

How to Discuss Cultural Diversity

Tip Sheet for IPS Specialists

The purpose of this tip sheet is to provide general knowledge and suggestions for IPS Specialists regarding conversations with job seekers about individual aspects of their culture, such as race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, age, disabilities, and/or veteran status. Gathering information about cultural diversity help IPS Specialists to better understand the background of the job seeker and how it relates to them obtaining and maintain employment.

Definitions

- **pronouns:** terms job seekers use to identify themselves in terms of gender (he, she, they, etc.)
- **culture:** the beliefs, customs, attitudes, behavior, etc. of a particular society, group, place, or time
- **cultural diversity:** the existence, acceptance, and celebration of a variety of cultures
- **values:** the beliefs and principles that help guide a person's behavior; feelings about what is right and wrong, and what they judge to be most important in their life
- **implicit bias:** subconscious thoughts or feelings that result from the brain's tendency to process information based on our involuntary associations, even when these are contrary to our conscious or declared beliefs
- **intersectionality:** the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, creating overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage
- **accessible:** easily used or accessed by a wide variety of people, including people with physical or mental disabilities; can also refer to something that has been adapted for use by people with disabilities

Why is it important to bring cultural diversity information into the IPS process?

Foundational to Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is the individualization of the employment goal based on each individual's preferences, strengths, support needs, and work experiences. Cultural background can help us gain a better understanding of many of those preferences. For example, a job seeker or worker's religion may worship on specific days of the week, and/or celebrate specific holidays, and this may inform their preferred work schedule. If we leave out cultural information, we are not getting a full picture of the job seeker or worker and their needs.

Every person has cultural identities that are specific to their life and experiences, and it is important for IPS Employment Specialists to understand these identities, and how they impact the individual needs and preferences of each job seeker or worker. Understanding what is important to an individual's culture will help the employment specialist and job seeker/worker collaborate to develop the best plan for success.

Trainer Discussion Questions

- If we leave out cultural information, what is missing about our job seekers/workers? How might this impact the quality of our services? *For example, if we don't ask about cultural norms for family interaction, we may fail to include an elder in the individual's family, and their approval may be very important to the job seeker/worker.*
- Think about your own culture. How does it inform your individual work preferences? *For example, a person who identifies with being a mom and a working professional might place a high value on childcare and require a job that offers health benefits, a flexible work schedule, and a salary that supports their family's cost of living.*
- What are the cultural aspects of mental illness or participation in mental health treatment? *For example, some cultures consider health issues to be a very private family matter and might discourage treatment.*

How to prepare to have conversations about job seeker culture

It is important that you are clear about the purpose and goal of the conversation and work to create an environment that will foster a collaborative conversation.

Preparing Yourself

- Identify the origin of your own biases and get in touch with your own belief and core values.
 - *“Implicit bias exists; however, if we are working on ourselves and using supervision, we can hold, with curiosity, our own reaction to something that “hooks” us. We then are able to process and release it outside of our time with the client to ensure that we are able to come back to them with the openness and lack of judgement they deserve.”* - Natalie McVeigh – EisnerAmper, LLP
- **Self-reflective questions to ask yourself:**
 - In what ways am I privileged?
 - How is my lens different from my client’s?
 - Have I identified my client’s specific needs?
 - Am I making any assumptions about my client?
 - How can I meet my client where they are?
 - How might the way I physically interact with people affect my client?
 - How do I know my client understood what I said?
 - What can I learn from each person I meet?
 - Where do I have room to grow in my cultural understanding of my clients?
 - How can I develop a better understanding of clients who have different identities than me?
- **Show up** and provide your own personal best to the situations. You are there to learn about the job seeker. Go into the conversation with a **learner mindset**. Hold space for the job seeker/worker to share with you.
- **Shared power** is working together with a shared vision. IPS Employment Specialists and job seekers/workers should work collaboratively to secure employment outcomes. Rather than domination and control, (using phrases such as “you need to do this,” or “you should work there”), try to provide IPS services using a ‘*power with*’ approach that will enhance your ability to act together.
- Take time to learn about the individual prior to meeting with them. What have they already shared with others?

