

Applying Practices of Buddhism to the Practice of Counseling:  
The Serving Model

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## Abstract

This module demonstrates how five principles found in Buddhism can be applied to counseling. The principles include enlightenment, compassion, acceptance, meditation/mindfulness, and the serving community: the Sangha. Each principle is demonstrated in an experiential activity. A case example is offered to illustrate how the five principles can be applied.

The primary CACREP-core content areas include

- G. 1. Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice.
  - b. professional roles, functions, and relationships with other human service providers, strategies for inter-agency collaboration; (*The Serving Community: The Sangha*);
  - d. self-care strategies appropriate to the counselor role. (*The Serving-Practice: Mindfulness/Meditation*);
  - i. advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients (*The Serving-Mind: Acceptance*);
- G. 2 . Social & Cultural Diversity.
  - e. counselors' roles in developing cultural self-awareness, promoting cultural social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, and other culturally supported

behaviors that promote optimal wellness and growth of the human spirit, mind, or body. (*The Serving-Being: Enlightenment*);

### G. 3. Human Growth and Development

- f. human behavior, including an understanding of developmental crises, disability, psychopathology, and situational and environmental factors that affect both normal and abnormal behavior (*The Serving Heart: Compassion/Loving Kindness*).

The overall objective for this module is awareness of how Buddhist practices can be applied to counseling work. Through applying such practices, perceptual flexibility can be expanded and a peaceful and compassionate way of perceiving the events in the world is offered. The module will demonstrate how five practices found in Buddhism: enlightenment, compassion, acceptance, mindfulness/meditation, and the spiritual community, can serve as a pieces of an integrated approach to counseling work. The Serving Model integrates Buddhist practices into a visual diagram representing five parts of serving. At the center is the *servicing being* nurtured by the *heart, mind, practice, and community*. The heart, mind, practice, and community nurture the serving being similar to leaves, roots, water, and oxygen for a tree (Meyer & Ponton, 2006).

Buddhism arose largely from the life of Buddha; however, the life of Buddha has many similarities to the journey of a counselor. A counselor goes into the world often underprepared for the sufferings and can be unaware of reactions and agendas.

Remember, our purpose is not to make more Buddhists, it is to make more enlightened beings. When you teach Buddhism, don't encourage people to become Buddhists; just encourage them to cultivate the qualities of

love, compassion, universal responsibility, and wisdom within themselves—*His Holiness the Dalai Lama* (Simpkins & Simpkins, 2001, p. 79)

Although applying Buddhist practices to advocacy may be helpful, there are limitations. To impose personal values upon another is an unethical practice in counseling (ACA, 2005). Buddhism could be viewed in negative way for some readers who may perceive it to be a religious ideology, possibly in conflict with their own. For this module, Buddhism is presented as a way of perceiving, not as a religious ideology. The Buddhist's traditions date back more the 2,500 years and thus it is important to recognize any presentation about Buddhism will be insufficient. Although the whole of Buddhism cannot be fully illustrated in one simple model; one outcome of this module could be to encourage the participant to learn more about spiritual models. In addition to the module, the list of references provided can serve as a spring board for additional reading.

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