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**MODULE EIGHT**

**Working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds**

**Contents**

* Importance of cultural-awareness training
* Issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds
* The refugee experience
* Reflecting on ‘culture’
* Cross-cultural communication
* Engaging with culturally diverse young people

**Overview**

This module will give participants an understanding of the importance of being culturally aware when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on how their understanding of ‘culture’ can shape the ways in which they interact with young people. Some issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds today will be explored.

**Duration**

This module is designed to be completed in 60 to 90 minutes.

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this session participants will have a greater understanding of the issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and the role of culture in their own lives.

Participants will look at how these issues might affect the way they approach their relationships with young people.

**Resources**

* Handout 8.1 – Culturally diverse young people – some definitions (CMY Handout)
* Handout 8.2 – Humanitarian youth arrivals in Victoria (CMY Handout)
* Handout 8.3 - Refugee young people and resettlement (CMY Handout)
* Handout 8.4 – What is ‘culture’?
* Handout 8.5 – Cross-cultural communication
* Handout 8.6 – Scenarios

**Running sheet**

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| **Topic** | **Activity** | **Duration (approx.)** |
| **Overview** | *This module will give participants an understanding of the importance of being culturally aware when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.*  *Participants are encouraged to reflect on how their understanding of ‘culture’ can shape the ways in which they interact with young people. Some issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds today will be explored.* | 2 mins |
| **Importance of cultural**-**awareness training** | *It is important to understand the impact of refugee and migrant journeys on typical adolescent development and how to best engage with young people in light of this.* | 2 mins |
| **Issues facing young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds** | * Provide an overview of ‘Culturally diverse young people – some definitions’ (Handout 8.1) * Provide an overview of ‘Humanitarian youth arrivals in Victoria’ (Handout 8.2) * Highlight changes in migration patterns and how this can impact on settlement experiences for young people living in Australia. * Highlight possible cultural groups in the areas where your program’s young people live. | 5 mins |
| **The refugee experience** | * Provide an overview of the characteristics of the refugee and migrant experience, highlighting commonalities and differences between journeys for refugee youth and migrant youth (refer to diagram on Handout 8.3)   ***Activity: Resettlement***  This activity aims to unpack the different ways in which resettlement might impact on a young person.  Divide participants into four groups to explore how the experience of resettlement might impact on a young person as:   * an individual * as part of a cultural community * as part of a new (Australian) community * part of a family   Ask each group to share their responses.  Acknowledge participant contributions while providing an overview of the elements listed on the final page of Handout 8.3. | 25 mins |
| **Reflecting on ‘culture’** | ***Activity: What does ‘Culture’ mean to you?***  This activity aims to explore participants’ perceptions about culture.  Ask participants to individually draw or write three things that represent the meaning of ‘culture’ to them.  Participants stick their ideas to a wall and share them with the group. Draw out similarities and differences between perceptions of culture.  Highlight the diversity in responses. Note that ,when working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, there will be varying responses, understandings, meanings and valuing of ‘culture’.   * Provide an overview of ‘What is “culture”?’ (Handout 8.4). * Highlight the explicit signs of culture and the importance of recognising that many aspects of culture are implicit.   Explicit: Literature; religious rituals; styles of dress; painting; holiday customs; gestures; eating habits; food; facial expressions.  Implicit: nature of friendship; concept of self; general worldview; concept of fairness; concept of personal space; work ethic; concept of beauty; concept of leadership; values; rules of social etiquette; understanding the natural world; notion of modesty; child-raising beliefs; importance of time; religious beliefs.  *Participants need to be aware that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may respond to situations, issues and experiences in different ways. There are many underlying (implicit) factors that shape a young person’s response.* | 15 mins  5 mins |
| **Cross-cultural Communication** | * Review ‘Cross-cultural communication’ (Handout 8.5)   *Although there may be similarities in terms of cultural background in groups, there is diversity in the ways in which young people identify or engage with ‘culture’ and ‘faith’.*  *It’s important to recognise young people as a resource for this knowledge and understanding, and the need to approach with respect but not fear when negotiating cross-cultural situations.* | 15 mins |
| **Engaging with culturally diverse young people** | ***Activity: Engaging young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds***  Divide participants into two groups. Provide each group with a scenario (Handout 8.6) and ask each group to discuss ideas on how to manage the situation.  Ask each group to share their ideas and strategies for managing the situation. These should be based on learnings from the ‘Cross-cultural Communication’ sheet (Handout 8.5). | 20 mins |

HANDOUT 8.1

Culturally diverse young people –  
some definitions

Handout available at:

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/285/3/Defintions2010.pdf>

HANDOUT 8.2

Humanitarian youth  
arrivals in Victoria

Handout available at:

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/1856/1/HumanitarianArrivalsUpdateOctober2011.pdf>

*Link Updated March 2012*HANDOUT 8.3

Refugee young people   
and resettlement

Handout available at:

<http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/288/2/InfoSheetNumber14-RefugeeYoungPeopleResettlement.pdf>

HANDOUT 8.4

What is ‘culture’?

There are a number of issues concerning culture to be mindful of and to think about when working with young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds.

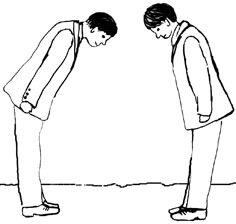
**Culture as guide.** Culture provides all of us with a guide for how we see the world, what we value, what we believe in and how we behave.

**Culture affects everyone.** We are all part of one culture or another. People can be part of a community, a region, a language or ethnic group or a work of organisational culture. Our cultural guide comes in the form of the values, practices, beliefs and attitudes that we may learn from and share with people around us.

