



Cultural  
competency

# What is cultural competency?

- Skills that help you interact with other people with different backgrounds and experiences
- The goal is not to change your values or beliefs but to help you work with and help people who may be different than you



# Why is cultural competency important in dentistry?



- Patients from different backgrounds may feel intimidated and unsure when seeking care
- Cultural barriers can impede access to care and contribute to poor health outcomes
- Your goal is to provide dental care in a supportive, nurturing environment
- Being culturally aware and sensitive to other people's worldviews allows you to better assist them

# 5 factors affecting access to care



1. Race and ethnicity

2. Cultural beliefs

3. Religious beliefs

4. Language

5. Low health literacy

# 1. Race and ethnicity



- Racial/ethnic demographics of U.S.
  - 57.8% White
  - 18.7% Hispanic
  - 12.4% Black
  - 6% Asian
- **Microaggressions** —unconscious messages that may demean a person based on their race
  - Saying you understand a person because you “don’t see race” or “have a friend” of the same race
  - Assuming a person doesn’t understand English because they are of another race or ethnicity
- **Don’t make any assumption about a person based on their race**

## 2. Cultural beliefs

- Cultural beliefs may affect patients' behaviors and attitudes toward dental health and dental care
- Examples of different cultural beliefs:
  - Discussing a disease or health disorder will cause it to occur
  - Rubbing the body with an object such as a coin can draw out some illnesses
  - Not following dietary advice if it doesn't conform to the foods or cooking methods they use
- Understand what a person's beliefs are and how that guides their behavior and decision making



# 3. Religious beliefs



- Religious belief can influence diet, medicine and modesty
- Examples of some religious differences:
  - Some people believe spiritual powers can affect the body and mind and cure disease
  - Women in some religions may need to see a female provider
- Give patients a chance to discuss their religious and spiritual needs and tailor their evaluation and treatment to meet those needs

## 4. Language

- 21.9% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home
- Low English proficiency may make it difficult for patients to make an appointment or discuss their dental problems
- Use Delta Dental's Language Assistance Program, which has phone assistance for enrollees in over 170 languages
- Delta Dental can provide on-site interpretation if you call 72 hours in advance
- Have forms and informational materials translated into the languages most relevant to your practice so they're available to patients





# 5. Health literacy



- People need to understand basic health information and services so they can make the right decisions
- Health literacy has nothing to do with actual literacy but affects how well people can understand the information you give them
- Use visuals such as photographs of the patient's teeth to illustrate diagnoses
- Have the patient repeat care instructions back to you so you know they understand them

# Ways to communicate effectively

- Speak slowly
- Chunk information in bits — no more than three things to remember at one time
- Be careful with eye contact, physical touch or gestures — they can be interpreted differently among different cultures
- Keep written materials at a seventh-grade reading level or lower
- Use plain language — no medical jargon
  - Cavities, not caries; gum disease, not periodontal disease
  - Make sure scheduling an appointment and completing forms are simple
- Learn common phrases in languages common in your area (“Does your tooth hurt?” “Do you floss?”)
- Provide written summaries and instructions that patients can take home so they don’t forget

Thank you!

Visit our website for additional resources:

<https://www1.deltadentalins.com/dentists/resources.html>