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Where We Come From Matters: Cultural Considerations, Trauma, Bias, and the Professional Perspective

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CHILDREN'S MEDICAL & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE NETWORK

Nothing To Disclose

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the impact of early childhood adversity, cultural trauma, and historical experiences on brain development, health, relationships, and behavior.

2. Examine how personal experiences, professional identity, cultural background, and implicit biases influence assessment, engagement, and decision-making.

3. Identify strategies to increase cultural humility, reflective practice, and trauma-informed interactions within multidisciplinary settings.

4. Apply principles of relational neuroscience and trauma-informed care to reduce bias and strengthen therapeutic, educational, and healthcare relationships.

Connector Activity

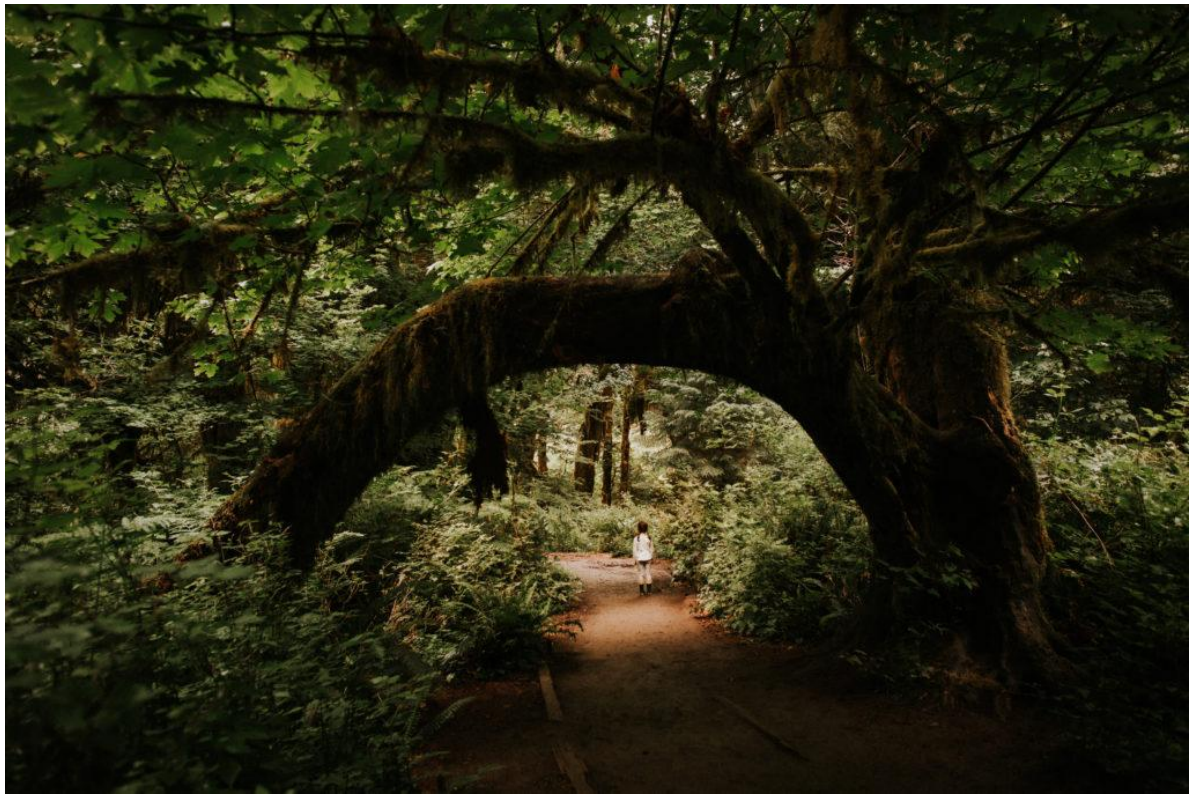





Gracious Space-What is it?

To create and maintain an environment in which honesty, equity, reciprocity, and partnership can thrive; the group enters into an agreement on honoring “Gracious Space”. The difference between gracious space and ground rules are that “rules” are things and often are set by others, have punitive consequences, and have a restraining connotation. Gracious Space is all about honor and respect for the place, time and people involved in a particular conversation. It allows for safe space in which to engage in real meaningful thought and conversation.

