



BALANCE

Employee Assistance Program Newsletter
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The EAP is a professional and confidential counseling service available to you and your family to help resolve personal problems before they affect your health, family or job. There is no cost to you or members of your family for services provided by the EAP.

In those cases where referrals are necessary, they can often be made to prescreened professionals or community organizations whose charges may be covered within the allowances of your health insurance. Call **845-638-8880** to arrange an appointment with an EAP specialist.

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From the Director

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Today in the U.S. we experience more diversity than ever before. With this increasing diversity it is necessary for us to practice social acceptance within our communities and with our families. Acceptance prepares all of us for the multi-cultural life of the 21st century. Quite simply, if we do not embrace diversity and practice social acceptance, we are without the skills needed to be viable in today's world.

Since acceptance or *harmony* in differences is a critical topic, we have dedicated this issue of BALANCE to addressing it. We will discuss workplace diversity, bias and intolerance to differences learned at home and how to accept and appreciate differences in the world's cultures and values. We will also explore opposite notions of social acceptance and sensitivity including racism, sexism, homophobia, and micro-aggressions.

We will discuss acceptance as a way of *thinking, feeling, and acting* that allows for our unique individuality, offers respect for those unlike ourselves and provides us the skills needed to live together amicably and peacefully. In our world today, teaching and practicing social acceptance and humility, and becoming culturally competent is a responsibility each of us must embrace.

"The highest result of education is tolerance."

Helen Keller

Cultural Sensitivity and Competence in the Workplace

Given the exponential growth of diversity in the work force, cultural sensitivity has become an essential competency in the workplace. The term “cultural competence” refers to the ability to work effectively with people from a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. These include employers, supervisors, coworkers, and patrons/customers.

Embracing diversity enhances one’s ability to see things from new and different perspectives and to respond thoughtfully to others’ unique differences. For instance, racial, ethnic, and cultural disparities are clearly documented in health care. People of diverse backgrounds suffer disproportionately from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and every form of cancer. Understanding patient’s diverse cultures – their values, traditions, history, and institutions – is not simply political correctness, it is integral to eliminating health care disparities and providing high-quality care. It influences the way patients respond to medical services and preventative interventions and impacts the way caregivers deliver those services.

Exploring the meaning and place of values in your work can assist you in seeing the range of values that others hold, and the variety of reasons people have for their beliefs. It also increases your understanding that people can hold values quite different from yours and be equally thoughtful and caring in their reasoning. Even when individuals have similar values, they may have different perspectives and reasons for having them. Our culture (values, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and patterns of thinking) governs our behavior, influences our interactions with others, and has an impact on our productivity in the workplace.

Your work cannot be free of values. You model your own and your community’s values every day through your actions (and inaction). All human interactions transmit values in some way – through how you dress, move, relate to others, and communicate. It requires us to examine how values affect our interactions with others with whom we work. Most importantly, moving us forward in our respect for and sensitivity to our workplace diversity.

Everyone has certain biases, and everyone stereotypes from time to time. Therefore, developing cultural sensitivity and competence is an ongoing, lifelong process of recognizing and addressing these biases by being flexible and seeking reliable sources of information involving those who are different from you.

If you would like to know more about cultural sensitivity and competence, contact the EAP at **845-638-8880** or email MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

References

Cross, T. L., Bazron, B. J., Dennis, K. W., & Isaacs, M. R. (Eds.). (1989). *Effective services for minority children who are severely emotionally Disturbed*.

Cross, T. L. (1996). Developing a knowledge base to support cultural competence.

Cultural and Language Barriers in the Workplace. Charolette-Mecklenburg Workforce Development, February 2002

Developing Cultural Diversity. Court Appointed Special Advocates

Improving Patient Care: Cultural Competence. American Academy of Family Physicians (October 2000)



When Opinion Formulates Prejudice

An opinion is a personal interpretation of information that is affected by one's feelings, values, and experiences. Opinions are many times lacking objectivity, as they are subject to generalization, oversimplification, exaggeration and inaccurate facts. As a result, an individual's opinions can stand in the way of their ability to view things in a neutral way and lead to biased or prejudiced beliefs and opinions. Research shows that enhancing knowledge, reducing anxiety, and increasing empathy and perspective towards individuals who we see as different will lessen our tendency towards prejudicial thinking.

