

## WE ALL ARE DIFFERENT

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We all are different but we all have something valuable to contribute to our family, our organization, and our community. We are different because we are all individuals, unique in background, experiences, and heritage. This program topic is designed to assist participants to:

- ♥ become aware of how each of us is different,
- ♥ better understand how differences affect our group and community, and
- ♥ acquire knowledge of how we can use this diversity to better society as a whole.

### Activity:

Secure a box of crayons containing enough crayons for each person to have one. Pass the crayons around and ask each person to choose one crayon. Discuss with members why they selected the crayon they did. Discussion: Our group is just like this box of crayons. It takes each one of us being different to make a complete box. The picture of life is much more colorful because we are not all the same color or hue. Wouldn't life be dull if we were all the same? Like the crayons, we each add our special touch to the complete picture.

or

Secure a bag of clean potatoes, enough for each person present to have one. Hold up one potato. Note the following: *I have here a potato. I don't know about you but I've never thought much about potatoes; I've always taken them for granted. To me potatoes are all alike. Sometimes I wonder if potatoes aren't a lot like people.*

Roll potatoes out of the bag and ask each participant to take one. Ask them to examine their potato; get to know its bumps, scars, and defects; and make friends with it for one minute so that they will be able to introduce their "friend" to the group.

Ask each person to show his/her potato to the group and introduce it with a little story. The story might

*center around certain physical characteristics. Get each to introduce the "friend" to the rest of the group. Then all can put their "friends" back in the bag.*

*Ask or observe if there is any difference between the way they handle their "friend" now from the way they handled it at first? Ask participants if they think they could find their "friends" again. Take the potatoes out of the bag and invite participants to pick out their "friends."*

*After the potatoes are back in the bag, ask the group if they would agree with the statement, "All potatoes are the same." If not, why? Perhaps potatoes are a little like people. We can lump people of a group all together. When we think, "they're all alike," we really are saying we haven't taken the time or thought it important enough to get to know individuals. When we do, we find out everyone is different and special in some way.*

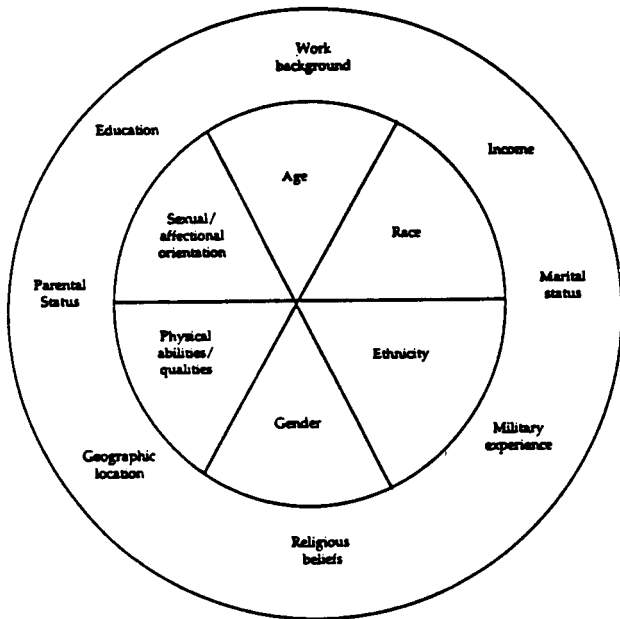
### What makes us different?

We live in one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse nations in the world. The "melting pot" theory has been challenged recently. In fact, many believe we are not a pot of melted cultures, but more like a delicious salad, or a beautiful quilt. Our cultural heritage has helped us have a rich background and provided many things to make our life better.

Activity: *You might wish to have the audience take the quiz found in the participant leaflet. Answers and notes are provided.*

Let's look at some of the differences that occur within this group. *Get members to name them. Among those that may come out are: gender; eye color; working, nonworking; religion; where we were born; birth order; where we grew up; where we live now; age; military experience; marital status; children; physical size; education; race; ethnic background; physical/mental abilities; income; etc. List on chart or board.*

Yes, we are different. Let's look at the differences we noted. *If possible, copy the diversity wheel below to share with participants.* What are the things (noted above) we were born with or that we cannot change? *Note that they are the same things that are in the inner circle of the wheel.* The other things are ones we can change, or which we decided to do. *Note that these things are found in the outer circle of the wheel.*



DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

## The Language of Differences

Before we go further, let's look at some of the words we may hear and use to see if we understand what they mean.

