

Conveying respect and being aware of and addressing cultural and language differences are vital when using teach-back. This includes: using a caring tone, respectful attitude and body language, and appropriate eye contact; using the person's preferred name; speaking clearly and not too fast; showing interest by focusing on the person, not on a computer, chart, or paperwork; demonstrating cultural humility; not making assumptions; asking about health beliefs and practices; using qualified interpreters with people whose preferred language is not English; and addressing neurosensory (e.g., hearing, vision, cognitive) needs.

Understanding and addressing culture in your interactions with patients, families, and clients is important for many reasons. Especially when using teach-back, consider these points:

- An essential element of using teach-back well is to avoid causing a person to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, or like they are being tested. In addition to stating you are taking responsibility for being clear, there may be cultural variations in how best to convey this through wording, body language, and considering the familial role of the person you are speaking with.
- It is important to know if a culture does not have a concept, or a language doesn't have a word, that conveys what you are talking about. These will need to be explained with commonly-spoken or extra wording when you are explaining the information and using teach-back.
- Be sure interpreters understand the purpose of teach-back so you can be sure they convey your and the person's exact words. This enables you to assess understanding, and re-explain and check again, as needed.

Consider Culture: Tool #10

The following guidance is adapted from the [Consider Culture: Tool 10](#) in the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) [Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#).

Overview

Culture – including customs, beliefs, and values – can influence how people understand health concepts, how they take care of their health, and how they receive medical advice and make health decisions. People can be part of more than one culture, based on their racial, ethnic, religious, political, gender or sexual identity, as well as their age, family composition, what language they speak, where they were born, where they live, what their occupation is, and other factors. Health teams can learn to develop plans with patients and clients that are consistent with and respectful of their cultures.

Here are some examples of how culture can influence how people interact with you.

- **Health beliefs:** In some cultures, people believe that talking about a possible poor health outcome will cause that outcome to occur.
- **Family customs:** In some cultures, family members play a large role in healthcare decision-making.
- **Healing customs:** Traditional healers and herbal or other remedies can augment or substitute for Western medicine in some cultures.
- **Religious beliefs:** Religious, faith, or spiritual beliefs may affect healthcare-seeking behavior and people's willingness to accept specific treatments or behavior changes.
- **Dietary customs:** Prevention- or disease-related dietary advice will be difficult to follow if it does not conform to the foods or cooking methods people use.
- **Interpersonal customs:** Eye contact or physical touch will be expected in some cultures and inappropriate or offensive in others.

Learn from Patients and Clients

- Respectfully ask about their health beliefs and customs and note their responses in their medical records. Address cultural values specifically in the context of their healthcare. For example:
 - “I would like to be respectful—what do you like to be called and what pronouns do you use?”
 - “Tell me about things that are important to you. What should I know that would help us work together on your health?”
 - “Lots of people see providers outside the clinic. Who else do you see about your health?”
 - “Tell me about the foods you eat at home so we can develop a plan together to help you reach your goal of losing weight.”
 - “Your condition is very serious. Some people like to know everything that is going on with their illness, whereas others may want to know what is most important but not necessarily all the details. How much do you want to know? Is there anyone else you would like me to talk to about your condition?”
 - “What do you call your problem? What do you think caused it? How do you think it should be treated?”
- Do not stereotype. Understand that each person is an individual and may or may not follow certain cultural beliefs or practices common in their culture. Do not make assumptions based on group affiliations or how people look or sound. Asking people themselves is the best way to be sure you know how their culture may impact their care.

Learn from Other Sources

High-quality online resources provide education on how to provide culturally-appropriate services.

- Courses and Web sites
 - Think Cultural Health offers several [courses](#) for free continuing education credit and fact sheets on ways to improve care for diverse populations.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers free continuing education credit for [Effective Communication for Healthcare Teams: Addressing Health Literacy, Limited English Proficiency and Cultural Differences](#).
 - The [National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center](#) (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and others) offers educational programs, toolkits, training videos, and over 50 webinars that provide continuing education credit.
 - [EthnoMed](#) contains information about cultural beliefs, medical issues, and other related issues pertinent to the healthcare of recent immigrants.
- Community organizations such as religious institutions and cultural organizations often can provide information and support to help make your setting more culture-friendly.
 - Invite a member of a relevant cultural group to attend a staff meeting and share observations about how their culture may impact healthcare.
 - Invite an expert to conduct an in-service training to educate staff on how to deliver culturally-appropriate services.
 - Build ongoing relationships with leaders in the community who can serve as cultural brokers.
- Integrate cross-cultural skills into orientation and other trainings. In addition to training dedicated to improving cross-cultural skills, you can weave those skills into all training activities.

Remember that culture is not limited to religious, racial, or ethnic groups. For example, the Deaf and LGBTQI+ communities have distinct cultures.

Help Staff Learn from Each Other

To increase understanding about cultural diversity:

- Hire clinical and other staff who reflect the demographics of the populations you serve. They can help contribute to creating a comfortable environment and can share insights with others in your setting about the customs of their cultural groups.
- Have staff take cross-cultural skills trainings and set aside time for them to share what they learned.

Practice Cultural Humility

- Reflect on your own values, beliefs, and cultural heritage, how that affects your personal health practices, and how you interact with the health system.
- Analyze the ways the dominant and medical cultures shape how your practice delivers healthcare and consider changes to make it more inclusive of the populations you serve.
- Do not make assumptions. You cannot tell a person's race, ethnicity, gender, or other cultural identities by looking at them. Treat everyone as an individual and ask people to tell you about themselves.
- Reduce the power differential between healthcare professionals and patients by:
 - Being humble and respectful.
 - Recognizing patients' expertise about themselves and what they want for their health.
 - Adopting a more open, less authoritative style.
- Commit to being a lifelong learner who values diversity and seeks to make healthcare more equitable.

This document is based on and adapted with permission from: AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit. Last reviewed March 2024. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. <https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/improve/precautions/index.html>