

Cultural Competency During Emergency Events

- **Be aware:**
 - People in uniform may not be immediately trusted. Recognize that different communities have different relationships with the government and may not trust services or warnings from that source.
 - Culture and language can affect one's ability to understand emergency notifications and updates.
 - Some cultures may prefer that rapport or a relationship is built before personal information is disclosed (i.e. medical or financial).
 - There are cultural variations in expression of emotions and manifestations and descriptions of symptoms.
 - Just because someone looks like you does not mean they share the same cultural beliefs or values.
 - Culturally and linguistically appropriate care also applies to emergency personnel.
- **Recognize that the most common reaction to disaster is disbelief.**
 - Be aware some cultures are more likely to rely on and trust social networks (i.e. friends, family, religious institutions) or ethnic media for disaster information as opposed to more formal warnings.
 - Individuals will often try to confirm the threat by seeking secondary information from someone in their community.
- **Understand that there may be cultural and/or socioeconomic reasons for unwillingness to evacuating, such as:**
 - Feeling safe because they have survived previous events or because of religious faith.
 - Misunderstanding regarding the severity of the storm.
 - Financial constraints.
 - Fear of neighborhood crime if the premises is vacated.
 - Perceived racism and inequities.
- **Ensure that:**
 - Individuals are able not only to access but also understand the forms of communication they are given.
 - Services are appropriate and modified to fit the cultural context of the community member(s) you are serving.
 - Information is provided in multiple languages via radio, television, and community or religious center announcements.
- **When communicating with someone with limited English-language proficiency:**
 - Exercise patience. Persevere with the person until comprehension is made or seek assistance from someone from the linguistic group.
 - Speak more slowly than usual and articulate each word.

- Avoid using interjections, technical words, and linking words together (i.e. *evacuatethearea*).
- Do not mix affirmative statements with negative statements.
 - Example: *Do bring warm blankets. Do not bring the dog. Do bring a flashlight.*
- Communication can be facilitated by:
 - Translating the most important phrases.
 - Organizing for interpreters.
 - Changing worded signs to symbols.
 - Using universal symbols when possible.
- Using children as interpreters is highly discouraged.
- Translated materials should not substitute for oral interpretation.

References:

1. Cultural and Linguistic Competency in Disaster Preparedness and Crisis Response. *United States Department of Health and Human Services*. Accessed:
<https://cccdpcr.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/default.asp>
2. Solis, G. (1997). Guidelines on Cultural Diversity and Disaster Management. *Canadian Framework for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction*.
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