

What is Anti-Oppressive Practice?

Anti-Oppressive Practice is a system of action-oriented concepts and practices that can be used to strategise, plan, and make decisions about how to recognise and challenge privilege, power dynamics, and systemic oppression. This QGuide outlines some key Anti-Oppressive Practices.

Accountability

This means acknowledging responsibility for our actions and their impact. We do this by repairing harm we may have caused—intentionally or unintentionally—in a way that people whom we have harmed feel is restorative, healing, and/or re-connecting. Accountability culture is a set of practices and community norms that promote accountability as a community standard. [Accountability processes](#) and [accountability pods](#) within marginalised communities respond to ruptures within our communities in a restorative rather than punitive way, holding people accountable for harm without involving dominant culture authorities that have historically oppressed and harmed LGBTIQ+ communities.

Cultural Humility

Instead of trying to learn a bunch of facts about another group of people, [cultural humility](#) is about recognising that we cannot be “experts” in another person or community’s lived experience. Instead, cultural humility means...

- Recognising the internal diversity within any “group” that has been excluded or mistreated (i.e., “If you’ve met one [Autistic](#) person, you’ve met one Autistic person”, and even if you’ve met a thousand Autistic people, there are many different lived experiences among Autistic people)
- Treating people and communities with a particular lived experience as the best authorities to consult about that lived experience (e.g., prioritising what trans people say about trans people’s needs, instead of claiming authority on the basis of having provided services to many trans people)
- Where practitioners and authorities disagree with lived experience communities, prioritising the wisdom of lived experience communities, seeking out and listening to the most marginalised people who don't have [being-in-the-room privilege](#) within those communities, and challenging practitioners and systems to advocate for what lived experience communities want.
- The South African disability rights movement slogan “nothing about us without us” was revisited at [the 2022 Global Disability Summit](#) to become “nothing without us!” When deciding which topics to research, which people to consult, how to distribute funding and resources, and defining “the problem” being addressed,

there is no substitute for finding out directly from people with lived experience.

ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE

This information is focused on supporting LGBTIQ+ people through a perspective of anti-oppression.



**A QLife GUIDE
FOR HEALTH AND
SOCIAL CARE
PRACTITIONERS,
SERVICE PROVIDERS,
AND FOLKS WHO
CARE**

Contact QLife

Health professionals wanting to know more can contact ask@qlife.org.au

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The Cultural Humility Journey

Cultural Humility involves committing to a life-long learning journey by engaging in regular, ongoing processes of:

- Learning directly from people with lived experience (e.g., through blogs, video clips, podcasts, etc.)
- Engaging in critical self-reflection, which means asking ourselves about ways we might be causing unintended harm to marginalised people and communities and identifying privileges we didn't previously notice we have
- Engaging in institutional self-reflection, which means investigating how our service or organisation might be causing unintended harm to marginalised people and communities, identifying ways that privilege has influenced policies and procedures, and recognising how our institution might be contributing to systems of oppression

Cultural Safety

Only people and communities with lived experience can determine whether something feels "safe" for them. Establishing cultural safety means learning about and doing your best to apply the protocols of a particular community:

- A non-Aboriginal practitioner who wants to visit an Aboriginal community contacts a recognised Elder or leadership body in that community to seek formal permission to visit that Country and listens to guidance about respecting their cultural protocols and laws
- When engaging with trans communities, a cis practitioner observes cultural protocols by introducing themselves with their own pronouns first
- When planning a meal-based queer community event, the organising committee checks a [multifaith calendar](#) to avoid traditional fast times (eg. Ramadan, Yom Kippur, [Hindu fasts](#), Tisha B'Av, etc.); asks about and meets religious dietary [needs](#); provides outsourced certified food options ([Halal](#), kosher [vegan food isn't necessarily kosher], etc.); and, if unavailable, offers vouchers and other forms of assistance
- An allistic [non-Autistic] facilitator makes their online meetings more inclusive for many Autistic people by sharing questions/ content in advance, explicitly stating in meetings and promotional materials that cameras can be off, small talk is not required, and text-based chat contributions and emoticons are welcome
- A hearing, sighted person makes meetings more inclusive for Deaf, [blind](#), and [Deafblind](#) people by providing both auditory and text-based descriptions of their own appearance and any images and visual prompts (also known as [alt-text](#))

Examining Privilege

Well-meaning people can often cause unintended harm due to unexamined privilege. We can address this problem by seeking lived experience sources that discuss common experiences of exclusion and mistreatment that might be unfamiliar to us, by actively cultivating our awareness of when privilege could be affecting our perceptions and reactions, and by asking ourselves which unearned benefits (privileges) we might be taking for granted.

Moving to the Margins

This perspective-taking technique involves centring people and communities with marginalised lived experiences. It involves shifting the focus of our scrutiny. For example, instead of asking "what makes people trans?", "why are people intersex?", or "what causes people to be queer?", we can instead ask questions like "why do cis people accept genders that other people decide for them?", "why are there so many endosex people?", or "why do some people have a problem with people being queer?" When designing intake processes and forms, we can prioritise input from marginalised people and communities, instead of making them an afterthought. By moving to the margins, we can challenge normativity and promote genuinely inclusive practice.

