



Maryland is a culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse state. Culture shapes people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Everyone is a member of multiple cultural groups based on race, ethnicity, faith, region of country, type of work, level of education, physical ability or disability status, sexual identity and so forth. If you are working with youth that have different cultural backgrounds from your own, there can be additional communication challenges. Many communities have agencies that provide services for specific cultural and ethnic populations.

Why is this important?

In today's classroom, the cultural differences that exist between teachers and their students are numerous. Diversity may exist with regard to race, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. In addition, many students in the classroom are faced with stressors such as homelessness, unavailability of caretakers, abuse, teen parenting, trauma, and community violence, which can negatively impact their academic performance. Unfortunately, within schools, many students are also faced with discrimination from other students as well as school staff, due to a lack of understanding or empathy with regard to the variations in beliefs, practices, and values of different cultural groups. Since ethnic minority children have higher rates of suspension/ expulsion, special education placement, and school dropout, it is evident that numerous disparities exist within the education system. Culture has a significant impact on beliefs and attitudes about child development, identification of problems, and judgment about the best way to intervene when problems do occur. Furthermore, each of us operates within an individual culture, which espouses specific beliefs that determine how we interact with others and interpret their actions. Cultural variations in expressions of behavior may contribute to misunderstandings and conflict, which can be decreased through enhancing multicultural awareness.

What can educators do about it?

- Recognize the cultural diversity and uniqueness of students and learn as much as you can about your students' cultural background.
- Recognize that socioeconomic and political factors have a significant impact on the psychosocial functioning of culturally and ethnically diverse groups.
- Recognize the diversity that exists within minority groups.
- Develop an awareness of your own cultural and ethnic background and acknowledge differences in the culture between you and your students.
- Identify your biases and prejudices and determine how they affect your expectations of students and your relationships with them and their families.
- Use instructional strategies and curriculum that are sensitive to cultural differences.
- Continuously request and accept feedback from students and their families.
- If you are present when bullying, harassment and/or discrimination takes place, follow school procedures and work with colleagues, families, partnerships, and students to stop the bullying, harassment, and/or discrimination.
- Promote tolerance and understanding of cultural differences.

Resource Links

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The Education Alliance at Brown University
<http://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>

National Education Association Policy Brief Promoting Educators' Cultural Competence To Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students

https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf

Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General Documents the disparities in access, quality and availability of mental health services for ethnic minorities and proposes recommendations for improvement.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44243/>

Multicultural Pavilion

A multitude of resources about multicultural education including a multicultural quiz, trainings, workshops, curriculum, and links to other websites.
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/>

President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Subcommittee on Cultural Competence

Report addressing the disparities in health care, the role of culture in service delivery, and making several policy recommendations for improving the health care system.
http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/mentalhealthcommission/subcommittee/Sub_Chairs.htm

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an initiative of



The Children's Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children's mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.