

# CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY



A monkey and a fish were caught in a terrible flood and were being swept downstream amidst torrents of water and debris. The monkey spied a branch from an overhanging tree and pulled himself to safety from the swirling water. Then, wanting to help his friend the fish, he reached into the water and pulled the fish from the water onto the branch. The moral of the story is clear:

*Good intentions are not enough. If you wish to help the fish, you must understand its nature.*

*- Ancient Chinese Fable*

# Learning Objectives

- Participants will describe cultural competency, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity.
- Participants will examine the importance of culture in crisis counseling and our cultural influences and biases.
- Participants will discuss issues related to cultural competency in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

# Culture

“Shared learned behavior that is transmitted from one generation to another to promote individual and group adjustment and adaptation.”

(Marsella, quoted in Drozdek and Wilson, 2007).

# Culture Includes . . . .

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Language
- Sexual Orientation
- Developed/Developing Countries
- Western/Eastern
- Socioeconomic Status
- Rural/Urban
- Professions
- Political affiliations
- Immigrants/Refugees/Asylum Seekers
- Gangs

# Culture Includes...

➤ Others?

# *Self-Identification Diagram*

## *Instructions:*

- 1. On the center of this page, draw a circle large enough to write your full name inside.*
- 2. Draw a straight line out from the circle like a spoke from the hub of a wheel.*
- 3. At the end of the spoke, write a fact about yourself. It could be your age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, or anything else.*
- 4. Continue making spokes and writing a different fact about yourself at the end of each.*
- 5. Turn to a partner and share your diagram.*

# Culture influences . . .

- How we are born
- How we live
- How we die
- How we grieve
- How we recover from loss and trauma
- How we make sense of our lives
- How we define culture . . .



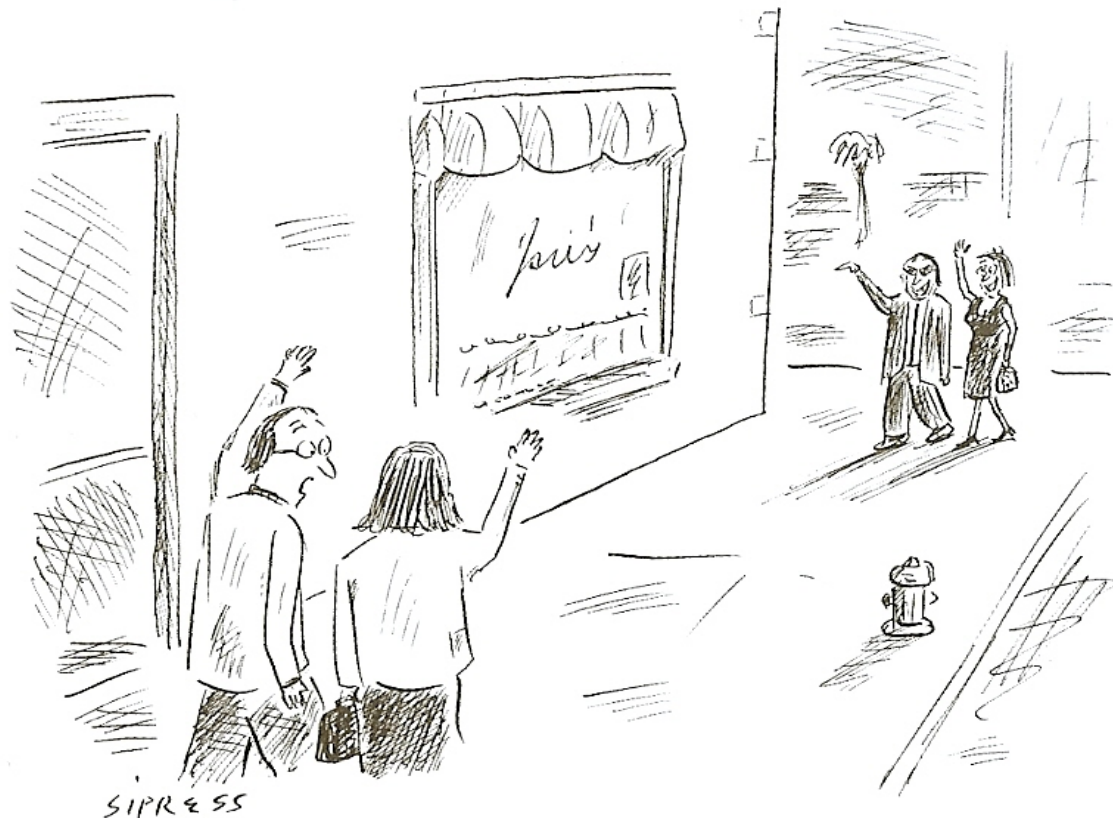


# GROUP ACTIVITY

- What are some typical foods in my culture?
- How does your culture view mental health?
- How do your culture view gender roles?
- How important is independence vs. interdependence?



