

What is Culture?

DO's & DON'Ts of Speaking to Someone of a Different Culture

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We live in a very diverse world filled with 100s of cultures. Every culture is **simply unique**. Whether it's someone from another part of your country or someone from a completely different country than yours, it's absolutely wonderful to meet someone of a different culture. However, there are always certain **"Do's & Don'ts"** that we must always keep in mind during conversation! This list was generated by speaking to various people of different backgrounds. It contains real-life phrases that are commonly said to people.

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#### EYE CONTACT & STANDING DISTANCE

Body Language, using one's body to communicate, differs across countries. Maintaining direct eye contact while speaking may be seen as a sign of respect in one place and disrespect in another. Standing closely to someone during conversation, may be seen as normal in one place and uncomfortable or strange in another.

**To ensure that you are not being disrespectful, always begin conversation standing arm's length and keep eye contact 50-60% of the time. Once you've gotten to know the person and have learned their form of body language, you'll know how to interact with the person.**

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Below is a chart describing the "Do's and Don'ts" of speaking to someone of a different culture.

#1 Tip: NEVER Assume!

#2 NEVER force an answer out of someone!

#3 NEVER start a conversation with someone asking them about their ethnicity/culture/background. It can be overwhelming and even rude. Instead, speak to the person like you would to any other friend. Allow the person to become comfortable with you **BEFORE** asking about their cultural background.

Please be mindful of your tone of voice and facial expressions. What you're saying may be respectful, but your body language may say otherwise. But most of all, don't forget to smile!

| DONT's | DO's |
|---|--|
| <p><i>What are you?</i>
 Never say ask this.
 (You want to know the person's ethnicity or if he/she is "mixed".)</p> | <p>Asking a person their cultural background, is not appropriate/acceptable unless you are friends or if a culture discussion is in occurrence. Share a little about your background (where you were born, raised, ancestry). Randomly asking, can be perceived as being rude. Furthermore, asking without sharing information about yourself can be perceived as interrogation.
 <i>I'm _____. What about you?, Where's your family from?</i>
 Even, if after you have shared information and have asked about them and they still have not given the answer you wanted, then maybe the person is not comfortable talking to you in a personal context.</p> |
| <p><i>You talk funny/weird.</i></p> | <p><i>I'm from <u>(city)</u>. What about you? (Etc.)</i></p> |
| <p><i>That's not how you pronounce/say ____.</i></p> | <p>Unless the person is your close friend, never say this to someone. Many times there are several ways to pronounce one word and it all just depends on what city or country the person is from.</p> |
| <p><i>Are you married?</i>
 <i>What are you?</i>
 (You're confused about the person's last name.)</p> | <p>Never assume that because their last name doesn't "match" their face, that their name couldn't be their birth name.
 (Popular examples of misconceptions below)
 A brown skinned person with the last name Soto. There are Latinos of African or Native/Amerindian descent.
 In the Caribbean/West Indies there are people of 2 or more ethnicities with last names representing their family background.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Where are you from?</i>
(You're assuming the person isn't from your country and would like to know where they're originally from.)</p> | <p>Once you've gotten to know the person, ask the person questions like: <i>Have you always lived in <u>(your city)</u>?</i></p> |
| <p><i>Eww, What is that?</i>
(You don't find what the person's eating very appealing.)</p> | <p><i>Hey, I've never had that before. What are you eating?</i></p> |
| <p><i>Are you Chinese? Mexican? Jamaican? Indian? Etc...</i></p> | <p>Never assume someone is a nationality based on their face or accent.
(Popular examples of misconceptions below)</p> <p>Never assume a person of Asian descent is Chinese. Asia is a very diverse continent filled with many countries.</p> <p>Never assume a person who speaks Spanish is Mexican. There are many Spanish-speaking countries.</p> <p>Never assume a person with a Caribbean/West Indian accent is Jamaican. Instead you may ask, "<i>Are you from the Caribbean/West Indies?</i>"</p> <p>Never assume a person from South Asia is Indian.</p> <p>The world is a very diverse placed filled with 100s of cultures!</p> |
| <p><i>Do you have _____ where you're from?</i>
<i>Do you have _____ in your country?</i></p> | <p>These questions are appropriate in the correct setting. If you're discussing each other's culture 👍, but if you're not 👎.</p> |
| <p>Don't immediately speak a certain language based on the person's ethnic appearance or last name.</p> | <p>1. Instead, speak the national language of your country. Then, once the person responds, you know for certain their</p> |

(You're assuming the person does not speak the same language as yourself. OR You're assuming the person is of a particular ethnic background based on their name.)

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language. Why? It can be very disrespectful in the person's point of view to assume that they do not know the national language of your country.

2. Sometimes names are not a reflection of a person's language or ethnicity, but a reflection of the history of a person's country.

(Popular Examples shown below)

In the Philippines, people have Spanish last names due to Spanish rule in the past. However, today they're national language is not Spanish.

In the Americas, due to the slave trade, people of African descent do not have African last names. Popular Examples of the African Diaspora below...

| Place | Last Names | Language |
|---|---|--|
| USA | British | English |
| Caribbean | Various | French
Dutch
Spanish
English
Creoles |
| Brazil | Portuguese | Portuguese |
| Guyana | Various | English, Creole |
| French Guiana | Various | French, Creole |
| Suriname | Various | Dutch, Creole |
| Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Angola & other African countries | Due to slavery in Africa, today some Africans have European last names. | English
French
Creoles
Various |