Key Concepts in Culture and Diversity is a computer-based, interactive short course (30 to 60 minutes). It lays out basic concepts about diversity and culture and explains how these relate to best practice in child welfare. It is a great learning tool supervisors can use in unit meetings or with individual workers.

Learners will:

- Review basic concepts around culture and diversity, how the two intersect, and where race, ethnicity, and other constructs commonly associated with these terms fit.
- Learn the concept and significance of “collective membership” (most people are members of several affiliate groups that shape and influence their identity, worldview, values, and codes of conduct).
- Understand the relevance of learning about their diversity and their clients’ diversity as a prerequisite to effective casework.

Competency:

307-01-001: Knows the various forms of diversity and how they shape people’s beliefs, feelings, actions, and relationships with others

Facilitation Instructions

Supervisors have two options for presenting Key Concepts in Culture and Diversity. One way is to follow the guidelines below, stopping between slides for group discussion and exercises. The second way is to show the presentation in its entirety, then follow it with a group discussion, using the questions provided as prompts. It is recommended that the supervisor be very familiar with the learning activity before presenting it to his or her staff.

This is the online link to the learning activity Key Concepts in Culture and Diversity.
A. **Welcome**

1. **Slide 1**: Start with “The first thing to remember about the American family is that it doesn’t exist. Families exist. All kinds of families” and ending with “That’s part of what makes your work in child welfare both a challenge and a joy.”

   Pause and ask the following questions:

   ? What is the point of the quotations, “The first thing to remember about the American family is that it doesn’t exist” and then “Families exist, all kinds of families”?
   - Don’t make assumptions about what a family structure should look like.
   - Don’t dismiss a family structure as invalid just because it does not fit with your preconceived notion, or ideal, of what constitutes “family.”
   - Remember that apart from the “nuclear family model” of father, mother, and children (where dad is the breadwinner and head of household) there are other models.

   ? What are some examples of different family structures in our society?
   - Two-parent families
   - Single-parent families
   - LGBT families
   - Multigenerational families
   - Others?

   **Key Point:**
   It is important to monitor our own perceptions and assumptions about what defines a family.

2. **Slide 2**: Play slide until the narrator says “I believe this approach will help you face the challenge of working with dozens of families, each one different from the one before, possibly in significant ways.”

   Skip the rest of this slide and proceed to the next section.

B. **Definition of Culture**

1. **Slide 3**:

   Play slide, “definition of culture”. When the narration stops the program will pause automatically. Explore your participants’ understanding of the terms beliefs, values, and attitudes (as they apply within the context of the culture definition) using the worksheet.
handout linked below. Ask participants to place an “X” at the point on the continuum that best represents where they stand on the issues in question.

Link to: Key Concepts in Culture and Diversity - Worksheet 1. (Please make copies for your participants.)

Collect the sheets and count the number of “X’s” on the right side versus the number of “X’s” on the left side of the continuum. Share results with the group.

- It is our natural inclination to make judgments based on our own values, beliefs, and attitudes. This mindset of judging everyone else according to our own cultural framework is what we call ethnocentrism. While this is a natural human tendency, it has no place in child welfare practice.

- Takeaway point: It is not a caseworker’s job to intervene in a family for anything other than abusive or neglectful parenting as determined by law—not just for what he or she personally considers less-than-optimal or different parenting.

- In short: As long as a child is not at risk of maltreatment, a variety of approaches can work in families—with a wide range of beliefs, values, and attitudes possible.

2. Slide 4:
Play the slide and click on the first three bubbles to review how the three terms just used in the learning activity (beliefs, values, and attitudes) are formally defined. Make use of the examples provided, if desired.

☞ To wrap up the discussion on beliefs, values, and attitudes, point out that although people may share a common background, location, race, ethnicity, or other kind of affiliation, they may or may not share the same beliefs, values, or attitudes on everything. We as child welfare professionals need to avoid making such an assumption.

☞ Review any other term on the slide that participants would like you to click on for its definition and/or further discussion. Do not include the term social groups.
Following is a larger discussion on social groups.

☞ To start the discussion about social groups, invite someone to explain the term in their own words, then click on the term for the written definition:
A social group is any number of people who share commonalities, like interests, values, or background that create a sense of identification among members.

Continue processing with the following questions:

What are some examples of social groups?

