

# Cross-Cultural Counseling With African Americans With Substance Use Disorders

Presented By:  
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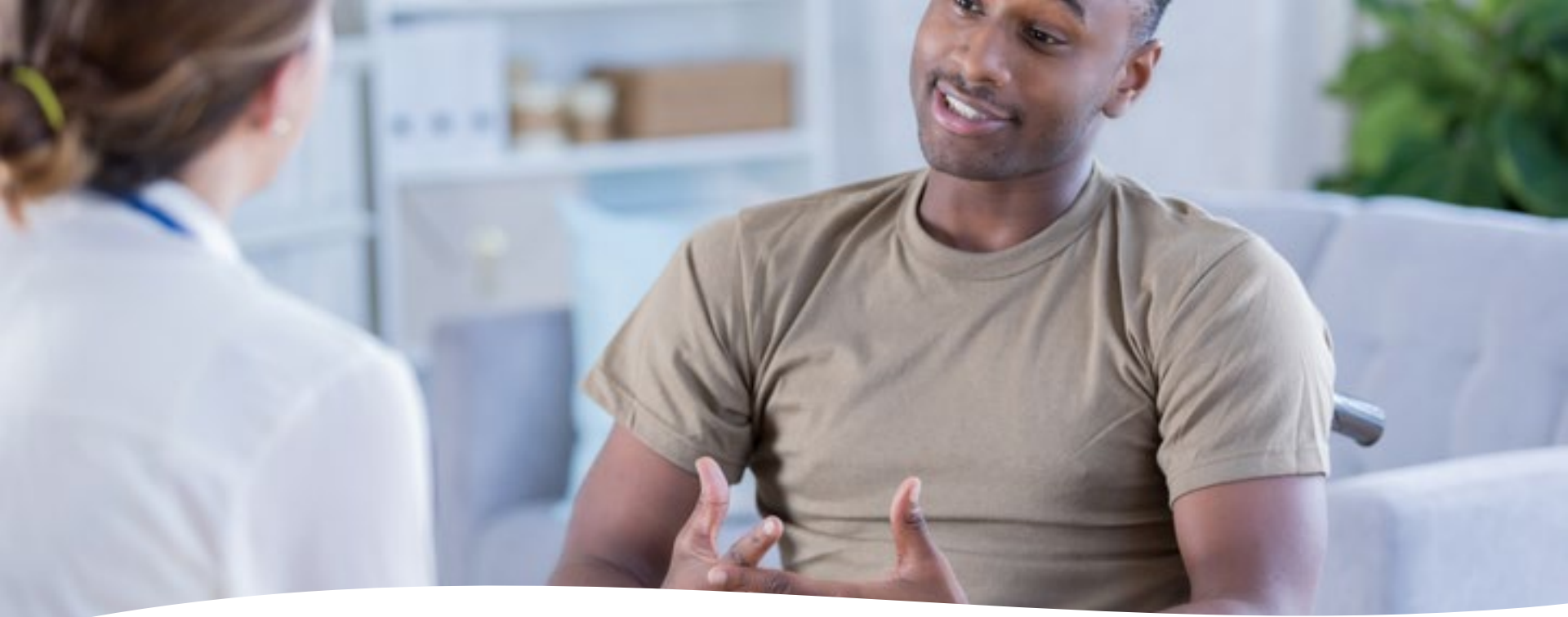


Great Lakes (HHS Region 5)

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**ATTC**

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



# Cross-Cultural Counseling

- Cross-Cultural counseling occurs when the counselor and client are from different cultural backgrounds.

# Aspects of Culture

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Aspects of culture include:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Socio-economic Status
- Celebrations
- History
- Language



Photo: iStock

# The Dynamic of Difference

Occurs automatically in cross-cultural counseling with African American clients with substance use disorders.

- Persons from both cultures may misjudge the other's actions based upon learned expectations.
- Each brings to the relationship unique histories with members of each other's cultural group and the influence of current political relationships between the two cultural groups.