# THE NEW YORKER



*“Quick! Remind me—are they handshakers, huggers, single kissers, or kissers on both cheeks?”*

# Cultural Competency

- The concept of cultural competency is being adopted into the field of disaster response as well as many other disciplines. Cultural competency is intended to inform the activities you already do – not replace them.

# Defining Cultural Awareness

- Obtaining knowledge about specific people and groups of people
- Integrating and transforming this knowledge into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes
- Using these tools to increase the quality of services and produce better outcome

SAMSHA DTAC

# Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health

(Office of Minority Health, 2001)

- **Cultural and linguistic competence** is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations.
- **Culture** refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups.
- **Competence** implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual and an organization within the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by consumers and their communities.

➤ Can one be “culturally competent”?

# Video

- When the Levees Broke by Spike Lee



# Understanding Culture

- Axiology: what is valued
- Epistemology: what is known and understood





# Cultural Sensitivity

- **The concept of cultural sensitivity is a set of skills that enables you to learn about and get to know people who are different from you, thereby coming to understand how to serve them better.**
- **Cultural sensitivity is a useful tool to build effective relationships. It is also a dynamic tool: we can always learn more about other cultures, their value systems, beliefs, and behaviors — as well as our own.**

# Cultural Sensitivity Continuum

5-Advanced Cultural Sensitivity

4-Cultural Sensitivity

3-Cultural Pre-Sensitivity

2-Cultural Blindness

1-Cultural Incapacity

0-Cultural Destructiveness

Prescription for Success: Community HealthCorps Member Training

# Terms & Definitions

- **0-Cultural Destructiveness.** The most negative end of the continuum is represented by attitudes, policies and practices which are *destructive to cultures* and consequently to the individuals within the cultures.
- **1-Cultural Incapacity.** The next position on the continuum is where individuals do not intentionally seek to be culturally destructive but rather *lack the capacity to help* diverse clients or communities. The individual remains extremely biased, believes in the racial superiority of the dominant group, and assumes a paternal posture towards “lesser group”.
- **2-Cultural Blindness.** At the midpoint on the continuum, individuals *think they are unbiased*. They function with the belief that culture makes no difference and we are all the same. Such attitudes ignore cultural strengths and blame the clients for their own problems.

# Terms & Definitions

- **3-Cultural Pre-Sensitivity.** The next position up the continuum is where people *realize on their own* any weakness in their service to culturally diverse clients and *attempt to improve* their service.
- **4-Cultural Sensitivity.** Culturally competent individuals are *open* to the cultural experiences of others and to new information about cultures.
- **5-Advanced Cultural Sensitivity.** This is the most positive end of the spectrum and represents the willingness and ability to adapt the **organization's** practice of health care to many different cultural situations. Providers at this level seek to *add to their knowledge base* through culturally relevant research, then *develop new approaches* based on that research.

# Cultural Sensitivity Continuum Activity

1. Distribute statements.
2. Discuss with your partner your statement and which level it belongs in.
3. Share with larger group.



➤ Video:

