

Culturally Adapted CBT For Canadians of South Asian Origin

Chapter 1: Awareness and Preparation



Module 1: Reflecting on Self-Positionality

02

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Identify self-reflective practices to challenge beliefs and misconceptions about South Asian clients.

Mindful Reflection Exercise

Self-awareness in therapists about their own belief system

Preconceived ideas or biases have a great impact on:

- Therapist-client relationship
- Power dynamics
- Case conceptualization
- Early termination from therapy
- Trust building
- Effectiveness of therapy



List of suggestions for self-reflective practice for therapist

- Building friendship/connections with a diverse group of people
- Writing in a self-reflective journal
- Consulting a mental health professional of a different cultural background
- Creating and nurturing diverse networks with other mental health professionals
- Working with clients from a variety of cultural backgrounds
- Participating in active cultural learning
 - Taking courses on world history
 - Understanding colonization through books, articles etc.
 - Learning new languages
 - Increasing cultural competency through seminars/workshops

List of suggestions for self-reflective practice for therapist

- Being open to passive cultural learning
- Experiencing cultures through various art forms (movies, plays, music, books, podcast)
- Examining complex topics like colonization, identity and belonging, through day-to-day conversations or passive interview watching



LEARNING ACTIVITY

Learning Activity

Using the suggested reflected practices and the questions below as a guide, take some time to reflect on your own self-positionality as a therapist.

You may reflect on a specific client or reflect generally.



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- What preconceptions/assumptions do I have about the client's culture, race, and religion/spirituality?
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- Am I assuming something about the client?
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- How much or how little do I know about a given culture or religion? Do I know where to go to access accurate information?
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Learning Activity – Sample Reflections

Some examples of reflections from therapists previously trained on CaCBT for South Asians:

“As a White male therapist, I assumed that South Asian women would not want to talk to a male therapist around issues relating to sexual intimacy. I wouldn’t ask questions around intimacy during sessions. Over time, I realized a lot of women were comfortable bringing it up during their sessions and it wasn’t as big a taboo as I thought it to be. I learned it was important for me to not make assumptions about a client’s comfort level based on my own beliefs regarding their culture.”

“As a South Asian therapist, I assumed I knew all the nuances of South Asian culture only to realize that was not the case. I realized that for the longest time I held back as a therapist, because I felt that older South Asian clients would probably not take too well to a younger therapist challenging their beliefs. I later realized that it could also be emanating from my own idea of showing respect to elders by not directly contradicting them. Now, being more mindful of my hesitation helps me build a relationship with older clients that is both collaborative and directive.”

Putting it all together

- Awareness about therapist's beliefs and worldview
 - Engaging in self-reflective practices
 - Being aware of one's assumptions, prejudices and biases
 - Being aware of one's emotional response towards a client
- Awareness about client's beliefs and worldview
 - Assessing for acculturation
 - Engaging in practices to counteract assumptions and biases
 - Asking the client to elaborate on concepts
 - Broaden your own horizons by gathering information on the culture through different books, podcasts, articles etc.



Putting it all together

Tackling differences

- Acknowledging power dynamics at the beginning of the session and inviting the client to intervene when they see fit
- Building self-awareness and cultural awareness
- Acceptance of differences and navigating that respectfully
- Inviting conversations around different beliefs and worldview
- Encouraging clients to provide feedback
- Making room for multiple belief systems through honest conversations
- Not relying solely on expertise in known spaces → embracing possibility of discomfort and uncertainty in order to work with clients from different cultural backgrounds

Self-reflection of one's positionality is a continuous process that therapists must practice in order to build a meaningful therapeutic relationship with their clients.
