

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Cultural Competence Information for Teachers and School Staff

Definition

A culturally competent provider is knowledgeable in understanding, approaching, and treating the problems of culturally diverse groups. They have an awareness of the assumptions and values they hold that influence their work with students and are able to provide effective services that are respectful of the student's race, ethnicity, social class, religion or faith, and sexual orientation.

Why Do We Care?

In today's classroom, the cultural differences that exist between teachers and their students are numerous. Diversity may exist with regard to race, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. In addition, many of the students in the classroom are faced with stressors such as homelessness, unavailability of care-takers, abuse, teen parenting, trauma, and community violence, which can negatively impact their academic performance. Unfortunately, within schools, many students are also faced with discrimination from other students, as well as school staff as a result of a lack of understanding or empathy with regard to the variations in beliefs, practices, and values of different cultural groups. With ethnic minority children displaying higher rates of suspensions, special education placement, and school drop-out, it is evident that numerous disparities exist within the education system.

Culture has a significant impact on beliefs and attitudes about child development, identification of problems, and judgments about the best way to intervene when problems do occur. Furthermore, each of us operates within an individual culture, which espouses specific beliefs that determine how we interact with others and interpret their actions. Cultural variations in expressions of behavior may contribute to misunderstandings and conflict, which can be decreased through enhancing multicultural awareness.

What Can We Do About It?

- Recognize the cultural diversity and uniqueness of students and learn as much as you can about your student's cultural background.
- Recognize that socioeconomic and political factors have a significant impact on the psychosocial functioning of culturally and ethnically diverse groups.
- Recognize the diversity that exists within minority groups.
- Develop an awareness of your own cultural and ethnic background and acknowledge differences in the culture between you and your students.
- Identify your biases and prejudices and determine how they affect your expectations of students and your relationships with them and their families.
- Use instructional strategies and curriculum that are sensitive to cultural differences.
- Continuously request and accept feedback from students and their families.
- If you are present when bullying, harassment and/or discrimination takes place, work with colleagues, families, partnerships, and students to stop the bullying, harassment and/or discrimination.
- Promote tolerance and understanding of cultural differences.

Key Resources/Links:

Critical Issue: Educating Teachers for Diversity highlights the issues involved in preparing teachers to work with diverse populations, provides several recommendations, websites, and examples of exemplary practices. This web-based article, provided by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory can be located at

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/presrvce/pe300.htm>

The tenets of **Culturally Responsive Teaching** are provided by The Education Alliance at Brown University at: <http://www.lab.brown.edu/tdl/tl-strategies/crt-principles-prt.shtml>

How is Cultural Competence Integrated in Education? This document provides information about cultural competence and highlights the importance of cultural competence in programs that serve children with or at risk of developing mental health problems. The document can be viewed at: http://cecp.air.org/cultural/Q_integrated.htm

Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity- A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. This report documents the disparities in access, quality and availability of mental health services for ethnic minorities and proposes several recommendations for improvement. This report can be retrieved from

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/cre/sma-01-3613.pdf>

The **Multicultural Education and Ethnic Groups** website provides several internet resources about multicultural education and diversity at

<http://www.library.csustan.edu/lboyer/multicultural/main.htm>

The **Multicultural Pavilion** has a multitude of resources about multicultural education including a multicultural quiz, trainings, workshops, curriculum, and links to other websites. Visit their website at <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

The **New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Subcommittee on Cultural Competence** report their findings about the disparities in health care, the role of culture in service delivery, and make several policy recommendations for improving the health care system.

http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov/subcommittee/CulturalCompetence_013103.doc

*Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.