How Do You Build Relationships With People From Other Cultures?

There are many ways that people can learn about other people's cultures and build relationships at the same time. Here are some steps you can take. They are first listed, and then elaborated upon one at a time.

- Make a conscious decision to establish friendships with people from other cultures.
- Put yourself in situations where you will meet people of other cultures.
- Examine your biases about people from other cultures.
- Ask people questions about their cultures, customs, and views.
- Read about other people's culture's and histories
- Listen to people tell their stories
- Notice differences in communication styles and values; don't assume that the majority's way is the right way
- Risk making mistakes
- Learn to be an ally.

Make a conscious decision to establish friendships with people from other cultures

Making a decision is the first step. In order to build relationships with people different from yourself, you have to make a concerted effort to do so. There are societal forces that serve to separate us from each other.

People from different economic groups, religions, ethnic groups, and races are often isolated from each other in schools, jobs, and neighborhoods.

So, if we want things to be different, we need to take active steps to make them different.

You can join a sports team or club, become active in an organization, choose a job, or move to a neighborhood that puts you in contact with people of cultures different than your own. Also, you may want to take a few minutes to notice the diversity that is presently nearby. If you think about the people you see and interact with every day, you may become more aware of the cultural differences that are around you.

Once you have made the decision to make friends with people different from yourself, you can go ahead and make friends with them in much the same way as with anyone else. You may need to take more time, and you may need to be more persistent. You may need to reach out and take the initiative more than you are used to.

People who have been mistreated by society may take more time to trust you than people who haven't. Don't let people discourage you. There are good reasons why people have built up defenses, but it is not impossible to overcome them and make a connection. The effort is totally worth it.

Put yourself in situations where you will meet people of other cultures; especially if you haven't had the experience of being a minority, take the risk.

One of the first and most important steps is to show up in places where you will meet people of cultures other than your own.
Go to meetings and celebrations of groups whose members you want to get to know. Or hang out in restaurants and other gathering places that different cultural groups go. You may feel embarrassed or shy at first, but your efforts will pay off. People of a cultural group will notice if you take the risk of coming to one of their events. If it is difficult for you to be the only person like yourself attending, you can bring a buddy with you and support each other in making friends.

**Examine your biases about people from other cultures.**

We all carry misinformation and stereotypes about people in different cultures. Especially, when we are young, we acquire this information in bits and pieces from TV, from listening to people talk, and from the culture at large. We are not bad people because we acquired this; no one requested to be misinformed. But in order to build relationships with people of different cultures, we have to become aware of the misinformation we acquired.

An excellent way to become aware of your own stereotypes is to pick groups that you generalize about and write down your opinions. Once you have, examine the thoughts that came to your mind and where you acquired them.

Another way to become aware of stereotypes is to talk about them with people who have similar cultures to your own.

In such settings you can talk about the misinformation you acquired without being offensive to people from a particular group. You can get together with a friend or two and talk about how you acquired stereotypes or fears of other different people. You can answer these kinds of questions:

- How did your parents feel about different ethnic, racial, or religious groups?
- What did your parents communicate to you with their actions and words?
- Were your parents friends with people from many different groups?
- What did you learn in school about a particular group?
- Was there a lack of information about some people?
- Are there some people you shy away from? Why?

**Ask people questions about their cultures, customs, and views**

People, for the most part, want to be asked questions about their lives and their cultures. Many of us were told that asking questions was nosy; but if we are thoughtful, asking questions can help you learn about people of different cultures and help build relationships. People are usually pleasantly surprised when others show interest in their cultures. If you are sincere and you can listen, people will tell you a lot.

**Read about other people’s cultures and histories**

It helps to read about and learn about people’s cultures and histories. If you know something about the reality of someone’s life and history, it shows that you care enough to take the time to find out about it. It also gives you background information that will make it easier to ask questions that make sense.

However, you don’t have to be an expert on someone’s culture to get to know them or to ask questions. People who are, themselves, from a culture are usually the best experts, anyway.

**Don’t forget to care and show caring**

It is easy to forget that the basis of any relationship is caring.

Everyone wants to care and be cared about. Caring about people is what makes a relationship real. Don’t let your awkwardness around cultural differences get in the way of caring about people.

