

Guidelines for effective Cross-Cultural Counselling

1. Counselors need to be aware of their own ethnicity and how it influences their interactions with other cultural groups.
2. Problems (physical, mental) need to be understood within the context of the person's ethnicity. We learn from our culture, appropriate ways of responding to illness. For example, one group of people may tend to complain about their physical problems, while another may deny having any pain and see it as a form of punishment.
3. Attitudes towards seeking help vary from one ethnic group to another. For example, one group of people may mistrust the helping profession and prefer to receive help from the church while another may produce physical symptoms when under stress and seek out a medical doctor; and the expression of emotional concerns is culturally discouraged.
4. It is important to clearly spell out the tasks of the first session to all family members and explain in detail the client-counselor relationship.
5. The expectations the family may have about the encounter might be based on its experience with the medical profession. The family may expect the counselor to take charge and provide advice. By being direct, active and using a structured approach, the counselor establishes rapport with the family.
6. The ethnic group may perceive the family as the primary source of support for its members. If this is the case, the family may be experiencing shame and guilt for not being able to solve its own problems. For example, an individual may turn to the family for support and seek out outsiders for support as a last resort. In some cultures, it is not acceptable to express personal concerns with a stranger; therefore, the clients adopt the counselor into their family.
7. There may be fears and embarrassment about not being able to speak the language of the dominant culture well enough to express difficulties. As a result the counselor may view the client as passive and resistant.
8. Culture influences the family's orientation toward being internally/externally controlled. An internally oriented family has the belief that their achievements, or lack of achievements, are determined by their own actions, thus shaping their destiny. On the other hand, an externally oriented family has the belief that achievements and non achievements occur independently of their actions and that the future is predicated on chance. An externally oriented family may be interpreted by an internally focused counselor as procrastinators.
9. Another important dimension when working with the people who are from cultures different than our own is the "locus of responsibility". "Locus of responsibility" assesses the amount of responsibility or blame given to the client or the client's system. Determining if the individual or the system is the cause of the behavior is important when making an assessment and determining interventions. In Canadian culture often the individual is seen as being responsible for his/her actions. Racial and ethnic minorities whose behaviors deviate from the middle class are labeled as deviant.
10. Be aware of ethno cultural roles and hierarchy. If the father is considered the authority figure, make sure you address him, first showing respect for his cultural

- positions. In attempting to seek information from the children, it is important to acquire permission before proceeding with the interview.
11. If you are dealing with issues concerning immigration, ascertain if the reason for immigration was voluntary or involuntary. It is important to determine if the immigration is temporary or permanent and if any family members remained behind.
 12. Inquire about issues that may be specific to a particular ethnic group. Family members are often delighted to teach counselors about the key “insults” of their cultural group.
 13. If you experience resistance, check to see if you have violated a culture norm.
 14. Counselors need to assess the degree of acculturation to Canadian culture. The family may espouse tradition roots; they may attempt to blend the Canadian culture into their own; they may decide to reject their culture and completely take on the Canadian way of life. The assessment of acculturation will influence your approach and their reaction to the therapeutic process. (Tzu & Schultz)
 15. The counselor can become overly concerned about the family’s ethnicity to the point where one loses perspective as to their reason for seeking help.