

Moving Toward CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Key Considerations to Explore

Key Attitudes and Approaches

Increasing your own cultural competence requires: a **belief** that it is important to become more culturally competent; an **acknowledgment** that you don't—and can't—know everything about every culture, including your own; and a **recognition** that becoming more culturally competent is a perpetual journey, not a destination to be reached.

As you work on moving toward cultural competence, keep in mind:

- Regardless of the various groups that someone belongs to, each person is an individual with unique preferences, strengths and perspectives and wants to be treated as such. Each of us wants to be respected and understood as an individual, not just as a member of some demographic group or category.
- Erring on the side of being more respectful and formal, rather than less, is a good starting point.
- It's okay to admit that you don't know something and to ask to be taught.
- Flexibility and adaptability are key in working effectively with diverse populations.

Questions to Consider

As you continue on your journey toward becoming more culturally competent, there are some key areas to explore and questions to ask yourself regardless of the population with which you are working. These questions are intended to help you:

- Increase your awareness of others' worldview.
- Gain knowledge about others' practices, understandings, interpretations, culture and worldviews.
- Value the particular culture that you seek to understand better.
- Build skills to understand, communicate with, relate to, and value that culture.

The topics and questions below are by no means exhaustive, but they provide a basic framework to use as you seek to increase your competence in working cross-culturally. These questions and considerations are aimed at helping you think about ways to increase your own understanding and ability to work effectively and respectfully with other cultures. **Note: these are not questions to ask directly of the families with whom you work.**

A great first step is to reflect on these questions as they apply to your own life. By increasing your own self-awareness and understanding of how being part of certain groups and communities has shaped your experiences and attitudes, you will be better equipped to gain a richer understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

Self-Identification

- How do members of the group refer to themselves and members of their group?
- What terms are considered most respectful? Which terms are disrespectful or inappropriate?
- How can you find out from individuals the terms that they prefer?

Cultural Identity

- How do you think members of the group view their cultural connections?
- Might they identify themselves as members of sub-groups rather than, or in addition to, broad groups?

Language

- Do members of the group share a language?
- Do they face any language barriers?
- How formal or informal do members of the group prefer to be with language?

Communication Styles

- Are there common communication styles and approaches that should inform your interactions?
- How much importance does the community place on nonverbal communication, directness vs. subtlety, humor, eye contact, etc.?
- What potential conflicts or misunderstandings may arise due to differences between your communication style and that of members of the group? How can you try to avoid these misunderstandings?

Family, Relationships, and Parenting

- Are there key patterns in relationship roles and family dynamics among members of the group?
- How do members of the group define the concept of “family” (e.g., Is family thought of as nuclear family, or is there a more expansive, inclusive concept of family?)?
- Do members of the group have common approaches to parenting and disciplining children?

Religion and Spirituality

- What role, if any, does spirituality or religion play with the group?
- What holidays, if any, are important to members of the group, and how are those holidays celebrated?
- Do members of the group tend to view religion and spirituality as something that can be discussed publicly, or is it a private topic?

Traditions

- What traditions and shared experiences are highly important to the group?
- What key life events and experiences are celebrated or otherwise marked by the group?
- Does the group have unique or rare traditions that may be misunderstood by others outside of the group?

Key Strengths

- What strengths (e.g., humor, extended family networks, resilience, connections to community, tribal affiliation, relationship with elders, etc.) does the group celebrate and rely upon for success?
- Do members of the group identify key sources of resilience and empowerment, either individually or for the group as a whole?
- Are there attributes that members of the group see as strengths, but that others may view as challenges or barriers (e.g., interdependence—a shared sense of supporting and sharing resources; having a close network of trusted confidants—strong relationships that have been established by building a rapport and a commitment to share information with only those who have been proven to be trustworthy; etc.)?

Discrimination and Barriers

- What forms of discrimination and barriers—both historical and current—does the group experience?
- Are there areas of particular sensitivity that you should be aware of related to discrimination and challenges (e.g., legal, financial, social, etc.) that members of the group experience?
- Are there ways to discuss—and provide strategies for overcoming—potential challenges that members of the group may encounter?

Taboos

- What subjects, topics and issues are off-limits for discussion?
- Are there topics that are deemed private and only discussed within groups of trusted family or friends?
- Are there respectful ways that sensitive or taboo subjects can be approached if information is needed for family assessment, etc.?

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