

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

"The ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and faiths or religions in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each."

Demonstrating Ethical Cultural Competence includes:

- Being knowledgeable about culture and its impact on human behavior
- Recognizing and appreciating the strengths found in cultures
- Considering the nature of social diversity and oppression

Mental health practitioners should understand five elements of Cultural Competence:

1. **Valuing diversity cross-culturally** in behaviors, practices, policies, attitudes and structures
2. **Conducting cultural self-assessment** to assess for personal and professional proficiency in cultural competence
3. **Managing the dynamics** of difference within natural, formal or informal support and helping networks within clinical settings
4. **Acquiring and integrating cultural knowledge** by seeking out information and consultation and practice application
5. **Adapting to diversity and cultural contexts** that include policies, structures, values, and services

Linguistic Competence is defined as:

"The capacity of a mental health professional to communicate effectively and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse audiences including persons of limited English proficiency, those who are not literate or have low literacy skills, and even individuals with disabilities."

Positive talk climates are:

- Descriptive
- Oriented toward problems
- Spontaneous
- Empathic
- Express equality'
- Provisional

However, common errors demonstrated by often well meaning professionals include:

- Unintentional racism
- Miscommunication
- Lack of personal awareness
- Insensitivity to nonverbal cues
- Gender bias
- Overemphasis of cultural explanations for psychological difficulties
- Lapse in including appropriate questions within the context of
- acquiring background information

- Inability to appropriately present questions that elicit valuable info. or feedback
- Non-participation in multicultural activities that facilitate cultural awareness that would include interactions among people of similar and different racial identities
- Little or no processing of cultural difference in supervision.
- Inability to identify multiple hypotheses and integrate this information in a culturally competent manner into a client's presenting problem

Mental health practitioners can use these recommendations to promote ethical practice in cultural competence through the following:

- Display materials that reflect cultures and ethnic backgrounds of clients within your practice
- Printed materials in your reception area are of interest to and reflect cultures of people served
- Treatment aids such as play therapy and games reflect cultures of people served
- Attempt to learn and use key words in client's language
- Understand that beliefs and concepts of emotional well being vary from culture to culture