

Guidelines for Determining the Appropriateness of a Diversity-Related Practice

1. Frame the practice/situation of concern in *descriptive and neutral* rather than judgmental, interpretive language.

e.g. To state that “She averted her eyes throughout most of the interview” (descriptive and neutral), as opposed to “During the interview it was obvious that she had something to hide” (interpretive and judgmental).

2. Once you have found the way to describe the practice/situation as objectively as possible, ask yourself the following questions:

- *Does the practice make sense in the context of the diversity of the person(s) in question?* (Here is where help from a reliable “culture coach,” or source who is well-versed in the diversity issue, can provide insight into that question.)

e.g., Let’s consider the example of Muslim parents who require their fifteen-year-old daughter to wear a headscarf to school. If they are doing so out of the conviction of their faith, it seems reasonable to assume that they are simply being conscious of a parental responsibility to instill values in their child that will ground and protect her.

Note: If the context of the client has changed so that the practice no longer serves, consider that the client may be well-intended but misinformed--and could use your input to help re-orient or educate him/her to the new situation or context that will call for new behavior.

e.g., Some refugees may be in the habit of slapping their children (too) hard for being outspoken. Why might that be so? It could be that in their home country certain authority figures were known to kill or harm children perceived as “rude.” From the perspective of a parent from that country, then, slapping a child hard could actually be an earnest attempt to protect that child (i.e., to deter the child from talking in a way that could get him/her killed.) In cases like these, all the intervention that such parents might need is a reminder that their children’s circumstances have changed in the new country--no longer requiring such extreme measures of discipline to be protected.

- *Is your internal, gut response to the practice/situation linked to a conflicting value from your own culture?* (Once you identify what your value is as compared to that of the family, consider the benefits and limitations of each—taking into consideration the overall values and circumstances of the family in question. Again, a conversation with a cultural coach or consultant could be very helpful here.)

e.g., Back to the example of the Muslim parents who require their fifteen-year-old daughter to wear a headscarf to school (and let's say she doesn't want to.) Many people in the U.S. have values that could lead them to sympathize more with the daughter's wish to have a choice in the matter—i.e., *not* to have to wear a scarf if she doesn't want to. At the same time, a caseworker inclined to encourage more independence in such a teenager runs the risk of doing more harm than good by undermining the parents' authority or unnecessarily driving a wedge between them and their daughter when all would have worked out in due time.

Note: Please be mindful that parents do have the legal right to raise their children according to the tenets of their faith—or to insist that their children be raised within those tenets when in foster care.

- *Is there a law or agency policy that obliges you to intervene? Seek a higher authority in response to the behavior if you are unsure (This is where your supervisor can provide critical input.)*
 - *Have you considered the pros and cons (for the family involved) of a caseworker insisting on a change in the behavior? (You may feel a parent is making choices for a child that the child is entitled to make for himself, but if you enable the child to make those choices without parental buy-in, have you considered what that may do to the parent-child relationship long after you're gone, and what that will mean for the child in the long run, within the context of his/her own culture?)*
 - *If you determine that a change is in order, can a compromise be negotiated on the basis of child safety and well-being?*
3. After you have considered and exercised the steps listed above, formulate your response/action plan. If you need to present the situation to another party, remember to use the descriptive language you formulated in Step 1.