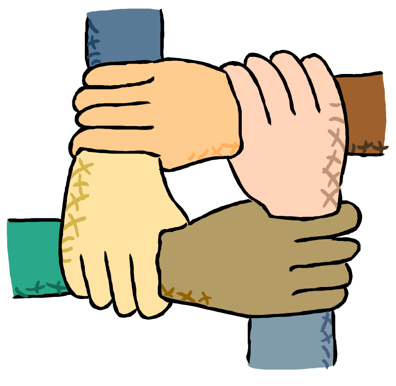
Supervising Culturally Sensitive Practice with Older Youth in Care

Handouts



Nurturing Youth's Possible Selves*

Adolescence is "a stage of possibility", the time when one creates the self "I could become" (Erikson, 1968). Transition to adulthood is likely to be more successful for teens who are able to "construct and maintain a compelling set of possible selves" (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

"Possible selves" are the selves

- we imagine ourselves becoming in the future
- we hope to become
- we are afraid we may become
- we fully expect we will become

Possible selves (expectations) can be rooted in:

- one's own experience and past behavior or accomplishments.
- what important others (e.g., parents, role models, teachers) believe one should become

and shaped by:

- **consensual stereotypes** about what "people like me" (a girl, a rural kid, a foster kid, a Native American) can become.
- **media images**
- **group norms and standards**: when we identify with a group – we fear disappointing them if we don't meet group norms standards

Youths with **balanced possible selves** have both:

- Expectations for success (positive selves)
- Fear of failure and consequences (negative selves)

Balance may enhance motivation and increase attempts to achieve positive expected self.
Lack of balance may lead to acts with consideration of possible negative consequences.

Pairing Positive Expectations with Action Strategies: Possible selves linked with strategies are better able to promote behavior change. Whether or not youth need help in linking strategies to goals depends on the youth and their problem solving abilities – what is obvious for some may not be for others.

“Positive selves” research findings with adolescents:

- Positive possible selves linked to higher self esteem (Knox et al 1998)
- Shifts in possible selves can lead to shifts in academic behavior (Oyserman et al 2002)
- Academically oriented possible selves AND strategies linked to improved grades (Oyserman et al 2004)
- Positive possible academic selves among academically “high risk” students linked to improved grades, endorsement of doing schoolwork (Anderman et al 1999; Oyserman et al 2004)
- Possible selves linked to delinquent involvement – youth identifying a delinquent lifestyle as a means to create positive possible selves as “independent”, “daring”, “competent”, “fun-loving and adventurous”.
- Studies of primarily African American delinquent youth: youth in lockup or attending school in a detention facility found the top 2 or 3 **expected** possible selves were negatively valued – “junkie”, “depressed” “alone”, “flunking out of school”, “pusher”, “criminal”
- Compared to delinquent youth in public schools and community placements, the top expected selves were “doing well in school” and “getting a job”.
- Possible selves and health risk behaviors: Youth without positive expected selves were more likely to be heavy substance users (25% compared to 1% of those with 3 positive expected selves).
- Goes both ways – involvement in risky behaviors increased subsequent negative possible selves and vice versa. (Aloise-Young, et al 2001; Stein and Markus, 1998).
- There are similar findings with respect to smoking and early initiation of sexual behavior.

*The concept of Possible Selves originated with Hazel Markus and has been elaborated in a variety of research papers, many co-authored with Daphna Oyserman.

SOCIAL GROUP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

NAÏVE: BIRTH TO THREE/FOUR; Focus is on own needs, interests and curiosity about human and social group differences

Agent/Target: Unaware of the complex codes of appropriate behavior for members of their social group. Display an interest in understanding the differences between people and often ask questions that embarrass or threaten adults. Break 'rules' and push against the boundaries which result in the transmission of messages.