**Listen to people tell their stories**

If you get an opportunity to hear someone tell you her life story first hand, you can learn a lot—and build a strong relationship at the same time. Every person has an important story to tell. Each person’s story tells something about their culture.

Listening to people’s stories, we can get a fuller picture of what people’s lives are like—their feelings, their nuances, and the richness of their lives. Listening to people also helps us get through our numbness—there is a real person before us, not someone who is reduced to stereotypes in the media.

Additionally, listening to members of groups that have been discriminated against can give us a better understanding of what that experience is like. Listening gives us a picture of discrimination that is more real than what we can get from reading an article or listening to the radio.

**Exercise:**

You can informally ask people in your neighborhood or organization to tell you a part of their life stories as a member of a particular group. You can also incorporate this activity into a workshop or retreat for your group or organization. Have people each take five or ten minutes to talk about one piece of their life stories. If the group is large, you will probably have to divide into small groups, so everyone gets a chance to speak.

**Notice differences in communication styles and values; don’t assume that the majority’s way is the right way.**

We all have a tendency to assume that the way that most people do things is the acceptable, normal, or right way.
As community workers, we need to learn about cultural differences in values and communication styles, and not assume that the majority way is the right way to think or behave.

**Example:**

You are in a group discussion. Some group members don’t speak up, while others dominate, filling all the silences. The more vocal members of the group become exasperated that others don’t talk. It also seems that the more vocal people are those that are members of the more mainstream culture, while those who are less vocal are from minority cultures.

**How do we understand this? How can this be resolved?**

In some cultures, people feel uncomfortable with silence, so they speak to fill the silences. In other cultures, it is customary to wait for a period of silence before speaking. If there aren’t any silences, people from those cultures may not even speak. Also, members of some groups (women, people of low income, some racial and ethnic minorities, and others) don’t speak up because they have received messages from society at large that their contribution is not as important as others; they have gotten into the habit of deferring their thinking to the thinking of others.

When some people don’t share their thinking, we all lose out. We all need the opinions and voices of those people who have traditionally been discouraged from contributing.

In situations like the one described above, becoming impatient with people for not speaking is usually counter-productive. However, you can structure a meeting to encourage the quieter people to speak. For example, you can:

- Follow a guideline that everyone speaks once, before anyone speaks twice.
- Invite the quieter people to lead part of the meeting.
- Talk about the problem openly in a meeting, and invite the more vocal people to try to speak less often.
- Between meetings, ask the quieter people what would help them speak, or ask them for their ideas on how a meeting should be run.
- A high school basketball team has to practice and play on many afternoons and evenings. One team member is a recent immigrant whose family requires her to attend the birthday parties of all the relatives in her extended family. The coach is angry with the parents for this requirement, because it takes his player away from the team.

**How do we understand this? How can this be resolved?**

Families have different values, especially when it comes to family closeness, loyalty, and responsibility. In many immigrant and ethnic families, young people are required to put their family's needs first, before the requirements of extracurricular activities. Young people from immigrant families who grow up in the U.S. often feel torn between the majority culture and the culture of their families; they feel pressure from each culture to live according to its values, and they feel they have to choose between the two.

As community workers, we need to support and respect minority and immigrant families and their values. It may already be a huge concession on the part of a family to allow a teenager to participate in extracurricular activities at all. We need to make allowances for the cultural differences and try to help young people feel that they can have both worlds—instead of having to reject one set of values for another.

If I asked someone if they have ever heard of Bessarabia, the answer would probably be 'no'. My maternal grandmother and her family were from a village called Mathildendorf in the country of Bessarabia. This area is now made up of parts of Moldova and the Ukraine, which were a part of the USSR at the time. Their people had emigrated from Germany to this area around the early 1800’s to escape religious persecution, oppression, forced military service, and more. They remained there until World War II. Around the 1940’s, Germany offered these individuals resettlement to the country their families originally descended from due to issues with a Soviet-German pact. I am a direct descendent of the Black Sea German-Russians. While they had their own traditions, rituals, recipes, etc., much of what I grew up with was the more traditional German traditions since my family moved back to western Germany in the early 1940’s. Although I am still trying to learn more about German-Russian traditions as well. However, in the spirit of winter and Christmas, I have decided to share some of our favorite German recipes and holiday traditions.

