

# Cultural Competence

In order for us to work with individuals of diverse backgrounds, we must become culturally competent. One of the most salient features is knowledge of particular ethnocultural groups. This includes knowledge of a group's diversity, history, culture and contemporary reality.

There are five elements for becoming culturally competent:

1. **Value Diversity/Awareness and Acceptance of Differences** – understand the way the "person/client" defines health and family.
2. **Self-Awareness** – understand how one's own culture influences how one thinks and acts.
3. **Dynamics of Differences/Be conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact** – two people may misjudge the other's actions based on learned expectations. Both will bring culturally prescribed patterns of communication, etiquette and problem solving. Also both may bring stereotypes or underlying feelings about working with someone who is different. Without an understanding of their cultural differences, misinterpretations or misjudgments may occur.
4. **Knowledge of Client's Culture** – institutionalize cultural knowledge and become familiar with aspects of culture.
5. **Adaptation of Skills** – develop programs and services that reflect an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. The helping approach so "fit" cultural differences and preferences.

Although focused on ethnocultural groups, the same applies to diversity from a geographical as well as sexual orientation standpoint. The bottom line is we must be open-minded, respectful and non-judgmental.

## References

1. Kane, M: Ethnoculturally-sensitive practice and Alzheimer's disease. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*. March/April 2002; 15(2):80-84.
2. Shadlen, M.; Larson, EB: Unique Features of Alzheimer's Disease in Ethnic Minority Populations. *Full-Color Aging*. Washington, DC: Gerontological Society of America. 1999; 33-45.
3. Dilworth-Anderson, P; Burton, L: Critical Issues In Understanding Family Support and Older Minorities. *Full-Color Aging*. Washington, DC; Gerontological Society of America. 1999; 93-105.
4. Stanford, EP; Torres-Gil, F: Diversity: New Approaches to Ethnic Minority Aging. Baywood Publishing Company; 1992 113-122.
5. Gelfand, D: Aging and Ethnicity: Knowledge and Services. Springer Publishing Company. 1994; 114-144.
6. Yeo, Gwen; Gallagher-Thompson, D: Ethnicity and the Dementias. Taylor and Francis. 1996; 167-173.
7. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1990 Census of population. General population characteristics. Washington, DC: Author.
8. Stanford, EP: Delivery of Health Promotions Programs: Outreach to Minority Elders. AARP. 1992.
9. NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice. 2001.