

# IMPLICIT BIAS

## in Occupational Therapy



IMPLICIT BIAS AFFECTS  
**EVERYONE.**

### What is it?

An unconscious association, belief, or attitude toward any social group that can lead to stereotyping. Implicit bias differs from explicit bias in that individuals are often unaware of their implicit biases, and must work harder to acknowledge and address them

### CAUSES

There can be several causes that include, but are not limited to: our own past experiences, cultural conditioning, media portrayals, and upbringing.



### SO WHAT CAN IMPLICIT BIAS LOOK LIKE WITHIN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?



### EXAMPLE 1

A client inadvertently receiving a lower standard of care because of race, age, or any other personal characteristic.

### EXAMPLE 2

Beliefs about roles in a client's life based on assumed gender, age, and race.



### Example 3

Assumptions about drug use based on SES, location, living conditions, and race.

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### Example 4

A provider's implicit bias about sexual orientation may impact decision making about a client in the LGBTQIA + community after a gender affirmation surgery

### EXAMPLE 5

Assumptions about a client being inactive with their care because they are obese.



### EXAMPLE 6

African Americans and Latinos being undertreated for pain by healthcare professionals due to assumptions that their pain experience differs.

### EXAMPLE 7

Assumptions that clients of color are more passive with their healthcare decisions



### Example 8

Occupational therapy instructors assuming that students from diverse backgrounds or social groups have differing intellectual abilities and/or ambitions

# JOURNEY TO DEALING WITH IMPLICIT BIAS

## Implicit Bias Test

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>

This site offers various tests that are available to measure the attitudes and beliefs that individuals may be unable or unwilling to report regarding implicit bias.

## Tips to Break Implicit Bias Patterns

- Increase contact with people who are different from you
- Notice positive characteristics and actions of people who are outside your group
- Be specific in your intent. Counter implicit bias by countering intentionally
- Change the way you do things to be more inclusive and understand the stories of those around you
- Heighten your awareness. Once you become aware of something you can't be unaware again
- Take care of yourself. Implicit bias is more likely to surface when we are mentally or physically exhausted, or highly stressed.

## Within the profession

In order to begin our journey to dealing with implicit bias within the occupational therapy profession, we must get to know our clients and build a strong rapport with them. We can complete comprehensive occupational profiles to understand our clients goals, barriers, backgrounds, and client factors.

We can use therapeutic use of self in order to consciously work toward facilitating a positive experience for the client.

# EXAMPLES: HOW TO RESPOND TO IMPLICIT BIAS IN THE OT PROFESSION

## Scenario 1

An African American parent seeks an occupational therapy consultation based on concerns about their child's eating habits

## Biased Response

The OT practitioner assumes that the parent does not understand the OT consultation process, and inadvertently dominates the conversation

## Non Biased Response

**Invite the parent to share details and examples of their concern and knowledge of occupational therapy services first. Engage in client-focused education based on this information, and tailor intervention with cultural sensitivity.**

## Scenario 2

Initiating home care services for an older adult client of Hispanic descent living with extended family

## Biased Response

Speaking to the younger family member, assuming the older client does not understand English

## Non Biased Response

**Directly speaking to the client and making eye contact; allowing the family to voluntarily share whether there is a language barrier**

## Scenario 3

Instructing energy conservation techniques to a client recovering from COVID-19 who identifies as transgender

## Biased Response

Avoiding ADL's because of practitioner discomfort, and instead solely focusing on therapeutic exercises and cooking activities.

## Non Biased Response

**Building a trust-based relationship allowing for open communication. Reviewing the AOTA Code of Ethics. Seeking out education on stereotypes and bias of the LGBTQIA community**

# References

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