Welcome & Framing



Opening Reflection

"Our professional lens is never neutral."

We All See Through a Lens

Individual Experiences

We All See Through a Lens

Individual Experiences

- Family values
- Childhood experiences
- ACEs
- Trauma
- Protective factors

We All See Through a Lens

Cultural Experiences

We All See Through a Lens

Cultural Experiences

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Gender
- Language
- Immigration
- Socioeconomic status

We All See Through a Lens

Professional Experiences

We All See Through a Lens

Professional Experiences

- Education
- Organizational culture
- Professional role
- Previous cases

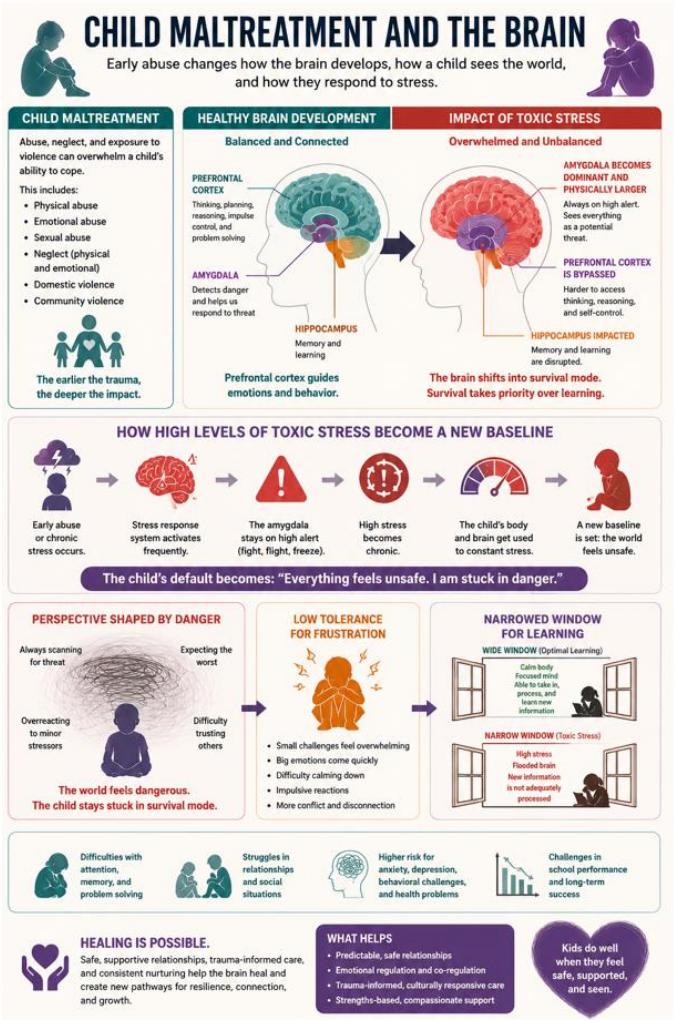
We All See Through a Lens

World View

1. The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world.
2. A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

Activity
"My Lens"

Trauma Shapes the Brain...and Bias



Neurobiology of Implicit Bias

- The human brain as a physical mechanism that translates perceptions and stored memories
- Memories become the basis of knowledge that guides future activity
- Memories are composed of complicated neuro networks that are impact perceptions response tendencies, attitudes, self concept and personality traits
- The brain functions at a conscious and unconscious level
- Multiplicity

Social Categorization

- Starting from infancy, it is developmentally normal and important for all infants and children to have the ability to sort the many different objects, events and people they encounter quickly and effectively into smaller numbers of meaningful categories
- This occurs spontaneously on the basis of several factors:
- Physical similarity
- Proximity or shared fate
- From the beginning both attraction and prejudice against are fundamentally related to social categorization and the perception of intergroup boundaries that define “we” from “they”

Social Categorization

- Children show a natural interest in learning about social categorization and seek to know how they fit in (especially from ages 7-11)
- They are susceptible to believing stereotypes
- Social values at this age come from trusted caretakers, along with others of social importance to them in their social groups, in addition the society at large has general messages through media.

Social Categorization

- Research has shown that people tend to quickly categorize others into **IN** Groups and **OUT** Groups in relationship to their own group identity
- These in group/out group preferences are not just behavioral but are evidenced by differences at the information processing neurological level.