People who share a common trait or belief, such as:
- Race,
- Religion
- Nationality
- Sexual orientation
- Others?

Can people be in the same social group and yet differ in their values, beliefs, and behaviors?

Yes. For example, the results of the mini-poll we just took might have demonstrated some differences within the group of caseworkers.

What could be possible factors to explain why people from the same social group may differ significantly on some beliefs, values, or practices?

In the past, homogenous communities were much more common. As a result, values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior patterns were usually the same. In today’s global society, however, there is a much broader range of diverse communities. Furthermore, more of us are taking on multiple roles and affiliating ourselves with multiple groups (back to the concept of collective membership).

Within our very heterogeneous society, we are the product of a single social group alone. Our values, beliefs, and practices are therefore likely to be a composite of many affiliations and other factors, such as individual attributes.

So what is the most effective way to identify a person’s/family’s beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices?

Dialogue, relationship-building, and approaching clients with cultural humility are the most effective ways to learn about a person/family. Cultural humility is
defined as an attitude that doesn’t presume prior knowledge of another person’s culture—but instead relies on that person to be the expert and key informant about his/her own culture.

The OCWTP offers a course to help workers learn how to incorporate these approaches in their interactions with families (i.e., *Interviewing Skills for Responsive Diversity Practice*.) More details about this course come later in this presentation.

**Key Point:**
*It is very important to take the time to find out a family’s values, attitudes, beliefs and practices and not fall into the trap of making assumptions.*

C. **More Than Just Race and Ethnicity:**

1. *Slides 5-8: Play Slides 5-8 straight through, pausing right after the narrator says “... and when we do that, we run the risk of making some honest, but pretty costly mistakes for families throughout the life of a case.”*

   ✶ Help the group discuss these ideas with the following questions:

   ? What does the narrator mean by falling into the trap of “pigeonholing” a person even when trying to honor that person’s diversity?

   o Making assumptions about a person’s diversity based on one’s own perceptions.

   o Viewing a person too narrowly by focusing on one aspect of a person’s diversity at the exclusion of others; failing to learn the uniqueness of an individual or family in a holistic sense.

   ? What is the “wrong” way to make use of cultural trainings?

   o To assume that the information you learn about a given group applies equally to all members of that group—which amounts, in effect, to stereotyping.

   o To perceive and treat a client too simplistically – as if there were no aspect to consider or understand about that person apart from his/her cultural affiliation or information taught in cultural training. This is also a form of stereotyping.
On the flip side, what is the recommended way to make use of cultural trainings?

- There is value in seeking a foundational understanding of the different kinds of diversity we may encounter in people—especially those we anticipate encountering. The key is to understand that the information we learn can give insight into what may apply to some members of a group but not necessarily to all. In this way we can be equipped with a set of clues, or working hypotheses that help us rule in or rule out what applies in each case and inform our questions, behaviors, and decisions accordingly.

So, can anyone describe when he or she has benefited from an insight picked up from a diversity training (or other resource), and how it led to a positive outcome?

Whether or not any relevant examples are offered, tell group the next few slides will offer some examples.

**Key Point:**

*There is value in seeking a foundational understanding of characteristics common to members of a certain kind of diversity—as long as we understand that it may apply to some members of the group but not necessarily to all.*

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2. **Slides 9-10:** Play Slide 9, *Examples*, and Slide 10, *Norma’s Story*, then pause for group discussion:

* How did Norma use her foundational understanding of Appalachian culture to unlock the key to gaining the cooperation of the mother?
  - She drew on her knowledge of Appalachian culture to inform an approach she tried with the mother.

At the same time, caseworkers must strike a balance between understanding the patterns/tendencies of a given group and *not losing sight of potential differences among individual members within a group*. Remember the following quotation:

> “If the first rule of being culturally-responsive is ‘Know the rules of the culture,’ the second rule is ‘Avoid over-reliance on those rules’.”
When working with a particular family perhaps the best balance between the two is to be informed of potential patterns (beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, etc.) of a group that the family self-identifies with, and at the same time use observation and skillful questioning to see if certain norms/patterns apply to the individual or family in question.

