

VALUING OUR DIFFERENCES

GOALS:

- To reflect on our own cultural background.
- To gain an understanding and appreciation of differences in others.
- To experience how language barriers contribute to breakdowns in communication.

RATIONALE:

In groups representing people from diverse backgrounds, difficulties may occur arising from cross-cultural communication. This lesson is designed to facilitate understanding and co-operation in culturally diverse groups.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

For each participant, a copy of *How Do I Fit* worksheet, pencils, paper.

METHOD:

Warm up: How Do I Fit?

Hand out copies of the worksheet *How Do I Fit*, paper and pencils. Instruct participants to write their answers to the different groups of questions.

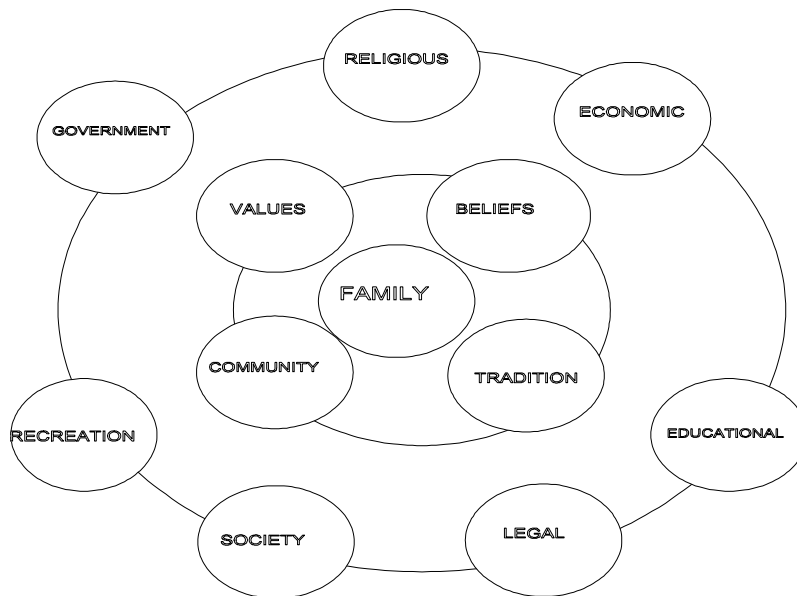
Answers are discussed in pairs.

Theory: See Theory Box

Exercise 1: Components of Culture

Put up the following diagram on the flipchart (leaving out the writing) and ask the group to come up with the components of culture starting with family at the centre.

CULTURE



Exercise 2: **Sharing Positive Memories**

Distribute paper and pencil to participants and ask them to think back to their childhood. Ask them what were some of the positive things that were important to them about their home, their family and community. Invite participants to do a drawing that shows some of those memories.

Participants share in pairs.

Exercise 3: **Babel: Interpersonal Communication**

Divide a maximum of 12 - 16 participants into groups of four and give each person a pencil, paper and blindfold.

When the groups have assembled, announce that each group is to create a language of its own. This language must not resemble English or any other language known. It must include the following:

- a greeting
- a description of some object, person or event
- an evaluative statement about an object or a person
- a farewell

Group members must be able to 'speak' their group's language at the end of this step. (20 minutes.)

Within each language group, members number themselves sequentially, i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.

Announce the location of all participants numbered 1. Similarly form new groups of participants numbered 2, 3, etc.. **DO NOT SPEAK TO YOUR NEW GROUP MEMBERS.**

All participants put on blindfolds. The task is to teach the members of your new group your new language without using English or any known language. (10 minutes.)

When the 10 minutes are up, ask participants with blindfolds still on to find their original group without the use of people's names or the use of any conventional language.

Now ask participants to take off their blindfolds and de-role saying, "You may forget your new language now. You no longer need it."

In the total group participants discuss the exercise using the following questions:

- What did this experience illustrate about communication?
- How did you feel during the experience?
- What did you learn about yourself?

EVALUATION:

REFERENCES:

YWCA. "Sharing Our Cultures." In *Discovering Life Skills, Volume 4*. YWCA of Greater Toronto, 2nd edition, 1999.

CREDIT:

Babel: Interpersonal Communication Exercise. Source Unknown.

THEORY BOX

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION:

Effective communication depends on the following components being understood and accepted by both the sender and the receiver.

pronunciation	grammar
stress	attitudes
intonation	circumstances
role and status	feelings
non-verbal cues	cultural norms
priorities	

The goal of communication is the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver. This process is full of hazards. Messages may be intercepted by 'interference'. When this happens the message received is not the one that was sent. Interference can come from use of language, stereotyping, perceptions of space and time, body language and other cultural differences.

Culture itself is a form of communication. Because much of culture operates outside our awareness, people can be unaware of how their attitudes and behaviour are altered by it. How we perceive and interpret what we hear, see and feel is defined by our cultural experience.

In some cultures, such as the North American one, the meaning of a message is carried mainly by words. In cultures such as Chinese, Japanese and Arabian, more information is contained in the context of the communication rather than in the words.

To function and to communicate effectively, one must master not only a linguistic but a cultural code. This is always a challenging task.

HOW DO I FIT

1. Family

- Describe what the term family means to you?
- When you talk about your family, whom does that include?



2. Community

- Was I brought up in a community of people from my ethnic background?
- Do I now live in a community of people from my ethnic background?

3. Work

- Why did I choose the work I am doing or plan to do?
- Is this work similar to that of my parents or grandparents?

4. Customs

- What language(s) do I use in my family, in my social environment, at work?
- What occasions/festivals do I celebrate?
- What foods do I like to eat?
- Have I always eaten these foods?