IN GROUP & OUT GROUP

Example: An undesirable action of an out group member is encoded at a more abstract level than presumes intentionality and disproportional outcome (eg: he's a drunken bum) when compared with the identical behavior of an in group member (he drank too much last night)

In contrast desirable actions of an out group members are encoded at more concrete levels (she was nice to me that one time) relative to the same behaviors of an in group member (she's a nice person)

IN GROUP & OUT GROUP

- The impact of these human inclinations is profound and these cognitive biases help to perpetuate social biases and stereotypes even in the face of countervailing evidence.
- Stereotypes are used to size up a person to make life easier, eventually they become a quick and spontaneous matter of automatic categorization.
- The mind tends to categorize environmental events in the grossest manner compatible with the actions
- Because positive behaviors of an out group member are encoded on the concreate level, the tend not to generally reduce the stereotypes.

Neurobiology of Implicit Bias

- Though it is an adaptive tool for some purposes there are many downsides of the brain's tendency toward social categorization
- While building group cohesiveness is generally beneficial, misperception of out group member would be adversely affected
- **Once the template for judgement has been established the bias resists any subsequent info that varies from the first impression.**

Reflective Exercise

Think about your work:

Who is:

"Noncompliant"

"Manipulative"

"Attention seeking"

"Lazy"

"Difficult“

“Lying”

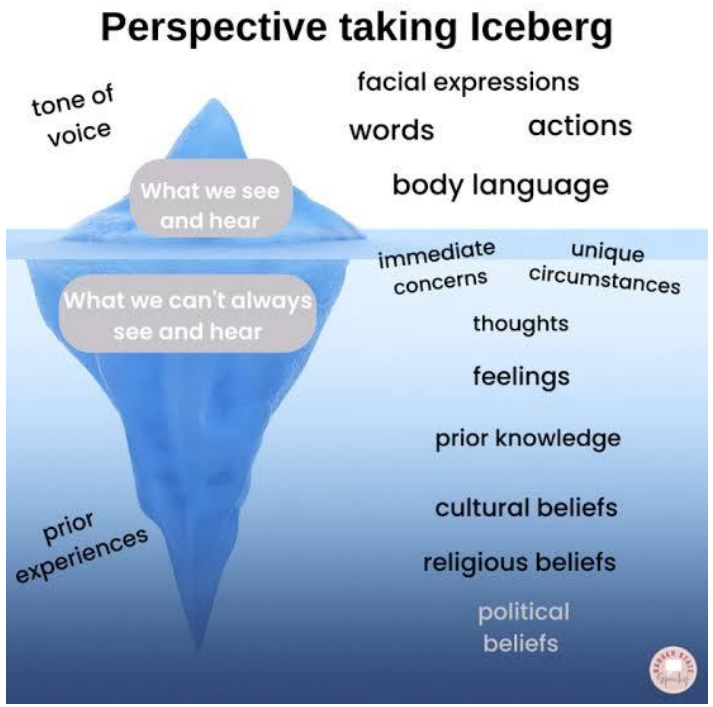
“A victim”

“Apathetic”