Preparing the Environment

- You will want to be sensitive about your surroundings when you plan to ask sensitive questions. Are there people near enough to be able to overhear the conversation? Is there a more private place you could meet?
- Employment specialists should gather information about accommodations and/or accessibility prior to meeting with the job seeker/worker. When in doubt, ask!
 - Prepare to have the tools needed to communicate with the job seeker/worker.
 - Consider how they communicate, as well as how they *receive* communication.
 - Is an interpreter needed for the conversation?
 - Is there a certain environment that will make the conversation more comfortable for that job seeker/worker, such as meeting in their home or nearby in their local community?
 - Do they need written/printed materials, including versions with large print or pictures?
 - Do they need to see body language and your face?
- Ask the job seeker/worker where they would like to meet. They may have ideas you haven’t considered yet!

Trainer Discussion Questions

- Given your experience with other professionals, what foreseeable gaps might occur in our communication that might be troubling to you? How might we avoid them?
- In situations where we may need information from one another, what might be the best way of obtaining that?
- How do we make our meeting accessible and safe to all job seekers/workers?

How to recover from saying the wrong thing

Many times, saying something that is unintentionally discriminating, offensive, or exclusionary to an individual can be embarrassing, uncomfortable, and sometimes even unsafe, for people on both sides of the interaction. How do you recover from that?

Here is an example of how to respond when this type of incident occurs:

Misgendering: When someone corrects you, try not to get upset. Briefly and calmly apologize, accept responsibility for the mistake, make corrections, and keep moving forward. You can do the same if you catch the mistake yourself.

- Suggestions for how to respond:
 - "I am sorry, I meant to say Jamie instead of Jimmy; I will do my best to remember your name the next time."
 - "My apologies for not being mindful of your identity, I meant to say they instead of she."
 - If you are a leader or manager and you notice staff using pronouns other than the person's preferred pronouns, consider holding a training on equity, diversity, and inclusion. You can also send an email to remind them of the appropriate terms, or address the team as a group at your next meeting. For example:
 - "Hello team! This is a reminder that everyone wants their gender, name, and pronouns to be correctly stated, so please practice using the preferred identifiers for your co-workers and clients."

Other tips for how to respond when you may have offended someone:

- Most people just want others to accept accountability when they make mistakes regarding these issues, rather than just brushing by them, glossing over them, or pretending they do not matter.
- After briefly apologizing, assess the harm that you may have caused. If you are not sure what was offensive about what you said, ask them to explain how what you said harmed them or hurt their feelings. For example:
 - "I'm sorry - I feel like I have said something that bothered you. Can you help me learn from my mistake so I can try to avoid upsetting you again?"
- Attempt to 'reset' the relationship, but if the person is unable or unwilling to move past the incident, you can still try to embrace the opportunity to understand what they have experienced and identify with their pain. This will help you view the world through other people's eyes in the future, which will likely make others feel more understood, heard, and safe when speaking with you.

Trainer Discussion Questions

- How could an existing relationship with the job seeker/worker help you to recover from an incident like these?
- Share an example of a time when you didn't say the right thing, or when you heard someone else say something that sounded less than ideal. What do you do, or how did you respond?
- What strategies have you used to recover and maintain a relationship after unintentionally offending someone?

How to advocate when bias is recognized

Along with recognizing our own implicit bias when working with job seekers/workers, IPS Employment Specialists may encounter employers, community members, family members, etc. that have biases that effect the employment process.

For example:

- A manager changes their approach to a job seeker when they see what they look like in person
- A manager wants a worker to change things about themselves after hiring them
- A family has low expectations for the job seeker/worker due to factors like where they grew up, or their education
- A job seeker/worker stays in a toxic environment because they do not think they can do any better
- A job seeker/worker expresses that they have increased anxiety around meeting with employer or manager as they are afraid that they will be treated differently

“See something, say something.”