Transition: Socializers' influence consciously/unconsciously encourages the integration of an ideology about their own and other social identity groups

ACCEPTANCE (PASSIVE/ACTIVE): Internalization (conscious/unconscious) of the dominant culture's logic system; "Acceptance" of messages about the nature of their group identity, the superiority of agents and the inferiority of targets

Agent: Generally unaware that they have privileges as dominant group members of an oppressive society; usually unaware that they think of themselves and other agents as superior; perceive own group as 'normal'

Target: *Have learned and accepted messages about the inferiority of targets and target culture; often these messages are held simultaneously and in contradiction to more positive messages; live with and rationalize varying degrees of cognitive dissonance on a daily basis; more consciously identify with Dominant group members and ideology*

Transition: Most Dominant group members are well into adult years before encountering events or circumstances which begin the transition to Resistance; often experience difficult emotions during this exit phase; identity comes under scrutiny and they are often afraid what the implications of his/her self-examination will be. Most Subordinate group members/Targets begin to acknowledge the harmful effects of the learned logic system and behavior patterns; may encounter someone of their own group who is a powerful role model

RESISTANCE (PASSIVE/ACTIVE): Increased awareness of existence of oppression and its impact on agents and targets

Agent: A dramatic paradigm shift brought about as a result of experiences and information; from an ideology that blames the victims for their condition to an ideology that names one's own group as the source of oppression. Begin investigating their own role in perpetuating oppression. Anger is a prevalent feeling at this stage—anger toward other agents, toward the nature of the social group identity; sometimes agents wish they weren't a member of their dominant group and distance themselves from other agents; may zealously confront other agents for their oppressive behaviors/attitudes. Identity based privilege becomes visible and a sense of having been lied to by socializing agents may be prevalent. Passive resistance is awareness accompanied by little action.

Target: Begins by questioning previously accepted 'truths' about the way things are; gradually become more skilled at identifying oppressive premises woven into the fabric of all aspect of their social experience; may begin to feel intensified hostility toward agents, and other targets who collude with agents. Has fully internalized the antithesis of the Acceptance stage and may feel overwhelming feelings of anger, pain, hurt, and rage; target group often adopts an 'anti-agent' stance. Identity is in opposition to the oppressor.

Transition: Agents begin to understand how their identity was shaped by social forces beyond their control; helps some move beyond guilt and feeling overwhelmed by personal responsibility; develop a new awareness of their social identity, but not necessarily positive. For most Targets, the primary task is to end the pattern of collusion and cleanse their internalized oppressive beliefs and attitudes. Begin to discover that they do have some power, even if not of the same type and quantity available to members of agent groups.

REDEFINITION: Focus is on creating an identity that is independent of an oppressive system based on hierarchical superiority and inferiority

Agent: Begin to redefine the social group identity in a way that is independent of social oppression; looking inward, not at targets' problems, nor exclusively reacting to the system. Who am I? Involves developing a positive definition of their social identity and identifying aspects of their culture and group that are affirming.
Target: This state is particularly significant for targets because it is at this juncture that they shift their attention and energy away from a concern for their interactions with agents toward a concern for primary contact with members of their own social group who are at the same stage of consciousness. This type of behavior tends to be viewed negatively in an oppressive society and is often seen as counterproductive by liberal agents who view themselves as kind and benevolent. Process involves reclaiming one's group heritage and coming to realize they are considerably more than merely 'victims' of oppression; may adopt a new personal or social group label to fit the changed consciousness.

Transition: For Agents, in contrast to the negative feelings about their social group identity in Resistance, people in Redefinition develop pride in their group and a sense of personal esteem; recognition that all groups have unique and different values. For Targets, renaming is one primary concern in this stage and formation of social group with others who share their identity and same development stage.

INTERNALIZATION: Main task is to incorporate the identity developed in Redefinition into all aspects of everyday life; process of uncovering previously unrecognized areas of Acceptance and Resistance will be on-going

Agent: Aware of past and concerned about creating more equal future; implicit in the term internalization is the assumption that the new aspects become a natural part of behavior so that people act unconsciously, without external controls; begin to make genuine connections with others of different identities in their lives
Target: Even in situations where their perspective is not valued and renegotiation does not succeed they find that their new self-esteem and self-concept can provide the necessary sustenance to prevail. Able to appreciate plight of all targets of any form of oppression; able to acknowledge coexistent Agent identities

Transition: Understands and accepts that process of understanding self, others, society will be on-going.