Below are some of the more common types of prejudice:

- Racism: The belief that some groups are inherently superior or inferior to others based on race or racial characteristics.
- Classism: a biased outlook towards an individual or group based on their socioeconomic status or class origin.
- Sexual Discrimination: Bias based on misconception that an individual is inferior or superior because of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Religious Discrimination: Prejudice based on one's religious group, beliefs or practices such as Islamophobia or anti-Semitism.
- Ableism: Prejudice based on one's limitation, difference, or impairment in physical, mental, or sensory capacity or ability.
- Ageism: To hold negative views of an individual or group based on one's age.
- Xenophobia: Fear of what is perceived to be foreign. This can result in prejudice towards foreigners and other societies/cultures.

It's hard for most individuals to see their prejudice without external evaluation; an honest self-assessment can serve as an opportunity to see firsthand the extent of one's prejudice and help to provide a more objective view.

If you would like more information about opinion formulating prejudice, contact the EAP at **845-638-8880** or email MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.



Self Assessment

Take a moment to complete the confidential self-assessment below to determine your personal level of bias.

Self-Assessment:

1. Rate yourself on the following criteria. Try to be as honest as possible.
2. When you've completed the checklist, make a list of areas you think need improvement.
3. Create specific goals for becoming more non-discriminatory based on your responses.

Discriminatory Behavior:

Rate yourself. Use rating scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)

1. I'm committed to respecting all people, even those that are different than me.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I recognize I'm a product of my background; my way isn't the only way.
1 2 3 4 5
3. I'm aware of my prejudices and consciously try to control my assumptions about people.
1 2 3 4 5
4. I regularly assess my strengths and weaknesses in the area of diversity, and I consciously try to improve myself.
1 2 3 4 5
5. I avoid stereotyping and generalizing about a person based on their group identity, gender, etc
1 2 3 4 5
6. I am aware of, and can explore and discuss with comfort, issues of racism and pluralism.
1 2 3 4 5
7. I am open to having someone of another race point out ways in which my behavior may be insensitive.
1 2 3 4 5
8. I consciously monitor my environment in my home, my work, and surrounding community for bias content.
1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel free to ask persons who are using discriminatory language and behavior to refrain and am comfortable stating my reasons.
1 2 3 4 5
10. I am comfortable giving constructive criticism to someone of another race, gender, age or physical ability.
1 2 3 4 5

Sources:

<http://www.bedfordchamber.org/pubs/selfassesmment.pdf>

http://www.adl.org/education/bias_language/Personal_Self_Assessment_Checklist.pdf

Pettigrew, T., & Tropp, L. (2008). How does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Meta-analytic tests of three mediators. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38(6), 922-934. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.504>

Celebrating Diversity in the Workplace

More than ever, a workplace is a diverse collection of individuals proud of whom they are: their gender, their sexual orientation, their religion, their racial and ethnic background, and all the other components that make an individual unique. One of the challenges of the workplace is how to help unify diverse individuals to work as a team. Organizations that don't possess effective teams fail. Hence, failing to embrace diversity can have serious costs and implications for the organization.



Why is it important to celebrate diversity?

- We are all diverse people. Accepting our differences, as well as our common interests, helps unite and educate us.
- Through each other's diversity we become more aware of our own. We gain a sense of pride for the diversity of our own and other's culture.
- Understanding people and their backgrounds is crucial to personal and organizational growth.
- We understand and appreciate each other's culture much more when we spend time together, personally and professionally.
- Knowledge is the key to sensitivity and cultural humility and competence.
- Diversity is strength.

Here are some ways to celebrate diversity in the workplace and bring individuals together:

- Hang a world map in the main office/hallway and have each staff member pinpoint their birthplace.
- Organize an intercultural potluck lunch and invite employees to write a short description of the food they contributed so that others can learn about the dish and the culture.
- Create a Learn at Lunch Day Series where those who wish can share an aspect of their culture not usually known.
- Acknowledge major religious holidays and celebrations, perhaps combining them with a lunch and learn.
- Count the number of languages spoken in your office/department and post them.
- We all carry an invisible backpack of history that we don't see. Invite staff to share their story in a newsletter or bulletin.
- Ask if diverse staff members would like to organize a cooking demo at lunch and prepare a traditional or common food item from their country of origin.

If you would like to know more about celebrating diversity within your workgroup, consider contacting the EAP for confidential consultation, ideas, and support at **845-638-8880** or email us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

Understanding Microaggressions

Microaggressions are behaviors that stem from stereotypes of specific groups of persons based on pre-conceived biases. Most often they are brief and verbal, although they can be behavioral or environmental as well. These transgressions can be intentional or unintentional and sometimes even well-meaning. However, to the receiver they are experienced as negative, (often racial) messages based on assumptions about the receiver.