Noticing and Naming [Structural Violence](#)

Economic, cultural, religious, political, and legal structures have caused many deaths in marginalised communities by preventing people from meeting their basic needs. Instead of blaming these communities, we can call attention to the denial of access to health care, public toilets, housing, education, food, and other resources as a form of violence.

Reflective Positioning

By explicitly acknowledging our societal privileges and lived experiences of oppression, we can create safer spaces for marginalised people. Showing we are aware of our privilege is one way we can begin to address systemic inequities. For example, when a counsellor shares, "I have white, cis, sighted, and allistic privilege", this demonstrates the counsellor's awareness that they might be treated differently in everyday life than people with whom they work. We can also establish shared understanding by communicating our marginalised societal positions, such as when a GP describes being a queer, non-binary Bengali Muslim in their online professional bios. Practitioner positioning is an evidence-informed and internationally recognised form of ethical self-disclosure used by Anti-Oppressive practitioners.



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Reparations

Reparations are a process to repair harm caused by oppression. Apologies are not enough, especially if the people who are apologising continue to benefit from the harm that was caused. For example, the [Pay The Rent](#) initiative provides an opportunity for non-Aboriginal people to translate “I’m sorry” into action by contributing financially to Aboriginal-led efforts to repair the ongoing damage caused by colonisation, genocide, and systems of racist oppression. However, financial contributions alone are not sufficient to make reparations. Reparations involve these six actions (not necessarily in order):

- Acknowledgement of the specific harms caused (eg. [this](#) apology and [this](#) apology)
- Compensation for harm, including but not limited to land, labour, property, lost relationships, kinship systems, culture, and spirituality
- Restitution, which means restoring what was lost or taken by giving back land, rights, and legal status
- Restoration or rehabilitation, including support to repair emotional and physical harm
- Stop the harm from continuing
- Guarantee or formal assurance that the harm will not be repeated, including changing laws, structures, and policies that contributed to the harm

A [Restorative Justice Process](#) can be necessary prior to a formal apology.

Systemic Advocacy

Advocacy is often needed to challenge unfair systems. This means it is not enough for a practitioner to act “diversity positive”, “affirming”, and “inclusive” during an appointment. Systemic advocacy means:

- Challenging barriers at a systemic level
- Taking action to publicly support marginalised people
- Challenging colleagues, when they act in ways that marginalised people consider oppressive
- Raising concerns about oppressive policies and practices within our profession

Some Resources and Further Reading

https://www.lowitja.org.au/icms_docs/328550_data-governance-and-sovereignty.pdf

<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression>

<https://members.caval.edu.au/indigenous-referencing-guidance>

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/>

<http://www.clearingconversations.com/accountability.html>

<https://ihra.org.au/research/>

<https://asan-aunz.org/about-us/>



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How can I evaluate my Anti-Oppressive Practice efforts?

Because Anti-Oppressive Practice prioritises the lived experiences of people who have been excluded or mistreated, top-down evaluations such as structured survey questionnaires can often fail to reflect how marginalised people and communities actually feel about your service.

[The Belonging, Dignity, and Justice \(BDJ\)](#) framework is an action-oriented, values-based way to work toward meaningful change. To evaluate Anti-Oppressive Practice efforts in our service, we can assess:

- **Belonging:** This means feeling safe and accepted for who they are. It means feeling able to be themselves without hiding, masking, or changing aspects of themselves to fit in, to be included, or to be accepted.
- **Dignity:** This means respecting and honouring the inherent voice and value of people and communities with marginalised lived experience, including respecting and honouring how they describe and express those experiences.
- **Justice:** This means “making right” or repairing harm, including when organisations formally acknowledge accountability for historic and/or ongoing systemic forms of oppression and discrimination and take action to make reparations. Justice means not glossing over or minimising past harms or problematising people who raise concerns (e.g., through tone policing).
- **Satisfaction:** This means only people and communities with lived experience can determine whether anti-oppressive efforts have been adequate. Their satisfaction is crucial.

Tips for Anti-Oppressive Practice

- Anti-Oppressive Practice means working toward the goals of marginalised people and communities, not imposing your agenda or trying to convince them to make difference choices
- Empathy and good intentions aren't enough on their own—Anti-Oppressive Practice is about translating those feelings into deliberate choices that actually help
- Think systemically and actively seek to identify patterns and cycles of systemic oppression, rather than assuming that exclusion or mistreatment are isolated incidents
- Make space in your life for learning about marginalised lived experiences and for critical self-reflection about your own biases on your own time
- Recognise that only people with lived experience can determine what is safe for them
- Establish safety by explicitly acknowledging your privileges and reflecting on the power dynamics that go along with those privileges
- Listen to silences: In many communities, silence can be a way to communicate disagreement, discomfort, or lack of safety. Do not confuse silence or lack of objection with actual consent or agreement. Make an effort to figure out what silence is telling you.