**Culture is individual.** As individuals we are all influenced by culture. We all express culture in the ways we behave, think and communicate. But the degree to which culture is taken on and expressed is different for every individual, family, community, region and society.

**Culture is dynamic.** Culture is always changing. This is because culture is a product of being human, and no human ever stays the same. Over time as individuals we all have experiences both small and large, meaningful and seemingly meaningless. We learn from these experiences. Based on these experiences we change. Culture is shaped by these changes.

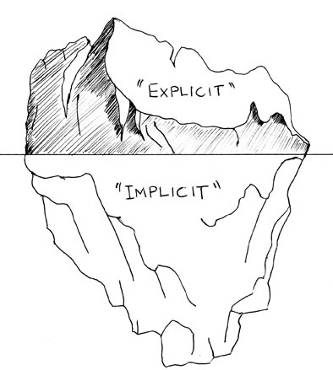
**Culture creates differences.** All individuals have differences; life would be incredibly boring if we were all exactly the same. So, while understanding culture gives useful clues about an individual family or community, all individuals, families and communities are different.[[1]](#footnote-1)



**Culture is ….**

**How we meet •** Metaphors we use **• Our humour •** The clothes we wear **• Our stories •** Our rituals **• Our use of space •** The food we eat **• How we greet strangers •** How we communicate **• Our gender roles •** How we view time **•How mistakes are dealt with •** Our celebrations **• Our heroes and heroines •** How we learn **• How we view hurdles •** Our religion **• How we understand family •** How we approach new problems **• How we view authority •** Our status symbols **• Our use of eye contact •** Our values **• The language we speak •** Our worldview **• Our music**

**Cultural iceberg**



Culture has been aptly compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the water and a larger, invisible section below, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected, imagined or intuited.

**Which aspects of culture do you think are ‘explicit’ and which are ‘implicit’?**

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| Child-raising beliefs | Literature |
| Facial expressions | Nature of friendship |
| Concept of leadership | Concept of personal space |
| Concept of fairness | Values |
| Notion of modesty | Painting |
| Food | Holiday customs |
| Understanding the natural world | Concept of self |
| Importance of time | General worldview |
| Rules of social etiquette | Gestures |
| Religious beliefs | Religious rituals |
| Eating habits | Work ethic |
| Styles of dress | Concept of beauty |

HANDOUT 8.5

*Adapted*  Gunn, Giles (1987) The culture of criticism and the criticism of culture, Oxford University Press, New York

Cross-cultural  
communication

Key points to consider when communicating with others whose English language skills are limited.

**Do:**

* Listen attentively
* Explain technical terms
* Keep language simple and use short sentences
* Speak slowly and clearly
* Use a professional interpreter to assist in communicating your message
* Remember that you are engaged in a dialogue rather than just needing to get your message across
* Make the message visual if you can
* Check that the message has been understood – ask questions and be patient
* Give people plenty of time to respond
* Recognise the influence of culture on communication styles and meanings; e.g. the degree of directness or indirectness, formality and informality, non-verbal/body language
* Remember that many languages are structured differently to English and some English terms will not have a direct translation
* Use direct questions; e.g. ‘Have you finished signing that form?’ rather than, ‘You haven’t finished that form yet, have you?’
* Learn and use some words in your young person’s native language.

**Don’t:**

* Shout, mumble or speak really slowly
* Show impatience
* Replicate the client’s accent
* Use technical terms, abbreviations, slang or jargon. [[2]](#footnote-2)

HANDOUT 8.6

Scenarios

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| **Scenario One**  ***Young Person***  Michael is 20 years old and from Lebanon. He lives with his parents and siblings at home while completing a Bachelor of Science at Victoria University.  ***Scenario***  You have been mentoring Michael for six months. Most of your meetings commence with you picking him up from his place. Consequently, you have seen a bit of his parents and developed a friendly relationship.  One day when you collect him, his mother asks if you would like to attend their family birthday celebration for Michael the following weekend.  ***How do you respond?*** |

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| **Scenario Two**  ***Young Person***  Thao is 18 years old, and came to Australia from Vietnam four years ago. She lives here with her aunt, uncle and their children (her immediate family remains in Vietnam), and is currently in Year 12 at school.  ***Scenario***  Thao is struggling to stay motivated with her studies. She has dreams of being a fashion designer but feels that she will never get the chance. Feeling disillusioned, she now wants to spend your meetings doing fun things. You have developed a good and trusting relationship and she wants to try new things together. For your next meeting she suggests going to a pub or a nightclub to have a dance and forget about things.  ***How do you respond?*** |

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| **Scenario Three**  ***Young Person***  Mohammed is 18 years old and studying Year 11 VCE at the local high school. He came here five years ago from Sudan and lives with his mum and two older siblings.  ***Scenario***  You go to collect Mohammed from his home and arrive to find him very upset. He tells you he has just received a C grade in his maths exam. Mohammed’s dream is to get into Medicine at university and he is worried that this mark is going to jeopardise his chances. He doesn’t want to go out with you as planned as he feels he should be studying instead.  ***How do you respond?*** |

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| **Scenario Four**  ***Young Person***  Samira is 16 years old. She is a refugee from Eritrea currently studying Year 11 at high school, while living with her mum, dad and four younger siblings.  ***Scenario***  During the first two months of your relationship, things seemed to be going well between you and Samira. But she hasn’t shown up for your last two meetings. You phone again to set up another meeting, this time arranging to pick her up in your car. She is home when you arrive there, and gives you a big smile when she sees you. But you’re upset about the missed meetings and feel you have to talk about it.  ***How do you respond?*** |

1. Harris, P., 2005. *Cultural Competence Works! A Manual to put it into Practice*, Sydney: Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)