

Tips and Tools for Providing Culturally Competent and Responsive Care to Older People who Experience Abuse

Culture often impacts our definitions, perceptions of, and responses to mistreatment. It also influences our willingness to report harm and ability to seek and access appropriate assistance in the aftermath of abuse. Culturally competent and responsive engagement is essential to meet the unique needs of our diverse older population and are critical to abuse prevention, harm reduction, and meaningful intervention.

What is culture?

Culture embraces many factors, including our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, language, communications, behaviors, customs, experiences, values, societal institutions, and norms.

What are cultural competence, cultural humility, and cultural responsiveness, and how do they intersect?

Cultural competence is the ability to respectfully embrace and engage with individuals whose beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds differ from your own. Cultural humility is the exercise of self-reflection, self-awareness, genuine interest, and inquiry to better understand and learn from others. Cultural responsiveness is applying cultural competence and humility into practice and daily interactions.

Why are culturally responsive interactions important to older people who experience abuse?

Older people who experience abuse may be unlikely to report harm and reach out for appropriate services. Since many offenders are family members, chosen family, or trusted others, elders may be reluctant to reveal maltreatment by those closest to them. Cultural considerations may impact an individual's response to abuse. Individuals may feel shame and embarrassment, fear the offender will retaliate. Some diverse elders may be resistant to reporting their loved one due to historical and ongoing discrimination by authorities and systems. Understanding and acknowledging the cultural and contextual factors that can encourage or inhibit disclosure are critical to facilitating engagement.



How can implicit bias inhibit culturally responsive engagement?

We all have unconscious attitudes, beliefs, and biases rooted in our unique experiences, exposures, and influences. These implicit biases may influence our perceptions and judgments of older people based on age, race, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Biases may lead to intolerance, exclusion, and inequity. They can also impede person-centered and competent service provision. It is important to be mindful and to dispel any harmful misconceptions you may hold that may adversely affect clients.

How should we approach older people who experience mistreatment?

- Acknowledge the intersectional identities, cultural values, experiences, and goals of all older people, even if they differ from your own
- Respond to all older clients in a way that affirms their core dignity, autonomy, and self-worth
- Use a strengths-based, solutions-oriented approach with clients
- Remain respectful, inclusive, supportive, and curious

How can agencies embed cultural literacy in engagement and response for older adults who experience abuse?

- Train employees about cultural competency and cultural humility to ensure that they engage with older adults in culturally responsive ways
- Hire service providers from diverse communities
- Provide accessible services inclusive of language needs and disabilities
- Offer services at an accessible and comfortable location, rather than an environment that may be historically charged or associated with discriminatory and oppressive practices
- Collaborate with trusted community leaders, community-based organizations, and partners that represent diverse communities



What can providers do to better support older adults who experience abuse?

- If you are a mandated reporter, be transparent about your role
- Build trust and rapport, listen with intention, and ask questions with humility and authenticity
- Mirror the language of your client by repeating back the words they are using to describe their experience
- Use non-verbal cues, body language, and gestures to convey kindness and support
- Provide consistent and reliable follow through with clients

What are some best practice tips to enhance cultural sensitivity and responsiveness?

- Affirm the value and worth of every individual, recognizing their preferences, cultural values, and goals
- Recognize past traumas and continuing grief that may impact a client's access to aid and responsiveness to assistance
- Consider culturally adaptable resources and alternative solutions that can be flexibly and uniquely applied to individuals; one size does not fit all.
- Identify family, chosen family, neighbors, faith leaders, and community networks that can offer assistance and help clients find safety and support



Resources

[Diverse Elders Coalition](#)

[Administration for Community Living Diversity and Cultural Competency](#)

[National Center for Cultural Competence](#)



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