Mentalizing: a process that builds culturally informed work

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Learning Objectives

Perspective taking from the lens of the other

Where science meets culture is best practice

Mentalizing requires that you let go of your dominant culture, professional culture biases to embrace the families lived experience of life and inequity

Our culture is the embodiment of our values and the life experiences we hold in our mind as correct socially or politically for us
What is Mentalizing

‘Mentalizing is the process whereby a professional (or parent) learns about the mental state (thoughts, intentions, feelings) of self and others’ (p. 149) Stroud & Morgan in *Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health: Core Concepts and Clinical Practice*

Mentalizing = When you can view another’s mind from the inside and view your mind from the outside – *Peter Fonagy*

Mentalizing involves perspective taking of the other’s experience, which requires you to step outside of your personal, professional, and cultural lenses

Knowing your internalized dominant culture bias, is the act of mentalizing your experience from the outside in
Cultural Humility

“Intrapersonally, cultural humility involves a willingness and openness to reflect on one’s own self as an embedded cultural being, having self awareness of personal limitations in understanding the cultural background and viewpoints of others: interpersonally, cultural humility involves an ‘other-orientation stance’ (or openness to the other) with regard to aspects of an individual’s or group’s cultural background and identity.”

Culturally Informed Practice

Understanding yourself as a cultural being

▪ Your alignment with dominant culture values
▪ Your investigation of personal values
  ◦ Family values
  ◦ Professional values
  ◦ Regional values and more
▪ Your personal experiences of inequity and discrimination
  ◦ The internal story or subjective narrative of that experience
▪ Investigating diversity with wonderment and letting go of fear
Culture as Values

What does this family value? vs What is their culture?
  ◦ Insight into what motivates parenting practices

What is this family passionate about for future generations?
  ◦ Links to hope in the family system

How has this family adapted or responded to social injustice in their community?
  ◦ Focus on strengths vs pathologizing necessary adaptations

How can I bring trust to a family system that might have historical experiences of inequity or abuse from systems of power-over?
Collaborative Practice

Child Development stands on dominant culture values

Promoting developmental success requires alignment with the families values/culture

Sharing knowledge builds collaboration
  ◦ What can I learn from this family?
  ◦ What can we learn from the child?
  ◦ What can I add to the system to increase resources or support the achievement of family defined goals?

As professionals, can we embrace the stance of ‘not knowing’ and trust the activity of ‘discovering with the family’
Compass for the Work

Who am I, as an evolving cultural being, using my past with necessary adaptations to inform choices for me today and tomorrow?

Who does the child/family need me to be in order to effectively make use of this relationship to evolve into their best self, heal from trauma, and move toward success?
Making Implicit Bias Explicit

We all have implicit/unconscious ideas of what is socially or morally correct

What is right for you may not work in my cultural or family framework

Our biases can be held in dominant culture, professionally defined best practices and/or our life experience

Mentalizing demands that you allow the needs of the other to direct your work, thus requiring that you let go of pre-determined ideas of right/wrong behaviors

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBQx8FmOT_0&t=4s
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References

