



Module 3: Cultural Responsiveness

Goal

In order to best provide services to students, providers must realize that every student comes from a unique and important background with influences often directly from the culture in which they were raised. Being actively responsive to a student's background and culture will influence our interaction with that student and build a more solid foundation for the relationship necessary to reach educational and life skill goals. It is not necessary to become an expert on a different culture in order to begin a provider-student relationship, but it is imperative to develop skills of awareness and responsiveness, particularly in the area of mental health and wellness.

This module focuses on cultural responsiveness—being aware that cultural differences and similarities exist and understanding how those differences may markedly influence reactions to different issues. In particular this module highlights how different cultures may view mental health issues and how service providers can address issues like stigma and misunderstanding specifically in the Latinx community, as the majority of migratory students have a Latinx heritage. However, these principles and activities can be adapted to use with all other cultures as well.

It is important to acknowledge that there is not a single correct way to manage cultural awareness, sensitivity, or responsiveness. All cultures and human interactions are complex, and it is critical to understand the context of any given situation. An action that might be appropriate in one particular situation might be completely inappropriate in another. This module helps service providers begin to understand the values and beliefs behind certain behaviors and, ultimately, assists their ability and confidence to assess a situation, make the most appropriate decisions, and act accordingly.

MEP service providers and recruiters need unique knowledge and skills in order to work successfully in multicultural settings. This module addresses the importance of understanding one's own view on culture (defining awareness and competence), examines stigma and cultural norms in the Latinx community, explores reasons why different cultures may not seek professional help in a timely manner, and provides tips on culturally responsive services.



The first step is recognizing that cultural stereotypes and biases based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender-identity, geography, etc. exist and influence everyone, often unconsciously. However, focusing on a more complete understanding of the value and benefits of other cultures can add a depth and richness to migratory services that may be the difference between success and failure. The value of traditional cultural connections must be acknowledged, and services and materials should incorporate aspects that are responsive to the racial, ethnic, and cultural needs of migratory students. [SAMHSA's *Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*, July 2014]

With a focus on mental health and wellness, it is also imperative to learn how culture closely impacts an individual's response to traumatic experiences. Knowing that the migratory student population faces uniquely challenging impacts due to traumatic experiences adds more layers to this complex issue. Traumatic events are inherently complicated—varying degrees of violence, injury, mobility factors, and isolation to name a few—and migratory students can exhibit wide-ranging, significant reactions to these events. The quality of support they are offered, which may come largely from the MEP, is key in helping them overcome and thrive.

Objectives

- Understand your own cultural lens and explore different types of cultural diversity.
- Identify the barriers to addressing mental health in Latinx communities.
- Develop culturally responsive practices (awareness and competence).



What to Know Before Presenting the Cultural Responsiveness PowerPoint

1. Introduce the concept of cultural responsiveness and how this can impact MEP service provision.

Explain that effective outreach and service provision only occurs when students (and their families) feel understood and valued. MEP staff can learn the importance of sensitivity to cultural differences and backgrounds by practicing how to see each other, and our shared experiences, from different perspectives.

2. Identify the ways that mental health needs may be affected by cultural bias. Different cultures respond to the concept of mental health in a variety of different ways. Service providers can learn options to approach students and families on what may be a very stigmatized subject, and to do so with sensitivity and effectiveness. There are many tools available today to introduce the subject of mental health and expand the conversation in non-threatening ways.

3. Discuss ways to improve our personal understanding of one's own culture and how this impacts how one interacts with others.

An authentic understanding of one's own cultural lens is a necessary starting place if service providers are to fully grasp the importance of cultural responsiveness.

4. Stress that all interactions are complex and that understanding and willingness to work together benefits all of us.

There is not a quick and easy way to fully understand the wide variety of cultures present in our world. Additionally, each individual is a sum of many different influences—culture is simply one of those. A strong sense of respect for differences is the beginning of effective cultural responsiveness, and often the willingness of a service provider to understand and respond to a student's culture and background is all that is needed to facilitate the relationship needed to guide that student to resources—both academic and personal—that will benefit the student in reaching their goals.



The messages in the Cultural Responsiveness PowerPoint emphasize an individual's ability to:

- **Learn about different cultures with an emphasis on understanding why culture informs the lens through which one sees all experiences.**
 - Learn new ways to ascertain how a culture views different issues concerning mental health specifically, gain new understandings, and apply them when working with others.
- **Define one's own cultural lens.**
 - Develop an understanding of how the service provider, as an individual, approaches their work and how to put that influence into a larger context.
- **Cultivate understanding and build relationships with those of different cultures.**
 - Develop and nurture a broad network of personal and professional relationships with people from a wide variety of backgrounds.
 - Develop quality relationships.
 - Build trust.
 - Engage respectfully with others by communicating supportively and being an effective listener.
 - Facilitate another person's success with appropriate cultural responsiveness that includes recognition, respect, and support.
- **Listen actively and deeply.**
 - In order to begin to appreciate another's cultural lens, one must develop the ability to listen well and seek to understand new viewpoints and priorities.
- **Practice reflection.**
 - Each interaction, even with students from identical cultures, will not be the same. The ability to hear and reflect successfully fosters understanding, new perspectives, and an outreach that is legitimately beneficial to the students with whom a service provider works.
 - Gain perspective by learning to see the world and its issues through a lens different from one's own.