

COUNSELLING AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

During the Holidays

BY TRICIA TOTH



Canada is unique for its multicultural population and the varied backgrounds of its citizens. We are fortunate to live in such an inclusive country, where we have opportunities both personally and professionally to learn openly about each other and gain an appreciation for our diversity. Religious rituals, Indigenous practices, ethnic traditions, and communication methods — these diversities are especially magnified during the holiday season when many customs

and beliefs are enriched and celebrated.

In order to maintain supportive and trusting relationships with our clients, as counsellors, we need to be considerate and respectful of cultural differences at all times of practice. It is especially important during the holidays for therapists to be cognizant of their own cultural perspectives and potential biases and be vigilant in recognizing and respecting variations. To establish a relationship that is respectful of cultural and traditional

differences, counsellors can adopt several practices.

Research and learn about your client's culture.

It is the counsellor's responsibility to educate themselves on how to best meet the needs of their clients. This includes learning about a client's presenting issue and cultural background outside of session time. It shows interest and respect, equips the therapist to address culturally relevant factors, and aids in identifying culturally specific supports and resources.

Use sensitivity when asking your client to describe their cultural practices.

Always ask your client if they are comfortable discussing and sharing this information. Be respectful if they choose not to share. Also, do not assume because a client is of a particular culture, that they share the same traditional practices of the culture as a whole. We are all unique.

Be non-judgmental and have an open mind while learning about the traditions and backgrounds of others.

Be aware of your own cultural values to ensure they do not create a bias or conflict. Be aware of your worldview and recognize that this view is subjective to your own upbringing and life experiences. Consider that you may even want to adopt some of your client's practices as your own family traditions.

Counselling with a multicultural approach is both beneficial to your clients and your practice. It allows you to enhance empathetic skills and gain a diverse awareness and respect for inclusion. When these skills are implemented in practice, we become more self-aware, and our client is better understood.

Tricia Toth, MSW, RCC, RSW, owns and operates Great Life Counselling. She works in the areas of trauma, addiction, and mental health, as well as supports individuals and families work through barriers. She is committed to assisting others to live their greatest life. For further information, go to www.greatlifecounselling.ca.