

ICSP RESOURCE D

Strategies for Promoting Cultural Competence among Agencies and Staff

The following are suggestions for increasing cultural competence with your staff and within your organization. These strategies are important when working with both a diverse staff, and most importantly, when serving a diverse population of children.

- Reinforce the important concept of individual differences. In any cultural group, there exists a great difference between family practices, beliefs, and customs. Avoid the “cookie cutter” approach to cultural competence, which assigns each culture and ethnicity with a separate list of beliefs and behaviors. Substitute an approach which encourages staff to look at, listen to, and learn from each individual family. Responding in a way that reflects families’ particular needs is the true hallmark of cultural competence.
- Ensure that staff members who are not bilingual know and understand at least several basic phrases (e.g. hello, good-bye, thank you) in the language(s) represented by the families on their caseloads. Often families themselves are the best resource in providing these translations. Bookstores, too, may be amenable to donating foreign language resources.
- Create a supportive environment where staff can explore and develop an understanding for all cultures. Create formal partnerships with community organizations and encourage staff to actively engage communities and families in the development of policy, program design, and service delivery.
- If your program utilizes the services of translators, help staff think about how they will establish a relationship and rapport with families (e.g. speaking directly to families instead of to the translator, maintaining eye contact with families while they speak, using body language – nods, smiles – to convey understanding, etc).
- Programs should maintain an updated resource list of trained and qualified interpreters. Consumers, children, adolescents and families are aware of the availability of interpreters through service advertisement efforts.
- Being inclusive to families from different cultures or ethnicities often requires looking at the program with a new set of eyes. Walk around your site and look through your materials. What message is the program sending to families? For example, one leader of a program serving both English and Spanish-speaking families realized that it might be best to hang a banner reading “Bienvenidos” under the site’s existing “Welcome” banner.
- Provide training to staff in the role that culture plays in a child’s development. By understanding how culture may impact our own and other’s perception of what “normal development” or “developmentally appropriate practice” is, staff members become more able to individualize their responses to family’s needs and requests.

- Ensure that all pertinent materials used by the program are available in the home languages of the families served, when possible. Often, university foreign language departments can provide low or no-cost translations.
- Advocate for the development of cultural competence principles in other groups to which your agency belongs. This advocacy can be included in Request for Proposals and other contracts that place emphasis on the ability of the applicant, contractor, or consultant to demonstrate the capacity and ability to achieve positive results that are culturally competent, linguistically appropriate, and are applicable to the needs of the children, youth and families being served.
- If your agency provides educational and/or recreational opportunities for the community and families they are serving, make sure that they include experiences that are reflective of all cultures or groups. Encourage children, youth and families to share knowledge about the cultural groups to which they belong.
- Be committed to promoting cultural competence. Develop a commitment through staff development and training, hiring, retention, career advancement, performance evaluations, and employee policies that support culturally competent and linguistically appropriate practice.
- Engage community participation by recruiting local citizens as members of advisory teams and task forces.
- Include cultural competence principles in activities for strategic planning, policy development, program design and the service delivery process. Increase the organizational and individual understanding of how the various dimensions of culture impact the children, youth and families that your agency serves and the staff that works with them.

For technical assistance on improving cultural competency contact Angie Logan anglogan@state.pa.us or Sherry Peters at shepeters@state.pa.us