



Children's Mental Health Matters!

Facts for Educators Cultural Competence

Definition

A culturally competent provider is knowledgeable in understanding approaching and treating the problems of culturally diverse groups. They have an awareness of the assumptions and values they hold that influence their work with students and are able to provide effective services that are respectful of the student's race, ethnicity, social class, religion or faith, and sexual orientation.

Why Do We Care?

In today's classroom, the cultural differences that exist between teachers and their students are numerous. Diversity may exist with regard to race, culture, religion language, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. In addition, many students in the classroom are faced with stressors such as homelessness, unavailability of caretakers, abuse, teen parenting, trauma, and community violence, which can negatively impact their academic performance. Unfortunately, within schools, many students are also faced with discrimination from other students as well as school staff, due to a lack of understanding or empathy with regard to the variations in beliefs, practices, and values of different cultural groups. With ethnic minority children displaying higher rates of suspension/expulsion, special education placement and school dropout, it is evident that numerous disparities exist within the education system.

Culture has a significant impact on beliefs and attitudes about child development, identification of problems and judgment about the best way to intervene when problems do occur. Furthermore, each of us operates within an individual culture, which espouses specific beliefs that determine how we interact with others and interpret their actions. Cultural variations in expressions of behavior may contribute to misunderstandings and conflict, which can be decreased through enhancing multicultural awareness.

What Can We Do About It?

- ✎ Recognize the cultural diversity and uniqueness of students and learn as much as you can about your students cultural background.
- ✎ Recognize that socioeconomic and political factors have a significant impact on the psychosocial functioning of culturally and ethnically diverse groups.
- ✎ Recognize the diversity that exists within minority groups.
- ✎ Develop an awareness of your own cultural and ethnic background and acknowledge differences in the culture between you and your students.
- ✎ Identify your biases and prejudices and determine how they affect your expectations of students and your relationships with them and their families.
- ✎ Use instructional strategies and curriculum that are sensitive to cultural differences.
- ✎ Continuously request and accept feedback from students and their families.
- ✎ If you are present when bullying, harassment and/or discrimination takes place, work with colleagues, families, partnerships and students to stop the bullying, harassment and/or discrimination.
- ✎ Promote tolerance and understanding of cultural differences.

Resources/Links

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
Critical Issue: Educating Teachers for Diversity
highlights the issues involved in preparing teachers to work with diverse populations, provides several recommendations, websites, and exemplary practices. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/presvrce/pe300.htm>

Facts for Educators

Cultural Competence Continued

Culturally Responsive Teaching from The Education Alliance at Brown University: <http://www.lab.brown.edu/tcl/tl-strategies/crt-principles-prt.shtml>

How is Cultural Competence Integrated in Education? Provides information about cultural competence and highlights the importance of cultural competence in programs that serve children with or at risk of developing mental health problems. http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q_integrated.htm

Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity
A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. Documents the disparities in access, quality and availability of mental health services for ethnic minorities and proposes recommendations for improvement. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/cre/sma-01-3613.pdf>

The Multicultural Education and Ethnic Groups website provides several internet resources about multicultural education and diversity at <http://www.library.csustan.edu/lboyer/multicultural/main.htm>

The Multicultural Pavilion has a multitude of resources about multicultural education including a multicultural quiz, trainings, workshops, curriculum, and links to other websites. Visit their website at <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

The New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, Subcommittee on Cultural Competence — report addressing the disparities in health care, the role of culture in service delivery, and making several policy recommendations for improving the health care system. http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov/subcommittee/CulturalCompetence_013103.doc

**Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org March 2009**