# Both parties may bring:

**Culturally prescribed** patterns of communication, etiquette, and problem solving.

**Stereotypes** or underlying feelings about serving or being served by the other.



# The Dynamic of Difference:

Each may have a different conceptualization of addiction, its cause, and its cure.

It's important for counselors to be aware of these differences and how they can impact the counseling relationship.





# **What Counselors Need to Know About African American Culture to be Effective Cross-Cultural Counselors**

# What Counselors Need to Know About African American Culture

## History and Historical Trauma

- Before 1619
- Slavery
- KKK terror
- Jim Crow
- Lynchings, bombings, and burning
- Riots





# It Didn't Start With You

HOW INHERITED FAMILY TRAUMA  
SHAPES WHO WE ARE AND  
HOW TO END THE CYCLE

Mark Wolynn



It Didn't Start  
with You

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What Counselors Need to Know About African American Culture:

## Trauma, Continued

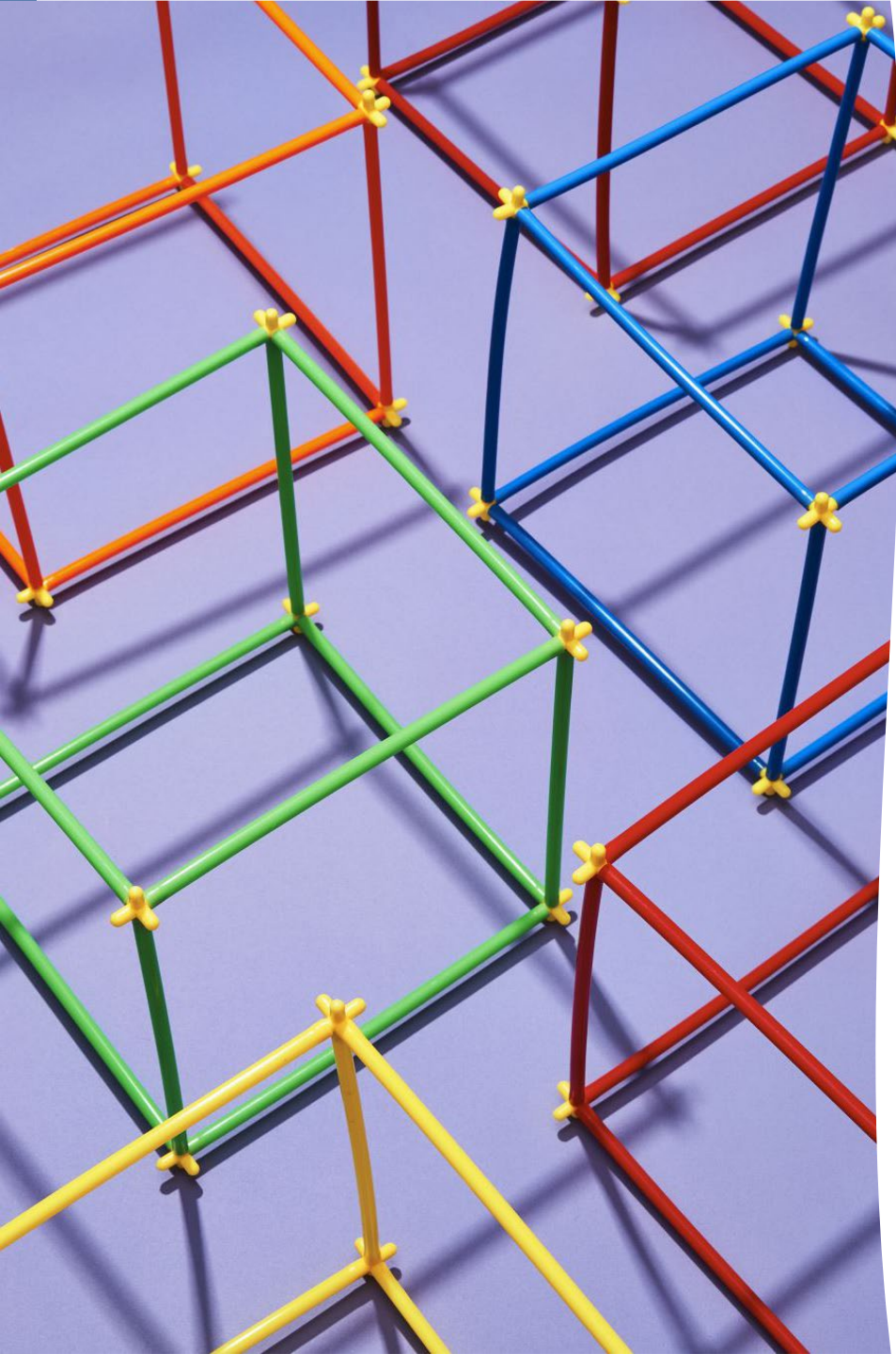
Medical trauma - Tuskegee

Police brutality

Gang violence

Gun violence

24 – 7 – 365 terror



# What Counselors Need to Know:

Impact of interacting with different  
systems:

- Hospitals
- Education
- Behavioral Health Systems
- Criminal Justice System
- Child Welfare System

# Counselors Need to Know:

- How racism, discrimination, socioeconomic factors and migration can impact drug use patterns
- Family structure – extended family orientation, taking in non-biological relatives

# And Counselors Need to Know

The importance of religion and spirituality

# The Diversity of African American Culture

diversity



Source: flickr.com

# Sub-cultures Within African American Communities

- Culturally Elite
- Biracial
- Middle Class
- Emergent
- The Abandoned