Content taken from the Harvard Business Review, Nov-Dec 2020

- Don't wait for marginalized people to react, as they're often accused of “playing the race or gender card”—a tactic used to silence women, people of color, and women of color specifically. When you witness discrimination, don't approach the victim later to offer sympathy. Give him or her your support *in the moment*.
- Also look out for gaslighting—psychological manipulation that creates doubt in victims of sexist or racist aggression, making them question their own memory and sanity. This tactic is designed to invalidate someone's experience. Examples include comments like these: “I'm sure he didn't mean any harm by that. That's just his way.” “You might be blowing this out of proportion.” “You'll have to learn to be less sensitive.” “Can't you take a joke?”
- Intervene whether or not [the people being discriminated against] are in the room. Explain that *you* are offended, and that such comments or actions aren't acceptable. Frame the confrontation as a learning or growth opportunity for the person. Assume that your response might be questioned, and have your arguments for inclusion lined up.
- Finally, avoid common mistakes made by people who claim to be allies. Some people who declare themselves to be antiracists think that they're absolved of their own biases and prejudices, or do it to put themselves on a higher moral ground. Being an ally is *not* about making yourself look good or feel better.

Trainer Discussion Questions

- How can you recognize microaggressions in the hiring process?
- How do we approach and address hiring manager bias?
- At what point do we act as an advocate on behalf of a job seeker/worker?
- How do we assist the job seeker/worker with advocating for *themselves*?

Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Resource List

Link & Description	Source	Year	Format
Advancing Health Equity: A Guide to Language, Narrative and Concepts AMA (ama-assn.org) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designed for physicians and other health care professionals, this provides guidance and promotes a deeper understanding of equity-focused, person-first language, dominant narratives, and why they matter. 	Center for Health Equity at the American Medical Association (AMA), in conjunction with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Center for Health Justice.	2021	54 page PDF with glossary
Whiteness on the Couch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clinical psychologist Natasha Stovall writes about the concepts of white fragility, white guilt, 'white as default,' and other ways that identifying as white can interact with the therapeutic process. 	Longreads.com	2019	Article
TED Talk: We Need to Talk about an Injustice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this talk, human rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson shares some hard truths about America's justice system, starting with a massive imbalance along racial lines. 	TED.com	2012	Video (24 min)
TED Talk: The Danger of a Single Story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice -- and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding. 	TED.com	2009	Video (19 min)
10 Diversity Questions Counselors Can Ask <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By being sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences, counselors are able to help individuals overcome traumatic experiences. This infographic provides questions staff can ask to address cultural issues. 	Wake Forest University, Human Services Department	2017	Infographic
Three Steps for Addressing Unconscious Bias at Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This article provides suggestions to reduce implicit bias, including data sharing, promoting self-awareness, and implementing systemic safeguards. 	Society for Human Resource Management <i>(this source allows for viewing 3 free articles per month)</i>	2017	Article
7 Practical Ways to Reduce Bias in Your Hiring Process	Society for Human Resource Management	2018	Article

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this article, the author outlines how HR and management prevent unconscious bias in the hiring process. 	<i>(this source allows for viewing 3 free articles per month)</i>		
<p>Ten Strategies for Holding Difficult Conversations About Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This articles gives details on strategies such as addressing hesitancy, active listening, establishing guidelines, and encouraging humility & questions. 	Coach Diversity Institute	(unknown)	Article
<p>Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In this video series, best-selling author and former NFL player Emmanuel Acho has insightful, honest conversations with people of various races & ethnicities on topics such as racial insensitivity and ignorance. 	YouTube Uncomfortableconvos.com	2020-2021	Video series
<p>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This compilation of articles, tools, and other resources covers such topics as equitable hiring/recruitment, gender parity, accountability, injustice, and discrimination. 	LinkedIn	(varies)	Website
<p>How To Be Culturally Sensitive Working with Clients with a Range of Identities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This article discusses how cultural insensitivity can lead to poor health outcomes and lists questions providers can ask themselves, as well as strategies to build trust with clients, and pitfalls to avoid. 	2U, Inc. - onlinemswprograms.com	2020	Article and additional resources
<p>NNEDShare Database and Webinar Archive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NNEDshare is a collaborative space to share resources that improve the delivery of behavioral healthcare services in diverse populations and advance behavioral health equity across the country. 	National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health nned.net	(varies)	Collection of resources and webinars
<p>The Guide to Allyship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An open-source starter guide to help you become a more thoughtful and effective ally to all oppressed people. 	Amelie Lamont, 'by Amelie' Studio Byamelie.studio	2016-2021	Article with lists
<p>Be a Better Ally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How people in power can use their privilege to lift up those without it, including suggestions for taking responsibility, becoming confidants, and intervening when bias is detected. 	Harvard Business Review	2020	Article; audio recording included