*For example:* When Norma heard the phrase “down home” it triggered a hunch that the mother was Appalachian. That’s when Norma checked out her assumption by asking the mother if she was of an Appalachian background. When the mother answered “Yes,” Norma’s understanding of the Appalachian culture led her to believe that someone “down home” could be a source of considerable influence in a positive way. Rather than to simply assume this, however, she asked the mother if there was someone “down home” to whom she could turn for support and guidance. Norma’s guess was confirmed when the mother named her grandmother as that person. And that’s what turned the whole case around.

**Key Point:**
It’s always best to ask and verify a person’s beliefs or behaviors rather than assume based on apparent group affiliation.

3. *Slide 11:* Before playing, introduce this segment by inviting the group to observe how *Nick’s Story* illustrates how we can get in trouble by making assumptions, even with the best intentions. Play Slide 11, then pause for group discussion:

Nick is a caseworker who really tried to be competent with diversity. He recognized the Japanese ethnicity in the name, he secured a translator, he was aware of a pattern of high performance expectations in many Japanese families, and he even took his shoes off at the door.

*What went wrong?*

Nick remembered the first part of the equation (be informed of a family’s potential group membership and the possible cultural influences) but he totally lost sight of verifying to what extent this family fit that cultural profile.

*How could Nick have avoided this blunder of unverified assumptions—which amounted to stereotyping and resulted in losing credibility with the family?*
If Nick had called to arrange an appointment ahead of time, he could have used the opportunity to begin learning about the family by asking some basic, self-identifying type of questions such as whether an interpreter was needed and clarification about pronunciation of names.

If Nick did not have the opportunity to get advance information, he could have relied more on a combination of observation and direct questioning skills during his visit (e.g., looking for behavioral clues about whether to remove shoes, asking for help pronouncing the child’s name, etc.) to guide his judgment on how to proceed.

4. Slide 12: Play, then pause to ask the following questions:

Let’s discuss the comment made by the narrator: “We need to ask each individual and family how they see themselves: their identities, strengths, goals, and challenges; how they would like to be treated and the kinds of outcomes they are hoping for.”

? As caseworkers, we may sometimes think a family is somehow “missing the boat” in how they are managing their lives and children. But what are ways we can miss the boat as caseworkers if we don’t find out what matters to a family, how they do things, and why they do what they do?

- In safety and risk assessments: Not taking time to understand a family member’s values, beliefs, practices, and even culturally-based use of language can lead to a variety of problems, such as misunderstanding a parent’s intention, not recognizing the protective strengths in a family, or missing the opportunity to appeal to a family through the values we’ve discovered are important to them.
- In case planning: Not taking time to understand a family’s perspective on what they need and the outcomes they hope for can lead to designing interventions that don’t make sense to the family--or just don’t work because the family can’t/won’t buy into them.
- In placements: Not taking time to understand a family’s culture can lead to placing a child in an environment that is totally incompatible with whatever represented a sense of identity, security, and wellbeing for the child in his or her own cultural environment.

? How do families differ based on differences in values, beliefs, and attitudes?
Following is a list (not exhaustive) of categories of values, beliefs, and attitudes that are shaped by membership in a specific group or culture.

Use this link to access a copy of the list in case you would like to share it with your participants:  Key Concepts in Culture and Diversity-Facilitator's Guide-Categories of Values, Beliefs, Attitudes that Affect Family Life-Handout 1

Explain that the list is actually limitless, but these are some categories that may be of particular relevance to child welfare issues:

- Attitude toward authority
- Expectation of the worker/client, supervisor/worker, or caregiver/foster child relationship
- What constitutes “family”
- View of “insiders” versus “outsiders”
- Family roles and expectations
- Social rules (both verbal and nonverbal)
- Childrearing practices
- Discipline practices
- View of health and health management (including mental health)
- View of substance use and abuse
- Help-seeking behaviors
- Financial management
- Time management
- What’s considered too “personal” or “private”


**Key Point:**

*When we make assumptions about families based on perceptions, hearsay, and appearances, we can make errors in assessment and decision making.*

**D. Diversity Sphere:**

1. Slides 13 and 14: Play slides. They will provide broader definition and a conceptual framework of diversity, where culture is just one influencing factor. No discussion; continue to the next slide.

**E. Collective Membership:**

1. *Slide15:* Play the slide which provides an explanation and illustration of *collective*
Have your participants fill out the Human Diversity and Collective Membership - Worksheet 2. (Use the embedded link to access the worksheet, and make enough copies for each participant.)

