



Navigating Your First Year as a Social Worker

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Navigating applying, interviewing and accepting your first job
- How to make the most out of your supervision
- Effective ways to track your supervision and CEU hours
- Learning to bounce back from mistakes
- Creating early opportunities for leadership

Katie Vinci LCSW

- Graduated with my BSW in 2021 and MSW in 2023 from USI
- Graduate Assistant for the MSW program
- Background in campus sexual/domestic violence prevention
- Internships with ITVAP, UE Title IX, and Lifespring
- Currently working at Adult and Child as the Lead Therapist for Whiteland School Based.

Taylor Sant LCSW

- Graduated with BA in psychology in 2017 from Marian University and MSW in 2019 from IUPUI
- Internships with Catholic Charities, Refugee and Immigrant Services, and Indianapolis Public Schools
- Work in domestic violence shelter children's program post undergrad
- Clinical supervisor at Adult & Child for Whiteland School Based

On a scale of 1-10 how prepared do you feel for starting your social work career?

When do I start applying?

How do I market myself to potential employers?

How do I survive my first interview?

How do I know I'm choosing the right career for me?

How do I negotiate my salary?

Applying for your first therapist job after grad school



Applying For Your First Job

Tip

Start applying for your first job 3-6 months before graduation.

Tip

Make sure your resume includes your "anticipated" graduation date

Tip

Create a document or spreadsheet to keep track of your applications.

- The time you applied
- Contact information
- Interview dates

Why should they hire you?

- **Know your strengths**
- **State what sets you apart**
- **Craft your “Brand”**
- **Ask the “Magical Question”**



The Magical Questions

- "What does success look like in this role after 3, 6, or 12 months?"
- "What differentiates someone who is good from someone who is truly great here?".

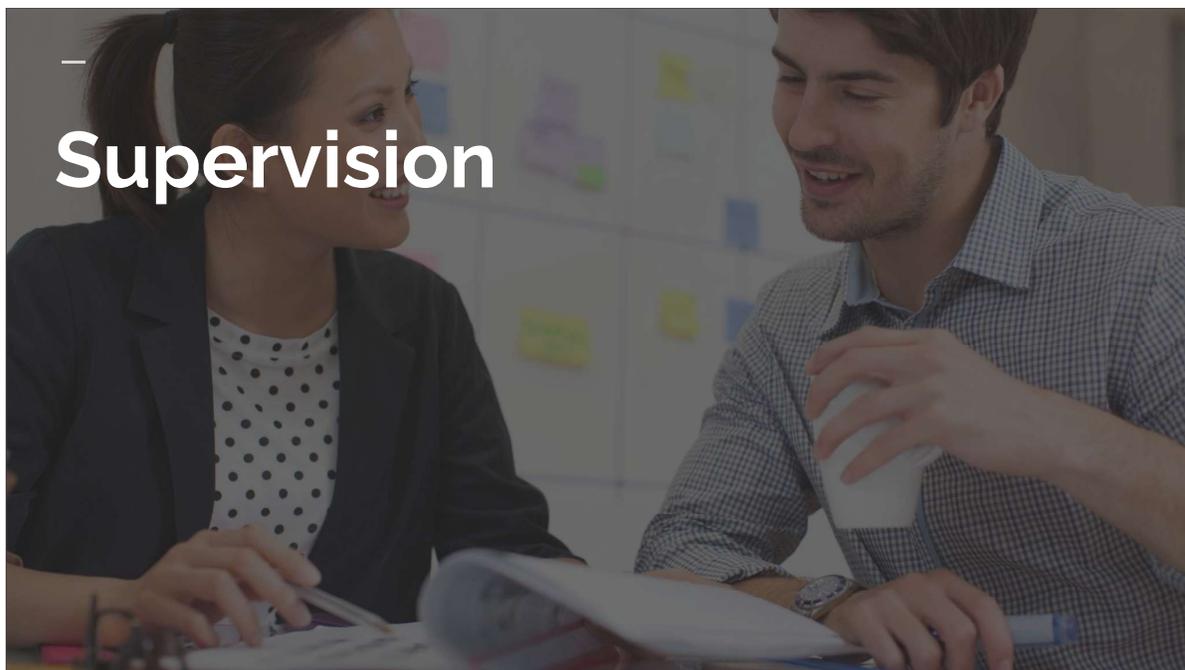
Negotiating Salary

- Research the average salary for someone with your educational background and intended job.
- Avoid demanding
- Make a “Non offer offer” (Lax et al., 2016).
- “Those who chose to negotiate salary, rather than accepting the offer on the table, increased their starting pay by an average of \$5,000” (Shonk , 2025).

