Diversity, Adversity, and Empathy Quick Guide

KEY TERMS

**Culture** – consists of gender, race/ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual identity, national origin, immigration status, age, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, and more; important to consider all in order to treat client in best way possible

**Privilege** – a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group; the other side of oppression

**Racism** - the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races

**Prejudice** - prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior

**Discrimination** - treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit

**Subjugation** - to bring under complete control; to make submissive or subservient; make someone or something subordinate

**Heteronormativity** – the belief that people fall into two distinct genders (man or woman) and that heterosexuality is the only norm for sexual orientation

INTERSECTIONALITY

- Takes into account the multiple factors that influence a person’s experience of the world
- Dynamic process (occurring now) and historical process

**Factors** – elements of diversity (see “culture” above); influenced by context
**Context** – the environment in which elements of diversity occur
**Attributes** – fixed, static characteristics; cannot be changed
**Currency** – characteristics may be negative, positive, or neutral
**Salience** – how important or prominent the factor is; how relevant it is at this time
**Visibility** – how much the factor can be seen by others
**Expression** – Implicit or explicit; how much we present or assert the factor

DIVERSITY AWARENESS AND ACTION

Become comfortable asking clients about their experiences, as opposed to assuming you know; use supervision to process your thoughts and feelings around diversity.

- What do I know?
- What do I think I know?
- What do I assume?
- What am I afraid to ask?
- What do I do when reality and expectations don’t match?

What are some actions you can take to increase diversity?

- Thinking about terms we use
- Being conscious about the environment we create
- Ensuring language accessibility
- Respect for customs, traditions, and adapting for individual needs
- Acknowledge differences and talk about them when needed
- Being empathic
- Asking questions

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CULTURALLY RELEVANT INTERVENTIONS

Ensure that the intervention you use will meet the diversity needs of your client.

- Explore and incorporate cultural specificity into practice
- Be respectful of culture and custom; become aware of how these may influence all stages of practice
- Commit to lifelong learning of cultures, rituals, and experiences that differ from yours

Engage in evidence-based interventions with the knowledge and understanding of their relevance across groups; adapt to include relevant cultural elements.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

- Individual may be influenced positively or negatively by factors outside of the individual on all levels of their systems
  - Gender
  - Access to health services
  - Employment and working conditions
  - Education and literacy
  - Physical environment
  - Social support networks
  - Personal health practices and coping skills
  - Social environments
  - Healthy child development
  - Biology and genetic endowment
  - Culture
  - Financial and social status

EMPATHY

What is empathy?

- The Social Work Dictionary defines empathy as “the act of perceiving, understanding, experiencing and responding to the emotional state and ideas of another person” (Barker, 2008, p. 141).
- Fuels connection
- Empathic responses are fluid, changing over time and based on historical, situational, or relational factors
- Requires perspective taking, staying out of judgment, recognizing emotion, and communicating your recognition of the emotion
- Requires connection with yourself and the other person
- Made up of cognitive empathy and affective empathy

Empathy and social work practice

- Empathy is the building block of the creation of a therapeutic alliance
- Empathy is at the core of the social work relationship


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