➤ “RSA Animate- The Secret Powers of Time” - Philip Zimbardo

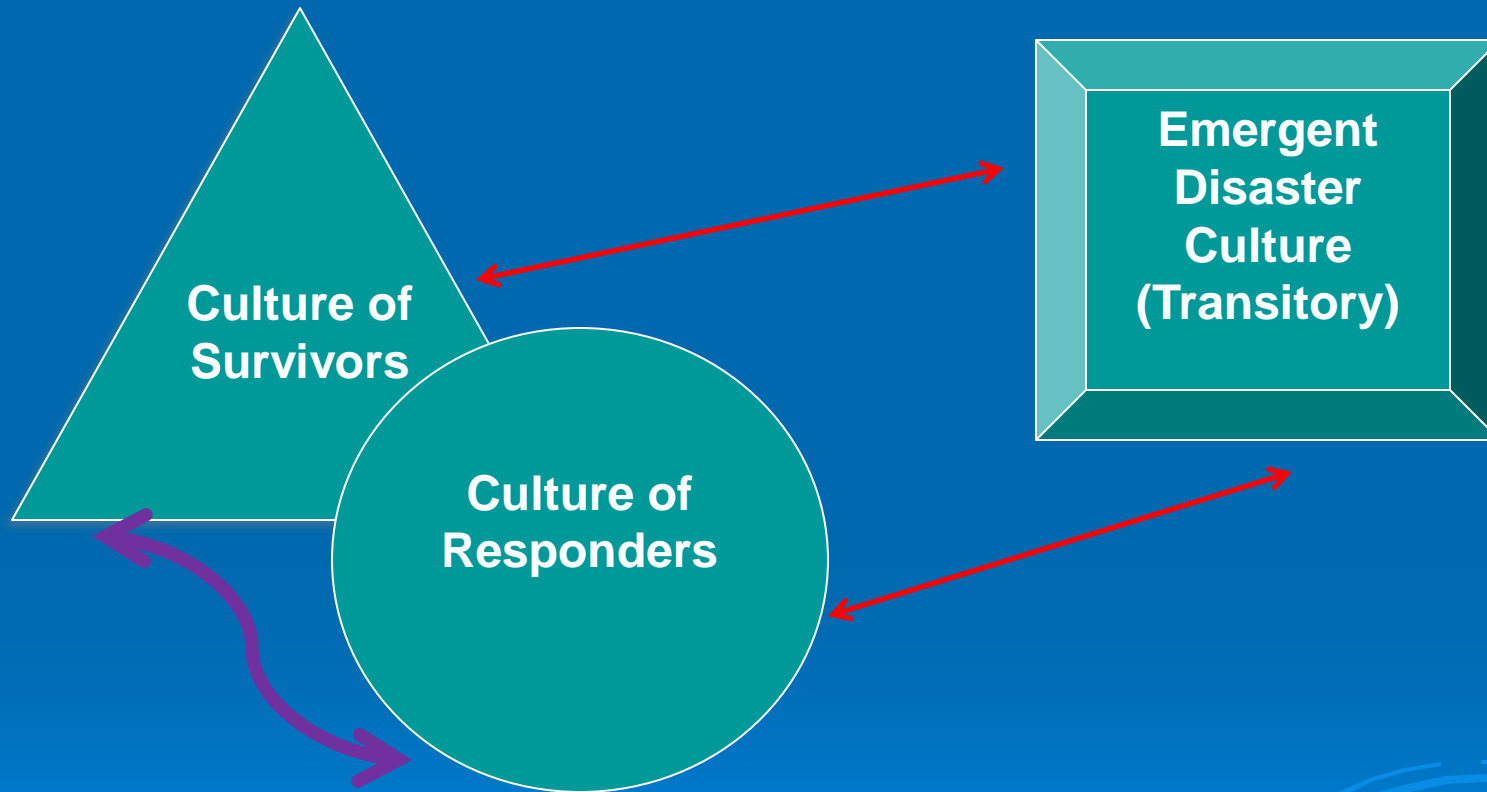




# Cultural Encounters in Disasters



# Cultural Encounters in Disasters



# Similarities in Response and Reaction

- Considerable body of research indicates that *physiological* reactions to traumatic events are quite similar in the immediate aftermath of such events
- Universal *biological* responses to trauma in terms of re-experiencing and arousal reactions
- Culture to a larger extent determines the reactions to traumatic events over time

# STRESS RESPONSE

- FIGHT: Feelings of anger/rage, crying, tight/tense jaw, knotted stomach/nausea
- FLIGHT: Anxiety/Shallow breathing, restless legs/feet, fidgety-ness, feeling trapped, tense
- FREEZE: Holding/restricting breath, feeling stuck in some part of the body, feeling cold/frozen/numb

<http://trauma-recovery.ca/impact-effects-of-trauma/fight-flight-freeze-responses/>

