

Cultural Competency During Emergency Events

Cultural and linguistic competency will provide emergency management personnel with the awareness and inclusive approach to better meet the needs and engage the growing diverse populations of Larimer County to improve the quality of services before, during, and after emergency and disaster 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, low literacy and deaf and hearing impaired:**
 - 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 for:
 - Non-English speakers
 - American Sign Language (ASL) for deaf and hearing impaired
 - 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. Cultural and Linguistic Competency in Disaster Preparedness and Response Fact Sheet. *United States Department of Health and Human Services*. Accessed: https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/abc/Pages/linguistic-facts.aspx#_ftn1
3. Solis, G. (1997). Guidelines on Cultural Diversity and Disaster Management. *Canadian Framework for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction*.