

## **Innovations in Counseling (Part 13 Session 4)**

### **Counseling Koreans and Korean Americans: Navigating Cultural Dimensions and Complex Nuances Within the Therapeutic Process**

Webinar Follow-Up Question and Answer Session with Esther Jung, MA, NCC, LMHC

**How can counselors remain culturally sensitive while still driving the client to challenge thought patterns?**

When broaching sensitive topics, counselors may share understanding of the general culture but also ask additional with questions so there's no assuming what it may feel like for that individual and specific situation. For example, "You're doing a great job. This is hard work. How does this feel for you?"

**Is pressure to be perfect common when working with Korean and Korean American clients? If so, how do you break through and work on identity struggles when the traditional norm dictates fitting in and following the set order?**

Yes, perfectionism (comparison and self-consciousness of the group mentality) is absolutely present. Doing grounding identity-related exercises that inform what the client's individual core values are can remind them to stick to their own standards. Reminding them that there's no one perfect, and all we can do is do our best while putting things into perspective.

**I see high school clients who struggle with the pressure of taking all advanced courses and scoring very high, leading to suicidal ideation and/or substance abuse. How can I support the student and respect the family if they don't understand the mental health issues that are going on?**

Doing grounding coping (e.g., breathing) and identity-related exercises that inform what their individual core values/dreams are can remind clients to stick to their own standards. Remind them that no one's perfect, and all we can do is do our best while putting things into perspective. Student group support might be a stretch if the family doesn't believe in mental health.

**What are some ways to encourage Korean American clients to attend counseling given the pervasive stigma?**

Of course it feels safer to come in secret to a Korean therapist. Although this could seem condescending in other cultures, for Korean clients especially, if it's their first time in therapy, I spend regular moments applauding them for doing this work. I also normalize it by saying therapy is the "new gym membership."