

Implicit Bias Awareness

Cultural Humility & Responsive Service Delivery • THW Continuing Education

REFERENCE

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A printable summary to keep nearby. Use after challenging interactions or as a self-check.

Key Facts About Implicit Bias

- **Everyone has implicit biases** — they're a normal function of how the brain categorizes information
- Implicit biases can **contradict our explicit values** — we may consciously believe in equality while holding unconscious biases
- They are **shaped by experience** — media, family, culture, and personal experiences all contribute
- They **can be changed** — with awareness, intentional effort, and exposure
- They **affect behavior** — even when we don't notice

Where Bias Shows Up in Peer Support

Area	Potential Impact
Communication	Using different tone, language, or body language with certain groups; making assumptions about communication preferences
Engagement	Spending less time or showing less enthusiasm with certain individuals; not offering the same level of attention
Assessment	Interpreting the same behavior differently based on someone's identity
Referrals	Suggesting different resources based on assumed preferences or capabilities
Trust	Giving the benefit of the doubt more readily to some than others

The Three Types of Microaggressions

Type	Definition	Example
Microassault	Conscious and intentional; more overt	Using a slur; displaying offensive symbols
Microinsult	Subtle snubs that convey rudeness or insensitivity	"You're so articulate" (implying surprise)
Microinvalidation	Excludes or negates someone's experience	"I don't see color"

If You Committed a Microaggression

- **Acknowledge:** “I realize what I said may have been hurtful.”
- **Apologize:** “I’m sorry — I see now how that landed.”
- **Don’t defend intent:** avoid “I didn’t mean it that way” as your main response
- **Listen:** let the person tell you what they need, if they choose to
- **Reflect later:** where did that come from? How can I avoid it next time?
- **Move forward:** don’t make the person manage your guilt

If You Witnessed a Microaggression

- **Interrupt if appropriate:** “I don’t think that’s quite accurate”
- **Support the person targeted** — check in afterward
- **Educate privately when possible** — with the speaker, away from the targeted person
- **Don’t expect the targeted person to lead the response**

What matters

Having implicit biases doesn’t make you a bad person — it makes you human. What matters is acknowledging them, examining them, and committing to ongoing work to mitigate their impact on the people you serve.

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