In behavioral health care, it is important to understand the impact that cultural background may have on a client.

**Language is one cultural difference that affects a client's interaction with others.**

Client behaviors that indicate cultural diversity include:

- How a client or family member views behavioral health services
- The client's health beliefs such as old wives tales, herbal remedies, or healers
- Treatment decisions
- Interactions with those in authority (for example, a client who accepts everything he or she is told by someone perceived as an authority figure, without asking questions)
- Family roles (for example, a husband who does all the communicating for his wife)
- Beliefs and rituals related to life events including illness, birth, or death
- Display of emotions, which may vary from very demonstrative to very reserved
- Language.
Cultural diversity is evident in co-workers as well as clients. When you don't know or understand the cultural background of a client or co-worker, you may misunderstand and misinterpret his or her body language or behavior.

Examples of cultural beliefs that may be related to the work of behavioral health care professionals are listed below:

- Many Asian cultures believe it is disrespectful to look someone in the eyes while speaking. However, in African cultures, failing to look a person in the eye is considered a sign of not being honest.
- The Arab culture prefers to buffer bad news to boost the spirits of the ill person.
- In some religions, it is important to include the elders of the church in any decisions that need to be made.
- Some cultures and religions oppose treatment by someone not of their culture.
- Family involvement is very important in some cultures. African-Americans, Amish, Arabs, Asians, and Mormons tend to have large, close-knit families.
- Those of the Islamic faith may wish to have privacy to pray during the day. If this is important for your client, try to allow time for privacy.
- There may be some articles of clothing, religious medals, holy pictures, icons or other objects that are important to a client. Whenever possible, allow him or her to keep these articles with him.
The actions of your clients, their families or your co-workers that you do not understand may be related to cultural beliefs or practice. It is important to be aware of the different cultural groups that may be represented at your facility among both staff and clients.

Learning about different cultures will help you understand your clients and their families but does NOT mean that you have to endorse their beliefs.

You will be better able to respond to culturally diverse clients and staff if you do the following:

- Learn about basic cultural beliefs, the patterns related to them, and how they impact their treatment. Learning about them will help you understand the behavior and support both the client and his or her family but does NOT mean that you have to endorse the beliefs.
- Include questions about culture and religion into initial assessments.
- Remember to be sensitive to cultural needs and try to incorporate them into the client’s care.
- Learn a few important words or phrases from the languages of co-workers and clients you care for frequently.
- Use resources such as interpreters that are available in your facility to overcome language barriers.
Evidence of cultural differences are seen in a client's views on behavioral health treatment, health beliefs, eating behaviors, treatment decisions, interactions with those in authority, family roles, beliefs and rituals, display of emotion, and language.

Client or co-worker behaviors may be misinterpreted and misunderstood if you are not familiar with the person's cultural background.

You will be able to respond to culturally diverse clients and co-workers if you include cultural questions in initial assessments, incorporate cultural needs into client care, learn a few words or phrases from the language of co-workers and clients you treat regularly, use resources such as interpreters available in your facility, and inform clients about potential risks in treatment.
In order to understand cultural diversity, you must know the meaning of culture and diversity.

**Culture**
Culture is a way of life. It is the knowledge, beliefs, and values of an ethnic or religious group, nationality group, or social group. Culture guides the groups' thoughts, decisions, and actions. The customs of each culture are learned and passed from one generation to another.

**Diversity**
Diversity is variety. It is the human qualities that are different from our own and the groups to which we belong but are present in other individuals and groups. Diversity can be divided into two sub-categories:

- The primary category includes things that we cannot change such as age, ethnicity, physical abilities, race, and sexual orientation.
- The secondary category includes things that can be changed such as educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, parental status, religious beliefs, and work experiences.

Cultural diversity refers to the differences between cultural groups and within cultural groups. For example, diversity within the Asian-American culture includes Korean Americans and Japanese Americans.

Cultural differences can be found throughout our country. For example: the popular sandwich made from a small bread roll and filled with a variety of meat, cheeses, and vegetables might be called a sub, submarine, poor boy, hoagie, grinder or foot-long depending on which area of the country you are in.
Different cultures have different "comfort zones."

All cultural groups have certain customs, normal behaviors, beliefs, superstitions, and language that guide how they:

- Live
- Make decisions
- Face a crisis
- Communicate
- Structure their society
- Prepare food and eat
- Celebrate holidays
- Dress.

The extent to which someone's cultural background influences their behavior is dependent on factors such as:

- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Class
- Education
- Status within the family
• Immigrant status.

Examples of how culture influences behavior are:

• A Russian woman who has only been in the United States for a month and does not yet understand English will behave differently than a Russian woman who was born and raised in the United States even if she were raised learning Russian customs and language.
• People of all cultures have a "comfort zone" that determines how close they allow someone they don't know well to stand next to them. If someone gets too close, they feel uncomfortable. Cultures such as those in South American countries have a "small" comfort zone. If someone whose culture has a "wide" comfort zone meets with someone from South America who stands too close, the behavior of the South American may be incorrectly interpreted as being aggressive.
Cultural diversity refers to the differences in the ways of life between cultural groups and within cultural groups.

All cultural groups have customs, normal behaviors, beliefs, superstitions, and language that guide how they live, make decisions, face a crisis, communicate, structure their society, prepare food and eat, celebrate holidays, and dress.

Prejudice is a premature judgment or attitude about a person or group that is not based on facts.

Stereotyping is the over-simplification and over-generalization of views about individuals or groups of people because they belong to a specific religion, race, nationality or other group.