# Confronting Client Bias

One of the criteria FORGE used for assessing LGBT cultural competency was whether agencies had and implemented policies designed to confront anti-LGBT remarks made by other clients or staff. Confronting others' biases, for many of us, is not a very well-developed skill, particularly when we want to be careful not to offend or disrespect the person who made the biased remark. Yet biases are expressed everywhere and all the time, whether the target be African-Americans, men, people with disabilities, women, individuals of a different religious background, or LGBT people.

We have identified several areas that need to be addressed to do effective anti-bias work.

## 1. Set the stage

Clients and staff must know from the beginning that the agency and/or space is a bias-free zone. Some ways to do this:

<u>Employees and volunteers</u>

- Statement in employee manual
- Statement/pledge signed by new employees
- Clause in patients' rights statement
- Incorporate into the annual personnel evaluation
- Continuing education trainings/exercises
- Stickers/signs: "Bias-free zone"

<u>Clients</u>

- Statement incorporated into admission/orientation forms
- Statement incorporated into verbal orientation/welcome session
- Separate signed statement: "I understand that this agency serves all types of people and strives to create an environment where people feel safe from bias. I understand and agree that staff and/or other clients may respectfully challenge me on any statements I make that may be perceived as biased against or a stereotype about a group of people. If I feel a biased statement has been made, I understand I have the right to seek staff assistance to address the remark."
- Ground rules set at the beginning of a group, posted, and referenced throughout the life of the group/event/interaction
- Clause in patients' rights statement
- Posted patients' rights statement
- Stickers/signs: "Bias-free zone"


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## 2. Train and empower

Help staff and clients learn and practice appropriate ways of identifying and confronting bias:

- Model behavior on the fly in staff meetings, other gatherings
- Role play in existing trainings
- Case studies in existing trainings
- Coaching/supervision (after the fact) (including videotaping training roleplays)
- Sponsor "Respectfully Confronting Bias" workshops open to the community
- Hand out tip sheets
- Provide readymade, easy and fully-understood tools: "Ouch!" "Don't Yuk My Yum"
- Acknowledge good practice when it happens (positive reinforcement!)
- Draw connections between biases/experiences people understand and biases/experiences they may not understand
  - Today's[1] examples:
    - Brainstorming what it's like to be a minority
    - RIDDLE exercise that names and demonstrates attitudes toward difference
    - Talking without gender (where we *created* an experience)
    - Splitting hairs color exercise (where we *created* an experience)

## 3. Address and follow-up with speaker

Bias needs to be named at the moment it happens, but most of the time, we don't want to abandon the existing agenda in order to devote the rest of a group or an appointment to "processing" the biased statement. Therefore….

- Develop a selection of quick "ready responses"
  - "Ouch!"
  - "To me, that sounds biased. Can you say it another way?"
  - "Your statement might go over better if you acknowledged that not all __(name the targeted group)___ are like that. Could you do that?"
  - "What you said may feel painful to some other group members/clients; would you be willing to rephrase it in a less global way?"
- Follow-up with the speaker later, to ensure sie has an opportunity to vent and, hopefully, learn

[1] This document was created for two all day trainings in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in August 2009. It was paired with a Confronting Client Bias exercise for participants.

## 4. Address and follow-up with target

Some biased statements are clearly aimed at a person who is present. When that's the case, pause the action after a correction has been made to check-in with the target and see if sie is willing to go on, or needs something else to happen (such as calling a break or leaving the room to talk with someone). You also need to follow-up with the target later, to ensure sie has an opportunity to discuss hir feelings and to get feedback on how the intervention felt.

Other times, biased statements are not aimed at any given person present, although those who are present may identify with the targeted group. A simple intervention as discussed above *may* be enough to reassure people that bias won't go unaddressed, and you can move on. Other times, people may be more distressed and permission to resume the original agenda may need to be sought from the group.

*This document was supported by Grant No. 2005-VF-GX-K032 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (Grant). Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.*