**Diversity** - Diversity is defined as differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human qualities.

**Pluralism** - Pluralism is the existence within a society of diverse groups, as in religion, race, or ethnic origin, which contribute to society's cultural matrix while retaining their distinctive characteristics. We live in a pluralistic society.

**Stereotype** - Stereotypes are mental pictures we have of a group of people, which we then apply to individuals. We interact with them on the basis of that perception. Stereotypes may distort our ability to perceive people as they are. They are expectations based on assumptions rather than fact of what a person is like. Stereotypes ignore the fact that people are multidimensional; that people within groups are unique individuals and different from one another.

They do not take into account the here-and-now specifics of the person or situation. Prejudice and bias are often based on stereotypes.

**Bias** - We show a bias when we fail to be objective and impartial about people or an issue. It is an attitude based on personal, subjective preference.

**Prejudice** - To judge people without really knowing them, on the basis of the group they belong to is prejudice. Its victims are treated as objects and not as persons.

**Discrimination** - Discrimination is defined as the systematic, intended or unintended, denial of recognition, power, privilege, and opportunity to certain people based on the groups to which they belong. When people act on the basis of their prejudices and stereotypes, they are guilty of discrimination.

*Ask group to give examples of things that have happened that relate to each of these words. Some of the following activities might be used to help participants better understand differences and how we react to them.*

**A. THE COLD WITHIN.** Read the following poem and have members discuss.

*Six humans, trapped by happenstance  
In the bleak and bitter cold,  
Each one possessed a stick of wood  
And so the story is told.*

*Their dying fire needed logs.  
The first man held his back,  
For one of the faces 'round the fire,  
He noticed it was black.*

*The next man, looking across the way,  
Saw one man not of his church,  
He couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire, his stick of birch.*

*The third one sat in tattered clothes.  
He gave his coat a hitch;  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?*

*The rich man, just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store;  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.*

*The black man's face bestowed revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.*

*The last man in this forlorn group  
Did not accept for gain;  
Give only to those who gave,  
Was how he played the game.*

*Their logs, held tight in death's still hand,  
Was proof of human sin.  
They did not die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.*

### **B. Putting People in Boxes**

*Prepare a set of headbands with one of the following on each: Newly Divorced, New Immigrant from China, Mrs. Rockefeller, Minister, New Yorker, Male President of Utility Company, Pediatrician, Wheelchair Bound, Female Lawyer, Famous Author.*

*Place a headband on each person, but do not let the person getting the label know what it says. Assign the group a task, such as meeting with county commission to secure funds for a community center.*

*After about 10 minutes of this group meeting, ask various participants how they felt about each other and how they were treated. Discussion might include the following: (a) specific examples of prejudicial behavior, (b) did people act differently based on the role individuals were playing; were you comfortable with everyone? (c) how you feel about this exercise.*

*C. Answer the following fill-in-the-blank items with your first impression.*

- 1. Taxi cab drivers in New York are \_\_\_\_\_*
- 2. Children of working mothers are generally \_\_\_\_\_*
- 3. High school kids are \_\_\_\_\_*
- 4. Most blacks are \_\_\_\_\_*
- 5. Asian women are \_\_\_\_\_*
- 6. The typical alcoholic is \_\_\_\_\_*
- 7. In relation to men, women are more \_\_\_\_\_*
- 8. Child molesters are usually people who \_\_\_\_\_*
- 9. All old people should be \_\_\_\_\_*
- 10. Men today are \_\_\_\_\_*

*Discuss your first reactions. Are we guilty of generalization, stereotyping, or prejudice?*

### **D. Celebrate Your Diversity**

*In our increasingly fragmented world, there is a common yearning in our hearts for reconciliation of our "selves" with others. Institutions that are supposed to bring us together--schools, religious organizations, work, families--often separate us instead, and we continue to long for authentic connections in our daily lives. Stories are the building blocks of community. Stones build bridges between persons as we share memories stored in our minds. They allow us to see a new tapestry of ourselves and others as we come to appreciate our role and heritage.*

