

Becoming Aware Of Cultural Biases In Counseling

Increasing Cultural Self-Awareness

The sooner we are able to admit and embrace the reality that we all have biases, the sooner we will be able to move towards overcoming them. To increase cultural sensitivity, we must first have a good understanding of our own cultural context and formation as it influences the way we hear what people share with us, what we identify and understand as the problem, and therefore the action steps we take for care. Following are reflection questions to lead you in exploring your cultural context and formation.

Describe the cultural context in which you live in using 7-10 words (ex: primarily Latino, higher social economic standing, fast paced, elderly, etc.).

- Which cultural component(s) are you most comfortable with and like being a part of?
- Which cultural component(s) are you most uncomfortable with and struggle to be a part of?

From the questions above, choose one of the cultural components you are uncomfortable with and struggle to be a part of. Then in the following questions, fill in the blank with your selected cultural component and further reflect on the questions.

- When was _____ first introduced in your life?
- How is _____ present in your life?
- How does your family of origin view _____?
- When was the first time you integrated _____ and your faith?
- How do you feel when your client brings up _____ in your session?

As you complete reflecting on one cultural component, be encouraged to process the rest of the cultural components that bring you discomfort or tension as you care for others. It may be helpful to process such things with your counselor, mentor or trusted friend. Your cultural sensitivity will be limited as long as these areas go unprocessed.

Cultivating Curiosity for Others

A second way to gain greater cultural sensitivity for those God has called us to serve is to have an increased curiosity towards them. Who are you serving? What is their story? What is their background? Keep in mind that even people that reflect the dominant culture (Caucasian, male, etc.) are also embedded in a cultural context (socioeconomic, ethnic heritage, region of the country). Take time to ask and understand about their formation too.

When dealing with differences, allow your curiosity to guide conversations and pay attention to the prompting of some of these questions:

- What are you interested in learning more of?
- What is unfamiliar?
- Where do you sense a connection?
- How are you experiencing empathy or apathy?

As you allow your curiosity to be present, continue asking more open-ended questions like:

- Tell me about your interactions with...
- How have you witnessed...
- When has _____ been present before?
- What does _____ mean to you?

We won't ever fully know a culture and a person but we can learn more about who they are. Be encouraged to gain a greater understanding of the following:

- What do they value? - What are the things dearest to their heart? What are the things that are non-negotiables? What are they willing to fight for?
- What are their preferences? - What brings this person greater peace? What will produce greater openness? Where can I alleviate some discomfort? What tears down any mistrust?

One of the greatest results of curiosity is compassion and empathy. And as we have greater compassion, we will be able to be more present and go farther with someone. The biggest aid we find on this journey of gaining greater cultural sensitivity is remembering that we and others are God's image bearers and we all have deep worth because we were created by our Heavenly Father.