

Learning Objective #5: Identify cultural barriers to offering disaster intervention services.

Cultural Barriers: (Source: Sue and Sue, 2003)

1. Culture bound values (Ex.: individual centeredness, emotions, intimacy, and cause and effect).
2. Class bound values (Ex.: strict time schedules, long-range goals, and ambiguity).
3. Language variables (Ex.: Standard English vs. Non-standard English).
4. Communication variables (Ex.: verbal and nonverbal communication).

Addressing Bias in Disaster Response Team Members (Source: Baggerly, 2003)

Americans are raised in a society in which prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination prevail. As such, some disaster response team members may have biases. When you hear bias expressed from team members, it is important to gently address them. This will help protect survivors and assure maximum effectiveness in delivering trauma interventions.

The following method is suggested to address bias in team members:

1. Acknowledge team member's desire to help.
Example: "I know you want to help. The survivors are really hurt and vulnerable now."
2. Remind to activate cultural sensitivity.
Example: "The best way to help is to activate cultural sensitivity, so that you will not inadvertently offend the survivor or their family members."
3. Give accurate information.
Example: "It's important to keep in mind . . . "

Strategies for Effective Communication (Sources: Doherty, 1999 & Sue and Sue, 2003)

Several strategies for effective communication with people who are culturally different have been identified:

1. Value diversity and view it as a strength.
2. Learn about specific culture and diverse groups.
3. Tentatively apply general guidelines. Allow openness to change and challenge.
4. Collaborate with a cultural broker/ informant.
5. Shift intervention style to meet the cultural needs of survivors.
6. Be overt by stating openness, awareness of limitations, and intention.
7. Ask for feedback on verbal and nonverbal messages.

Example: "I'm here to help out. I want to understand you and your experience. I know we have cultural differences and I may come across differently, but I do want to be of assistance. Please let me know if I say or do something that you are not comfortable with. Help me to understand what this has been like for you."

8. Be attuned to social rhythm. (Ex.: Starts, stops, interruptions, involvement.)
9. Be aware of nonverbal communication.
 - A. Proxemics – personal space
 - B. Kinesics – body movements, facial expressions, eye contact, and touch
 - C. Paralanguage – loudness, silences, rate
 - D. High context (nonverbals) vs. low context (content)
10. Recognize societal acts of discrimination and advocate as needed.