One of the most memorable traditions, which we still follow to this day, is how we celebrate Christmas holiday. Unlike the American tradition of opening gifts from Santa on Christmas morning, we open our gifts from the Christkindl (“Christ Child”) or der Weihnachtsmann (Father Christmas/Santa Clause) on the night of Christmas Eve. For many in Germany, St. Nicholas actually brings small treats for children on Saint Nicholas Day (der Nikolaustag) which is on December 6th. The night before, children will put out stockings or a pair of shoes by the door for Saint Nicholas to leave them treats such as candies, nuts, fruits, or other small gifts.

On the morning of Saint Nicholas Day, the children awaken to their treats and share them with their loved ones. However, if a child has not been well-behaved that year, it is said that they will instead get twigs and rocks in their shoes/stocking. I have decided to raise my son with that tradition, and he has loved it so far, and I have equally loved sharing it with him. This year he awoke to find his shoes filled with a variety of German chocolates and luckily no twigs.

Another part of our culture is quite a few German dishes that I have learned to make from my mother. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy my cheeseburgers and pizzas, but I absolutely love German food. I have a few favorites that I love to share whenever I talk to people about German recipes, or when I make them to share with others. This includes dishes such as spaetzle, rouladen, schnitzel, and our borscht.

Some of these dishes may sound complicated, but spaetzle and schnitzel are actually fairly simple dishes. Spaetzle is simply a homemade egg noodle made with eggs and flour, and pressed with a round noodle press into boiling water; whereas schnitzel is just a breaded and fried boneless pork chop that has been flattened with a meat hammer, dipped in an egg/milk wash, flour, and breadcrumbs.

Rouladen is a slightly more complex recipe with what sounds like an odd variety of ingredients such as beef, pickles, bacon, and spicy mustard that is both cooked on the stove to brown and then baked to completion, and served with brown gravy.

Our borscht however is not what you would imagine, it is not the typical red beet borscht many are familiar with. Our recipe includes cream, diced potatoes and onions, large pieces of pork, and fresh dill. Of course this is not representative of all Germans. Like America, there are different regions with their own recipes and takes on dishes. While my family serves our potato salad cold, there are other regions of Germany that serve theirs warm, as well as, we serve our spaetzle as long spaghetti length noodles, whereas, some regions serve them as short noodles. While we make these dishes occasionally throughout the year, we also serve them as Easter and Christmas meals instead of ham or turkey dinners.
My other favorite part of the winter holiday, besides Christmas and the wonderful dinner foods, is all of the amazing sweets that come with it. Things like spitzbuben and pfeffernüsse cookies, marzipan stöllen, lebkuchen, and so many others. Many of these can now be easily bought at local grocery stores like Aldi, Lidl, or the European Market or the recipes found on Google or Pinterest. The spitzbuben cookie is a fairly simple jam sandwich cookie with the top layer often having a design cut out, for example hearts, circles, and stars.

While the pfeffernüsse cookie, which may not be everyone’s cup of tea, is one of my favorites and is an iced gingerbread cookie that includes ingredients like brown sugar, ground white pepper, and Lebkuchengewürz (a collection of varies spices such as cinnamon, cloves, star anise, etc.). The stöllen however, has a bit of a story to it.

The Christmas stöllen has been around since the 15th century and was meant to resemble an infant Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes. Lucky for us, it tastes much better now than the original recipe did. I could go on for days and pages about German sweets, as there as so many to enjoy and share. However, I will leave you with just these few Christmas time favorites.

Although I only shared our Christmas and a few food traditions with you, there is so much more to the German culture. If you found this interesting, I encourage you to read and learn more about Germany, its people, language, traditions, and more. I love and embrace my German heritage every day and enjoy getting to share it with my son and others.

Traditional German Schnitzel

**Ingredients**
- 4 boneless pork chops
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour combined with 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3/4 cup plain breadcrumbs

**Instructions**
1. Place the pork chops between two sheets of plastic wrap and pound them until just 1/4 inch thick with the flat side of a meat tenderizer. Lightly season both sides with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
2. Place the flour mixture, egg, and breadcrumbs in 3 separate shallow bowls. Dip the chops in the flour, the egg, and the breadcrumbs, coating both sides and all edges at each stage. Be careful not to press the breadcrumbs into the meat. Gently shake off the excess crumbs. Fry immediately.
3. Make sure the cooking oil is hot enough at this point (about 330 degrees F) as you don’t want the Schnitzel to sit around in the coating before frying. Use enough oil so that the Schnitzels “swim” in it.
4. Fry the Schnitzel for about 2-3 minutes on both sides until a deep golden brown. Transfer briefly to a plate lined with paper towels.
5. Serve immediately with slices of fresh lemon and parsley sprigs.

