



# Cultural Awareness

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that Australia is a “fast-changing, ever-expanding, culturally diverse nation”. According to the 2021 Census, the country's population has more than 250 ancestries and over 350 spoken languages.

With this in mind, we are all responsible for ensuring each one of us experiences a safe, inclusive, and supportive community. We are responsible for creating a community that embraces and accepts who we are, not just in the ways that we are alike, but also in the ways we are not.

## What is Culture?

Culture is that which shapes us and our ways of life. Culture can be made up of language, beliefs, religion, values, norms, customs, and behaviours. It informs our identity – both individually and collectively – and influences our behaviour, choices, and actions.

Culture is unique to us as individuals, based on our singular interpretation of our cultural experiences. And yet it is our shared experience of culture that binds us on a communal level.

There are several key steps we must take if we are to create a culturally safe environment for all individuals. Each step is of great importance and deserves its appropriate time and attention.

## Cultural Awareness

Cultural Awareness is a person's understanding of the individual differences between themselves and others. It involves the conscious acceptance of the values and beliefs held by others. Cultural awareness also involves our individual values and beliefs and their impacts on how we view and engage with the world around us.

Increasing your cultural awareness is a simple step you can start today. Get to know the people in your community. Abandon your preconceived notions, recognise everyone as individuals, and start communicating with others. Build your cultural awareness from those around you and fine-tune your interpersonal skills by truly connecting with others.

Self-reflection is also vital to increasing your cultural awareness. What are your values and beliefs? How have they been informed by your experiences? How have they been informed by your country of origin or your parents and grandparents? Seek to understand the integral impact of culture on who you are and how you view the world.

## Cultural Competency

Cultural competence refers to the daily choices we make and the actions we take to strive toward creating a culturally respectful environment.



Self-respect and respect for others serve as building blocks in creating this environment, where differences are appreciated and celebrated, where there is safety in self-expression, and where equality in opportunity is possible.

Increasing your cultural competency involves exploring how you engage with people from a culture other than your own. For example, how do you effectively communicate across cultures? This step may include sitting with some challenging realisations about yourself. Remember you have choice and control over where to from here.

### **Cultural Safety**

Cultural safety serves to strengthen our communities and creates new opportunities, new growth, and new development through open-mindedness and curiosity.

The emphasis on cultural safety is empowerment. Imagine a community where you and those around you could show up as yourself and themselves. In a community where no one has to concern themselves with explaining who they are or placing others at ease through denial of their identity. Where everyone feels at ease, knowing they are respected, valued, and appreciated. This is a culturally safe community.

Sociologist Dr Caleb Rosado identified seven actions involved in multiculturalism that are key to cultural safety:

# Over 250

ancestries make up Australia's population, speaking over 350 languages.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *2021 Census: Nearly half of Australians have a parent born overseas.*

- Recognising the abundant diversity of cultures
- Respecting the differences in cultures
- Acknowledging the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions
- Valuing what other cultures offer
- Encouraging the contribution of diverse groups
- Empowering people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential by being critical of their own biases
- Celebrating rather than just tolerating the differences to bring about unity through diversity.

These actions may guide you on a day-to-day basis, supporting your efforts towards a culturally safe community for all.

### **Final Words**

The strive towards cultural safety is a continuous one, one in which we may have to self-reflect and perhaps address some uncomfortable truths. You are not alone in this journey. Support is always available to you here at Acacia EAP.