



Cultural Awareness

United Institute is committed to providing a multiculturally supportive environment for our learners and staff members. We aim to achieve this by educating our learners and staff members on culturally appropriate communication techniques, as well as acceptable behaviours and actions.

General Cultural Awareness Principles

All cultures have customs, values, and codes of behaviour that are important. These contribute to the cultural diversity we get to cherish in Australia. United Institute will outline the observances, practices and etiquettes of three common cultures in Australia:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – the original people of Australia (both mainland and the 274 islands located north of the mainland);
- Chinese – the fastest growing cultural group in Australia since 2011; and
- Indian – the second fastest growing cultural group in Australia since 2011.

(Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2016)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Respect

Respect and acknowledgement are essential to good working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and it should always be our first priority. This demonstration of respect will make it easier to set up mutual standards of respect and trust and will make it easier for working relationships to take place effectively.

What to call people

It can be offensive to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the incorrect way. Some prefer to be called 'Aboriginal' and others prefer 'Indigenous'. It is always a good idea to try and gauge how people want to be addressed. You can do so by spending some time listening to their conversation, or you can ask if you feel that it won't be offensive. It is generally better to avoid referring to Aboriginal people as Kooris or Murris, or any other name they may use themselves.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Gender protocols

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies still regard some information as specific and sacred to either men or women. The knowledge is sacred and recorded in a way that only men or women can access. Discuss with the learner if there are any aspects of the training that are considered men's or women's business, and if so, make appropriate adjustments in the program.

Communication process

The communication process requires respect, good listening, patience, understanding, checking, clarification and confirmation.

It is important to remember the following when interacting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

Not to assume anything

Be honest, sincere and open-minded

Use simple, clear, plain and appropriate language

Do not mimic Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of speaking (i.e. words, slang, speech or accent)

Never be boastful about your ideas

Do not be too direct as this can be taken as confrontational and/or rude

Do not ask hypothetical questions

Language

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make considerable use of non-verbal signs, especially when discussing direction. These are an integral part of the communication process and should not be ignored. Be sensitive to the use of non-verbal communication cues. The use of silence does not mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not understand. They may be listening, remaining non-committal or waiting for community support. During discussions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may delay expressing a firm opinion, preferring to listen to others' opinions first before offering their own.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

It is common for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to use swear words in their regular vocabulary and in general conversation. Swearing is not considered offensive as it is in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Be aware that if an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person swears, it is important not to take any offence. The only exception to this is if the person swears directly at you. When this happens, it is important to speak to the CEO about this as soon as possible as this behaviour should not be tolerated by anyone.

Providing support

It is important to approach this sensitively and not cause embarrassment or shame to the person by asking them whether or not they can read and/or write. In most cases, the person will ask for assistance if they need it, provided the issue has been approached with sensitivity and respect.

Naming and images of deceased people

Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community may have different protocols regarding naming and displaying images of the deceased. It is best to avoid naming or displaying images of the deceased. If it is important to do so, make sure that you have permission from the person's family and/or community and include a relevant disclaimer. The CEO must be consulted if it is important to name or display images of the deceased, and approval must be given by the CEO.

Welcome to Country

A 'Welcome to Country' is where the Traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Custodians, in most cases the Elders, welcome people to their Land. A non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cannot perform a 'Welcome to Country' as to do so is considered to be rude and disrespectful to the traditional owners and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. This is a significant recognition and is made through a formal process. A 'Welcome to Country' should always occur in the opening ceremony of the event in question, as the first item, and the person or group delivering the 'Welcome to Country' must be remunerated.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Protocols in relation to the performing of a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony are wide and diverse and can vary according to region and locality. A 'Welcome to Country' may consist of a single speech by the representative of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, or it can also include a performance of some description (which varies according to region and locality). Performances can include a Traditional Welcoming Song, a Traditional Dance, a didgeridoo performance, or a combination of any of the aforementioned.

Acknowledgement of Country

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship of traditional owners of the land.

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' can be performed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the Traditional Custodians of the Land and/or Sea where the gathering of participants is being conducted.

