

Learning Objective #1: Define cultural competence and related terminology.

What is Cultural Competence?

- A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It is a complex integration of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness or sensitivity, attitudes, cultural skills, and cultural encounters (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991).
- The level of knowledge-based skills required to provide effective disaster assistance to survivors from a particular ethnic or racial group (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration [DHHS, HRSA], 2001).
- The ability of systems to provide care to clients with diverse values, beliefs and behaviors, including tailoring delivery to meet clients' social, cultural, and linguistic needs (Betancourt, Green & Carrillo, 2002).
- "Understanding the importance of social and cultural influences on (disaster survivors') beliefs and behaviors, considering how these factors interact at multiple levels of the (emergency response) system, and devising interventions that take these issues into account to assure quality delivery (of disaster response and recovery interventions) to diverse populations" (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo & Ananeh-Firempong, p. 297, 2003).

What are the General Characteristics of Cultural Competence?

(Source: DHHS, HRSA)

- Understanding, appreciating, and respecting the cultural differences and similarities within, among and between diverse groups.
- Respecting individuals and cultural differences.
- Implementing a trust-promoting method of inquiry.
- It is not limited to race and ethnicity. It includes acculturation level, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion and gender.

What does it mean to be Culturally Competent?

Culturally competent individuals have the capacity to function effectively in other cultural contexts and within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behavior as defined by a group.

What are some common terms that are related to Cultural Competence?

To increase cultural competence and create an awareness of sociopolitical forces that result in multicultural and diversity barriers, it is important to understand the following terms:

- **Culture** - The thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. It refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups (DHHS, Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services [CLAS], 2001).
- **Competence** - Having the capacity to function effectively as an individual and an organization within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors and needs presented by consumers and their communities (DHHS, CLAS, 2001).
- **Stereotype** - Fixed ways of thinking about people that do not allow for individual variation.
- **Prejudice** - A negative attitude directed toward people, simply because they are members of a specific social group.
- **Discrimination** - A negative action toward members of a specific social group.
- **Racism** - Attitudes toward members of a racial group that incorporate both egalitarian social values and negative emotions, causing one to avoid interaction with members of the group.
- **Sexism** - Any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates a person because of her or his sex.
- **Heterosexism** - A system of cultural beliefs, values and customs that exalts heterosexuality and denies, denigrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior or identity.