

From Awareness to Practice: 101 Strategies for More Culturally Responsive Mental Health Services

The purpose of this form is to help mental health practitioners to explore and evaluate strategies they may wish to use to enhance their work with diverse clients. This document is adapted from the "From Awareness to Practice" workshop¹, which is based on an extensive literature review, and grounded in the Psychotherapy Adaptation and Modification Framework². Additional information is available through the author at <http://www.culturedpsychology.com/>.

Practitioners are advised to employ any recommendations contained herein, only in combination with their best clinical judgment, consideration of a client’s individual characteristics and preferences, as well as with in-depth knowledge of the client’s specific cultural group.

Suggested citation format for this handout:

Rapacki, T. M., & McBride, D. L. (2014, June). *From awareness to practice: 101 Strategies for more culturally responsive mental health services*. Paper presented at the XXXVI annual symposium of the International Association for Social Work With Groups, Calgary, Canada.

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Please rate the following cultural competency strategies from 1 to 5 according to how well they fit with your personal helping style, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 meaning "very well".

Domain 1: Dynamic Issues & Cultural Complexities					
Section 1: Self-Esteem	1	2	3	4	5
1. Include interdependent traits ³ in self-esteem work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Inquire about group membership when assessing self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Ask the question “what would your mother (friend, etc.) say are your personal strengths?” ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Acculturation and Personal Values	1	2	3	4	5
4. Use clients’ level and strategy of acculturation to inform how to “size” ^{5,6} cultural interventions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Personalize statements recognizing clients’ cultural values without stereotyping ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. But, discuss common cultural experiences if doing so normalizes stigmatized experiences or emphasize the customization of a counselling program ⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Assess acculturation formally e.g. through the GEQ ⁸ , VIA ⁹ , AVS ¹⁰ , etc. ^{11,12}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
8. Assist a client with finding and employing a comfortable acculturation ¹³ strategy	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
9. Ask clients about the role of culture and context in their lives when unsure of how to dynamically size interventions	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Minority Identity Development	1 2 3 4 5
10. Utilize a model of minority identity development ¹⁴ to guide counselling when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 4: Personality in Context	1 2 3 4 5
11. Limit the weighting of personality assessment conclusions based on limited cultural norms	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
12. Interpret personality in the context of national differences ^{15,16} in mean scores	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
13. Consider that newcomer “neuroticism” scores may simply reflect acculturative stress ¹⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
14. Learn about and use indigenous personality tests, such as the CPAI-2 ¹⁸	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
15. Discuss indigenous personality values and concepts with your client	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Domain 2: Orientation to Therapy	
Section 1: Orientation to Therapy	1 2 3 4 5
16. Make time for a longer, more detailed orientation ^{2,6}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
17. Educate explicitly about roles and expectations in therapy ^{2,6}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
18. Explain the typical course of therapy ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
19. Build rapport by emphasizing confidentiality ¹⁹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
20. Discuss healthy therapeutic termination to reduce dropout ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
21. Reduce stigma by articulating a holistic/biopsychosocial model that doesn't make clients feel personally blamed for their illnesses ^{2,4}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Meeting Client Expectations	1 2 3 4 5
22. Assess if the client may prefer a more active, problem-focused, and expert approach ¹⁹⁻²⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
23. Discuss with clients how needing extra time to acclimatize to a foreign therapeutic culture and having waited longer to seek help may slow initial therapeutic benefits ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
24. Offer the gift of a small solution early on as an example, and for motivation ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Establishing Goals/Structure	1 2 3 4 5
25. Emphasize co-constructing ¹⁹ therapy	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
26. Consider establishing frequent goals and markers of treatment progress with periodic review ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Domain 3: Cultural Beliefs					
Section 1: Holistic, Psychoeducational Approach	1	2	3	4	5
27. Teach and utilize a biopsychosocial model of mental illness ²	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Maintain a more systemic focus ²⁸	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Help resolve relational/social conflicts ^{4,6}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Explore the consequences of interventions for the client's family ²⁹	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Simplify material, reduce learning load, consolidate complex topics ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. Consider increasing session length; teaching time for unfamiliar concepts ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Cultural Bridging Techniques	1	2	3	4	5
33. Use a traditional wellness model from the client's culture such as Yin & Yang ⁷ or the Medicine Wheel ³⁰⁻³² to explain therapeutic strategies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Utilize the wheel of wellness ³³	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Learn and make use of cultural sayings to explain therapeutic concepts ^{2,34-36}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Frame interventions so as to be congruent with cultural values ^{7,36}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Incorporating Cultural Beliefs, Strengths, and Resources	1	2	3	4	5
37. Increase focus on resolving relational problems ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. Assess social/familial/environmental contributions to illness and wellness ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. Emphasize collaboration over confrontation ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Teach problem-solving for coping with practical environmental stressors ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. Present skills together with cultural context within which they will be effective ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. Refocus hierarchical, punitive cultural parenting styles on harmonious collectivist values ³⁷	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. Reframe familial conflict as acculturation differences, offer assistance as a cultural broker ³⁸	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. Educate about Acculturative Family Distancing and its effects on mental health ^{39,40}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. Reframe acculturation as bi-cultural competence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. Emphasize counselling as finding solutions rather than admitting failure ⁴¹	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. Encourage culturally-congruent and inexpensive self-care activities ^{4,2}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. Conduct a cultural strengths/assets search ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. Be aware of possible differences in values such as sharing vs. individual achievement, non-interference ⁴² , dialectical/negotiated problem resolution ^{43,44}	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Section 4: Reducing Stigma	1	2	3	4	5
50. Increase collaboration with cultural healers, doctors, elders, religious leaders, and other physical/spiritual health practitioners ²	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
51. Increase visibility in the cultural community ⁴⁵	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52. Distribute materials and raise awareness where clients first seek help ⁴⁵	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
53. Address community misconceptions about counselling ⁴⁵	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
54. Stress privacy and confidentiality ⁴⁶	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

