
- APS report?
- How will you follow through?
- Contract?
- Domestic Violence
- 5150 hold
- Know the laws in your state and county.

- What is your ethical responsibility to the client?
- BOUNDARIES (i.e. dual relationships)
- Scope of practice
- Confidentiality
- Values/Beliefs