



American Counseling Association

School Counselor Connection

Advocating for Equity in the Schools

The student population in the United States is growing more and more diverse. With this significant change in K–12 student demographics, school counselors must accept the responsibility of providing precise, inclusive, and tailored support for student success. Research indicates that race-related stressors negatively impact the mental health of students of color (Williams, 2018). Unfortunately, students of color are less likely to receive mental health services compared to White students. To demonstrate cultural competency, school counselors should recognize that the diverse experiences of student populations impact the way their problems are experienced and defined. This requires a focus on social justice, a push for equitable access, knowledge of culturally-appropriate resources, and the examination of data to inform decisions.

Counselors need to be knowledgeable about:

- Privilege and power issues
- Cultural values and differences
- Potential cultural stigma surrounding mental health issues
- School policies that unfairly target particular groups
- Systematic barriers that impact diverse groups
- Culturally appropriate resources in the community and literature

Action steps:

- Engage in self-exploration and examine personal biases and blind spots
- Connect with diverse groups
- Review school data and note noticeable gaps among groups
- Collaborate with faculty, staff, and administration to address these inequities
- Disrupt practices or conversations that negatively impact students of color
- Address observed microaggressions to ensure that students experience a safe and welcoming environment
- Engage in culturally alert consultation
- Create an inclusive school culture
- Address diversity in newsletters, presentations, trainings, events, bulletin boards, and curriculum
- Be available to parents in creative ways (after school meetings, virtual meetings, create webinars for future viewing, seek venues for workshops that are closer to neighborhoods)
- Engage in consistent dialogue and provide information on mental health issues to reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behavior

Resources

Teaching Tolerance: <https://www.tolerance.org/> [Free resources]

Atkins, R., & Oglesby, A. (2019). *Interrupting racism: Equity and social justice in school counseling*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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