An example of 'Acknowledge of Country' is:

'Let us acknowledge that we are meeting on country for which the members and elders of the local Aboriginal community have been custodians for many centuries, and on which Aboriginal people have performed age old ceremonies. We acknowledge their living culture and unique role in the life of this region.'

Chinese

Proper character and behaviour

Traditional Chinese beliefs place a great deal of importance on observing the proper social etiquette and showing good character and behaviour. Chinese people prefer modesty and keeping a low profile, both in regard to their own achievements and status as well as their interactions with others. Chinese people will often downplay their own positions and achievements while emphasising those of others. The average Chinese person will generally not attempt to make waves or to make themselves stand out overtly when compared to others. When praised by strangers or friends, a Chinese person will often downplay an accomplishment or character trait. Those who are not as modest or prefer to claim their own accomplishments can be viewed as rude, proud or braggarts. Chinese people also dislike being touched by strangers. It is not common for Chinese people to touch, hug, lock arms, back slap or make any body contact. You can however greet a Chinese person by using a handshake or a nod.

It is also considered rude to click one's fingers or place feet on a desk or a chair. It is important to be mindful of these behaviours as it can be taken as offense.

Respect

Chinese people place a strong emphasis on respecting the feelings of others, often by not directly refusing a request. Aside from respecting the feelings of others, speaking in a less direct, roundabout manner is also viewed as a proper way to comport oneself, and by talking in this manner, one upholds the socially acceptable idea of how to behave as a cultured individual.

Chinese people place a strong emphasis on respect, and their language reflects this intimately. They are very polite and it is not common for them to be as open with their communication as those from a Western background are.



Chinese

Language

There are many dialects in the Chinese language, with the two most common dialects being Mandarin and Cantonese. It is considered very disrespectful to assume that all Chinese people speak the same dialect.

Lucky colours

The Chinese believe that red, yellow and green are three main lucky colours and white and black are considered unlucky colours.

Red – is believed to bring happiness, beauty, vitality, good luck, success and good fortune. It is widely used during festivals and important events like weddings. Red lanterns adorn businesses and residences, red outfits are worn during weddings and festivals, and red envelopes are stuffed with money and given as gifts during Chinese New Year.

Yellow – is the most important colour from an ancient perspective and symbolises royalty and is reserved for the emperor. Emperors were dressed in yellow imperial robes, rode in yellow carriages, and travelled on yellow paths. Official seals were packaged in yellow fabric.

Green – is the colour of wealth, fertility, regeneration, hope, harmony and growth. Buildings, banks and restaurants in China are often painted in green. Packaging for milk or produce is often in green to indicate that the product is contamination free.



Indian

Family

For generations, India has a prevailing tradition of the joint family system. It is when extended members of a family live together. Usually, the oldest male is the head of the joint Indian family system and he makes most of the important decisions and rules. The other family members are likely to abide by them without question. This is why they are very respectful of their elders and treasure the family structure.

Significance of the cow

The cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism and it is believed to be the mother goddess and brings good fortune and wealth. For this reason, cows are revered in Hindu culture and feeding a cow is seen as an act of worship. It is an offense to consume any beef in mainstream Hindu and Jain society. It is important to be mindful when consuming any beef around Indians as this may be seen as an act of disrespect.

Language

Indians are really inquisitive people and their culture is one where people do anything but mind their own business, often due to a lack of privacy in India and the habit of placing people in the social hierarchy. One should not be surprised or offended if someone asks how much you earn for a living and a host of other intimate questions in the first meeting. It is encouraged to ask the same types of questions in return.

Etiquette

It is not polite to be pointing your finger or feet at people, or touching people or objects with your feet or shoes. If you do so accidentally, one should apologise straight away. It should also be noted that Indians will often touch their head or eyes as a show of apology, and it is a sign of respect to bend down and touch an elder person's feet in India.

It is also considered to be impolite to pass food or objects with your left hand. The left hand is considered to be unclean in India as it is used to perform matters associated with going to the bathroom. Therefore, it is advisable to only use the right hand to pass food or objects.