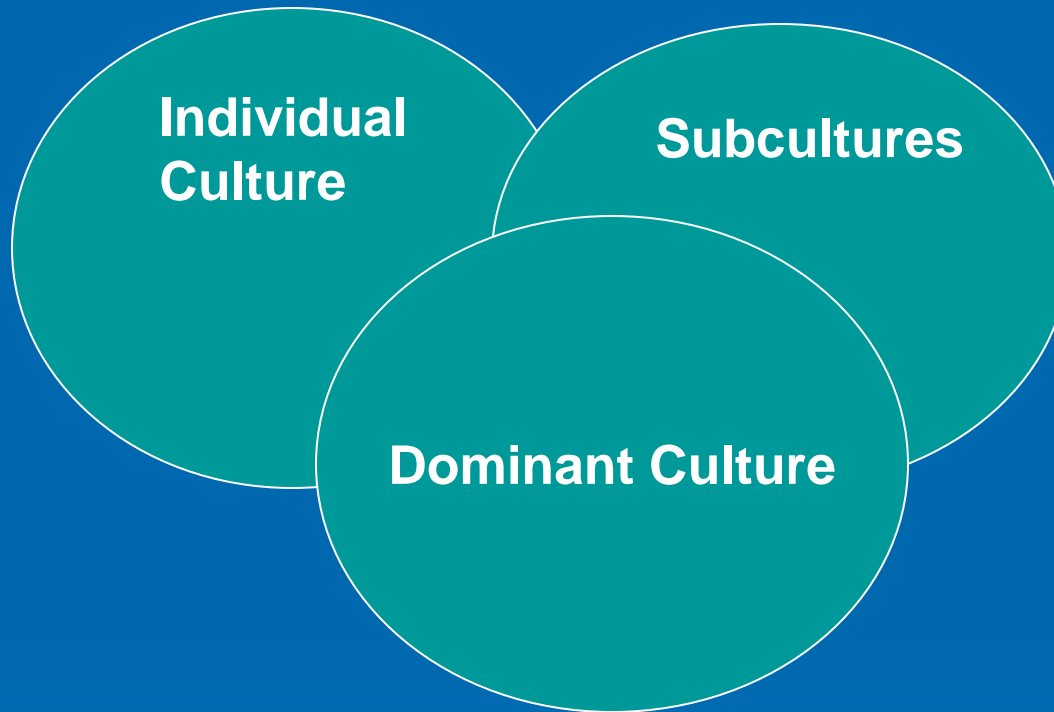
# Variations in Meaning

- Although the biological experiences of trauma may be similar across cultures, the *meaning* of the event and the person's response differs dramatically
- In general, individuals from developing or non-western countries often tend to ascribe *physical or spiritual* attributions to their traumatic experiences, rather than describing them as psychological experiences

# Differences + Similarities = Diversity

- **Differences** focuses on what we see across cultures.
  - Caution: beware the threat of the “other”
- **Similarities** need to be carefully examined for bias regarding criteria
  - Caution: beware the “myth of sameness”
- **Diversity** focuses on a more in-depth understanding of culture not just across cultures, but **within** a culture as well, leading to a deeper and richer understanding of experience

# The Trifocal Lens of Culture







➤ *"Every encounter is a cross-cultural encounter."*

➤ *Robert Like, M.D.*

# Development of Cultural Knowledge

It is important to develop knowledge specific to the cultural groups which are present in the communities you serve, or may be deployed to serve in. This includes developing collections of information which identify facts about each of the different cultures and help you know how to gather more information.

# 5 Elements of Cultural Sensitivity

1. Awareness and Acceptance of Differences
2. Awareness of our Own Cultural Values
3. Understanding and Managing the “Dynamics of Differences”
4. Development of Cultural Knowledge
5. Ability to Adapt Activities to fit into Different
6. Cultural Contexts

# 1. Awareness and Acceptance of Differences

Awareness and acceptance of difference means that you are aware of diversity and that you respect its worth. It means you understand that organizations and communities are made stronger when they accept individuals from different backgrounds. Different insights, choices, beliefs, and points of view all make for a stronger and more prepared community.

## 2. Awareness of our Own Cultural Values

By performing a cultural self-assessment, you gain awareness of your own cultural values. By doing so, you enable a system of care to increase and improve service delivery by first understanding your current level of cultural competence and your own organizational culture. An accurate understanding of your own biases and belief systems is useful in determining what strategies and actions you should take next. Also, conducting a self-assessment (and having the ability to do so) demonstrates to survivors, communities, and fellow workers that you value diversity and cultural awareness.

