

## Connecting Across Cultures

*When we learn how to connect with others as fellow human beings, we learn there are things we all have in common, including a need for friends, family and love.*

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It is important to our well-being to have friendships with those who share similar backgrounds. Life is much richer, however, if we also form connections with people whose experiences are different enough that they help us challenge our assumptions and discover new ideas, traditions and perspectives. See our tips below on connecting across cultures.

- **Think global, act local.** If you are looking to build connections beyond your current social circles, getting involved in your local community may help. Volunteering for or participating in cultural events, community fairs, neighborhood associations, and local politics is a great way to meet new people in your area.
- **Learn a language.** There are at least 350 different languages spoken in U.S. homes, according to census data. Different languages are so much more than just different words for the same things. Taking a language class or even using an app can help you learn about a culture while also increasing your ability to connect with someone whose native language is different from your own. You don't have to become an expert! Being able to say "hello" or "how are you today?" can be a simple yet powerful way of expressing honor and care.
- **Follow your kids' lead.** Making new connections as an adult can be challenging, especially if there are cultural differences. Many kids have an easier time with both things. Never miss an opportunity to build a new connection with the parents of your children's friends. You have a built-in something in common—your kids!
- **Embrace the unfamiliar.** Whether you live in a sprawling city or a close-knit small town, visiting unfamiliar places is a way to get out of your comfort zone and meet people you otherwise wouldn't. If you live in a city, try visiting a different part of town. Explore parks, shops, and other places you might enjoy. If you live in a small town, you don't have to travel abroad to visit unfamiliar places. Introduce yourself to someone "new to town," or take a trip to a new city.

## Connecting Respectfully

It can be exciting and nerve wracking to build new connections across cultures. It's important to remember a few key tips to get new friendships off to a good start.

Consider these tips for navigating new cross-cultural relationships respectfully:

- **Consider your intentions.** What do you hope to gain from the relationship? What will you bring to it? Make sure you enter into any relationship with good intentions and kindness in your heart.
- **Examine your biases.** We all have unconscious bias. We can't unlearn it, but we can learn about it in order to improve how we communicate with and relate to one another.
- **Be careful not to appropriate.** While you may deeply admire aspects of another person's culture, appropriation happens when members of a dominant culture use and/or exploit elements of non-dominant culture, especially if it's outside of their original cultural context. If you think something might be appropriation, don't do it.
- **Do not tokenize.** No single person is a representation of their culture, just like no person is a representation of their city, state or country. Honor individuals by treating them as such.
- **Avoid assumptions.** When forming any relationship, it is important to start with an open mind and not to make assumptions about another person, based on culture or other factors.