55. Decrease emphasis on changing cognitions; increase positive thinking, problem solving, and behavioural activation ^{4,6}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
56. Question the helpfulness rather than rationality of a problematic beliefs, particularly when stressors are real ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Domain 4: Client-Therapist Relationship	
Section 1: Developing Cultural Knowledge/Self-Awareness	1 2 3 4 5
57. Read about clients' cultural backgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
58. Inquire directly about cultural values and influences	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
59. Expose self to different cultures	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
60. Explore Hofstede's cultural dimensions for a client's culture ^{47,48}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
61. Take cultural workshops, coursework, supervision, and consultation; diversify caseload ⁴⁹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
62. Utilize a White ⁵⁰ /ethnic ¹⁴ identity model to guide own cultural development	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Improve Joining	1 2 3 4 5
63. Utilize proper cultural etiquette in initial sessions ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
64. Offer tea; show concern about client's physical comfort; increase self-disclosure ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
65. Discuss/assess family and immigration history as an icebreaker ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
66. Normalize client feelings/perceptions of stigmatization ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
67. Actively provide validation, praise, emotional support, validate difficulty of sharing ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
68. Convey alignment nonverbally, e.g. moving one's chair to sit alongside the client while addressing a list of current problems ⁵¹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 3: Promoting Realistic Expectations	1 2 3 4 5
69. Explicitly discuss roles and expectations ^{6,2}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
70. Appear professional and be more proactive with giving advice ⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
71. Be aware of transference of expectations: e.g. a doctor, healer, or priest ⁵²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
72. Facilitate development of realistic expectations ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
73. Be aware that more severe problems may be possible due to delaying treatment due to cultural stigma of mental health help-seeking ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
74. Begin with easier tasks to inspire confidence ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
75. Share anecdotes or cases that normalize help-seeking, reduce feelings of isolation, normalize initial difficulties ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 4: Allying Against Racism and Prejudice	1 2 3 4 5
76. Actively broach the topic of race and racism in sessions ⁵³	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
77. Anticipate mistrust ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
78. Strongly consider validating any feelings of victimization ^{4,53}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
79. Validate racial microaggressions ^{54,55} as real and hurtful	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Section 5: Cognitive Matching	1 2 3 4 5
80. Generally avoid challenging cultural beliefs unless this is a goal of the client ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
81. Use cognitive matching: match therapeutic discussions and interventions to individual, sociocultural, or universal levels by following the client's lead ⁵⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Domain 5: Cultural Differences in Expression and Communication	
Section 1: Differences in Communication	1 2 3 4 5
82. Consider using silence to demonstrate understanding in initial sessions ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
83. Avoid misinterpreting normal low-key, indirect communicative behaviour as passivity, avoidance, or shyness, if such communication is a cultural trait ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
84. Allow Aboriginal persons ample time to finish speaking ⁵⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
85. Be aware of differences in meaning of smiles, silence, and eye contact ^{19,58}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
86. Increase self-disclosure ^{19,58-62} , invitational body language ⁶⁴ , invite questions ¹⁹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
87. Employ visuals, translators, supportive friends or family members, multilingual dictionaries ⁶⁴	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
88. Be mindful of the ethical limitations of using child translators ¹⁹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
89. Apologize for the limitations of one's cultural helping style but express a willingness to understand the client and his or her situation ⁶⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
90. Utilize homework evaluation forms ⁶⁶ ; translated exit/feedback slips (i.e. SRS ⁶⁷ , ORS ⁶⁸)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
91. Discuss the cultural meaning of interpersonal distance ⁵⁸	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Section 2: Expression of Distress	1 2 3 4 5
92. Focus part of early assessment on physical symptoms ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
93. Inquire about psychosocial symptoms indirectly: "Dealing with headaches and dizziness can be quite troublesome; how are these affecting your mood, relationships, etc.?" ⁶⁹	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
94. Help clients differentiate between thoughts and feelings during treatment ⁶	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
95. Use a non-stigmatizing procedure to make a co-diagnosis with a client ⁷	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Domain 6: Issues of Salience	
Section 1: Specific Cultural Issues	1 2 3 4 5
96. Take the initiative to learn about the strengths and challenges of individual cultural groups ²	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
97. Adopt an expanded understanding of responsibilities as a counsellor ^{70,71}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
98. Assist/counsel clients on meeting practical needs, overcoming structural barriers ^{4,68-73}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
99. Use the Three Dimensional Model of Multicultural Counselling ⁷⁰	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
100. Consult with the community or community leaders on adapting your counselling approach ^{6,7}	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
101. Utilize the FMAP ⁶ or Cultural Adaptation Process Model ⁷⁴ to incorporate community feedback into therapeutic modifications	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

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