Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is when all people feel respected and safe when they interact with the health care system. Culturally safe health services are free of racism and discrimination. People are supported to draw strengths from their identity, culture and community.

There are five principles that Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists can use to engender cultural safety during service delivery:

Protocols: involves finding out about cultural forms of engagement and respecting these, e.g., showing respect by asking for permission/ informed consent, seeking cultural knowledge from the client during assessment and intervention, demonstrating reciprocity in learning (learning that goes both ways), or finding allies or mentors in the community of practice (e.g. other clinicians familiar with the client's culture).

Personal Knowledge: involves becoming aware of one's own cultural identities and of how our own beliefs and values, families and community influence how we interact with others and our delivery of clinical services. It also involves becoming more aware of one's socio-historical and political contexts, and how these relate to our clients.

Partnerships: involves balancing the power relationships between yourself and the client, and promoting collaborative practice, which recognizes the client as carriers of important information and joint problem solvers and decision makers. This can mean sharing knowledge instead of 'telling', avoiding the 'expert' one-way interaction, and working alongside clients to negotiate and change services that better align with client's unique needs.

Process: involves engaging in building relationships, mutual learning, and frequent checking in to ensure that proposed speech-language pathology or audiology supports 'fit' with client's values, preferences, lifestyles, and needs.

Positive Purpose: involves ensuring that positive options exist for the client to achieve their communication goals. Overall, this means ensuring that the clinical interaction and subsequent action plan avoid inflicting cultural harm: "any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and well-being of an individual".

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