

Becoming Aware of Your Own Culture

This exercise is designed to guide small-group discussions in cultural awareness.

Subgroups should discuss one question at a time. Each member should, in turn, respond to each question by describing how the issue was addressed in his/her own family and culture. Compare each other's answers, consider differences in attitudes and values, and identify ways in which failure to recognize cultural differences could lead to misunderstandings or misjudgments about one another.

1. Who took care of you when your mother or caregiver had to go out? At what age were you left alone? At what age were children in your family given responsibility to care for the other kids in the family? At what age were you allowed to babysit with younger siblings or other children?
2. What form of discipline or punishment did your family use most often? Did this form of discipline affect how you felt about your parents? How so? Were there any kinds of discipline or punishment your parents wouldn't use because they felt it was harmful to you?
3. What were the family rules about meals? Did everyone sit down at the table together? Who cooked? Did your family cook regular meals every day? Did children cook? Did older kids feed the younger kids? Could you eat whatever you wanted, when you chose? What kinds of foods did you eat most?
4. Did your family have different expectations for different children in the family? Older (or younger) children? Boys and girls?
5. Who made what kinds of decisions in your family? Which were made by your mother, your father or other family members? Any joint decisions? What influence was there from extended family, grandparents, others living in the home? What decisions were children permitted to make for themselves?
6. Who did your family turn to for help and support in times of need or trouble? Did you help yourselves? Did you turn to immediate, close or extended family? A wide range of extended family and friends? A church group? A community? Did you turn to "professional" helpers (the plumber, the electrician, a counselor, the bank)?
7. Did adults other than your parents care for you for a period of time or have a strong influence on your development? How did you feel about being cared for by people other than your parents? What was your relationship with relatives? What part did aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, non-blood family, and godparents play in your life?

8. What were your family's values and beliefs about the following?
 - Respecting your elders
 - Sex outside of marriage
 - Pregnancy outside of marriage
 - People who didn't work regular jobs
 - Formal education
 - Talking to people outside the family about family matters
 - Finances, money and the importance of money and success
 - The major life goals your family had for you
9. Which of your family's values and patterns of behavior do you still adhere to and which have you changed?