



SELF-STUDY GUIDE: CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Unit I: Culture and Cultural Competence

1) **Culture:**

Culture represents the values, norms and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group think, interact, behave and make judgments about their world. Culture is a basic part of every society; every person, every organization and every country has a culture.



Examples of Cultural Groups

Native American
Disability Culture
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered
Military Culture

2) **How to Learn More about Different Cultures:**

- a. Read an article or book about a particular culture
- b. Learn factual information about other cultures and their histories
- c. Talk to people from different cultures to learn from them, and share your culture
- d. Attend cultural events in the community; put yourself into situations where you'll meet people from other cultures
- e. Attend trainings and conferences on cultural diversity

3) **Cultural Competence:**

Cultural Competence is the ability to honor and respect the beliefs, languages, interpersonal styles and behaviors of the individuals and families we serve, as well as the staff who work with them.

- It is being able to work effectively with people from various cultures, races, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, etc. in a way that recognizes and values the similarities *and* differences.
- Developing cultural competence results in the ability to understand and effectively interact with people across cultures.

InReach Supports Cultural Competence in the Following Ways:

- We employ diverse individuals, have a diverse Board of Directors and serve a diverse population
- We have organizational-wide cultural competence policies outlined in our cultural competence plan that are implemented on a daily basis
- We have a Cultural Competence Committee that implements activities that embrace and celebrate diversity
- We provide Cultural Competence training to all staff on a regular basis
- Therapeutic relationships exist between customers and staff where our customers are supported by staff to achieve their goals and problem solve
- We have an open-door policy for staff and customers
- We are consistently learning to change our practices to be responsive to the needs of the individuals we serve, their families and the community

Unit II: Cultural Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity

1) Cultural Awareness:

Cultural Awareness involves the ability to take a look inward and ask, “What *are* my cultural values, beliefs and perceptions?” “Why do I do things *this* way?” “Why do I react *that* way?” “How do I *really* see the world?”

- Culture is not conscious to us; since birth, our experiences, values and upbringing lead us to perceive things a certain way and behave a certain way. Cultural awareness becomes evident when we interact with those from other cultures, and we see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways.



Think About It

What is considered appropriate behavior in one culture may be inappropriate behavior in another. Remember, we are not all the same; similarities and differences are what make the world go around.

Think about your family culture. How do you act when you get together for gathering? Are you quiet and reserved, or do you get loud and rowdy?

2) Degrees of Cultural Awareness:

1. *My Way is the Only Way* – At this first stage, people are only aware of their own way of doing things; their way is the only way. They ignore the impact of cultural differences
2. *I Know Their Way, But My Way is Better* – At this stage, cultural differences are seen as a source of problems and people tend to ignore them or reduce their significance. They are aware that things are done differently, but consider their way as the best.
3. *My Way and Their Way* – At this point, people realize that cultural differences can have both positives as well as negatives and are willing to use cultural diversity to create new ways, better solutions and alternative options. People are aware of their own way, and others' ways, and choosing the best way.
4. *Our Way* – This final stage brings people from different cultural backgrounds together to create new meanings and new rules to meet the needs of a particular situation. It is the creation of a culture of shared meanings.

In Becoming Culturally Aware, We Recognize That:

We are not all the same, and that is a good thing. Life would be boring if all the flowers in the garden were just roses or tulips. The most beautiful courtyards in the world are the ones filled with a variety of sizes, colors, scents and textures.

Similarities are important and differences are important. We must make an effort to value, respect and welcome those qualities that make us alike and those that make us unique as human beings.

There are many ways to reach the same goal and to live a productive, meaningful life. There is no such thing as the "right" way. Each situation and each person is different and may require a different solution.



"I am dressed for success! Of course, my idea of success may not be exactly the same as yours."

3) Cultural Sensitivity:

Cultural Sensitivity is developing not only an acceptance but an appreciation of another cultural group. You don't necessarily have to agree with all of the values, beliefs, traditions, etc. of the cultural group, but you recognize that they have a right to practice their values, beliefs, traditions, etc, and they are not "wrong" for doing so.

- Being culturally sensitive may involve changing your own personal attitudes and values, knowing that similarities and differences exist, and having respect for those that are different from your own beliefs, values, traditions, etc.

4) Know What Respect Looks Like to the Individuals and Families You Serve:

What looks like respect to you may not look the same to me. Ask questions!



