

## Lab 1: Self-Awareness

*Goal:* To help beginning helpers become aware of their own cultural values, begin to appreciate other cultures, and begin to be more mindful.

### Exercise 1: Cultural Awareness

1. Get in a dyad with someone who is culturally different from you in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, or religion. Each person should talk for at least five minutes about some aspect of culture that she or he experienced as a child (e.g., holiday customs, a time when one was sharply aware of one's culture). The other person should listen without interrupting, except to encourage the person to keep talking.
2. Get back together in the large group. Each person can introduce the other person and say something he or she learned about the person's culture.

### Exercise 2: Hot Buttons

1. Take a minute to visualize yourself sitting across from a client in each of the following categories and think about how you would feel and react. What "hot buttons" (intense inner reactions) would get elicited? On each line, circle the category of person you would be most comfortable working with and put an X through the category of person you would be least comfortable working with (e.g., you might circle "lesbian" but put an X through "heterosexual" clients). Be honest with yourself—awareness is the first step to understanding and changing.
  - race/ethnicity (African, Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American)

- sex (female, male)
  - sexual orientation (bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, transsexual, questioning)
  - religion (Atheist/Agnostic, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish)
  - age (6 to 17 years, 18 to 30 years, 31 to 60 years, 61 to 100+ years)
  - socioeconomic status (poor, middle-class, wealthy)
  - psychological status (substance abusing, depressed, anxious, actively psychotic, mildly distressed)
2. Get together with another person and talk about what you think your list reveals about you.  
What are you most proud of? What is your edge that you want to work on?

### Exercise 3: Mindfulness

The purpose of this exercise is to begin to learn to look at your thoughts and examine them—but not beat yourself up about them. This is a first step toward self-awareness, which we will be talking about throughout the book.

1. Get comfortable in your chair with feet on the floor and nothing on your lap. Close your eyes. Take several deep breaths and relax. Clear your mind of anything outside the present moment.
2. Think about being a helper. Let a thought come into your mind, think about it, and then let it go. For example, you think that you will be anxious when you try to be a helper. Think about that for a minute. What would it feel like to feel anxious? Where would you feel that in your body? Imagine the experience of sitting across from a client. And then let that thought go. Take a deep breath. And let another thought come. Perhaps you think about how helping is something you've always wanted to do. Experience that thought completely. Think about the

pride of feeling like you can help others. Think about a life where you gain meaning by helping others. And then let the thought go. Again, take a deep breath. And let some other thought come into your mind. Do this exercise for about 5 minutes.

3. Practice mindfulness on your own throughout the semester.

#### Personal Reflections

- What did you learn that is new about yourself?
- What did you learn that is new about a different culture?
- What reactions did you have to thinking about your “hot buttons”?
- What could you do to work on your “hot buttons”?
- What were your feelings during the mindfulness exercise? Were you able to let the feelings go?