

Checking our Blind Spots: Multiculturalism and Ethics

Tips and tools from the DC CoP

Implicit bias, the attitudes and stereotypes we may have of others without our conscious awareness of these beliefs, is universal and not every bias is negative or hurtful. Most of our actions occur without our conscious awareness, therefore understanding and increasing our awareness of the biases we hold is important. Additionally, most of our negative biases are exhibited toward people who are different from ourselves.

Implicit bias can interfere with decision-making, provider-patient and teacher-student relationships, clinical assessments, and interactions with families. When we recognize that all professionals carry some implicit bias based on their own experiences and the attitudes of the wider culture, we start to recognize how those biases influence our interactions with clients/students.

What can we do

- In our homes, schools, and places of work, we can reinforce norms, promoting respect for all cultures and groups across all sectors of society.
- Schools and organizations can identify potential risks where implicit biases may affect behaviors and judgments and implement policies and procedures outlining structured decision making reducing the risks.
- An important step is to recognize and avoid racial microaggressions in therapy. Learn more [here](#).
- To explore the nature of your own implicit bias or help others understand it, take the [implicit association tests](#) created by Project Implicit.
- For more suggestions see the Tip Sheet: [Addressing Implicit Bias: A Barrier to Family Engagement](#).

Cultural Humility

Cultural humility involves having a humble and thoughtful outlook when working with people of different cultures and is a key principle for providing competent and equitable services. Like implicit biases, cultural humility requires ongoing self-reflection and a willingness to learn from others. Cultural competence is not a goal to be achieved, but rather a lifelong journey of curiosity and learning. Here is how to develop cultural humility:

- Develop self-awareness of our own cultural background and experiences and how these identities affect others.
- Increase awareness of our own cultural biases.
- Develop knowledge of working with various cultural groups.
- Develop specific skills working with various cultural groups.
- Increase awareness of microaggression in the therapeutic space.
- Appreciate that we cannot know everything about every culture.





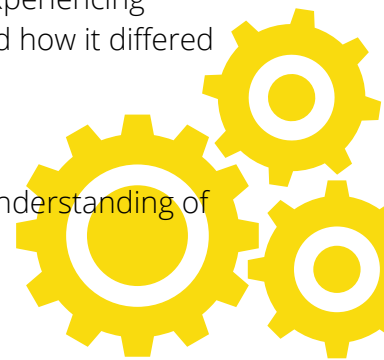
The Cultural Formulation Interview

The Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) is a tool to help mental health and educational professionals take a non-judgmental, curious approach for engaging students/caregivers in the diagnostic process. It also provides a way for students/caregivers to describe their experiences conversationally, not necessarily through clinical terms. It can help provide culturally sensitive care, which can improve trust, communication, and treatment outcomes. The CFI guides clinicians through the diagnostic process while maintaining a person-centered, strength-based approach within the context of the student and caregiver's culture.

Using a structured interview may seem counter to your profession, therefore, we suggest you practice using it a few times to help you internalize ideas and information. This will help you approach your clients and students with an eye toward their experiences, rather than a lens of bias or the dominant culture and systems.

How to Use the CFI

- Build rapport with clients by taking a non-judgmental stance, focusing on strengths, and expressing empathy, creates a therapeutic collaboration leading to better outcomes.
- Be flexible.
- Before you start with each section, explain the purpose of that section.
- Clarify that the questions being asked are part of the questionnaire and not because you expect him/her/they to have these symptoms.
- Ask all questions using simple, easy-to-understand words as much as possible and use lay language. Double-check whether the patient has understood your question correctly.
- It might be necessary to repeat several times that all reported information is confidential.
- Stay away from “Why” questions because it implies judgement.
- Instead of “Why are you having these problems”, ask, “What was going on in your life at the time you started feeling this way?” or “How did you find yourself experiencing these feelings?” or “Can you talk about when these feelings started and how it differed from your previous experiences/feelings?”
- Trust your clinical judgment and cultural sensitivity.
- Don't shy away from questions that make YOU uncomfortable.
- Be intentional to not allow implicit bias or judgement influence your understanding of the presenting problem.



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