(Source: *The Splintering of Black America*, by Eugene Robinson)

# Effective Cross-Cultural Counseling With African Americans With Substance Use Disorders



Source: iStock





# Effective Cross-Cultural Counseling

1. The importance of joining

# Small Talk

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“Only equals engage in  
small talk.”

Maya Angelou





# Joining

- Work
- School
- Interests
- Travel to the agency
- Hobbies

# Joining With Mandated Adolescent African American Males With Substance Use Disorders

- Shoes
- Hats
- Jerseys
- Hand and arm tattoos
- Music
- Aspirations for the future
- Work



Source: flickr.com

# Effective Cross-Cultural Counseling Continued

2. The importance of an effective opening statement.



# Opening Statement

I know I cannot make you stop getting high. I will honor whatever decision you make concerning your use.



# Effective Cross- Cultural Counseling, Continued

3. The importance of examining your own biases, assumptions and stereotypes about African Americans with substance use disorders.



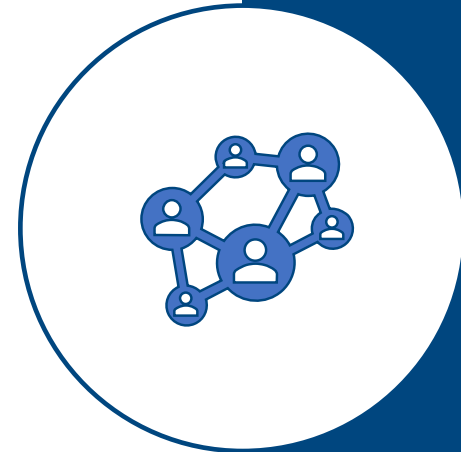
# Biases

- When you were growing up what biases did your family and community hold about African Americans?



# Biases, continued:

- Which if any of these biases did you internalize?
- How do these biases effect your relationships with African American Clients?
- What actions will you take to help assure that these biases do not negatively impact the cross-cultural counseling relationship?



# Assumptions

- What assumptions, if any, do you make about African Americans?
- What are the origins of these assumptions?
- How will you challenge these assumptions so that they do not show up in your work with African American Clients with substance use disorders?

# Stereotypes

List any stereotypes you have regarding African Americans.