[https://www.daringgourmet.com/traditional-german-pork-schnitzel/](https://www.daringgourmet.com/traditional-german-pork-schnitzel/)

**Spitzbuben Cookies**

Makes about 3 dozen

**Ingredients**
- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 3 1/2 cups flour, plus more for dusting
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 cup raspberry jam
- Confectioners’ sugar, for dusting

**Instructions**
Heat oven to 325°. Beat butter and sugar with a hand mixer until fluffy. Add vanilla and egg. Beat. Add flour and salt; mix. Transfer dough to a floured surface, form into a disk, roll until 1/4" thick. Using a 2” fluted round cutter, cut out cookies and transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2” apart. Chill for 30 minutes. Using a 1 1/4” plain round cutter, cut out centers of half the cookies; discard centers. Bake cookies until lightly browned, 10-12 minutes; cool. Dust cookie rings with confectioners’ sugar. Place 1 tsp. jam in center of each whole cookie; spread to within 1/3” of edge. Top each with a cookie ring.

The State of South Carolina, as well as the United States, continues to become more diverse and pluralistic. As such, clients who were once at the fringes are beginning to become increasingly more comfortable with their identification as members of the LGBTQIA community. Practitioners are therefore left with many questions as to how best serve the needs of this at-risk community of youth.

First and foremost, it’s important to begin with a foundational knowledge of the acronym that seemingly continues to grow. In breaking it down into its component parts, LGBTQIA refers to the following: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual. It’s important to note that within this acronym, gender expression and sexual orientation are intermingled. These two concepts are indeed distinctly different and should therefore be treated as such.

When we talk about sexual orientation, it’s crucial to understand that we’re talking about attraction. In its most basic form, we’re exploring and defining to whom are clients are attracted. This can actually become quite complex as we get into the many definitions, but for the purposes of this article, we’ll ground in the simplicity of attraction.

In exploring gender expression, we’re now shifting our focus to the more visible nature of our clients. This is the “who” they are choosing to present to the world based on their innate feeling of the gender that best represents the “who” they feel themselves to be. As with sexual identity, this concept can also get quite complicated as new gender identities are espoused by this population as they begin to learn more about themselves and how they choose to identify as time goes on.

Overall, when we take both of these concepts into consideration, it’s important to view them on a continuum rather than distinct and defined realities in and of themselves. The intrinsic transitory nature of these identities should also be kept in mind as they tend to change over time based largely on increased insight and/or lived experiences.

Once we become comfortable with the foundational knowledge of how these clients come to the identities they espouse, it then becomes important to understand how these identities are developed. While this is unique to each client, we must keep in mind that there are some constants based on where we are. More specifically, our clients are developing their identities in a politically/socially conservative and highly religious environment. Negative scripts therefore abound for this population and there’s no reason for them to think that we believe otherwise.

That becomes our job to show them. To create the environment in which they feel comfortable to be who they are and engage with a clinician who seeks nothing more than to help them become that which they aspire to be. Not change them. You see, that’s part of what they’ll be expecting and this is where things tend to come off the rails so to speak. It is indeed possible to “not get it” and still be effective and to have beliefs that conflict and still be supportive. That’s when we truly meet our clients where they are and possibly even find out a little, or even a lot, more about ourselves.

In the end, as LGBTQIA adolescents and young adults, they aren’t that much more different than what you’d typically see from the majority. The systems that operate around them are though. It’s the systems which make this population more likely to die by suicide. It’s the systems that move them to cope with substances. It’s the systems that make them drop out of school because of bullying and the lack of support.

It therefore becomes a choice on our part to be the agents of change to disrupt those systems or the facilitators of sameness. None of our youth are expendable and none of them have any less worth than the other. Each of them has worth and each of us has a responsibility to advocate and usher these clients to adulthood. It can seem daunting, but you’ve already taken the first step as you took the time to read this article.