



Cultural Competency

Cultural competence training for health care professionals can improve the providers knowledge, understanding, and skills for treating patients from culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. Valuing diversity means embracing the uniqueness of all individuals along several dimension such as race, religious beliefs, ethnicity, age, gender, physical abilities, political beliefs, and socio-economic status.

Cultural competency is a set of congruent behaviors, knowledge, attitudes, and policies that enable work in cross-cultural situations.

“Cultural competence involves understanding and appropriately responding to the unique combination of cultural variables—including ability, age, beliefs, ethnicity, experience, gender, gender identity, linguistic background, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status—that the professional and client/patient/student bring to interactions. “Developing cultural competence is a dynamic and complex process requiring ongoing self-assessment and continuous expansion of one’s cultural knowledge. It evolves over time, beginning with an understanding of one’s own culture, continuing through interactions with individuals from various cultures, and extending through one’s own expansion of knowledge.”—ASHA

Practice Portal on Cultural Competence

Cultural competence requires healthcare professionals to continuously work to improve their understanding of both their own beliefs and those of the patients they serve.

Why is Cultural Competency so important in healthcare?

- Reduces health disparities and promotes health equity
- Improves patient safety
- Improves patient outcomes
- Improves patient satisfaction
- Increases quality of healthcare services
- Builds trust with patients and communities

Tips for culturally informed communication?

- **Think beyond race and ethnicity.** Opportunities to expand our cultural understanding exist everywhere, especially when we consider culture beyond its association with ethnicity. Culture is central to our identity and, as such, may be seen or unseen by others. Culture is shaped by personal experiences that may include: ethnic and racial identity; religion; age; educational level; body size; heritage and family tradition; physical and cognitive abilities; sexual orientation; gender identity; and geographic and socioeconomic experiences.
- **Experience culture.** Consider experiential ways that you can learn about other cultures and endeavor to participate in activities that may not be familiar to you. When possible, take part in social, community and educational activities like viewing films, reading books, and attending faith-based services, festivals, parades, concerts, sporting events, art exhibits, workshops and lectures.
- **Use language that evokes images of people actively engaged in life when working with people with disabilities.** Avoid phrases that suggest helplessness or tragedy. For example, say “Bob uses a wheelchair” instead of “Bob is in a wheelchair.”
- **Think outside your own box.** We are influenced by our own values, beliefs, biases and life experiences. We need to carefully consider how our perspectives affect our understanding of other cultures and avoid making assumptions about others based on our own experiences. Becoming culturally aware starts with recognizing the limitations of our own cultural knowledge.
- **Listen carefully.** Hearing is not necessarily listening. Our own perceptions, biases and expectations sometimes make it difficult to really listen to and comprehend both overt and covert messages. Be mindful to focus on and identify the information being conveyed.
- **Learn by asking.** People feel respected when others are genuinely interested in learning about their views and perspectives. Consider incorporating questions into conversations that demonstrate your desire to learn more about others’ cultural experiences. Use simple or open-ended questions that encourage dialogue, such as: “What do you think?” “How can I be of assistance to you?” “What information is important for me to know about you and your culture?” “If I was a member of your community, how would I most likely react to/cope with this situation?”
- **Avoid insensitive comments.** In group contexts, individuals sometimes make insensitive and hurtful comments about others (e.g., jokes, slurs, etc.). Do not reinforce this behavior. If you are comfortable doing so, make known your discomfort with what has been said and ask that no more insensitive comments be made.
- **Tune in to non-verbal behaviors.** Sometimes, behaviors can provide more details about how someone is reacting to a situation than what they may be comfortable saying. It is important to recognize welcoming behaviors as well as those that may be defensive so that you can adjust your approach accordingly. Similarly, be aware of your own body language. Does standing while others are sitting demonstrate authority, or aggressiveness?
- **Respect language preferences.** Before approaching a new group of people, consider whether the materials you have to offer or your presentation need to be adapted to ensure that you are understood. In some cases, it might be necessary to translate materials or invite an interpreter to the presentation. Other times, such as when communicating with young children, simply adjusting your vocabulary might suffice.
- **Expand your comfort zone.** It is likely that there will be individuals or cultural groups with whom you do not have experience working. Acknowledge this challenge and make an effort to learn as much as possible about the individual or group so that you can build your confidence and bolster your outreach. Ask questions to make it clear that you want to learn more and to ensure that you’re delivering information in a way that is useful.
- **Honor flexibility in people’s self-identification.** We may make assumptions about people’s cultural identity while they may have an entirely different perception of themselves. Listen for information about self-perception. For example, do they consider themselves as having a spouse or a life partner? People

may identify with a particular aspect of their diversity at different times (e.g., being a lesbian may be very salient in some circumstances but not in others)

- **Make local connections.** What community-based organizations and venues are respected and trusted by those with whom you work? Organizations like social clubs, advocacy groups, religious institutions, civic groups, unions, colleges and universities can help you deliver your messages in a forum that is relevant to your audience. In some cases, you may want to partner with leaders from these organizations to help you communicate even more effectively.

Sourced from <http://champsonline.org/tools-products/cross-disciplinary-resources/cultural-competency-resources>

<https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/guide-to-cultural-awareness-iii>