

# Promoting Cultural Understanding and Developing Cultural Competence

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## Lesson Goals:

The goal of this program is to help individuals develop skills, acquire behaviors, and expand their beliefs and attitudes in order for them to effectively work, interact with, and respect individuals of different backgrounds.

## Objectives:

- Individuals will be able to define cultural competence and identify its components.
- Individuals will understand the importance of identifying their own biases and exploring their own culture.
- Individuals will understand that cultural competence is a lifelong process of development.
- Individuals will begin to develop some skills that will help them become more competent in responding to people of diverse backgrounds.

## Recommended Resources:

- *Enhancing cultural competence in out-of-school time programs: What is it, and why is it important?* 2007. By E.K. Kennedy, J. Bronte-Tinkew, & G. Matthews. Practitioner Insights: Research-to-Results. [http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child\\_Trends-2007\\_01\\_31\\_RB\\_CultureCompt.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2007_01_31_RB_CultureCompt.pdf)
- *Culture and Parenting: A Guide for Delivering Parenting Curriculums to Diverse Families.* By L. L. Ontai and A. M. Mastergeorge. University of California-Davis. <http://groups.ucanr.org/kids/>
- *A Youth Leader's Guide to Building Cultural*

*Competence.* 1994. By Advocates for Youth. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/guide/>

- *A Class Divided.* Aired on PBS for the program *Frontline*, this program illustrates Jane Elliott's groundbreaking and award-winning work on discrimination. While teaching a third-grade class in Iowa, Elliott provided her students first-hand experience on discrimination. Her work has been referenced for decades in college courses in sociology, education, psychology, and many other disciplines. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/>
- *101 Ways to Combat Prejudice: Developing a Common Language.* A joint project between the Barnes & Noble Co. and the Anti-Defamation League, this free booklet gives concrete action steps: [http://www.adl.org/prejudice/prejudice\\_terms.asp](http://www.adl.org/prejudice/prejudice_terms.asp)

## Introduction:

The ethnic composition of the United States is rapidly shifting. It is projected that by the year 2050, close to 50 percent of the U.S. population will be comprised of individuals from various racial and ethnic minority groups. Nonetheless, despite the increasing diversity in many communities, bias, prejudice, and racism still pervade our society. For this reason, more and more people recognize the need for individuals to gain the skills necessary to work and interact with people from various cultural backgrounds.

## What is Culture?

Culture is an extremely difficult concept to define. Social scientists have more than 100 definitions for the term, and are nowhere close to reaching a consensus. While there is no commonly accepted definition, most agree that culture has to do with a *shared* set of beliefs, practices, and values that often result from shared experience or heritage; and that is passed on from parents to their children.

Culture influences almost all aspects of our lives, and we often do not even realize the power that it plays in our everyday functioning. Culture enhances our lives. It brings wonderful traditions, informs our beliefs about the world, and structures the ways in which we act. Cultural diversity also makes the world a very interesting place. Unfortunately, culture has also been (and still is) used by some in a very negative manner. Throughout history, culture has been used by some to oppress other groups, to look down on others, and to form preconceived and often negative notions (i.e., stereotypes) regarding various cultures. As such, it is essential that individuals learn to respect people from other cultures and to work effectively with others from different backgrounds.

## What is cultural competence and how do you develop it?

The development of cultural competence is a long-term and lifelong process. Cultural competence is a combination of skills, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors that allows one to successfully interact with, and respect people from, different cultural backgrounds. To “develop cultural competence,” one must grow and develop in each of these areas. (Note: The following section is adapted from Advocates for Youth, 2004, referenced previously.)

### Knowledge

- Developing cultural competence entails learning about your own culture and understanding the role it plays in your life. Understand how it has shaped you and how it continues to influence various aspects of your life today. Be aware of how it influences the way you view and judge things.

- While it might be impossible to learn everything about all the other cultures in the world, it is still important to gain knowledge about other cultures, particularly if you are interacting with specific groups. Read about other cultures and history, participate in cultural events, and interact with people of different backgrounds.
- It is important to acknowledge that some cultural groups have been disadvantaged over time on the basis of their color, culture, and/or ethnicity. It is important to understand how the power structures in societies today are still slanted toward some groups and against others.

### Beliefs/Attitudes

- It is impossible to live in the world without forming biases. However, it is important to be aware of them, and to do something about them. Think about your biases, prejudices, and beliefs. What comes to mind when you think of particular culture groups? What first comes to mind when you meet people of a particular race? Are these beliefs stereotypes or are they based on fact?

### Skills/Behaviors

- Cultural competence entails concrete behaviors. Be aware of your actions and whether you express bias and prejudice. Do you avoid interactions with people of other groups? Does your speech express prejudice?
- Stand up for people of other groups. Be an advocate. Educate others regarding cultural issues.

### Final thoughts

As was mentioned earlier, developing cultural competence is a long-term and lifelong process. The goal of this program is to start you off on this path toward growth and development. This program gives you the preliminary tools to begin this process. The next steps are up to you.

# Self-Assessment Exercise

Place a circle around the corresponding number that best describes yourself.

	<i>Absolutely true</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Absolutely NOT true</i>
1. I am aware of the <b>facts</b> regarding race issues and changes in the ethnic population of the country.	1	2	3
2. I believe that culture influences all aspects of my life and influences the way I see things.	1	2	3
3. I am fully aware of my own biases and stereotypes about various culture/racial groups.	1	2	3
4. I believe that there are important differences between culture groups, but that all human beings are equal and fundamentally the same.	1	2	3
5. I believe that in this day and age, I can learn about other cultures if I really wanted to.	1	2	3
6. I understand that to be culturally competent, I have to undergo a process of growth in my beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge.	1	2	3
7. I have made efforts to learn about other cultures and other groups.	1	2	3
8. I believe that race and culture have been used throughout history by some groups to oppress others.	1	2	3
9. I try not to let ethnicity, race, gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation influence my view of people.	1	2	3
10. I do not make judgments on people based on their looks, their race, gender, age, religion, or sexual orientation.	1	2	3