Reflective Exercise

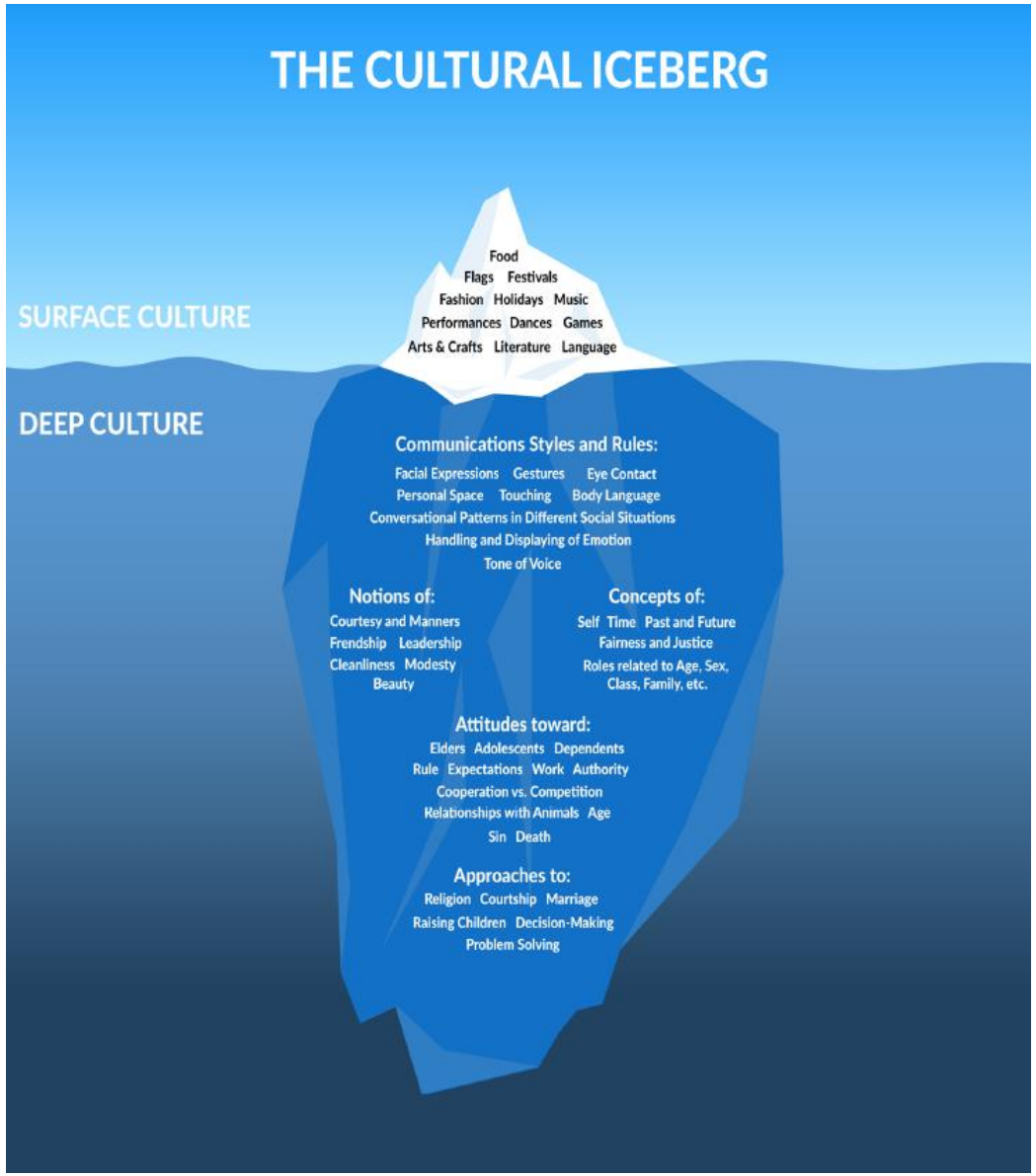
- What is the story you are telling yourself?
- What else can be true?
- "What happened?"
- "What matters?"
- "What strengths exist?"

Trading Spaces Activity



Neurobiology of Implicit Bias

Trauma informed professionals can appreciate the adverse and traumatic experiences of stigmatization and discrimination become physically stored memories that may remain frozen and isolated from other memory networks when activated either consciously or unconsciously these unresolved memories affect perception, feelings and behaviors


THE CULTURAL ICEBERG
SURFACE CULTURE
Food
Flags Festivals
Fashion Holidays Music
Performances Dances Games
Arts & Crafts Literature Language
DEEP CULTURE
Communications Styles and Rules:
Facial Expressions Gestures Eye Contact
Personal Space Touching Body Language
Conversational Patterns in Different Social Situations
Handling and Displaying of Emotion
Tone of Voice
Notions of:
Courtesy and Manners
Frendship Leadership
Cleanliness Modesty
Beauty
Concepts of:
Self Time Past and Future
Fairness and Justice
Roles related to Age, Sex, Class, Family, etc.
Attitudes toward:
Elders Adolescents Dependents
Rule Expectations Work Authority
Cooperation vs. Competition
Relationships with Animals Age
Sin Death
Approaches to:
Religion Courtship Marriage
Raising Children Decision-Making
Problem Solving

Your Culture Map

- What do you look like when looking through your cultural lens?
- Take a few minutes, reflect and write down aspects of your own culture.
- How would you introduce yourself to another person “culturally”?

