



# Effective Cross-Cultural Communication Skills

## Improve Your Cultural and Linguistic Appropriateness

- Understand that improving cultural and linguistic appropriateness is an ongoing journey.
- Understand the role that your culture plays in your interactions and delivery of care.
- Understand the role culture plays in health beliefs and behaviors.
- Become knowledgeable about the backgrounds of the individuals you serve.
- Be aware of language differences, and offer language assistance services.
- Build trust and rapport with the individuals you serve to facilitate learning about their needs, values, and preferences.
- Be aware that some individuals may use various terms to describe medical issues (e.g., “sugar” for diabetes).
- Be aware of barriers that can arise when expressions, idioms, or multi-meaning words are used (even if you and your patient both speak the same language).
- Ask questions.

## Do Not Make Assumptions

- Use simple language. Avoid medical and healthcare jargon. Do not assume you know an individual’s literacy and health literacy levels.
- Check understanding and encourage questions. Do not assume an individual understood what you communicated.
- Adopt a positive, curious, nonjudgmental approach toward all individuals. Do not assign meaning to an individual’s nonverbal communication cues.

## Understand and Recognize Differences in Communication Styles

- Appreciate how your communication preferences and style may differ from others’.
- Understand how communication styles (e.g., nonverbal communication cues) and norms (e.g., the role of various family members) differ across cultures.
- Tailor your communication so that your patients can better understand you.

### Sources

- Epstein, R. M., & Street, R. L. (2007). *Effective communication in cancer care: Promoting healing and reducing suffering*. [NIH Publication No. 07-6225 ed.]. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute.
- Hall, E.T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hall, E.T. (1990). *Hidden differences*. New York: Doubleday.
- Teal, C.R. & Street, R.L. (2009). Critical elements of culturally competent communication in the medical encounter: A review and model. *Social Science & Medicine*, 68, 533-543.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d-200d-7 (1964).