



Child Centered Play Therapy - International

CCPT and Cultural Humility

CCPT-I operates within the multicultural orientation (MCO) framework, which emphasizes that the therapist's attitudes, values, and beliefs towards their own cultural identity and those of the client influence their understanding of the clients and the therapeutic relationship (Davis et al., 2018). The MCO framework is "a way of being" rather than "a way of doing" (Owen et al., 2011). When a cultural encounter occurs, the therapist focuses on being with the client, engaging with the client, and becoming attuned to the client's perspectives and needs. This framework includes three pillars: cultural humility, cultural opportunities, and cultural comfort (Owen et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2018). Cultural humility is the cornerstone of MCO and intersects with CCPT in meaningful ways.

Hook et al. (2017) define cultural humility as "an awareness of one's limitations to understanding a client's cultural background and experience...an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented rather than self-focused in regard to the cultural background and experience of the client" (p. 9). Cultural humility is the therapist's openness and willingness to work to honor all aspects of the client, while acknowledging their own limitations and inability to fully know and understand the client's beliefs and experiences (Hook et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2022). Being culturally humble is a process that is always evolving. It requires the therapist to accept and confront their own biases and privileges, actively engage in continuous cultural self-exploration, and incorporate feedback from their clients.

CCPT and cultural humility are consistent in their philosophical underpinnings. Dr. Garry Landreth (2024) once said the play therapist's job is to "discover that which I don't know that I don't know I don't know" (p. 81). The play therapist enters the relationship with the child with no assumptions or expectations about who the child is or their worldview (Landreth, 2024; Ray, 2011). In CCPT, the child leads the session, and the therapist strives to see the child's world through their lens with genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy (Landreth, 2024; Ray, 2011). Meanwhile, a culturally humble play therapist is curious and learns from the complex cultural expression of the child through play, rather than acting if the therapist is an expert in the client's cultural experiences. The play therapist is inviting and communicates authenticity to support this process, even when this process evokes confusion, vulnerability, discomfort, or any other feelings in the play therapist. The connection between CCPT and cultural humility is also evident in how both emphasize self-awareness. Self-awareness allows for the play therapist to examine the personal implicit and explicit predispositions arising in the cultural dynamics or encounters in sessions, which further strengthens the development of therapeutic relationships with child clients and caregivers (Ray et al., 2022).

Caregivers are an integral component of the therapeutic process and thus a play therapist engages in this way of being with them as well. Play therapists aim to create a safe, open, and inviting space to the caregivers to better understand the families' cultural experiences.

Recent research has shown that when parents of clients perceive play therapists to hold strong cultural humility their therapeutic relationship is also strengthened (Aguilar, 2024). Parents also appear to report a strengthened relationship when cultural conversations occur. Thus, highlighting the importance of play therapists engaging in cultural conversations and strengthening their cultural humility for the benefit of the therapeutic relationship.

Play and culture are interconnected. Children play out their daily experiences that are oftentimes shaped by culture. To facilitate a culturally inclusive and affirming therapy experience, it is crucial that play therapists have the sensitivity, humility, and desire to understand how children and their caregivers perceive themselves and others in a cultural way. We encourage CCPT therapists to grow in knowledge and engagement with cultural humility in and outside play therapy sessions. And CCPT-I plans to continue to support the growth of play therapists' cultural humility through continued discussion, training, and dissemination of resources.

References

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