Open the lines of communication so you are clear about how to show respect to the families and customers you work with. This may prevent cultural barriers (roadblocks).



5) Tips for Positive Intercultural Communication:

1. Don't assume certain people have certain values or like to do certain things. Get to know the person as an individual and avoid stereotypes.

(Stereotype: A fixed or over-generalized belief about a particular group of people)

2. Don't talk down to people. Everybody has worth and value; we are all human.
3. Try to find common ground, placing focus on those things you have in common. Often you will find that you share more similarities than differences.
4. Always consider the thoughts, feelings and experiences of others. Remember to think before you speak.
5. Be yourself! Don't try to speak or act a certain way to try to "fit in" or build a relationship with a person from a different cultural background. Just relax and enjoy the differences as well as the similarities.



Think About It

Different cultures show emotion in different ways. In some cultures, it is very common and socially acceptable to openly get emotional and express one's feelings. In these cultures, people may outwardly yell, cry, exhibit their anger, fear and frustration, as well as their joy and happiness. Other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden, feeling shame, weakness, loss of control or embarrassment if their feelings are displayed. We must take this into consideration when communicating with our families and customers.

What is accepted by your family when it comes to showing emotion? Have you ever had to adjust to a person from a different culture that showed emotion in a way that you weren't used to? What was that like?



Cultural Differences in Non-Verbal Communication:

Gestures: In some cultures, the use of a finger or a hand is used to signal, "Come here please." In other cultures that same signal is used to summon a dog and is considered very offensive when used on people.



Touch: Many Asians consider a friendly pat on the head to be very inappropriate because it is considered a sacred part of the body. In the Middle East, the left hand is specifically used for hygiene and should not be used to touch another person or for moving things. People of the Muslim faith generally do not touch individuals of the opposite sex.



Eye Contact: Although many cultures believe it is a sign of respect to look a person in the eyes, other cultures think very differently. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern and Native American cultures feel that eye contact is rude and disrespectful. In some cases, women must avoid eye contact with men or it may be taken as a sexual advance.



Other Things to Consider About Intercultural Communication:

Physical Space: Some cultures are comfortable with close body space, while others prefer a greater standing or sitting distance.

Disclosure of Information: Some cultures are hesitant to talk about personal or family information with "outsiders" or those they don't know very well, while others are very willing to talk very openly with just about anybody who will listen to them.

Gender Roles: Some have very traditional, rigid or strict gender role expectations. Other cultures are flexible about gender roles.

Silence: Some cultures are comfortable with long periods of silence in conversation. Others consider it appropriate to speak before another person has stopped talking.

Unit III: Negotiating Solutions in a Culturally Sensitive Way

1) Always maintain your professionalism.

- Smile, show warmth and be friendly
- Ask the customer and family how they prefer to be addressed
- Avoid using slang words or expressions that may be hard to understand
- Instead of judgments about behaviors, make observations
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues. If you feel as if you may be offending somebody, ask if this is the case. If so, apologize and explain that you did not mean to offend them



2) You may use the following steps when trying to problem-solve with your customers and families in a way that respects cultural values and differences of opinion:

a. LISTEN:

Listen with sympathy and understanding in a non-judgmental manner. Use active listening skills to show your customer that what he or she is saying is very important to you.

b. EXPLAIN:

Explain what you heard the individual tell you. This will create an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings.

Ex. "It sounds like you're saying that....", "What you're telling me is...."

c. **ACKNOWLEDGE:**

Acknowledge the similarities and differences between you about the specific situation you are working on together.

Ex. "You and I both want to make sure that....", "You feel that _____, and our staff members feel that we need to _____"

d. **SUPPORT:**

Support the family and individual in identifying culturally relevant and practical options from which to choose. Always offer several choices.

Ex. "There are several different options you can look at....."

e. **NEGOTIATE:**

Negotiate a plan of action that allows the customer and/or family to decide on the option that best meets their needs at that time. Respect and support the choices they make.

Ex. " ____ is your decision? Ok, sounds like a good plan!"



Think About It

Be flexible when facing different values and cultures. Try to understand what reasons may be behind other ways of thinking. Keep an open mind, and let individuals live their own lives. Address your concerns in a therapeutic manner when safety and/or health are at risk.

Do you like to be told what to do? How would you feel if somebody made you do something their way because your way was wrong? Have you ever been challenged about your beliefs, values or morals? What happened as a result?