Research into microaggressions has found that these race-based interactions and assumptions, which can include slights, exclusions, avoidance and even unfair treatment, are not only stressful, but can be demoralizing and threaten the mental and physical health of the receiver.

Microaggressions have two parts; one is the **conscious** communication of the initiator, which is often intended to be a surface compliment, the second is the **unconscious** message the microaggression sends. Addressing the unconscious message requires what researcher Derald Wing Sue describes as “micro interventions”.

Micro interventions initiated by the receiver, or another ally, need to underscore the message within the microaggression that the receiver has experienced. Sue further indicates that addressing these interactions involves 3 strategies:

1. **Make the invisible, visible.** Make the initiator aware that they have been offensive.
2. **Educate the initiator.** To do so, you must move away from the intention, as often microaggressions are unintentional. Instead, focus on the impact of the comment and its significance to allow the initiator to understand how it may have caused pain.
3. **Disarm the microaggression.** Move away from the problematic remark itself and instead communicate to the initiator how and why it is offensive or harmful.

Incidents of microaggressions which deny racialized experiences include comments such as:

- “When I look at you, I don’t see color”
- “I’m not a racist, I have several black friends”
- “You speak English very well”
- “There is only one race, the human race”
- “As a woman I know what you go through as a racial minority”
- “Everyone has equal opportunities for achievement”
- Examples of microaggressions that involve behavior include:
- A faculty member of color is mistaken for a service worker
- A female physician is mistaken for a nurse
- An instructor tends to call on male students more frequently than females
- A heterosexual man who socializes with his female peer’s more than his male peer’s is labeled as gay

The ability to notice these interactions requires educating oneself about the experiences of diverse groups of people. Consequently, if someone tells you a remark you made was harmful, be open to the criticism and thank them for bringing it to your attention; receive it as an opportunity for growth. Rather than becoming defensive receive it with humility and apologize. In the event you don’t understand why what you said was wrong ask what part you got wrong and why; inquire, listen and lean in. If you’d like more information involving microaggressions contact the EAP at **845-638-8880** or email us at MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org

References:

www.ncbi.nlm.gov/pmc/articles/ www.cnn.com/2020/06/05/health/racial-microaggressions-examples-responses-wellness
Sue, Derald Wing, Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation, Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Suggestions to Mitigate Racial Stress

Racial stress refers to the emotional, physical, and psychological responses to racial tension and discrimination. Racial stress can sometimes make it difficult to take care of basic needs as these experiences often build on one another. The development of a positive individual and cultural identity however is important to overall well-being. Having a strong racial and cultural identity, along with advocacy, are protective factors against discrimination and help to reduce overall racial stress. Below are suggestions for mitigating racial stress:



Stay physically and psychologically healthy. Try to stay physically active, taking 10-20 minutes each day for meditation or exercise. Limit your media intake, including social media and the news. Media can be a significant source of racial stress, so control when and how much information you take in.

Build and/or access your support network. Connect with individuals and/or organizations that affirm your background and culture. Connecting with those who share similar experiences and feelings will help to combat racial stress by reducing feelings of isolation. If spirituality plays a significant role in your life, connect with your congregation and spiritual leaders through participation in their events.

Incorporate cultural foods, activities, books, and other traditions. Taking the time to reflect on and promote your culture will increase feelings of pride. Listen to music, access podcasts, and cook traditional foods to enhance this feeling.

Give yourself permission to feel and reflect. All feelings of injustice are valid and acceptable. Take time and space to process your experiences which will allow for the opportunity to choose a response. This is better than having involuntary reactions. Utilize coping strategies such as journaling to help express your reactions.

Focus changes on a micro level. Focusing on change at a larger scale may feel overwhelming. Instead, organize those closest to you, including family members, friends, or neighbors. Remember that each moment of advocacy is important and even the smallest of changes can have a significant impact.

Seek out counseling when needed. Connect with a counselor or therapist who can assist you with processing your feelings and experiences. This will help you develop coping skills that reflect your cultural values. Finding a counselor who you feel connected to through shared experiences can help to deepen the therapeutic process.

If you or a loved one is experiencing racial stress and would like more information, or resources please reach out to the EAP at **845-638-8880** or email MNH-EAP@montefiorenyack.org.

Resources:

Surviving & Resisting Hate: A toolkit for people of color. Dr. Hector Y. Adames & Dr. Nayeli Y. Chavez-Duenas

Racial Stress and Self-care: Parent Tip Tool. Resilience, apa.org.