

Cultural Sensitivity

You and your tutee may come from very different backgrounds. Although it's beneficial to try to remember what it was like to be your tutee's age, it's important not to make assumptions about your tutee. It's better to get to know your tutee(s) by listening to them and learning about them. Here are some things to keep in mind when you are tutoring.

- Always **listen, learn and ask**. It's important to have respect for another person's differences. If you have a question about a particular saying or behavior, ask the student to clarify it for you. However, if you think what you are about to say is inappropriate, it is better not to say it.
- **Avoid making generalizations** about someone because the person is a particular race or ethnicity. Everyone is a unique individual.
- Try to **be aware of your own prejudices** and how they affect your interactions with your tutee(s).
- Recognize that all cultural groups have **values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors** that are as valid as your own.
- **Don't attribute** your tutee's actions to their ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic group.
- **Avoid the "savior syndrome."** Don't assume that a tutee from a different cultural or economic group is disadvantaged.

Communicating Across Cultures

The following are a number of skills and guidelines that are suggested for communicating successfully in cross-cultural situations.

Pay attention. Try to clear your mind of all distractions so you can concentrate on what is being said. Try hard to listen.

Set your assumptions aside. Try to hear not just what the other person is saying, but what the person means by what s/he says. (You may find that this requires you to ask a lot of questions.) Try to recognize that there are understandable reasons for the other person to have certain ideas and behave in certain ways. It's easier to understand those reasons if you set aside your own ideas and try to thoroughly explore the other person's.

Withhold judgement. Remember that other people do not have to agree with your ideas, and that you'll have more success in communicating with other people if they know you are trying to understand them rather than evaluate them.

Be complete and explicit. Be ready to explain your point in more than one way, and even to explain why you are trying to make a particular point in the first place. Give the background; make clear "where you are coming from."

Pay attention to the other person's responses. If you take the time to notice the other person's verbal and nonverbal reactions you can usually tell if you have failed to make yourself clear.

Be alert for different meanings being attributed to certain words, phrases or actions. Sometimes you'll think you understand what the other person is saying, and suddenly realize you do not. When this happens, stop your conversation and discuss the misunderstanding.

Paraphrase. After the person has spoken, but before you begin to make your own comments, restate what you heard the other person say and what you thought s/he meant. You can say something like this: "As I understand it, you are saying...Is that correct?" Only after the person has assured you that you heard him or her accurately should you add your comment. This can help avoid situations in which you and the other person assign different meanings to the same word or phrase.

Ask for verification. After you have spoken, try to get confirmation that you have been understood. Ask the other person to restate what you have said by saying something like this: "I want to be sure I made myself clear. Would you tell me what you

understood me to say?" It does not usually work to ask the other person, "Do you understand?" Most people will say "yes" to that question whether they understand or not.

Do not ask questions you would or could not answer yourself. If you would not want to tell the student about your personal life, for example, don't ask about his or hers. Following this guideline will help you avoid asking embarrassing or silly questions.

Analyze communicative behavior. Be aware of the communication process as well as the content of the conversation. Does your conversation partner seem to be paying attention? Are you paying attention yourself? Do you both appear to understand each other? Are there feelings such as anxiety, embarrassment or defensiveness that might be interfering with your efforts to understand each other? Asking questions like these will help you to recognize communication problems and remedy them.

When you are (or think you may be) having trouble communicating, talk about the trouble you are having. Use phrases such as "I don't understand that point," "I'm not sure how that relates to what you said before," "I don't think I made myself clear," or "Let me explain why I'm telling you this." This focuses your attention to the process of communication (rather than the topic you were discussing) and clears up confusion.