

Developing Cultural Competence Working with a Japanese Client

Mrs. Kita is the parent of two children. Her family has emigrated from Japan, and both she and her husband Hiro are U.S. citizens. Currently, Hiro is in prison for embezzlement. Diane is the social worker assigned to the case. As a guest in Mrs. Kita's home, there are some cultural considerations to take into account. For example, Mrs. Kita is a very proud person who is uncomfortable asking for help. Diane recognizes her discomfort and tries to put Mrs. Kita at ease. On entering Mrs. Kita's home, Diane takes off her shoes and also offers Mrs. Kita a basket of fruit. This demonstrates an awareness of Mrs. Kita's customs. Mrs. Kita looks down periodically during the interview, consistent with her cultural norms. She wants to "save face," a trait characteristic of Japanese culture. Diane's tone of voice conveys care and concern. The pace of the interview works, as Diane mirrors Mrs. Kita's voice volume, expressions, and nuances.

Social Worker: My name is Diane Jones. I am the social worker with the Family Promise program. (Show her your name tag.) Diane looks around and notices shoes lined up by door; she then removes her shoes with no comment.)

Social Worker: Thank you for meeting with me today. (Hands Mrs. Kita a small box with some fruit in it.)

Social Worker: I brought this for you. (Mrs. Kita looks down very slightly.)

Mrs. Kita: Thank you. (Bowl. Please come in. I have been expecting you. (Mrs. Kita shows the social worker where to sit, placing the entrance.)

Mrs. Kita: Please have some. (Offers her a drink of water and some already prepared food on a tray. All this is through gestures.)

Social Worker: Yes, that would be great. Thank you. (Slight smile.)

▶ Watch Mrs. Kita's case here.

Watch the greeting between the social worker and Mrs. Kita.

1. What did you notice about the social worker, Diane, and Mrs. Kita's introduction to each other?
2. What would you do differently?
3. How can you assure Mrs. Kita that you are a social worker who wants to enter into a working relationship with her?

separating them from each other and understanding how these feelings are related to one another. Social workers use reflection of feelings to understand how a client responds emotionally to life (Cormier et al., 2011). However, there are no right or wrong feelings—they just are. In these videos, you'll learn more about the skill reflection of feeling. Listen as the instructor walks you through the definition. When is it helpful to use this skill?

▶ Reflection of Feeling

Sometimes the social worker may have a difficult time fully appreciating the complexity of the client's emotions and misreads them. When this happens, it is important to acknowledge your possible mistake and try again. When a beginning social worker attempts this skill, limited life experiences may be seen as a barrier. For example, it may be hard to express authentic sadness if you have never experienced the death of a close friend, parent, or other close relative. The social worker

must also be sensitive to nonverbal language since feelings tend to express themselves nonverbally (e.g., a nervous laugh, rolling of the eyes, nervous twitching, blushing, or looking down). Additionally, if the client has difficulty expressing a feeling, the social worker may want to present several feeling words, all with similar meanings, so that the client can select the one with the best fit (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013). For example, "I am observing that things are overwhelming and challenging for you right now, but you also get a thrill out of winning the game and finishing first. Am I correct?" This enables the client to confirm the feeling but without experiencing the pressure of identifying feeling states. The social worker can also normalize feelings; for example, "Many people who lose a beloved pet feel the way you do—very empty and alone." Reflection of feeling is a technique that helps the social worker explore the extent of the client's problems and how the client views the situation. Validating the client's feelings can be good modeling, thus showing the client that his or her feelings matter and have a powerful effect on cognition and behavior.

The best way to gauge if you are using this skill appropriately is to listen to the client's response. If you correctly capture the meaning, the client will likely feel understood and continue speaking. Think about how affirmed you feel when someone is listening to you and conveys an accurate reflection of your emotional state.

Social workers must be comfortable in the world of feelings in order to assist clients in the management and understanding of their emotional responses. Clients can express their feelings either explicitly (outward indication of feeling state) or implicitly (the inner emotional response but not necessarily expressed). Clients may correct the social worker's attempt to pinpoint the feeling. With that "correction," the social worker can gain valuable insight into how the client describes the experience versus the social worker's perception of it.

It is important to determine the readiness of the client to explore feelings. For some clients, dealing with emotions is a very unnatural and foreign concept. Testing out feeling choices by offering some alternatives can open the client to deeper exploration of feelings. The social worker can sometimes infer what the client is feeling and reflect that understanding back to the client.

Clients often experience conflicting feelings regarding the same situation—for example, being excited about summer camp and at the same time fearful and scared about being away from home for the first time. Exploring these conflicting feelings can be very helpful in assisting the client in understanding the complexity of life. Resolving conflicting feelings can also lead the client to change. Conversely, strong feelings can interfere with a client's ability to make rational life choices. Once a client is better able to identify and explore feelings that may be at odds with each other, the opportunity for a more open discussion can be followed by problem solving.

Ethical and Professional Behavior

Behavior: Use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.

Critical Thinking Question: Explain why conveying an understanding of the client's emotional state is so critical to the helping relationship.