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Hardiman, Rita and Jackson, Bailey. "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses," *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook.* Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, Pat Griffin, editors. New York, NY: Routledge. 1997. pp 16-29.

Viewing/Discussion Questions for “Knowing Who You Are” video (from Casey Family Programs):

1. How did Mary, Marquita’s social worker, integrate issues of racial and ethnic identity into her conversations with Mary?

2. How did the experiences of the foster youth in the film shape their ideas of “possible selves”?

3. What are your overall impressions of the concepts brought up in the video regarding racial and ethnic identity?

4. Does the film raise any concerns for you about working with youth around these issues? If so, describe them.

5. What are the top 2 or 3 points highlighted by the film that you would want to address in your day-to-day practice with youth?

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural competence involves the **awareness** of cultural differences, the commitment to learning and unlearning information held as **knowledge** about self/others, and the development of practical **skills** to be able to work effectively with people of various backgrounds and identities.

Components of individual inter/cultural competency include:

- Being mindful of one's own cultural values and beliefs, and recognize how they influence attitudes and behaviors.

- Being aware of and sensitive to others' cultural values and beliefs, and how they may influence their attitudes and behaviors.

- Acknowledging the historic and current-day context of social interactions. Often we want to view our individual actions as isolated, ahistorical behaviors. But when two people interact they interact human to human and also history to history. Because of this, in cross-cultural settings trust may need to be earned, rather than assumed. Being culturally competent requires an understanding that the societal context affects individuals' and communities' resources, histories, social identities.

- Gaining specific knowledge about cultural communities, including an understanding that diversity **within** cultures exists, as well as, diversity **between** cultures.

- Learning more about various cultural communities through:
  - developing authentic relationships with individuals from cultural backgrounds different than your own,
  - discussing with individuals of a similar cultural background how your culture impacts your experiences in society and what you have been taught about other groups,
  - participating in events and activities outside of your cultural 'comfort zone,'
  - reading cultural texts – fiction, nonfiction, films, newspapers -- that represent diverse cultural perspectives,
  - developing a network of cultural advisors willing to serve as resources.

- Lastly, becoming culturally competent requires that an individual be willing to acknowledge that this is a process, not a one-time "event." It involves knowing that you will not have all of the answers, and that you may face conflict in the process. As stated by Orlando Patterson, "If the integration of [two] groups legally and socially separated for more than 350 years does not produce friction, it is the surest sign that no meaningful change has taken place." Being committed to cultural competence means being able to offer genuine apologies when you offend someone and really listening to the impact of your behavior. Most importantly, becoming culturally competent is an acceptance that although you will make mistakes, it is a greater mistake not to try.

Foundational Components for Cultural Competence in Child Welfare

by Anna R. McPhatter, PhD

Excerpted from "Cultural Competence in Child Welfare: What Is It? How Do We Achieve It? What Happens Without It?, Child Welfare," Vol. LXXVI, #1, January-February 1997

In the field of child welfare, developing an essential knowledge base is an expansive endeavor. A number of areas, however, are absolutely critical to enhancing competence with ethnically and culturally diverse people. No list would ever be considered complete or comprehensive, but the following essentials are believed to be foundational components for every child welfare worker actively engaged in becoming culturally competent.

1. **Knowledge of the history, culture, traditions and customs, preferred language or primary dialect, value orientation, religious and spiritual orientations, art, music, and folk or other healing beliefs of the groups for which the worker carries out professional responsibilities is required.** While it is frequently necessary in cognitive processes to rely on generalizations, caseworkers must discern important differences in culture and practice between and among groups typically categorized as monolithic. Further, the worker's exploration of her or his own ethnic or cultural group is essential because the value and meaning others hold about the culture will likely emerge from it.

2. **Child welfare workers need intimate familiarity about social problems and issues that have different impacts on minority group members.** These conditions are, most especially, sustained patterns of socioeconomic disadvantage because of poverty, unemployment, or truncated education; morbidity and mortality; health and psychosocial risk factors such as substance abuse; and increasing rates of interpersonal and community violence. It is fundamentally important that workers understand the dynamics that sustain these problems, as well as their origin and etiology, so that interventions may be appropriately targeted.

