



Tip Sheet

Considering Culture When Integrating Healthy Marriage Education Skills

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Culture includes how individuals and families pass values, behaviors, and attitudes from one generation to the next. Culture affects how people view the world and their relationships. It also affects how individuals behave within their romantic relationships.

Therefore, when integrating healthy marriage and relationship education concepts and skills into services, it is important for caseworkers and other service providers to do so in culturally appropriate ways. If this is accomplished, clients are more likely to be receptive to the messages provided.

The goal of service providers should be to know and understand a culture well enough to support cultural values and experiences and not disrupt a cultural value system.

Learning About Culturally Diverse Audiences

It is critical that individuals providing services to culturally diverse populations learn about the cultural values and collective experiences of the people in order to address the cultural issues that may arise. This can be accomplished in the following ways:

- Reading academic resources such as journal articles, books, and other scholarly works to provide an understanding of the targeted culture.
- Listening to radio stations or watching television stations that are managed by or broadcast for members of the culturally diverse population to learn about the culture and experiences of a population. For example, listening to African American and Latino radio stations may help someone become more familiar with those cultures. In addition, newspapers published by and for specific cultural groups can contribute to learning.
- Visiting cultural events sponsored by and for a diverse population, such as religious rituals, festivals and holiday celebrations, as well as exploring ethnic markets, grocery stores, and art galleries can be particularly useful in gaining an understanding of what is important to a cultural group. For example, going to Latino markets could aid in understanding the importance of religion in the Latino culture, as they likely carry a variety of religious articles and the art for sale may also highlight the culture's religious beliefs.
- Identifying a "cultural guide" who can be a teacher to answer questions and clarify information about a culture. This can be extremely useful in understanding the values and experiences of a cultural group. This relationship may be informal, whereby the person from the culture occasionally answers questions, or formal, where meetings take place on a regular basis. There may be a need to compensate a cultural guide for time and expertise.



Issues to Consider

It is important that organizations have multi-lingual and culturally diverse staff in order to be welcoming to people of other cultures. It is critical that all staff be aware of their own cultural values and biases and how they may affect personal and professional interactions. In addition, it may also be beneficial to partner with other organizations that are culturally sensitive and competent to effectively provide services to members of culturally diverse audiences.

When addressing healthy marriage and relationship skills with members of culturally diverse audiences, it is important to consider how marriages, couple relationships, and families are perceived within their specific culture. For example: How is marriage defined? How is family defined? How is extended family defined and what role do extended family members play in their lives? It is critical to consider these factors as couples in certain cultural groups sometimes consider themselves married because they have lived together for long periods of time, or because they have made personal commitments that are more important than legal commitments. In addition, some cultures have a collectivistic view where

The goal of providing healthy marriage and relationship education is to provide it in a way that does not delimit life experiences and cultural values. Therefore, the considerations provided are all important in order that we effectively integrate the teaching of healthy marriage and relationship concepts and skills with services to culturally diverse populations within a cultural context.

actions and decisions are not solely made by an individual or couple, but rather by both the nuclear and extended family. In such cases, it may be appropriate to include the extended family members in the relationship education process.

Understanding gender norms in a culture is also critical when integrating the teaching of relationship concepts and skills into services provided. Gender norms have implications regarding who has power in the couple relationship or in the family. For instance, in some American Indian cultures, women make the majority of decisions about couple and family relationships; while in other

cultures, such as Asian American culture, men typically make those decisions. It could, therefore be harmful for the family system and disruptive to the predominant cultural values to assume that men and women have equal say in what happens in a relationship.

Culture and life experiences also affect how couples learn about having healthy couple relationships. Some cultures, such as many American Indian cultures, share knowledge by telling stories; while others, such as in some Asian American cultures, highly value learning from a lecture; and still others, such as many Latino cultures, learn through discussion. Food is often assumed by members of the culture to be an important part of a learning experience, since it creates an atmosphere of fellowship. Who provides the information also differs for various cultural groups. In certain cases, someone from one's own culture is considered the best source of information. For example, spiritual leaders or an individual considered by the group to be highly educated may be perceived as the most esteemed source of advice or relationship information. In these instances, the service provider may need to partner with someone who is respected from the cultural group to provide relationship education. It is important to think about where learning most effectively takes place for a cultural group. Trusted places may have to do with past experiences. For example, government buildings may not be comfortable and welcoming for those who have not been treated well by government organizations. Schools, religious buildings, or gathering places for a target population may be considered more appealing.

Finally, it is also important for the service provider to consider the degree of acculturation and assimilation of the couple. For example, a Latino couple who has been in the United States for three generations might have incorporated the dominant cultural values to a greater degree than a couple who has been in the country for three months. The extent of acculturation and assimilation can also affect whether the couple speaks Spanish or English and, thus, whether the educational material should be provided in English or Spanish.

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