OBJECTIVES
1. To identify how heritage influences attitudes and behaviors.
2. To discuss the importance of respecting cultural differences.
3. To select a few ways to demonstrate cultural awareness.

BACKGROUND
Our heritage influences everything from our values and beliefs, to our thoughts, communication style and behavior. Heritage refers to ethnicity, ancestry, religion and culture.

- **ETHNICITY** is a common way to define people by ethnic group. The five ethnicities that are most identified are:
  1. African Americans or black people
  2. Asians
  3. Europeans, Caucasians or white people
  4. Latinos or Hispanics
  5. Native Americans

- **ANCESTRY** reflects where our family members originated prior to immigrating to the United States. For example, people may be of German, Israel, or Russian descent.

- **RELIGION** refers to a belief system based on a higher power, such as Catholicism, Hinduism, Judaism, Protestantism and Islam.

- **CULTURE** represents shared values, learned beliefs and behaviors that cut across ethnicity, ancestry and religious lines. For example, people with disabilities and even sexual orientation represent different cultures within the U.S.

Did you know?

- **CULTURAL AWARENESS** requires an understanding of our self and others.
- **CULTURAL SENSITIVITY** involves curiosity, empathy and respect, rather than making value judgments.

“In people’s attempts to be culturally sensitive, it seems like we are become less sensitive. If I hear one more person tell me they see me and not my skin color, I am going to scream. You better see me as a black woman as it defines who I am and my life experiences.” – Teddie, age 78
Due to the wide range of backgrounds and lifestyles, a “one size fits all” approach is not an option. One’s customs, differences and preferences must be acknowledged and respected to ensure safety and well-being.

SENSITIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT
The following questions can help you determine your level of sensitivity.

- How accepting are you of people of a different heritage or background?
- What stereotypes and prejudices are associated with the ethnic group with which you identify?
- How are your beliefs, values and outlook on life, different from people of other backgrounds?
- What is your attitude toward people, especially older people who are difficult to understand because they have a thick accent or have trouble speaking English?

There are cultural norms that need to be respected. Being more sensitive to people who are different from us can help us care for and support them in ways that are consistent with their values, beliefs and preferences. Not being respectful of cultural norms can be rude, hurtful and disgraceful.

Did you know?
- Even within a particular ethnic group, there are differences. For example, Latino or Hispanic people represent more than 20 different countries, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic and South or Central America.
- Asians comprise people from China, Korea, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Some beliefs and behaviors are broad and span multiple ethnicities, while others are specific to a particular subgroup.

INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL BELIEFS
It is important to be aware and sensitive to the ways of other cultures. For example, etiquette in terms of personal space, physical touch, eye contact and hand gestures vary from one culture to the next. Every day, try to learn something new about a culture other than your own. Keep an open mind and give others the respect you would expect for yourself.

If you are not sure of cultural etiquette, ask people for input, watch for clues and follow their lead. For example, while eye contact is common in face-to-face interactions, consider these differences:
- European Americans typically use direct eye contact when speaking with people.
- Some Native Americans consider direct eye-contact impolite or disrespectful.
- Latinos may view eye contact as a sign of aggression.
- Many Asians consider eye contact inappropriate between men and women.
The eye-contact example is just one of the many things we need to be sensitive to. We encourage you to take the time to learn about the customs and values of the people that you interact with the most.

For more information
To learn more about different ethnicities and cultures, consider the following resources:

- Center for Aging with Dignity at the University of Cincinnati’s College of Nursing – “Ethnogeriatrics” – GeroGems article under the Generational Diversity and Sensitivity section. [http://nursing.uc.edu/centers/aging_with_dignity/exploring_aging/gero_gems.html](http://nursing.uc.edu/centers/aging_with_dignity/exploring_aging/gero_gems.html).

You might also visit: [www.transculturalcare.net/ethnogeriatrics.htm](http://www.transculturalcare.net/ethnogeriatrics.htm).

ASIAN CULTURES - EXAMPLE
The following are examples of Asian etiquette. Generally, Asian cultures believe:

- Older people are to be respected, revered and honored.
- Younger people typically bow when greeting their elders.
- Adult children are expected to take care of their parents as they age.

