

# Special Considerations: Cultural Considerations

## Cultural Considerations

Quantity and speed of information exchange seem to be the goals of technology development, but this information is not always correct or comprehensive analysis [1]. So, is the advancement of digital technology creating a global culture of connection and acceptance, or an emerging culture of youth who cannot analyze and consider viewpoints different from their own?

### Global Digital Culture

The cultures, beliefs, world views, global geography, and families our clients come from influence their perceptions and digital technology use.

Social determinants of health, such as income, education, social supports, and coping skills, influence access to digital technology by children, youth, and their families, as well as how much they use it. This has led to the formation of a “social class system of technology” and a global digital culture [2].

Nestled within this global digital culture are subcultures [3]. Even though global connection is available 24/7, algorithms used by search engines, apps, and identified interests lead to the user being fed information that supports their own world views and validates their beliefs and perceptions, while excluding dissenting information [4].

### New Immigrant Youth

Recent immigrants, who make up 21.9% of Canada’s population, have unique mental health needs impacted by their family, culture, health-seeking behaviours, world views, and previous exposures [5]. New immigrant youth in Canada access the mental health system at lower rates than Canadian-born youth [6]. When they experience any form of mental health crisis, they usually go to the emergency department for treatment. Specifically, first-contact emergency department visits are higher amongst immigrant youth than Canadian-born youth. New immigrants may not have had the opportunity, time or resources to find a primary care physician [7].

New immigrant children, youth, and families face additional barriers to healthcare access, including poverty, language difficulties, being unaware of services, transportation concerns, cultural stigma, discrimination, and isolation [6].

When supporting children, youth, and families experiencing problematic use of digital technology, it is important to create a non-judgmental space that allows for differing cultural perceptions of technology. The following are examples of cultural considerations and practice guidelines:

- Consider that your client may come from a culture that does not think of technology use as positive.
- Provide access to interpreters.

- Assess any generational or cultural divide regarding technology between the youth and their caregivers.
- Find out if you need to consider religious beliefs and how they impact the family.
- Consider that exposure to pornography, violence, and even the way characters in games are dressed can conflict with certain cultural values.
- Consider personal definitions of problematic use in relation to cultural values. Digital technology may interfere with a value or practice surrounding family time.
- Be aware of personal reactions, biases, values, perceptions, and potential prejudices you have as a care provider, as they may impact how you support a family.
- Educational opportunities and a lifelong commitment to culturally competent practices support service providers in developing skills to advocate on behalf of children, youth, and families who may be experiencing issues with digital technology [8, 9].

### Refugee Youth

Refugee youth in Canada rarely use mental health services due to systemic and cultural barriers. The mental health concerns of refugee children, youth, and families are most effectively addressed by:

- Facilitating cultural integration and a sense of belonging.
- Bridging to settlement services.
- Supportive counselling.
- Facilitating referrals to mental health practitioners.
- Educating about mental health and addiction.
- Providing contextual information [10].

### LGBTQ2S+ Youth

LGBTQ2S+ is an acronym representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), and 2 spirit people. The plus sign includes other sexually and gender diverse individuals. The term two-spirited is used in Indigenous culture to self-identify gender or sexual fluidity [11].

Many people who identify as sexually or gender diverse have unmet health needs and are less likely to access routine, emergency, and preventive healthcare services. This may be due to real or perceived discrimination [12].

Children and youth who are questioning their sexuality or gender, or identify as LGBTQ2S+, may not have support from their families, peers, schools, communities or even their governments. Even in the most progressive societies, they may be concerned for their personal and emotional safety, which could be a barrier to accessing treatment. Overall, they may fear for their safety, fear discrimination and judgment, have internal conflict, and a non-supportive home

or social environment. These factors contribute to depression, suicide, anxiety, and addiction. LGBTQ2S+ individuals often use digital technology to find information and connect with people in a supportive environment that may not be easy or safe to access in their community. Currently, a gap exists in healthcare resources specific to the needs of the LGBTQ2S+ community [12].

Although the internet may provide a viable solution for this gap, online information is not always credible and can be inaccurate or inadequate. For example, a youth who identifies as transgender does not need the same sexual health resources as a straight cisgender peer. Transgender youth may access pornography sites for transgender sexual education not available elsewhere, to satisfy curiosity and to see sexual images. Although this may not be a negative experience, it can be difficult to control content.

Evidence-informed treatment for the problematic use of digital technology includes providing a safe place, non-judgmental interactions, appropriate addiction and mental health screening, and applicable interventions [12]. As a service provider, you can work towards providing a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ2S+ youth and their families by:

- Creating a welcoming environment by placing LGBTQ2S+ transgender flags in a visible place
- Introducing yourself by including your pronouns. This shows that you are respectful of different self-identity expressions. For example: “Hello, my name is Jamie. I use the pronouns he/him/his.”
- Creating inclusive intake forms and paperwork. Forms can include check boxes for preferred pronouns, an “other” box for gender, and use language such as partner/spouse or parent as opposed to mother or father
- Advocating for an inclusive or genderless bathroom
- Including magazines and resources in waiting rooms that reflect diversity
- Reflecting on your internal biases or personal perceptions of the LGBTQ2S+ community and discuss them with someone you trust
- Staying informed by search for resources. For example, AHS has a page on its website with content specific to LGBTQ2S+/Sexual and Gender Diversity:  
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page15590.aspx>
- Considering inclusiveness training. For example, AHS has learning opportunities in cultural and equity, diversity and inclusion, and LGBTQ2S+ topics; search for Developmental Pathways Modules on its Primary Health Care Learning Portal:  
<https://phc.myabsorb.ca/>

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