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Cultural Patterns/Protective Patterns

Cultural Patterns Can Help Us

- Core values
- Shortcuts to understand and navigate the world
- Belonging to a group of people with whom we feel safe
- Opportunities for celebration and strength

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Cultural Patterns Can Harm Us

- Blind us to others truth
- Cause Judgments that short circuit relatedness
- Perpetuate lack of access to health and wealth
- Alter our health – behaviorally and genetically

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Protective Patterns

Reactive Resilience

Inform how we react to the world

- Distrusting
- Hypervigilance
- Hyper Caretaking
- Avoiding
- Defending
- Attacking

Protective Patterns

Protective Patterns

What they look like

We react with Protective Patterns when we **feel unsafe** (physically, emotionally, socially). **We all have them,** and usually learn them early in life.

How they help

Protective Patterns can keep us safe and help us deal with danger. Since they are **automatic,** they help us react quickly, before thinking.

How they harm

Protective Patterns can hurt us and **harm our relationships** when they are unwarranted and disruptive.

What you can do to mitigate Protective Patterns

- Be **curious** and notice when we are reacting and assess if this is harming or helping.
- **Choose** Resilience Skills to center, connect and collaborate.
- **Commit** to practicing Resilience Skills.

When and how am I using my Protective Patterns?

Practice: Recognize when and how you use Protective Patterns. When you use one, such as Avoiding or Hyper-Caretaking, ask yourself "Is this helping or harming me or others?"

Model: When you realize you are using a Protective Pattern, choose a Centering Skill. Name the pattern and the skill you used for those around you. *"I am sorry I was Attacking you. As soon as I noticed, I started Breathing Mindfully and I calmed down."*

Coach: Help others name and claim their Protective Patterns, so they can see the impact. *"Son, are you being Hypervigilant with your friends? It seems you might be missing out on fun with them. Which Centering Skill could you choose to help?"*

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Distrusting Myself and Others

Protective Patterns

What it looks like

- Doubting or **being critical** of yourself
- Negative self-talk
- Being wary or overly critical of others

What you can do

- Practice **Positive Reframing**–look for an alternative story that includes trust
- Have Empathy for yourself and others

How it helps

- Ensures **you are careful** so you don't make mistakes
- Protects you from being taken advantage of
- Makes you cautious, preventing potential harm

How it harms

- Results in inaction, getting **stuck**
- Difficult to be in healthy relationships with others
- Self-doubt holds you back from healthy risks and opportunities

Science

- Even when people have a history of being exploited, **cultural competence and trustworthy behavior can overcome accumulated distrust.**[1]
- Since distrust increases diligence, depending on the task it can help teams perform better.[2]

1 Rodgers W, Williams EM, Smalls BL, Singleton T, Kamen D, Gilkeson G. Treating Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE): The Impact of Historical Environmental Context on Healthcare Perceptions and Decision-Making in Charleston, South Carolina. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2020 Jan;17(7):2285.

2 Lowry PB, Schuetzler RM, Giboney JS, Gregory TA. Is trust always better than distrust? The potential value of distrust in newer virtual teams engaged in short-term decision-making. Group Decision and Negotiation. 2015 Jul 1;24(4):723-52.

Hypervigilance

Protective Patterns

What it looks like

- Seeing potential danger everywhere
- Constant **high anxiety** and worry that impacts you or others

What you can do

- Work with others to reasonably assess risks
- Use Breathing Mindfully to slow down and assess a situation
- **Find Gratitude** for what is happening, not focusing on what could happen

How it helps

- **Identies threats early**
- Helps you create appropriate actions and defenses
- Keeps you engaged

Science

- Parents/caregivers facing limited resources are more likely to be hypervigilant.[1]
- Trauma can induce Hypervigilance.[2]

How it harms

- Creates a sense of fear when none may be warranted
- Causes inaction and/or overreaction
- Prevents enjoying the present moment
- Limits healthy risks/growth opportunities for children

1 Gallo M, Schleifer D, Godoy LD, Ofray D, Olaniyan A, Campbell T, Bath KG. Limited bedding and nesting induces maternal behavior resembling both hypervigilance and abuse. Frontiers in behavioral neuroscience. 2019;13:167.
2 Tahir MA, Gujar NR, Jahan N. A Case of Pediatric Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Presenting as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Case Report. Cureus. 2017 May;9(5).

