

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2003). *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.



PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY 11.1

Cultural Competence in Difficult Interactions

Although being aware of cultural differences and respecting others' values and priorities is important in all adult interactions, it is particularly important when conflict occurs. The following factors may affect how individuals from various cultural groups perceive conflict and how they wish to resolve it:

- ◆ The importance and legitimacy of preserving harmony
- ◆ The importance of face-saving
- ◆ The value of being other than confrontative or forthright
- ◆ The systemic roots of conflict and the need for systemic change
- ◆ The significance of time stretching far into the past and the future
- ◆ The usefulness of time in easing conflict
- ◆ An inclusive definition of parties (including extended family, for example)
- ◆ The importance of healing
- ◆ The significance of the differences between high- and low-context cultures
- ◆ The significance of the differences between individualist and collectivist cultures
- ◆ The importance of symbolism and ritual
- ◆ Visual and nonverbal cues
- ◆ The importance of involving "elders," gatekeepers, and "wise ones" in conflict resolution processes
- ◆ The legitimacy of advice giving in some cultural contexts
- ◆ The honor attached to indirectness and subtlety in various cultural contexts
- ◆ The lack of power experienced by members of some groups over a long period of time, such that techniques to "balance power" may be insufficient
- ◆ Varying needs for formality or informality
- ◆ The meaning of a contract or written agreement; this is considered evidence of bad faith in some cultural contexts and a necessity in others
- ◆ Different communication norms and styles in different cultural frameworks

How might each of these factors influence your interactions with other professionals? Parents?

How could you learn about another person's cultural preferences regarding how to interact during a conflict?

What should you do if you recognize during the middle of an interaction that you are responding to a colleague or parent without cultural competence?

From LeBaron, M. (1997). Mediation, conflict resolution, and multicultural reality: Culturally competent practice (pp. 315–335). In E. Kruk (Ed.), *Mediation and conflict resolution in social work and the human services*. Chicago: Nelson Hall.