

Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication An interactive tool for developing awareness, knowledge, and skills

<https://www.norquest.ca/NorquestCollege/media/pdf/centres/intercultural/CriticalIncidentsBooklet.pdf>

Building a cultural profile

Use the following questions to look at various elements of culture. Pick one set of questions and have participants talk about them with a partner. Then ask the participants to look at the critical incidents and quote cards and explore other perspectives about each. Ask participants to speculate about how some of their friends from other cultures might answer the questions below. This activity is intended to motivate self-awareness of learners' (and the facilitator's) own cultural values and orientations.

Use these questions to explore the ideas and underlying values and beliefs.

1. Family

- Describe what the term "family" means to you.
- When you talk about your family, whom does that include?
- Do you put relationships or tasks first?

2. Community

- Describe what the term "community" means to you.
- Were you brought up in a community of people from your ethnic background?
- Do you now live in a community of people from your ethnic background?

3. Work

- Why did you choose the work you are doing now or are planning to do?
- Is this work similar to the work of your parents or grandparents?
- What do you consider to be rewarding work?
- What do you value at work? (e.g., independence, money, friendship, etc.)
- How do you view authority? For example, if a boss asks a subordinate to help with a task outside of work and outside of his or her job description, what would you advise?
- How are you expected to dress for work?

4. Customs

- What language do you use with your family, at work, and in your social environment?
- What occasions and festivals do you celebrate?
- What foods do you like to eat?
- Have you always eaten these foods?
- Does your culture of origin have special forms of address or titles for people who are older, have higher status, or special professions?

5. Sense of space

- How do you like to be greeted?
- How close or distant do you like people to stand when next to you?
- What voice pitches and volume and what speed of spoken communication are you comfortable with?
- What gestures and body language do you find challenging or confusing? For example, do you make eye contact with some people but not others?
- What does eye contact mean to you?
- How do you define privacy? What kinds of questions do you consider to be an invasion of privacy?

6. Time

- What does time mean for you?
- What are some proverbs about time in your language? i.e. "A stitch in time saves nine." "The early bird catches the worm."
- What is "late" for you?
- What do you typically do if you are late?
- How do you react if someone else is late?
- Do you feel that time is plentiful or scarce?