3. **Because children and families live in and relate to neighborhoods and communities in deeply interlocking ways, workers must include neighborhoods and communities as vital aspects of their practice domain. Neighborhood and community profiles, including, for example, sociodemographic information and a comprehensive knowledge of neighborhood needs and resources, are essential.** Formal, civic, and informal resources are important. Workers often fail to use valuable resources offered by churches, religious institutions, and other community-based programs that have a long history of prominence in communities of color.

4. **Caseworkers must demonstrate a firm understanding of the dynamics of oppression, racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination that shadow and defame culturally different clients irreparably.** It is also critical to understand the process by which clients internalize oppression, how that process is manifested, and how it compounds an already overburdened reality. Persons with an enlightened consciousness no longer engage in the futile process of denying the historical and current existence of oppression; they no longer make excuses or try to justify the fear and hatred that fuel it. Instead, they acknowledge the need to develop strategic and persistent responses to thwart and eliminate individual and institutional mechanisms that maintain oppression, and busy themselves doing so. These efforts require knowledge of advocacy and individual and community empowerment as child welfare professionals form real collaborations with families and communities.

5. **Child welfare workers should have knowledge of the formal child welfare system, its history, the contributions made by people of color to the development of services for children and families, the current issues facing child welfare (including funding and policy shifts), and, most especially, the obstacles to providing effective services to culturally diverse clients.** Workers must clearly understand minority group perceptions and feelings about the larger social welfare system generally, and specifically, their own perceptions and feelings concerning the child welfare system. Consumers of social and child welfare services have a long history of receiving degrading and humiliating experiences within these

systems and harbor great fear and distrust of the system. In fact, social workers are generally held in extremely poor regard in communities of color, where the negative experiences of members are transmitted over time. Recent focus groups of child welfare clients conducted by the author in an eastern city confirmed just how negatively perceived these institutions are. Workers must be able to engage clients empathically and with sensitivity concerning these very real perceptions, and most importantly, must stop citing the understandable resistance offered by clients as something inherently deficient in the client when inappropriate interventions fail.

6. **Workers must be well-versed regarding the diversity of family structure and the often overlooked functionality of diverse family forms among families of color.** Billingsley [1992] provides an exhaustive and informed description of the great variation in African American families and an unparalleled discourse on the remarkable strategies these families have used to survive and to excel over time.

7. **Knowledge about family functioning is a broad and expansive area fraught with ambiguity concerning indicators of what constitutes optimal functioning or its opposite, dysfunctioning, within families. Assessing family functioning is even more problematic when one lacks knowledge about culturally proscribed and prescribed behavior.** Child-rearing practices, including methods of discipline, nurturing, and meeting physical and psychosocial needs of children; responses to illness and health; and racial socialization are all areas where culturally competent caseworkers must be adept. The imprecise nature of the ways in which the profession assesses risk for children and what genuinely constitutes neglect and abuse demand that we approach these areas solidly grounded in community and cultural norms. The use of corporal punishment in many African American families, for example, is an area where great care and understanding must be exercised. Coping strategies and survival behaviors of people of color demonstrate great variance, and lacking knowledge that an immersion experience provides puts caseworkers at an extreme disadvantage when seeking to discover "what works." Martin and Martin [1995] portray dynamically how African Americans use blues and spirituals as a way of defining a problem through "moanin;" engage a problem-solving process through "mournin," which includes collective empathy, emotional catharsis, inculcation of hope and faith, and facing reality objectively; and express through "mornin," finally seeing the light and achieving hoped-for dreams most typically through the connection and intervention of a sovereign God. It is knowledge of these diverse cultural processes and the ability to validate and support them that increases the effectiveness of child welfare practice with culturally different clients.