- For example, If the average LSW in indiana makes between 45,000-50,000 a year

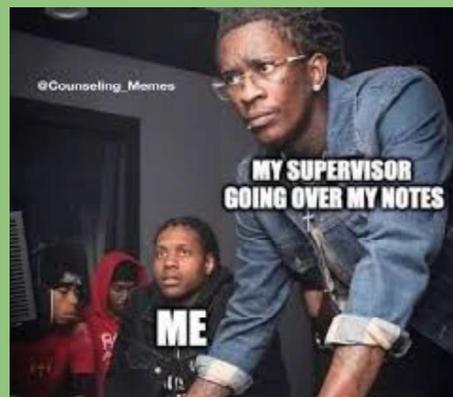
Say, “I have heard that someone with my educational background and experience on average makes 50,000-55,000 a year. With my experience, I would like to fall within that range.”

(Shonk, 2025)



Supervision

- Supervision is more than just a “task” to complete
- Your relationship with your supervisor is vital
- Feedback is a “tool not a threat”



Clinical Supervision Is NOT...

- Personal therapy
- Venting session among friends
- Strictly administrative
- Only needed during a crisis



Tip

Your place of employment may have a certain way they want you to track supervision hours. It's a good idea to still have your own spreadsheet or log.

Tip

Come prepared with a list of topics or clients to talk about.

Tip

Use this space to process all aspects of your role. This includes your failures and successes!

Tracking Supervision Hours

- Find out how your agency wants you to track supervision
- Use an Excel spreadsheet
- Keep physical copy

Tip

Keep copies of your hours in multiple places! You may change jobs or have technology issues and don't want to lose it!

Date	Time	Location	Supervisor	Duration
2/6/2026	8:00 AM	Office	Taylor Sant LCSW	1 Hour
2/13/2026	10:00 AM	Virtual	Taylor Sant LCSW	.5 Hour
2/20/2026	2:00 PM	Office	Taylor Sant LCSW	1 Hour

Continuing Education Credits

- “LBSWs, LSWs and LCSWs need 40 hours of CEU (20 Category I and 20 Category II
- LBSWs, LSWs and LCSWs need 2 hours of their 40 hours to be Category I need to in ethics.” (NASWIN)

<https://www.naswin.org/page/IndianaLicensure>

“Category I – are more formal classes that have been approved by a board approved organization. This can include:

- Formal courses, workshops, seminars
- Home study programs that are accredited by board-approved organizations.
- Classes as part of the curriculum of an accredited educational institution.” (NASWIN)

“Category II – are more self-directed education and can include:

- Journal reading
- Case conferences;
- Serving on boards/commissions in organizations specifically related to the profession.” (NASWIN)

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Bouncing Back From Failure

- Failure is inevitable in social work
- Lean to reject the idea that feedback is criticism
- **Your worth as a social worker is not measured by your productivity**
- **Take actionable accountability**

Actionable Accountability



- Own your mistake(s)
 - Identify barriers to achieving your objective
 - Create a specific, measurable and time limited plan with your supervisor
 - Seek support from your agency, co workers or supervisor
 - Make a clear effort
-

Creating Early Leadership Opportunities

What qualities make a good leader?

Creating Early Leadership Opportunities

Craft your
"brand" as a
social worker.

Learn when to
lead and when to
follow

Have a strong
foundation in
social work ethics
and values

Conclusion

- Give yourself grace
- You will learn so much about yourself in the first few years
- Its okay to make mistakes
- You have valuable insight and experience, don't forget to advocate for yourself!
- Ask for support!

Sources

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Shonk, K. (2025, October 29). *How to negotiate salary: 3 winning strategies*. PON.
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