- How did you develop these stereotypes?
- How do these stereotypes effect your work with African American Clients?
- What strategies will you use to decrease, or eliminate these stereotypes so that they won't negatively effect your work with African American Clients?

# Effective Cross-Cultural Counseling:

4. The importance of understanding intergroup diversity among African Americans.

Some  
African  
Americans  
feel like a  
“minority  
within a  
minority”

- Socioeconomics
- Sexual orientation
- Occupation
- Drug of Choice
- Religion
- Geography, age

# Effective Cross Cultural Counseling, Continued

5. How the client views a substance use disorder.

# The Client View

- Many counselors view an addiction as a primary disease or illness. Others consider addiction to be brain disease.
- When working with African Americans in cross-cultural counseling, it's important to examine how the client views addiction.

# What is Addiction?

- I asked this question of African American clients



# Some answers:

*"An addict is that person who drinks wine out of a brown paper bag in an alley."*

*"An addict is someone who smokes crack and is willing to do anything to get crack. I just smoke weed so I am not an addict."*

*"Addiction is when you can't control your drug use. I qualify. Every time I try to control it, I wind up in a hospital."*

*"Addiction is genocide in the Black Community. These drugs come from outside of our community into community to destroy us."*

# Addiction is:

*"Addiction must be a crime because they put so many Blacks that get high in prison"*

*"There is lots of gang violence in my community and lots of shootings. Addiction is not a disease in my community, it's medicine for PTSD."*

*"An addict is a man that can't handle his liquor."*

*"My uncles is addicted to drugs. He's a hype. He uses heroin and steals everything that's not nailed down to support his habit. I smoke weed every morning on my way to work. I'm not an addict. I'm a boss!"*



# And:

*"A woman who neglects her kids and sells her body for drugs is an addict."*

*"To overindulge in anything is a sin"*

*"Addiction is a disease"*



Each response  
was different

No one said, “It’s a brain  
disease.”



# What is Addiction: Perspectives

It is important in the cross-cultural relationship for counselors to be aware early in the relationship how clients view addiction.

As the relationship develops you are in a position to:

- understand the client's view,
- validate the client's view,
- introduce the client to other perspectives, and
- **challenge client's view.**

# Effective Counseling, continued

## 6. Attitude towards counseling

# What is the Client's World View?

- Psychotherapy in America reflects western, White middle-class cultural values (Sue and Sue, 2019).
- Thus African Americans and members of other communities of color seek therapy less frequently than White Americans and often discontinue counseling earlier (Sue and Sue, 2019).
- In addition, many African Americans are mandated to treatment by the child welfare and criminal justice systems.
- This can create a double challenge in that counseling may not reflect the client's world view and they are being forced to go.