8. **Knowledge of child welfare interventions is enhanced by incorporating alternative theoretical and practice perspectives that are culturally relevant.** One must be constantly alert to the possibility of alternative explanations for behavior and events. For example, what is often described as manipulative behavior may be reframed as problem-solving efforts in need of support and skill development. Chestang [1972], in a seminal work on character development in a hostile environment, describes an effective dual response wherein a balance is sought between a perennial belief in the goodness of people and the reality of threats posed by them. Workers who recognize and understand the dynamics of hostile environments for people of color do not ask them to give up a major survival and adaptive strategy before they are on firm footing with other more effective alternatives.

9. **Child welfare caseworkers must value and build on the longstanding informal foster/adoption/kinship care practices that are characteristic in families of color. Because family preservation, family reunification, and family support interventions are pursued within a cultural milieu, they represent new challenges for caseworkers.** Many of the models being implemented in various parts of the U.S. are built on theoretical and practice perspectives that are incongruent with minority families' belief systems. For example, many ethnic and cultural groups use faith and the belief in a higher power to resolve difficult and seemingly elusive problems, whereas professionals often minimize or dismiss the legitimacy of this practice. In this regard, it seems obvious that cultural context must form the basis of intervention choices and strategies with clients of color. Short-term and intense interventions must be measured in the context of the oftentimes longstanding risk factors such as poverty and unemployment that clients have little control over and are not likely to resolve in an arbitrary time, despite their best efforts.

10. **Concepts related to strengths and resilience must be incorporated into explanations of behavior and approaches to intervention.** The ability to identify assets in a family beset by overwhelming liabilities often produces the pivotal turning point toward successful interventions with culturally different clients. Although a great deal of effort has been made by child welfare caseworkers to incorporate a strengths perspective in work with families, many of the models that make up the landscape of practice continue to overemphasize deficits, making it difficult to help clients glean a sense of hope for positive change. This point is especially pertinent due to the unrelenting negative images of people of color portrayed in our society.

A grounded knowledge base must significantly expand the social work and child welfare knowledge base as currently constructed. To become culturally competent, workers must engage in persistent and thoughtful analysis of the cultural implications of the most basic and fundamental theoretical constructs and practice approaches. The search for cultural relevance must be put to the test unapologetically and used in ways that continually enrich this critical knowledge base.

Eight Key Organizational Practices from the Child Welfare League of America's

Best Practices Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care

1. Understand the issues, prevalence, risks for LGBT youth in out of home care.

2. Create an inclusive organizational culture in which the inherent worth and dignity of EVERY person is respected.

3. Understand the importance of family connections and the steps to preserve families and create and support other permanent connections.

4. Promote the health and wellbeing of LGBT youth in care by supporting the development and integration of their sexual orientation and gender identification, prohibiting practices that pathologize or criminalize same-sex orientation or gender non-conformity and providing healthy social and recreational outlets for LGBT youth.

5. Create a safe space for LGBT youth to self-identify and selective share ("come out") while protecting confidentiality of information about sexual orientation and gender identity. Use language that signals acceptance – partner instead of girlfriend or boyfriend, not assuming sexual orientation, not asking but if youth brings it up, follow up with questions, show personal comfort with topics around sexual orientation and gender identity.

6. Implement strategies for ensuring appropriate homes for LGBT youth.

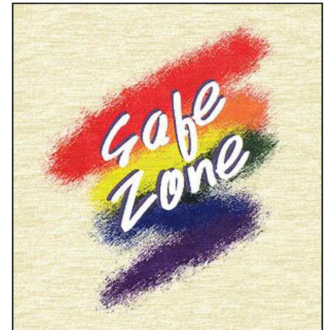
7. Implement strategies for ensuring safety and well-being of LGBT youth in institutional settings.

8. Implement strategies for providing inclusive and nondiscriminatory health, mental health and educational services to LBGT youth in custody.

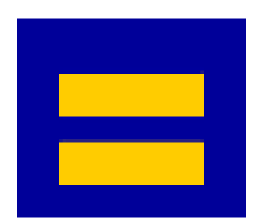
Symbols of Inclusion

Pink (or Black) Triangle
Nazi Holocaust

Rainbow for diversity & unity



Human Rights Campaign



Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network, www.glsen.org