

CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND MULTICULTURALISM

DESCRIPTION

A culturally competent school mental health program is one that demonstrates sensitivity to, and understanding of, cultural differences in program design, implementation, and evaluation. The National Center on Cultural Competence defines *cultural and linguistic competence* as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals to enable effective work in cross-cultural situations.” (Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs (1989).

RATIONALE

Cultures have different attitudes toward issues of mental health and mental illness that can affect levels of awareness among students and families and the likelihood that they will seek services. The familiarity and accessibility of schools can aid in reaching out to culturally diverse families. It is very important that school personnel are comfortable in cross-cultural situations and able to address students' mental health needs regardless of their race, religion, language, or other cultural influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations offer guidelines for schools, school mental health providers and stakeholders on how to move towards increased cultural competencies.

1. To strengthen cultural competence, school mental health programs can:
 - Assess their current level of cultural competence at the service delivery, administrative, and policy levels.
 - Develop support for change throughout the organization and community.
 - Identify the leadership and resources needed to change.
 - Devise a comprehensive cultural competence plan with specific action steps and deadlines for achievement.
 - Commit to an ongoing evaluation of progress and a willingness to respond to change.

The following description of a culturally competent school mental health program is adapted from the National Center for Cultural Competence. For more information, visit their website, <http://gucdc.georgetown.edu/nccc/index.html>.

1. **Culturally competent school mental health programs strive to:**
 - Acknowledge culture as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and institutions.
 - Acknowledge and accept that cultural differences exist and have an impact on service delivery.
 - Believe that diversity within cultures is as important as diversity between cultures.
 - Respect the unique, culturally defined needs of various client populations.
 - Recognize that concepts such as "family" and "community" are different for various cultures and subgroups within cultures.
 - Understand that people from different racial and ethnic groups and other cultural subgroups are unique.

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- Understand that people from different racial and ethnic groups and other cultural subgroups are often well served by persons who are a part of, or in tune with, their culture.

The process of becoming increasingly culturally competent in the field of school mental health requires cultural knowledge and skill development at all service levels, including policymaking, administration, and practice. The following guidelines, adapted from the [National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health](#) (see references), offer strategies for increasing cultural competence on individual, administrative, and policy levels.

At the Service Level

Culturally competent school mental health practitioners:

1. Learn as much as they can about an individual's or family's culture, while recognizing the influence of their own background on their responses to cultural differences.
2. Include neighborhood and community outreach efforts, if possible.
3. Work within each person's family structure, which may include grandparents, other relatives, and friends.
4. Recognize, accept, and, when appropriate, incorporate the role of natural helpers (such as shamans or "curanderos").
5. Understand the different expectations people may have about the way services are offered (for example, sharing a meal may be an essential feature of home-based mental health services; a period of social conversation may be necessary before each contact with a person; or access to a family may be gained only through an elder).
6. Know that, for many people, additional tangible services--such as assistance in obtaining housing, clothing, and transportation--are expected, and work with other community agencies to make sure these services are provided.
7. Adhere to traditions relating to gender and age that may play a part in certain cultures (for example, in many racial and ethnic groups, elders are highly respected). With an awareness of how different groups show respect, school mental health providers can properly interpret the various ways people communicate.

At the Administrative Level

Culturally competent administrators:

1. Include cultural competency requirements in school mental health job descriptions and discuss the importance of cultural awareness and competency with potential employees.
2. Ensure that all school mental health staff participates in ongoing cultural competency training.
3. Promote school mental health programs that respect and incorporate cultural differences.
4. Consider whether the school's location, hours, and staffing are accessible and whether its physical appearance is respectful of different cultural groups.

At the Policymaking Level

Culturally competent school mental health programs:

1. Appoint advisors or board members from the community so that there are diverse groups participating in decisions.
2. Actively recruit qualified multiethnic and multiracial staff.
3. Provide ongoing [staff training](#) and support developing cultural competence.
4. Develop, mandate, and promote standards for culturally competent mental health services.
5. Insist on use of best practices around cultural competence if contracting for services.
6. Nurture and support new community-based multicultural programs.

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7. Support research on cultural competence.
8. Support the utilization of culturally appropriate [assessment instruments](#) and interview guides.

REFERENCES

Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA. (2008). An Introductory Packet on Cultural Concerns in Addressing Barriers to Learning. Los Angeles, CA: Author. Copies may be downloaded from: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.

Cross T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M. (1989). *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care*, Volume I. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.

Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. (n.d) *Conceptual Frameworks / Models, Guiding Values and Principles*. Retrieved from <http://gucdc.georgetown.edu/nccc/index.html>

The Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health (2008). *Sample Cultural and Linguistic Competence Plan for Advancing Cultural and Linguistic Competence in Systems of Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.tapartnership.org/cc/>.

RESOURCES

<http://www.georgetown.edu/research/gucdc/nccc/>

National Center for Cultural Competence of the Georgetown University Child Development Center

<http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/documents/ChecklistBehavioralHealth.pdf>

Promoting Cultural Diversity and Cultural Competency: Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Behavioral Health Services and Supports to Children, Youth and Their Families.

<http://www.healthinschools.org/Immigrant-and-Refugee-Children/Tools-and-Documents.aspx>

Tools and Documents to Support Immigrant and Refugee Children

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/cultural/culture.pdf>

An informative packet from the UCLA School Mental Health Project on Cultural Concerns in Addressing Barriers to Learning.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/Spring04.pdf>

UCLA School Mental Health Project article, Diversity and Professional Competence in Schools, *A mental health perspective*.