*Following are some ways to get participants to explore their stones. Choose one or two of them to discuss in your meeting or assign a topic to each person present and ask for a report on it at the next meeting.*

- Share the complete story of your name.*
- What experiences make you feel close to nature?*
- If your shoe could tell its story, what would it say?*
- Describe something that made your family happy.*
- Describe your mind picture of the word "home."*
- Tell the story of when you realized that you existed.*
- Describe something your parents taught you that was very important.*
- What activities, besides eating, went on at the kitchen table in the place where you grew up?*
- Tell about a famous person you have met.*
- Tell about a person who has significantly influenced your life. How?*

### **Benefits and Ways of Enhancing Differences**

*Brainstorm with the group the benefits of having differences in the group and or community. Some of the benefits noted may include:*

- \* increased productivity*
- \* tapping into and developing underused human potential*
- \* increased effectiveness*
- \* enhanced creativity and innovation*
- \* a new feeling for tolerance, understanding, and respect for others*
- \* increased feeling of concern for inequities*
- \* more participation or involvement of all members*

*Eliminating or reducing our use of stereotypes is an ongoing, lifelong process in which we try to relate to every human being as an individual and learn to treat each person as we would want to be treated. After all, we all will be considered "different" or a minority to someone at some time.*

Three basic approaches have been identified for dealing with those who are “different”: (1) the “Golden Rule” approach, (2) the “right the wrongs” approach, and (3) the “value all differences” approach.

The basis of the **Golden Rule** approach is the notion that people are more similar than they are different. Consequently, all people should be treated in the same way, no matter what groups they belong to or what their special concerns are. But problems often arise with this approach because there is a tendency to disregard differences and to expect people to assimilate to the dominant culture.

The **right the wrongs** approach recognizes the legitimate anger or isolation of specific groups that have been disadvantaged by the dominant culture. Two efforts are involved: (1) accommodating members with special advantages to compensate for the barriers they face, and (2) enhancing the sensitivity of the dominant culture to the unique concerns of the disadvantaged. Often these efforts result in “we/you” dialogue; people are prompted to take sides, which may increase the problem.

The **value all differences** approach means that people are appreciated for being different, and everyone is encouraged to be conscious of and responsive to the wide range of differences. The result is a feeling of oneness and pluralism combined with an appreciation of and contribution toward community and group goals.

There are a number of ways you can begin to help others value differences, including:

- \* Think about and/or share “counter-examples” which provide true yet positive information.
- \* Use adjectives other than race/ethnicity alone to describe an individual or group. Avoid qualifiers that support or reinforce stereotypes.
- \* Avoid words and images which imply that the majority of a group are all alike.
- \* Actively question the reliability of the source of the information. Resist the impulse to stereotype others based on a limited number of reported experiences, especially if they are second- or thirdhand.

- \* Politely disagree.
- \* Resist the tendency to generalize from limited experience.
- \* Challenge a possible prejudgment or false interpretation of behavior.

## Resources

Batts, Yolanda. “Understanding Diversity.” West Virginia Community Futures. Charleston, WV: W.Va. Development Office. 1992.

Boggs, Annette. “Understanding Prejudice.” Morgantown, WV: WVU Extension Service.

Community CARES. *Many Faces, One People*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council.

Moreno, Juan C. “Reflections of Oppression, Its Cause and Its Cure.” University of Minnesota: Student Diversity Institute.

*Pathway to Diversity*. Extension Service, USDA: Strategic Planning Task Force on Diversity. October 1991.

Sauders, Leslie. “Valuing Pluralism as a Way of Work and Life.” Talk presented at Summit III - Youth at Risk Conference. 1991.

Simmons, Patricia. “Stereotypes and Assumptions.” Athens: University of Georgia Extension Service.

*The Yellow TAXI: Creating a System Without Boundaries*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council. 1994.

Vineyard, Sue. “Everyone is Culturally Diverse,” *Managing Volunteer Diversity*. Downers Grove, IL: Heritage Arts Publishing. 1992.

Two videos available from the Dorsey Resource Center are:

“Tale of ‘O’.”

“Answering Children’s Questions about Prejudice.” ABC Television.

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