Some Asian people place a high value on personal space and prefer to avoid physical touch. Waving, exposing the bottom of your shoes, pointing with your fingers and a gesture like ‘thumbs up’ can be disrespectful and insulting. In addition, some believe the left hand is considered unclean. Instead, use your right hand to pick-up or pass things.

“Don’t impose your values and beliefs on me because mine may be quite different than yours. My values and beliefs reflect my heritage and the way I was raised. For my people, a nursing home is not something we would consider. We feel a responsibility to take care of our own.” – Vernon, age unknown
In regards to sensitivity, consider the difference between the Golden and Platinum rules. The Platinum Rule is not what WE think they want, but what THEY actually want.

- **GOLDEN RULE**: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- **PLATINUM RULE**: “Do unto others as they would want done to them.”

“If you have a question about my values or the customs of my people it is okay to ask me. I’d rather you ask me than offended me by something you do or say, even if it is unintentional.” – Dorothy, age unknown

The following two models can help you develop more culturally competent behaviors:

**A.W.A.R.E.**

The AWARE model, developed by Allyse D. Sturdivant and based on material originated by Noel A. Day of Polaris Research & Development. It is intended to guide cross-cultural communications:

- **A** is for ACCEPT someone’s behavior without judging it based on what that behavior means in your culture.
- **W** is for WONDER what someone’s behavior means in his or her culture, rather than what it means in your culture.
- **A** is for ASK what it means to the person, showing a respectful interest.
- **R** is for RESEARCH the person’s culture so you are able to place their behavior in the context of their cultural world view.
- **E** is for EXPLAIN what their behavior means in your culture. Then demonstrate or describe your culture’s behaviors for similar feelings or meanings, so they can learn new behaviors that will help them function in your culture.

**L.E.A.R.N.**

Elois Ann Berlin and William C. Fowkes, Jr., developed the LEARN model to help professionals practice culturally sensitive health care. It can also be used by social service providers, first responders and others serving and safeguarding older people. The steps are as follows:

- **L** is for LISTEN with empathy and understanding to the person’s view of the situation.
- **E** is for ELICIT culturally relevant information and explain your view of the situation.
- **A** is for ACKNOWLEDGE the similarities and differences between your points of view.
- **R** is for RECOMMEND options/alternatives and RESPECT the person and their choices.
- **N** is for NEGOTIATE agreement.
KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER
Consider the following as you interact with older people:

1. Trying to be funny by making ‘jokes’ or comments about others can be hurtful and offensive. It is insensitive to engage in such behavior.

2. Being sensitive to generational and cultural differences involves empathy or “walking a mile in another’s shoes.” Many older people may not share the same values, beliefs, attitudes or experiences. We need to be sensitive to how we interact with and respect others.

3. Be aware of and recognize differences. A “one-size fits all” approach does not respect and appreciate diversity.

4. People feel respected when asked about their opinions. Simply asking “what do you think?” may open up a whole world of understanding and appreciation. Sharing stories is a great way to connect with others and discover similarities, regardless of differences.

FINAL REFLECTIONS
We close this final module with some excerpts from the LOOK CLOSER, SEE ME poem.

“What do you see, people, what do you see?
What are you thinking, when you look at me?”

Do you see and think diversity and sensitivity?

We close with the last two lines of the poem:

“I think of the years all too few — gone too fast, and accept the stark fact that nothing can last. So open your eyes, people, open and see,
Not a crabby old woman, LOOK CLOSER, SEE ME.”
The *LOOK CLOSER, SEE ME* Generational Diversity and Sensitivity training program (
[www.LookCloserSeeMe.org](http://www.LookCloserSeeMe.org)) was made possible by a grant from an anonymous foundation and the financial support of Marjorie Motch, an active 87-year-old member of the University of Cincinnati College of Nursing Board of Advisors. Thank you to the many older people and representatives from various cultural communities who actively participated in this project by reviewing the training materials and sharing their thoughts, opinions and comments. Thanks also to Arlene de Silva for sharing her cultural perspective and photos from her book *Faces in Aging* - [www.FacesInAging.org](http://www.FacesInAging.org).

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Center for Aging with Dignity
– (513) 558-2428 | [www.SafeAfter60.org](http://www.SafeAfter60.org)

University of Cincinnati College of Nursing
– (513) 558-5500 | [www.Nursing.UC.edu](http://www.Nursing.UC.edu)