

Cultural Sensitivity in Communication:

Communication is a big part of building good relationships, but it can be tricky when people come from different cultures. In this lesson you will understand how culture affects the way people talk and act.

1. What is cultural sensitivity?


Cultural sensitivity is the ability to recognize, understand, and respect cultural differences while communicating. It involves being aware of how your words, actions, and behaviours may be perceived by people from diverse cultural backgrounds.


Importance of Cultural Sensitivity:

- _ Reduces misunderstandings.
- _ Fosters mutual respect and trust.
- _ Enhance relationships in personal and professional settings.

2. Cultural differences in communication:

a) Verbal communication:

 **Language barriers:** non-native speakers may struggle with idioms or jargon.

 **Directs vs. indirect styles:** some cultures value straightforward communication, while others prefer subtlety.

b) Non-verbal communication:

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✚ **Gestures:** a thumbs-up may mean “good” in one culture but be offensive in another.

✚ **Eye contact:** in some cultures, it conveys confidence, while in others, it may be considered disrespectful.

✚ **Personal space:** the acceptable physical distance during conversations varies by culture.

c) Cultural values:

✚ **Time orientation:** some cultures value punctuality, while others are more flexible with time

✚ **Hierarchy and status:** cultures may differ in how they view authority and formality in communication.

3. Barriers to cultural sensitivity:

❖ **Stereotypes and prejudices:** making assumptions based on someone’s cultural background.

❖ **Ethnocentrism:** believing your own culture is superior to others.

❖ **Lack of awareness:** not understanding cultural norms and practices.

4. Strategies for culturally sensitive communication:

i) Be Open and Curious:

- Approach cultural differences with an open mind.
- Be willing to learn from others’ experiences and perspectives.

ii) Practice active listening:

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- Listen carefully to what the other person is saying
- Avoid interrupting or jumping to conclusions

iii) Adapt your communication style:

- Use clear and simple language, especially with non-native speakers.
- Match the tone and formality appropriate to the culture.

iv) Avoid assumptions:

- Don't assume everyone shares your cultural norms.
- When in doubt, ask respectfully.

v) Learn about other cultures:

- Research cultural norms and practices of the people you interact with.
- Be aware of holidays, traditions, and values that may influence behaviour.