

MULTI-CULTURAL ASSESSMENTS

Susan Newell, MA, CTRS

Creative Forecasting, Be Our Guest – August, 2003

How well does your activity program incorporate the cultural and religious interests of your residents? Does your activity program reflect individual resident assessments? (OBRA Interpretive Guidelines for Activities asks surveyors to specifically examine these two elements.)










Whatever the setting, assessment is the cornerstone in providing the best program of activities to meet each individual's needs. It is important to assess the physical, mental, and psychosocial abilities and needs of each person, but we shouldn't stop there! Assessing an individual's cultural background as it relates to his interests, lifestyle, habits, routines, and spirituality is vital to understanding and working with that person.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS






How an individual thinks, acts, and responds throughout life is based largely on his cultural background. Culture encompasses the skills, arts, manners, and more pertaining to a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group.

You can incorporate cultural considerations into your current assessment tool or use a separate assessment form. Begin by inquiring about the individual's relationship with any racial, ethnic, religious, and social groups. Then, keeping culture in mind, ask specific questions relating to each person's interests, lifestyle, daily habits, routines, and spirituality.

Some culturally-driven lifestyles, daily habits, and routines will be relatively easy to identify such as

-  Appearance and dress - how we look, what we wear, why we wear it
-  Bathing and hygiene - from baths versus showers to how often clothes are washed
-  Food preferences - what and when we eat, different methods of preparation
-  Geographic considerations - Midwest versus Southern, urban versus rural, language patterns, etc.
-  Holidays and celebrations (not everyone celebrates Christmas or birthdays)
-  History, customs, and traditions - information and actions passed down through generations
-  Recreational pursuits - what is done, with whom, and why
-  Sleep habits - times, where (i.e., bed, floor mat), amount, conditions (i.e., music playing)
-  Spiritual or religious beliefs (spiritual does not necessarily mean religious)

Cultural considerations that are equally important, but perhaps not so obvious, involve

-  Attitudes toward animals - from eating them to playing with them
-  Attitudes about the environment - including use and abuse of natural resources
-  Birth, life, and death beliefs and traditions
-  Family and community structures and dynamics - role and value of each member
-  Important events in the normal rhythm of life - first day of school, first car, etc.

How we work with an individual is further impacted by the following cultural elements

- ✎ Health and medical perceptions and expectations - acceptable methods/types of treatment
- ✎ Interpersonal interactions - communications, decorum, and physical contact
- ✎ Methods of learning and teaching
- ✎ Perceived control of one's environment - individual control versus fate, destiny
- ✎ Perceptions of work and play - individual and group priorities
- ✎ Values system

INTERESTS

Cultural influences can be determined when assessing each individual's current and past interests. Consider examining the person's patterns of social interaction and recreation involvement. Ask, "Who do/did you usually do activities with? What activities do you associate with your cultural background? What interests were passed down from previous generations?" In my family, for example, we learned to polka as soon as we could walk, and pinochle games on Sunday involved four family generations. Ask, "Did you have a pet? If so, what kind? Where was the pet kept?" (Dogs aren't always allowed in the house, not to mention on beds!)

LIFESTYLES, HABITS, AND ROUTINES

Lifestyles, daily habits, and routines help us work effectively with each person; however, I find that these elements rarely get assessed in any detail, yet alone identify cultural influences. Ask the individual to share his routines and contacts with others for each day of a typical week, prior to coming to your facility. **Note:** *If the person is unable or unwilling to communicate with you, ask the person's family and friends.* Include questions about the person's values, perceptions of work and play, and family influences. Next, review the person's activities of daily living prior to coming to your facility. Some other questions to ask are "Do you enjoy any specific ethnic foods? Does anything impact your food choices (i.e., religious considerations)?" To assess interpersonal interactions, observe the individual (and anyone with him) as well as ask questions such as what rules of decorum and propriety does the person adhere to. In addition, observe if he looks you in the eye and if he considers it appropriate to shake hands.

SPIRITUALITY

Culture also impacts the individual's spirituality. Allow the person to define spirituality in his own words. Possible questions include "What does the word 'spiritual' mean to you? Do you believe in a supreme being or higher power? What spiritual or religious beliefs do you adhere to? How do you express your spiritual beliefs or practice your faith? Do you have any specific spiritual routines? Also, try to determine how important spirituality is to the individual and what enables him to cope on a daily basis and handle personal crises.

USING THE INFORMATION

As you discover an individual's cultural background, be sure to write it down. Appropriate information pertaining to interests, lifestyle, habits, routines, and spirituality

should be shared with all staff/volunteers working with the individual. Include specific details in the person's care plan whenever possible.

Contact T.R.-T.I.P.S., Inc. for multiple use Activity/TR Assessments and Interest Questionnaires, Lifestyle/Daily Habits/Routines Questionnaires, Spiritual Assessments, and all of your management, documentation, and recordkeeping needs. Phone/fax: (712) 322-0026, www.trtips.com. CF