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Hyper-Caretaking

Protective Patterns

What it looks like

- **Over-prioritizing others** to the detriment of yourself
- Enabling others
- Victimhood or giving up your own needs
- Codependency

What you can do

- Practice Nurturing Myself, and meeting your own needs without abandoning the needs of others
- Help others become independent and learn to help themselves

How it helps

- **Helps others in need**
- Creates connection
- Strengthens community
- Gives you a feeling of value when helping

How it harms

- Neglects your own fundamental needs
- Doesn't honor the self-reliance and **capacity of others**

Science

- Hyper-Caretakers **risk their own physical and emotional well-being.**[1]
- Hyper-Caretaking can lead to neurological changes such as decreased activation in the left dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (responsible for executive functioning and some emotional and behavioral responses).[2]

1 Bortolon CB, Signor L, Moreira TD, Figueiró LR, Benchaya MC, Machado CA, Ferigolo M, Barros HM. Family functioning and health issues associated with codependency in families of drug users. Ciencia & Saude Coletiva. 2016;21:101-7.

2 Zielinski M, Bradshaw S, Mullet N, Hawkins L, Shumway S, Story Chavez M. Codependency and Prefrontal Cortex Functioning: Preliminary Examination of Substance Use Disorder Impacted Family Members. The American journal on addictions. 2019 Sep;28(5):367-75.

Avoiding

Protective Patterns

What it looks like
- Withdrawing from specific relationships
- **Retreating** to yourself
- Being overly optimistic
- Numbing–avoiding emotions
- **Addictive behavior** (substance misuse, overeating, workaholic, shopaholic, TV zombie)

What you can do
- Develop the wisdom to engage honestly and **Speak Authentically**
- Confront directly without Attacking
- Find healthy ways of coping with addictions

How it helps
- Deescalates a situation
- Creates a **safe space** which protects you from harm (physical, emotional)
- Avoids perpetuating previous trauma

How it harms
- Shuts down your emotions or needs
- Prevents finding lasting solutions
- Creates **loneliness**
- Reduces connection

Science
- Depending on the circumstance, avoiding behaviors can reduce anxiety, stress and depression better than focusing on one's emotions.[1,2]
- Avoiding strategies are often used to manage anxiety and depression but can **increase negative moods.**[3]

1 Win S, Ho R. Life Satisfaction of Seminary Final Year Students in Yangon, Myanmar: A Path Analytic Study of The Direct and Indirect Influences of Coping Styles Being Mediated by Stress, Anxiety and Depression. Scholar 2016;8(2).
2 Tran VA, Chantagul N. Influence of Coping Style on Life Satisfaction Among Vietnamese Undergraduates of Psychology, Mediated by Stress, Anxiety, and Depression. Scholar: Human Sciences. 2018 Dec 27;10(2):174.
3 Shin M, Kemps E. Media multitasking as an avoidance coping strategy against emotionally negative stimuli. Anxiety, Stress, & Coping. 2020 Mar 21:1-2.

Defending

Protective Patterns

What it looks like

- Reacting quickly by digging in your heels to self-protect
- Responding as if you feel constantly questioned, judged, or accused
- Trying to **prove you are right,** potentially at the cost of the relationship

What you can do

- Get curious about the other person's perspective
- Use **Heartfelt Listening** to really hear the point of view of others
- Use Breathing Mindfully to center

How it helps

- You **stand up for yourself**
- Prevents others from controlling you
- Ensures others hear your point of view
- Illuminates your values being crossed

How it harms

- Interrupts others and shuts down ability to listen to their perspective
- **Escalates con ict**
- Prevents other person's intent from being heard
- Creates distance
- Appears as "always right"

Science

- People who have difficulty with empathy are more likely to respond defensively and have more difficulty overcoming other's distrust.[1]
- People who are not confident in their abilities and **feel threatened tend to respond defensively to their** subordinates' suggestions for improvement.[2]

1 Labanauskas L, Justickis V, Sivakovaitė A. Defensive Medicine in Lithuanian Health Care: Development of Doctors' Defensive Reactions. Health Policy and Management. 2013 Oct 6;1(5):134-47.

