



Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling

Preamble

The Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling are guidelines that complement, not supersede, the values and standards espoused in the ACA Code of Ethics. Consistent with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), the purpose of the ASERVIC Competencies is to “recognize diversity and embrace a cross-cultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (p. 3). These Competencies are intended to be used in conjunction with counseling approaches that are evidence-based and that align with best practices in counseling.

Culture and Worldview

1. The professional counselor can describe the similarities and differences between spirituality and religion, including the basic beliefs of various spiritual systems, major world religions, agnosticism, and atheism.
2. The professional counselor recognizes that the client’s beliefs (or absence of beliefs) about spirituality and/or religion are central to their worldview and can influence psychosocial functioning.

Counselor Self-Awareness

3. The professional counselor actively explores their own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion.
4. The professional counselor continuously evaluates the influence of their own spiritual and/or religious beliefs and values on the client and the counseling process.
5. The professional counselor can identify the limits of their understanding of the client’s spiritual and/or religious perspective and is acquainted with religious and spiritual

resources, including leaders, who can be avenues for consultation and to whom the counselor can refer.

Human and Spiritual Development

6. The professional counselor can describe and apply various models of spiritual and/or religious development and their relationship to human development.

Communication

7. The professional counselor responds to client communications about spirituality and/or religion with acceptance and sensitivity.
8. The professional counselor uses spiritual and/or religious concepts that are consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and that are acceptable to the client.
9. The professional counselor can recognize spiritual and/or religious themes in client communication and is able to address these with the client when they are therapeutically relevant.

Assessment

10. During the intake and assessment processes, the professional counselor strives to understand a client's spiritual and/or religious perspective by gathering information from the client and/or other sources.

Diagnosis and Treatment

11. When making a diagnosis, the professional counselor recognizes that the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives can a) enhance well-being; b) contribute to client problems; and/or c) exacerbate symptoms.
12. The professional counselor sets goals with the client that are consistent with the client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives.
13. The professional counselor is able to a) modify therapeutic techniques to include a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives, and b) utilize spiritual and/or religious practices as techniques when appropriate and acceptable to a client's viewpoint.
14. The professional counselor can therapeutically apply theory and current research supporting the inclusion of a client's spiritual and/or religious perspectives and practices.

In the spirit of professional collaboration, ASERVIC endorses the counseling competencies that have been established by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development ([AMCD](#)) and the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities ([SAIGE](#)). In so doing, these three divisions seek to enhance the counseling of clients and the training of students by intentionally focusing on honoring the many facets of diversity.