



## Six Top Tips cont..

**5. Utilise natural support systems for young people.** In a number of cultures extended family have an important role as mentors. To maximise the positive mentoring experiences of these youth, programs should explore ways of utilising and supporting these ties. Volunteer mentors could for example work with natural mentors to strengthen social support networks for young people. During cultural competency training, volunteer mentors could be trained to work with mentees' family members, especially with cultures that highly value family relationships.

**6. Consider developing culturally specific mentoring programs.** Mentoring programs should attempt to be culturally consistent in their design and activities with the lives of targeted youth. In some instances this may merit the design of programs that are geared specifically towards the needs of a given cultural or ethnic group. Programs that reflect an integrated and comprehensive attention to the cultural background of a given population of young people in this manner may yield dividends in both youth outcomes and acceptance in support of programs within the surrounding community

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This fact sheet will help you understand a few of the basics of cross-cultural mentoring



### References & Further Information

- Youth Mentoring Network—[www.youthmentoring.org.au](http://www.youthmentoring.org.au)
- Centre for Multicultural Youth—<http://www.cmy.net.au/Home>
- Centre for Multicultural Youth: useful links—<http://www.cmy.net.au/UsefulLinks#YouthParticipation>
- Calendar of Cultural and Religious Days—<http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia/>
- Cultural and religious days of significance - <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/>
- Kelley, C. & Meyers, L. 1995. *CCAL Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory*. Chicago, IL Pearson Reid.
- Liang, B., Tracy, A., Kauh, T., Taylor, C., & Williams, L. 2006. *Mentoring Asian and Euro-American college women*. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 34, 143-154.
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- Sawrikar, P., Griffiths, M. and Muir, K. 2008. *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Young People and Mentoring: The Case of the Horn of Africa Young People in Australia*. Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Retrieved September, 2010

# Introduction to cross-cultural mentoring

Culture influences virtually every aspect of life, from your general perspective or outlook on the world to the understanding of what constitutes socially acceptable behaviour. Culture also has a broad explanation of "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations". And with cross-cultural mentoring the challenge begins with the very perception of the task as 'mentoring' is perceived differently in different cultures and even a definition of mentoring will vary cross-culturally. When

working in a cross-cultural mentoring program it is important to understand some basic concepts to successfully implement a cross-cultural mentoring program. Here we identify and explain a number of the concepts.

### Definitions

**Race:** Refers to the biological, genetic heritage of a group.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to groups of individuals who have a common culture, nationality, history or religion.

**Culture:** Although there is no agreed upon definition, cultural refers to the shared patterns of society.

It is important to understand the basic definitions of race, ethnicity and culture because individuals often assume that people of the same race are also of the same ethnicity or culture. Awareness of the distinction between race and ethnicity and ethnic or cultural differences is a relevant consideration with respect to both mentors and young people within relationships. For example, the mentor might make assumptions about the cultural values of his or her mentee just because they share the same race, which could have a negative impact on the quality of their communication. At the program level, it is important for you to be aware of the nuances of race, ethnicity and culture, which will help you in making better matches and better training your mentors on young peoples' needs.

The effective, culturally aware mentor who takes into account the cultural tendencies of the mentee and attempts to provide responses that are both faithful to the mentor's natural tendencies as well as sensitive to the mentee's cultural expectations, may increase mentoring effectiveness. Also and in addition to

understand these definitions it is a good idea to explore the possibility of an intercultural induction session in which both mentee and mentor first learn more about each other's cultural expectations before finalizing their mentoring agreement. Ultimately, a mentor must begin by learning to see the world as the young people that they mentor do.

#### **Cultural values**

**Individualistic cultures:** Individualistic cultures tend to have a more diverse population, and are characterized with emphasis on personal achievements, and a rational assessment of both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of relationships with others. Highly individualistic cultures include the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Italy.

*Ultimately, a mentor must begin by learning to see the world as the young people that they mentor do.*

**Collectivist cultures:** A collective culture is one in which people tend to view themselves as members of groups (families, work units, tribes, nations), and usually consider the needs of the group to be more important than the needs of individuals. Collectivism tends to be valued more strongly by Indigenous cultures, African, Asian and Latino cultural groups.

The difference in these cultural values may increase the likelihood of cross cultural differences. Theoretically, collectivism and individualism have the potential to directly influence the quality and effectiveness of mentoring relationships experienced by ethnic minority youth. This includes the level of trust in the relationship (cultural mistrust), the responsiveness of the mentee to mentor guidance, and mentors' ability to be a satisfactory role model of mentees holding different value systems.

Individualism and collectivism may also impact on the prevailing concepts of mentoring that are emphasised by programs. With few exceptions, most programs have reflected a view of mentoring as a one-one relationship between a youth and an unrelated volunteer. This concept can be viewed as a Westernised idea based around individualism whereas in collectivist cultures multiple individuals are seen as being involved in the well-being of a child. This program design may therefore be limited in their potential because they fail to reflect the values of collectivist cultures. Therefore, for some cultures, programs that seek to actively support mentoring received from multiple individuals in the youth's existing network including immediate and extended family could prove more effective.

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## Six Top Tips

**1. Do not match pairs on race/ethnicity only.** The combination of factors that contribute to successful mentoring relationships is complex and transcends racial/ethnic characteristics. Simply matching by race/ethnicity appears to be insufficient. Practitioners should consider the interests of mentors/mentee and factors such as mentors' cultural sensitivity and mentees' levels of cultural identity.

**2. Use assessments of cultural factors to target support.** Factors such as cultural mistrust, cultural values, and racial/ethnic identity can be assessed and used to target and direct support for mentoring relationships within programs. For young people in cross-race relationships who exhibit high levels of cultural mistrust, it may be beneficial to provide extra support to the matches to promote more effective mentoring and prevent premature terminations.

**3. Measure cultural values at the beginning.** Measuring cultural values in the screening phase of the recruitment process may be particularly useful. In this way, program staff can better match mentors that specifically address the cultural contexts and values of the young person.

**4. Provide cultural competency training to mentors.** Research highlights the manner in which feedback is provided in mentoring relationships as an important consideration from a cultural perspective. Simply providing suggestions and weaknesses may lead ethnic minority mentees to feel that they have been judged because of racial bias. Mentors should be trained on how to adequately provide feedback that will contribute to the well-being of mentees and the establishment of trust in the relationship. Mentors should also learn about mentees' culture in order to understand their experiences and foster trusting relationships.



More information for MENTORS can be found on the **AUSTRALIAN YOUTH MENTORING NETWORK** Website under the Information for Mentors page [youthmentoring.org.au/info-for-mentors.html](http://youthmentoring.org.au/info-for-mentors.html)