Cultural Safety in Practice with Children, Families and Communities

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Cultural safety is respectful engagement that supports and protects many paths to well-being. “Finding our way to wellness among diverse communities of children and families requires many pathways. No one approach, no one program model, will reach or work for everyone.”

Indicators of cultural un-safety

- Low utilization of available services
- Denial of suggestions that there is a problem
- Non-compliance with referrals or prescribed interventions
- Resistance in interactions with practitioners
- Anger
- Low self-worth
- Protests about lack of cultural appropriateness of tools and interventions transported from dominant culture to minority culture

Culture: forms and goals of interactions among members of a group, and how they understand and communicate with one another.

Cultural sensitivity: appreciating that there are differences among cultures.

Cultural competence: being skilled in understanding interactions among members of a culture on their own terms.

Cultural safety: the outcome of interactions where individuals experience their cultural identity and way of being as having been respected or, at least, not challenged or harmed.

Cultural safety is an outcome. It is determined by the recipient of a service, or the participant in a program or project.

Respectful relationships create cultural safety.

Equitable partnerships appreciate that all parties have the right to influence the terms of engagement.

The quality of engagement contributes importantly to outcomes.

What can we do to create culturally safe environments and encounters?

How can we reduce the sense of personal risk that some people experience when coming to a program, service, or project?

“My grandparents taught me that to truly understand the importance of something you must look back seven generations and you must look forward seven generations.”

Once upon a time...

- Pre-contact: Cultural heterogeneity/Insular communities
- And then...
  - Colonialism: Cultural homogenization/Silencing and resistance
  - Present: Cultural reconstruction/Persisting racism and essentialism
- So now...
- In future...
  - Transnationalism: Hybrid cultures and identities
  - Braiding together: “It’s about us!”

Cultural perspectives on: Practitioner implications:

1. Goals for development 1. Goals for program, services, or intervention
2. How to support optimal development and quality of life 2. Conceptual understandings
3. How to respond to development or life problems 3. Choice of program activities, service method, intervention strategy
4. Who is best positioned to help 4. Capacity development and deployment (recruitment, training, staff assignments)

All are embedded in particular cultural histories, contexts, and agendas.

To learn more:

Equity, Dignity, Critical Self-Consciousness, Engagement