

## CULTURAL AWARENESS

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*“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive”*

– Mahatma Gandhi

*“When we’re talking about diversity, it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.*

– Ava Duvernay



America has always been a diverse nation. We interact daily with people of different cultural, language, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. As our diversity increases, we are encouraged to engage ALL families and communities fairly

and skillfully. Becoming culturally aware is a first step to effectively engaging with all families and communities.

Because culture is ever-changing and involves unspoken rules, practices, and behaviors, it is challenging to understand and accept another group’s culture. Although it is natural to feel uncomfortable talking or thinking about someone else’s culture, that discomfort is actually progress as long as it leads you to learn about another group’s cultural background. Learning helps us be more open, aware, and thoughtful about our own behavior, creating environments where ALL people feel welcomed, respected, and valued.

Diversity and inclusion are often treated as the same thing, but there is a difference between the two. Diversity is having a variety of representation, whereas, inclusion brings diversity to a new level with equal comfort and equal power. To create diverse and inclusive environments, we must understand how privilege and discrimination operate. Privilege and discrimination run throughout society which means our biases and assumptions influence how we see and interact with people. Becoming culturally aware and responsive helps us to reduce behaviors and practices based on privilege and discrimination so we can create equitable and inclusive environments.

### IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

**Equality** – every receives the same resources or opportunity

**Equity** – resources and opportunity match what is needed to achieve success

**Implicit Bias** – unconscious assumptions about people’s abilities and traits based on their group of belonging

**Microaggressions** – everyday communications that relay a message about a person based upon their group of belonging rather than their own identity

**Prejudice** – preconceived opinion of someone based on their group

**Racism** – denial of opportunity or power based on prejudice beliefs of race

**Cultural Awareness** – the ability to analyze and evaluate our own behavior and beliefs about our own and others’ groups of belonging

**Cultural Competence** - the ability to appreciate and respectfully interact with those who are different from ourselves

**Cultural Mistrust** – reaction of skepticism from an oppressed group based on past treatment

**Privilege** - a benefit you have based solely on your group of belonging

## IMPACT V. INTENTION



Most of human interaction is instinctive. We form opinions and relate to people based on our upbringing and personal experiences. Most people do not intend to offend another person with these implicit biases. However, we are sometimes unconsciously insensitive to people who are not like us. Even when our lack of sensitivity is not intended, it can still have a negative impact on the other person. People who are not in groups that typically have power are more likely the recipients of these actions or microaggressions. By being conscious of behaviors that have the potential to make someone uncomfortable and apologizing for even unintended negative impacts, we can create a more inclusive environment. Comments about the attractiveness of females, the intelligence of people from Asia, or athleticism of African Americans are examples of microaggressions. Even statements that seem positive, when based on a generalization about their group of membership, reduce an individual into a stereotype.



## MOVING FORWARD

Becoming culturally competent is a process that takes time. Each step may make you feel a bit uncomfortable but it is hard to grow if you never challenge yourself to leave your comfort zone. Perfection is not required. Most people will recognize and appreciate efforts to become more aware, inclusive, and responsive. One way to continue the process is to keep a journal. Write down beliefs you have and take the time to think about where they came from and how true they are. Another idea is to keep a list of things you can do to educate yourself about other cultures; such as art exhibits to visit, authors to read, movies to see, or public celebrations to join. Lastly, actively work towards understanding the perspective of another group's cultural by surrounding yourself with people who do not share the same cultural background as you. Learn from them by listening to their experiences.

## STRUCTURAL RACIAL INEQUALITY

When we think about racism, the first things that usually come to mind are individual beliefs or actions. Structural racism is much more complicated and has just as big of an impact. Structural racism is the accumulating effects of a variety of societal factors that benefit whites and disadvantage people of color. Structural racism is so deeply built into our society that it is seen as normal. Institutional racism goes hand in hand with structural racism. Institutional racism involves the laws, policies, and practices that provide different access to goods and services based on race. Institutions such as education, health, housing, criminal justice, and banking, have historically discriminated against people of color. This creates systems of inequality that are hard to overcome from one generation to another and are still present today. Exploring the historical roots of inequality helps to provide a better understanding of individuals and their obstacles in current systems.



## RESOURCES:

Information and assessment on Implicit Bias: [implicit.harvard.edu](https://implicit.harvard.edu)  
Resources promoting equity: <https://educationalequityinstitute.com/>  
[Is Everyone Equal? By Sensoy & DiAngelo](#)  
[Stamped from the Beginning by Kendi](#)