2 Fast NJ, Burris ER, Bartel CA. Managing to stay in the dark: Managerial self-efficacy, ego defensiveness, and the aversion to employee voice. Academy of Management Journal. 2014 Aug;57(4):1013-34.

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Attacking

Protective Patterns

What it looks like

- Being **aggressive** in a way that feels like a personal attack to the other person (or to yourself)
- Constantly judging, blaming, or criticizing others or yourself
- Physical or verbal intimidation/action

What you can do

- Be curious about other perspectives so you can **Empathize** instead of criticize
- Speak Authentically and be assertive rather than aggressive
- Create and hold healthy boundaries

How it helps

- Protects you from the aggression of others and physical or emotional harm
- Creates a **feeling of power**
- Signals you won't let your values be crossed

How it harms

- Hostility **invites counter attacks**
- Stops possible engagement
- Can hurt others and prevent connection

Science

- Attacking is not a helpful conflict resolution strategy.[1]
- Children who are aggressive are more likely to be physically aggressive and lack self control of anger as adults.[2]

1 Du Plessis K, Clarke D. Couples' helpful, unhelpful and ideal conflict resolution strategies: Secure and insecure attachment differences and similarities. Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships. 2008 Jun 30;2(1):65-88.

2 Kokko K, Pulkkinen L, Huesmann LR, Dubow EF, Boxer P. Intensity of aggression in childhood as a predictor of different forms of adult aggression: A two country (Finland and the United States) analysis. Journal of Research on Adolescence. 2009 Mar;19(1):9-34.

Internal Reflection

What part of me shows up when...

- Someone yells?
- A parent challenges me?
- Someone refuses treatment?
- A child lies?
- A family doesn't follow through?

Internal Reflection

Possible parts

- Fixer
- Rescuer
- Rule Enforcer
- Perfectionist
- Avoider
- Judger
- People Pleaser
- Self

Self Reflection

What experiences shaped this part?

How has it protected me?

When does it help?

When does it get in my way?

Becoming Trauma-Informed and Culturally Humble

Instead of:

"What is wrong with you?"

Ask

"What happened?"

"What matters to you?"

"What strengths have helped you survive?"

"What do you need from me today?"

Practical Strategies

- Pause
- Breathe
- Notice
- Reflect
- Be Curious
- Check assumptions
- Use inclusive language
- Validate experiences
- Repair ruptures
- Reflect after encounters

Connectedness

- Human beings have an innate need to feel socially connected and include the social richness that comes in such a cultural connection- can be a great source of satisfaction and meaning
- Cultural experiences can be painful
- Being excluded or devalued by people from another culture or within one's culture can be traumatizing
- This can tap into fears of being cut from the heard

Cultural Curiosity

- Humility reduces assumptions about others and replaces it with an active curiosity
- Learning about cultural differences helps us show a sensitivity to cultural needs
- An attitude of cultural curiosity seeks knowledge about a clients cultural values, experiences, needs and general ways of being

Cultural Curiosity

- Acquires knowledge as a natural and enjoyable part of attunement to the clients cultural world knowledge can be gained from many sources
- The professional should assess the degree to which a client is attuned with these cultural ways and how they vary from them or are in conflict with them
- Showing awareness of cultural knowledge can build trust

Cultural Competence

- A clinically competent attitude is a state of mind.
- Embraces a multi cultural perspective
- Values diversity along with dimensions
- Begins with a capacity to understand and appreciate one's own cultural background
- Create opportunities for own personal reflection
- Awareness of strengths and difficulties associated with our own cultural experiences

Cultural Competence

- Developing cultural competence as a professional is a journey, not a destination
- The quest is an ongoing pursuit and viewing in that way is a first step

Call to Action and Reflection

One assumption I will examine...

One strategy I will practice...

One conversation I will approach differently...

One way I will continue learning...

Final Thought

Every interaction is influenced by two stories—ours and theirs. Trauma-informed, culturally responsive practice begins when we recognize that our **professional expertise is strengthened**, not weakened, by curiosity, humility, and self-awareness.

The goal is not to eliminate bias, but to notice it, reflect on it, and choose responses that honor the dignity, strengths, and lived experiences of every individual we serve.