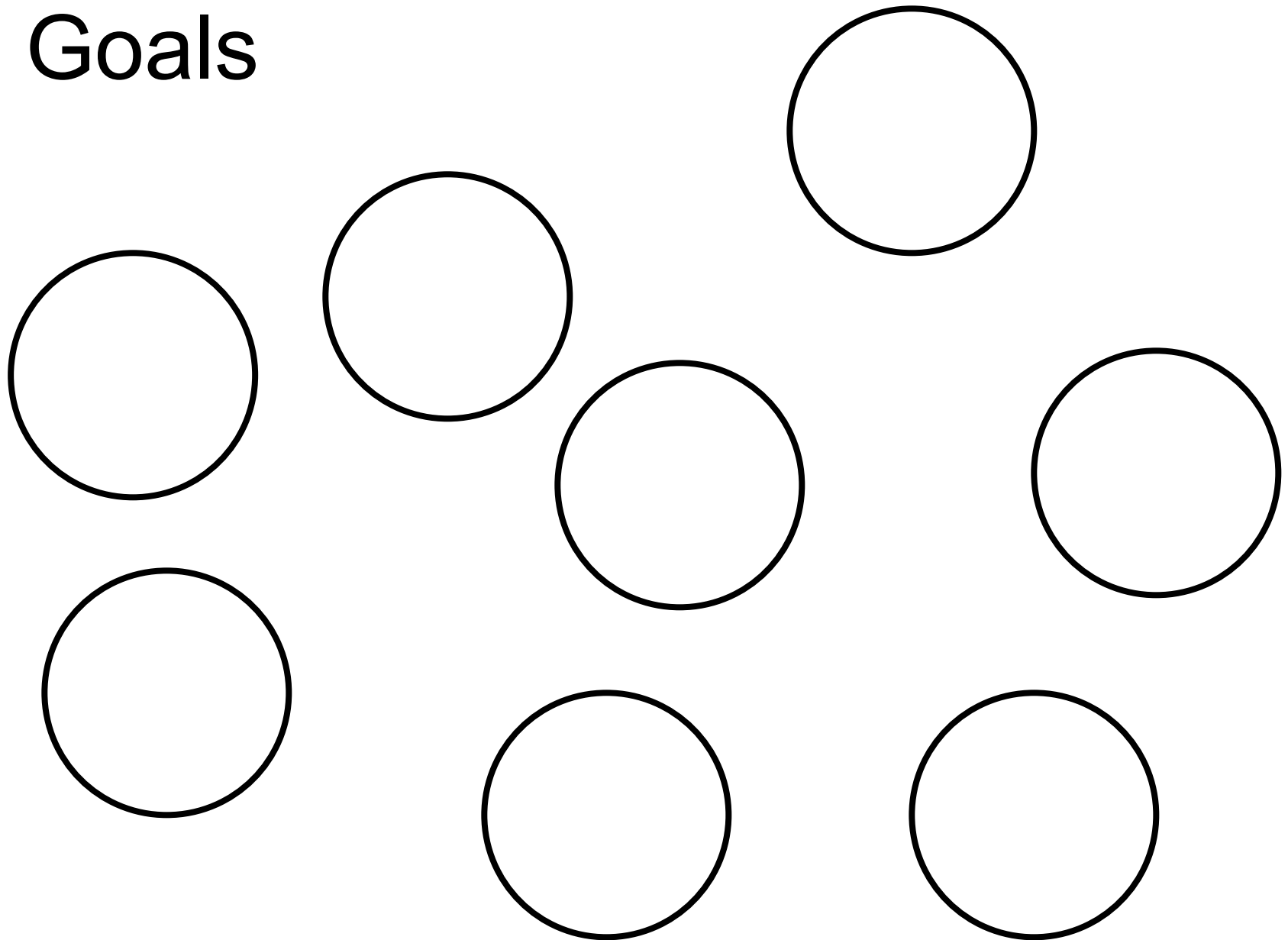
# What Helps

- An explanation of how counseling works
- Informed consent
- Paying attention to the alliance and things that can negatively impact the alliance
- Discussion of client goals





# Goals



# What Helps, Continued

- Understanding client expectations
- The leverage question if the client is mandated
- Three sessions at a time
- Previous experience in counseling
- Altering counseling approaches as needed

# What Helps:

A recognition of current and historic tension between African Americans and your cultural group, along with the ability to have a discussion of the tension and differences if they are barriers to trust.

# Effective Counseling: Language

7. The ability to work with language barriers



# Language Barriers

## **Misunderstanding based on differences in:**

- Dialect
- Pronunciation
- Terminology and slang
- Accents

## **Key**

- Ask for clarification
- Invite client to do the same
- Avoid judgements
- Be genuine

[www.museumofafricanamericanaddictionsrecovery.org](http://www.museumofafricanamericanaddictionsrecovery.org)

## Online Museum of African American Addictions, Treatment and Recovery

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**WELCOME** The purpose of this website is to serve as a single location where individuals who are interested in information about addictions, treatment, and recovery among African Americans can be found. The site contains historical data, scholarly articles, educational videos, music and DVDs.