

Six Key Attitudes for Communicating Across Culture

To be effective at communicating across culture, you do not need to concentrate on when to shake hands, what word means "hello," or how to use chopsticks. Those things may prove helpful. But the most important thing you can do is to work at developing the following key attitudes:



A willingness to suspend judgment.

Be willing to set aside your ideas about how things ought to be done. When your refugee partner does or says something that seems strange, difficult, or confusing, look for the logical reason behind it. Don't immediately jump to conclusions or make judgments. Keep an open mind and seek to learn. Remember, every culture makes sense to the people living it. Try to discover how the different pieces of his/her culture fit together.



A willingness to listen and learn.

Ask questions. Find out as much as you can about the history, customs, values, and attitudes of your refugee partner and the country he or she left behind. Listen carefully to the answers. Don't simply use the answer as a springboard to talk about how different it is here in the United States. (On the other hand, you will want to answer any questions your refugee partner has about you and your culture.)



A sense of humor.

Don't take things too seriously. Be willing to laugh off the embarrassing moments, confusion, or annoyance you encounter as you and your refugee partner work to understand each other.



A low goal/task orientation.

Americans often focus on accomplishing things. Try not to set unrealistic goals for your time in the New Neighbor Program. During your time with your refugee partner, don't focus on certain tasks you will accomplish together. Instead, concentrate on simply spending time with one another.

**An ability to take a risk and to fail.**

If you are afraid to fail, you will not take the risk of reaching outside your own culture. Be willing to venture out into unknown territory. Don't be afraid to try new things, say new words, or reach out in new ways, even if you aren't as "successful" as you would like.

**A willingness to share yourself.**

Don't be afraid simply to be yourself. Remember that you have special gifts to offer, as well as the opportunity to receive. Be open and honest in your relationships. If you are uncomfortable in a situation, take time to identify your emotions and understand what is causing you to feel that way.