### 3. “Understanding and Managing the “Dynamics of Difference””

Dynamics of difference refers to the various ways cultures express and interpret information. When people from different cultures or backgrounds interact, misinterpretation and misunderstanding may occur. Your system of care must allow for cultural differences to be acknowledged and respected in the workforce.

## 4. Development of Cultural Knowledge

It is important to develop knowledge specific to the cultural groups which are present in the communities you serve, or may be deployed to serve in. This includes developing collections of information which identify facts about each of the different cultures and help

you know how to gather more



## 5. Ability to Adapt Activities to fit into Different Cultural Contexts

This concept refers to the ability to adapt your programs and to fit the culture of the survivors and communities you are serving. With limited resources, systems of care should seek to reduce the gap between survivor and community needs and the availability of services.

# Exercise

- Break into groups:
- Discuss a situation in which you experienced a cultural difference at work



# Ten Frequent *Assumptions* of Cultural Bias

- A common measure of “normal” behavior
- An emphasis on individualism
- An emphasis on definition of the problem
- Dependence on abstract words
- Overemphasis on independence

# Ten Frequent *Assumptions* of Cultural Bias

- Neglect of naturally existing support systems
- Dependence on linear thinking
- Changing the individual, not the system
- Neglect of history (a historical perspective)
- Dangers of cultural encapsulation

# Video

- Lost Boys of Sudan/
- God Grew Tired of Them

# Cultural Responsiveness Is . . .

- Being honest about our biases
- Being open to “not knowing”
- Being *curious* – seize opportunities to learn
- Being mindful of diversity
- Being committed to co-creating a healing environment – sharing power and responsibility

# The Cost of Cultural Non-Awareness

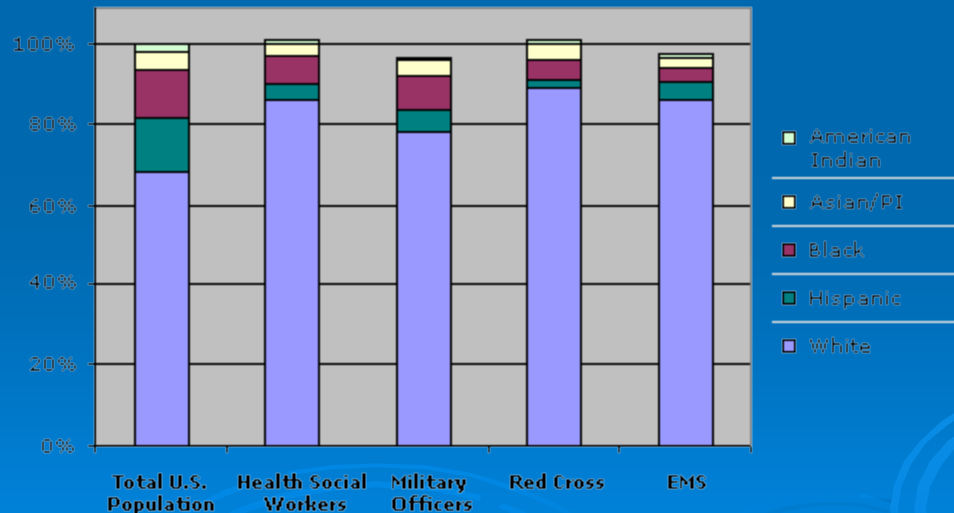
- Cultural awareness is more than a principle of care: it *defines* good care.
- • What happens when we are *not* culturally aware?
- –Disconnection                      –Disillusionment
- Distress                              –Dysfunction

(Experienced by Disaster Survivors and Disaster Responders)



# Responders

- **Racial Makeup of Disaster Personnel by Percentage as Compared to the U.S. Population**  
Data Sources: HRSA, U.S. Census 2000, NASW 2006, IOM 2007, GAO 2007  
\*Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force



# ADAPT

- As a disaster responder, you have two primary ways to reach your Limited English Proficient (LEP) population: either through speaking in a language they will understand, or by providing documents that are in their primary language. These two services are accomplished through the use of interpreters or translators.
- **Interpreters:** work with disaster personnel and individuals affected by a disaster to ensure they understand one another in conversation. Examples of interpreters include bilingual staff, dedicated interpreters, telephone interpretation services, or community members.
- **Translators:** adapt the written word from one language into another. Examples of materials that may be translated include consent forms, treatment or discharge instructions, and any forms completed by patients. Graphics and signage may also be translated so LEP individuals can navigate through health care settings.

