



Make Prevention a CHOICE

Cultural Diversity

The United States census report shows that there is an increasing ethnic diversity in this country, and it will have an unpredictable impact on the nation's political and social climate. Cultural diversity plays a pivotal role in the self-understanding of many people and has a significant effect on the goals, objectives, and structure of a military society. To be effective, cultural diversity programs must achieve two primary objectives: to improve communication among a diverse population and to increase morale and productivity. To be successful, cultural diversity programs must have involvement and support of EVERYONE; that includes active-duty personnel, retirees, and family members.

Terms and Definitions:

- **CULTURE** – The integration of behavior that includes thought, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a group. EVERY society that shares and perpetuates behaviors to its members has a culture.
- **CULTURAL COMPETENCY** – Acceptance and respect for difference; continuing self-assessment regarding culture; attention to the meanings of difference; ongoing development of cultural knowledge.
- **RACE** – (A frequently misused and misunderstood term). Two ways to define race: A biological definition is: A population that differs in physical traits which distinguishes it from others, e.g. skin pigmentation, facial features, color or texture of body hair. A social definition of race is: A group who is identified, in social relations with others in the group by their physical characteristics. (Research suggests that the concept of race is so ingrained in our society that it defines significantly how most of us identify ourselves)
- **RACISM** – Discrimination based on skin color or ethnic heritage.
- **IDEOLOGICAL RACISM** – A belief that links physical characteristics of a group to psychological or intellectual characteristics.
- **DISCRIMINATION** – Any behavior directed against persons because of their identification with a particular group. (Sexism, for example, is a form of discrimination based on gender).
- **ETHNICITY** – Taken from Greek, ethnos meaning “nation”. Nationally or cultural characteristics; One's Social and Cultural heritage. Physical traits are NOT parts of ethnic differences..
- **STEREOTYPES** – Beliefs about a group that impact our evaluation of a specific person within that group. Beliefs that associate groups of people with certain characteristics, e.g. Jocks are “dumb”, Librarians are “serious”, Used-car salesmen are “dishonest”, Italians are ‘emotional’, British are “reserved”.

- **PREJUDICE** – Negative feelings toward others based on their belonging to a certain group. Prejudice means literally “to prejudge”.
- **GROUP** – Two or more persons perceived as related because of their direct interactions, membership in the same social category, or common fate. Typically based on sex, race, or other attributes. (It is important to remember that there are many kinds of groups: Families, political parties, nations, religious affiliations, etc.)

What Can One Person Do?

1. Learn to know others; getting to know a person as an individual NOT a stereotype.
2. Tolerate and appreciate different cultural practices, AS YOU WOULD WANT SOMEONE ELSE TO RESPECT YOU.
3. Get involved in your children’s schools; find out what atmosphere exists. Distrust, intolerance, and misunderstanding MAY be present.
4. Be active in your neighborhood and community.
5. Be aware of WHOM you vote for; research candidates’ beliefs, intentions, past actions, etc.
6. Be aware of “humor” that involves ethnic or racial slurs/jokes.
7. Be aware that people are individuals, just like you, and NOT objects to be feared or hated.
8. Be aware of organized groups (sometimes called “hate groups”) which promote distrust and fear toward other races and cultures; they are on the rise in our nation and in other countries.
9. Attune yourself to verbal and non-verbal communication, which can differ greatly from culture to culture.
10. Ask questions in order to gain understanding about an individual’s lifestyle. Try new foods they may offer, for example. Also ask how he/she likes to be addressed. Respect personal space, eye contact, and other culture-specific social behaviors.
11. Attend social and cultural events in your community.

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