**Key Point:**
All of us have memberships in multiple groups. These memberships influence who we are, how we think, and how we experience life.

2. *Slide 16:* Play the slide for further discussion of the conceptual framework for diversity and an illustration of collective membership (program will pause automatically). Read the following quotes from the presentation and guide discussion of the question listed under each quote.

“**The groups you identified on your collective membership worksheet may contribute to your values, beliefs, behaviors, priorities and/or general lifestyle. However, at different points in your life, some of these attributes will play a lesser role and others a much greater role in how the world interacts with you and how you, in turn, experience and view the world.**”

? What are some examples from your own life?

“There’s a real value in spending time gaining clarity regarding your own diversity.”

? What is the value of doing this exercise as a first step in working with diverse clients?

- By articulating our values and recognizing them as our own, we become aware that they are just that: our personal values—and therefore do not necessarily represent universal truth in everyone’s eyes or culture.

- This awareness may also serve to heighten our awareness of potential biases or assumptions that we might unconsciously apply toward a family whose values or traditions differ from our own.

- The more we remember that we ourselves exist within a spectrum of
diversity, the more we can guard against an ethnocentric perspective (the unconscious assumption that our culture is always right) and develop some empathy toward families with their own diversity.

“What three groups did you select as most important to you right now? Why are they important to you at this point? Have they always been important? How do they influence your values, beliefs, and behavior?”

? How does this insight and self-awareness help you in your work with families?

- In this case they may serve to uncover potential biases or assumptions that we carry in specific areas—biases or assumptions that we could unconsciously hold against a family whose values or traditions differ from ours in those areas.

**Key Point:**
*Our membership to different groups changes during our lifetime, as does the value we see in the different group memberships.*

3. *Slides 17 – 18:* Play the slides which explain that individuals and families are influenced by a complex array of affiliate groups and other factors—making it impossible for us to identify all that is relevant to their identities, cultures, or lives without the family’s guidance.

After you hear the narrator say “To presume to know without asking would be to fall into the human trap of stereotyping,” pause and ask the following question:

? Why should we attend cultural trainings at all? What are the benefits and what are the caveats to bear in mind?

To give us an idea of cultural patterns that may generally apply to a group but it is important to verify what actually applies to each family.

**F. Value of Training**

*Slides 19-20:* Play slides to confirm the value of cultural training. Since there’s no discussion here, let the program continue to play through the next section. You may also want to encourage participant to develop a plan to learn about specific groups in you geographical area of work.
G. Summary

Slides 21 – 22: Play slides to hear final comments and summary. Since there are no new discussion points (summarized below), let the program continue to play.

**Key Points:**

- While individuals are influenced by their cultures and affiliate groups, one cannot make assumptions about the nature or extent of those influences—since this will vary from person to person.
- Trainings specific to different kinds of diversity can be useful in making us aware of beliefs, values, behaviors, and practices that are common to many members of a group. But as we work with each individual and family, we must verify what does/does not apply to them in each case.

Slide 23: Play the slide to hear about training opportunities.

After the narrator says, “Please contact your RTC if you’re interested in this course,” pause to give the following additional information:

- *Interviewing skills for Responsive Diversity Practice* is the same workshop mentioned early in this presentation.
  - This six-hour course offers an engaging, skill-based approach to asking questions, and is based on the premise that we need to give children and families the opportunity to educate us about themselves—not to use as ammunition for judging them, but to figure out jointly what works best for them.
  - It’s a hands-on workshop—with built-in examples and opportunities for practice.
  - Participants are encouraged to take this workshop.

Slide 24: Play slide then point out the directions printed on the screen, which read as follows:

? Look at your completed “Collective Membership” worksheet. How has at least one of your memberships influenced you as a child welfare practitioner? Because the factors that shape one’s attitudes and reaction are often unconscious, you may need to give this question some careful thought.
Depending on time and group dynamics, follow up on the question above with one of the following activities:

- Respond to the question in writing (for either self-reflection or individual follow up with you).
- Break off in pairs and share with each other.
- Share their reflections with the larger group.

Wrap up this session by encouraging participants to be conscious of what they wrote in their reflections, so they can cultivate this awareness as they work with “all kinds of families” (as mentioned in the opening quote).

--- THANK YOU ---