# Interpreter Roles

## ➤ Culture Broker:

The interpreter provides a necessary cultural framework for understanding the message being interpreted.

## ➤ When to adopt this role:

Cultural differences are leading to a misunderstanding on the part of either disaster personnel or community member.

# Interpreter Roles

## ➤ **Conduit:**

This is the most basic interpreter role (default role). The interpreter conveys in one language literally what has been said by the other, without additions, omissions, editing, or polishing.

## ➤ **When to adopt this role:**

Interpreter perceives a clear potential for misunderstanding.

# Interpreter Roles

## ➤ Clarifier:

The interpreter explains or makes word pictures of terms that have no linguistic equivalent (or whose linguistic equivalent will not be understood by the LEP individual) and checks for understanding.

## ➤ When to adopt this role:

Interpreter believes it is necessary to help all participants understand.

# Interpreter Roles

- It is important for disaster responders to know that the use of children as interpreters is highly discouraged because it can create unique problems, such as:
  - Role reversal - the child ends up having to process information and provide support for the parent;
  - Editing - the child may intentionally leave out information to spare parents from suffering, which in turn, creates a burden for the child;
  - Mistakes - there is no guarantee the child will understand the intended message, even when they say they do.<sup>31</sup>

*Is the culture always  
right?*

*Not always.*

# *Co-Creating Responsive Interventions*







*"Never, ever, think outside the box."*

# Practical Suggestions

- Analyze your own preconceptions and biases as you go.
- Recognize that your knowledge, values, methods and approach are extensions of a cultural system that may be very different from the one you are entering.
- Honor and respect local people who have much to teach about the meaning of resilience.



# Practical Suggestions

- Ask what you have done to actively invite sharing of local beliefs and practices.
- Situate the current community orientation and problems in historic context, connecting psychological issues with problems of colonialism, poverty, racism and discrimination.
- Ask on a continuing basis “***who benefits?***” and “***who’s excluded?***”

(Nader, Dubrow & Stamm, 1999)

# Promoting Protective Cultural Norms

(L. Potter, 2006)

- Interdependence – interconnectedness
- Knowledge and skills
- Positive attitudes toward help-seeking
- Accurate understanding of mental health and mental illness

# Activity

- Break into groups, each group is assigned one protective cultural norm:
- At your deployment, how would you promote protective cultural norm?
-



# Five Cultural “Corrections”

1. Crisis intervention and disaster response programs are often a historical in perspective

# Five Cultural “Corrections”

2. Crisis counseling and disaster relief programs are by their very nature short-term and problem focused.



# Five Cultural “Corrections”

3. Cultural competence is often taken to mean adapting programs based upon Western assumptions (scientific knowledge) to other cultures.

***Foster real collaboration to co-create new interventions. Create services based upon knowledge from within the culture, then slowly introduce innovations from beyond the culture.***

# Five Cultural “Corrections”

4. Many cultures are more affected and/or traumatized by secondary consequences of disasters than by the loss of resources brought on by the disaster itself.
  - ❖ *Prepare ourselves by learning the axiology (what is valued) and the epistemology (what is known or believed) of a particular culture.*

# Five Cultural “Corrections”

5. Much of Western-based interventions are “talk-based”, yet language, as a product of cognition and emotion, is only one of the five ways in which humans organize experience.

❖ *Listen holistically, speak intentionally.*

# Lessons Learned

- Cultural responsiveness is the foundation for all crisis, trauma and grief-related services.
- At the end of the day, it's about the relationship.



GOD BLESS  
THE  
GOOD GUYS



9 8:43

# Resources

Office of Minority Health: [www.thinkculturalhealth.org](http://www.thinkculturalhealth.org)

Prescription for Success: Community HealthCorps  
Member Training

[www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cultural-awareness-dbh-presentation.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cultural-awareness-dbh-presentation.pdf)

# Thank You!

*For more information...*

New Jersey Division of Mental  
Health and Addiction Services  
Disaster & Terrorism Branch

[www.disastermentalhealthnj.org](http://www.disastermentalhealthnj.org)

NJ Division of Mental Health  
Services, Disaster & Terrorism  
Branch