

Case Studies for Conflict Resolution: A key element in civil rights training

Case Study #1

Julia just finished a certification appointment for Maria, a client who has cerebral palsy. Maria has some difficulty speaking and uses a wheelchair for mobility.

As they head toward the door, Maria says something to Julia. Julia replies, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you said." Maria repeats her comment.

Julia looks confused and says, "One more time please?" Maria repeats her comment in a louder voice.

Looking a bit flustered, Julia says, "Okay, well, maybe we can talk about that next time."

Julia reaches for the door and says, "Let me get that for you." Maria, at the same moment, angrily pushes the button for the automatic door and rolls away. Julia walks back to her office feeling embarrassed and that she is no good at working with disabled clients.

Case Study #2

Mrs. Ortiz checks in to the WIC clinic for her NE class. She is Spanish-speaking. Mrs. Ortiz has brought her children with her to the clinic. While in the waiting room before the session begins, the children are noisy and begin running through the waiting area.

Melissa is trying to work at the front desk and is getting frustrated. She begins speaking in English to another WIC employee, loudly enough so that some people in the waiting room can hear what she is saying. She is overheard saying, "These people (referring to Mrs. Ortiz) don't know how to control their kids."

Melissa tells the client, "If you don't get control of your children, you'll have to reschedule your class for another day and get your vouchers then." Mrs. Ortiz leaves the clinic without getting her vouchers.

Mrs. Ortiz later calls the state WIC office and states that she was discriminated against and was denied WIC services. Mrs. Ortiz says that Melissa thought she couldn't understand English, but in fact she heard what Melissa was saying about her family.

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Case Study #3

In a predominately Hispanic community, a new client is transferred in. The new client, Angie, is not Hispanic and does not speak Spanish.

Angie just found out she is pregnant, and she also needs to schedule a recertification appointment for her daughter. She calls the clinic to schedule the appointments. The clerk, Sandra, answers the phone in Spanish. Angie explains that she doesn't speak Spanish but needs to schedule two appointments. Sandra switches to English, and she and Angie begin looking for appointments.

Angie is having a hard time understanding Sandra. Sandra tries to explain that she can't get Angie and her daughter appointments together until the end of the following week. Angie is frustrated and says, "This is not going to work. Obviously you don't want to help me, why don't you get someone on the phone who speaks English so I can get my vouchers."

Sandra says, "Well, I guess you should have planned ahead instead of waiting until the last minute."

Angie hangs up the phone and decides she will not ever go to this WIC clinic.

Case Study #4

A WIC clinic in a diverse area employs several bilingual staff. There is a group of staff who speak Vietnamese, and they often converse in their native language at work.

Kelly, an employee who doesn't speak their language, feels self-conscious and sometimes wonders if they are talking about her. She frequently complains to her friend at work about other staff not speaking English.

One day Kelly walks into a meeting room and several staff are already there, speaking in Vietnamese. Kelly walks in and says, "Hello." The other staff say "Hello" back and then resume their conversation, which Kelly does not understand. Kelly rolls her eyes and sits down on the other side of the room to wait for the meeting to start.