3.4. Ability to work with difference

There are many factors to considered in the development of culturally competent practice, and finding a language that encompasses them all is a challenge. For example, issues in relation to gender, disability or sexual orientation may vary (or intersect) according to a specific cultural group. Nonetheless, the competences required to work in a culturally competent manner are similar. They relate to the capacity to value diversity and maintain an active interest in understanding how people may experience specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles, and to consider any implications for the way an intervention is carried out.

Practitioners and the people they work with will vary in beliefs, practices and lifestyles. Some differences may not be immediately apparent, leading to a wrong assumption that they do not exist. Also, it is a person's sense of the impact of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles that is important (the meaning these have for them) rather than the factors themselves. Almost any encounter requires the practitioner to consider carefully any potential issues relating to specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles, and their relevance to the intervention being offered.

Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that, because issues around specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles often relate to differences in power and inequalities, practitioners need to be able to reflect on the ways in which power dynamics play out, in the context of the service in which they work and when working with people.

Stance

- An ability to draw on knowledge that in working with specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles, it is stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that are problematic rather than any specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles, and therefore:
  - an ability to value equally all people for their individual constellation of characteristics, and to be aware of stigmatising and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in the practitioner and others (and the ability to challenge these)
  - an awareness that there is no 'normative' state from which people may deviate, and therefore no implication that a 'normative' state is preferred and other states are problematic

Knowledge of the significance for practice of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles

- An ability to draw on knowledge that it is the individualised impact of background, lifestyle, beliefs or religious practices that is critical
- An ability to draw on knowledge that the demographic groups included in discussion of 'different' beliefs, practices or lifestyles are often those that are subject to disadvantage and/or discrimination

- An ability to draw on knowledge that a person will often be a member of more than one 'group' (e.g. someone from a minority ethnic community who is also gay), so the implications of combinations of lifestyle factors need to be held in mind
- An ability to maintain an awareness of the potential significance for practice of social and cultural variation across a range of domains, but including:
  - ethnicity
  - culture
  - gender, gender identity and gender diversity
  - sexual orientation
  - religion and belief
  - socioeconomic deprivation
  - class
  - age
  - disability
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the relevance and potential impact of social and cultural factors on the effectiveness and acceptability of an assessment or intervention

Knowledge of social and cultural factors that may impact on access to the service

- An ability to draw on knowledge of cultural issues that commonly restrict or reduce access to interventions, for example:
  - language
  - marginalisation
  - mistrust of statutory services
  - lack of knowledge about how to access services
  - the range of cultural concepts, understanding and attitudes about mental health that affect views about help-seeking, treatment and care
  - stigma, shame and/or fear associated with mental health problems (which make it likely that help-seeking is delayed until or unless problems become more severe)
  - stigma, shame and/or fear associated with receiving or having a mental health diagnosis
  - preferences for getting support in the community rather than through 'conventional' referral routes (such as their GP)

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the potential impact of socioeconomic status on access to resources and opportunities
- An ability to draw on knowledge of how social inequalities affect development and mental health
- An ability to draw on knowledge of the impact of factors such as socioeconomic disadvantage or disability on practical arrangements that influence attendance and engagement (e.g. transport difficulties, poor health)

Ability to communicate respect and valuing of people

- Where people from a specific sociodemographic group are regularly seen within a service, an ability to draw on knowledge of relevant beliefs, practices and lifestyles
- An ability to identify protective factors that may be conferred by membership of a specific sociodemographic group (e.g. the additional support offered by an extended family)
- An ability to take an active interest in a child/young person's social and cultural background, and hence to demonstrate a willingness to learn about their sociocultural perspectives and world view

Ability to gain an understanding of the experience of specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles

- An ability to work collaboratively with children/young people to develop an understanding of their culture and world view, and the implications of any culturally specific customs or expectations for a therapeutic relationship and the ways in which problems are described and presented, and:
  - an ability to apply this knowledge to identify and formulate problems, and intervene in a manner that is culturally sensitive, culturally consistent and relevant
  - an ability to apply this knowledge in a manner that is sensitive to the ways in which children/young people interpret their own culture (and therefore recognises the risk of cultural stereotyping)
- An ability to take an active and explicit interest in a child/young person's experience of the beliefs, practices and lifestyles pertinent to their community to:
  - help them discuss and reflect on their experience
  - identify whether and how this experience has shaped the development and maintenance of their presenting problems
  - identify how and where they locate themselves if they 'straddle' cultures
- An ability to discuss the ways in which individual and family relationships are represented in a child/young person's culture (e.g. notions of the self, models of individuality and personal or collective responsibility), and to consider the implications for organisation and delivery of any interventions

Ability to adapt communication

- Where the practitioner does not share a child/young person's language, an ability to identify appropriate strategies to ensure and enable their full participation in the assessment or intervention:
  - where an interpreter/advocate is employed, an ability to draw on knowledge of the strategies that need to be in place for them to work effectively and in the child/young person's interests
- An ability to adapt communication with children/young people who have a disability (e.g. using communication aids, or altering the language, pace and content of sessions)

Ability to use and interpret standardised assessments and measures

- Where standardised assessments/measures are used in a service, an ability to ensure that they are interpreted in a manner that takes into account any individual or familial demographic factors, e.g.:
  - If the measure is not available in their first language, an ability to take into account the implications of this when interpreting results
  - if a bespoke translation is attempted, an ability to cross-check the translation to ensure that the meaning is not inadvertently changed
  - if standardised data (norms) are not available for the demographic group of which they are a member, an ability to explicitly consider this issue when interpreting the results

Ability to adapt psychological interventions

- An ability to draw on knowledge of the conceptual and empirical research base that informs thinking about the impact of social and cultural factors on the effectiveness of psychological interventions
- Where there is evidence that specific beliefs, practices and lifestyles are likely to impact on the accessibility of an intervention, an ability to make appropriate adjustments to it and/or the manner in which it is delivered, with the aim of maximising its potential benefit
- An ability to draw on knowledge that culturally-adapted treatments should be judiciously applied, and are warranted if there is evidence that:
  - a particular clinical problem encountered by a person is influenced by membership of a given community
  - people from a given community have been found to respond poorly to certain evidence-based approaches

Ability to demonstrate awareness of the influence of a practitioner's own background

- An ability for practitioners of all backgrounds to draw on an awareness of their own group membership, values and biases, how these may influence their perceptions of a child/young person, their problem and the therapeutic relationship
- An ability for practitioners to reflect on power differences between themselves and the child/young person they are working with

Ability to identify and to challenge inequality

- An ability to identify inequalities in access to services and take steps to overcome these:
  - considering ways in which access to, and use of, services may need to be facilitated for some people (e.g. home visiting, flexible working, linking families/carers with community resources)
  - where it is within the practitioner's role, identifying groups whose needs are not being met by current service design/procedures and the possible reasons for this, and identifying and implementing potential solutions