

Expert explains the importance of respecting other cultures

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With approximately 190 countries and seven billion people on Earth, it is not hard to imagine that many diverse cultures exist. Given this, one Baylor College of Medicine expert explains the importance of respecting other cultures and offers tips on how people can learn more about different cultures.

"By learning about [people](#) of different cultural backgrounds, you can increase your horizons," said Dr. Asim Shah, professor and vice chair for community psychiatry in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor. "If you put aside any prejudices or biases you might have and you are open to other people, it can help prepare you to listen, talk and learn about other people and their cultures."

One of the most important first steps people can take to learn about other cultures is to simply accept that there are many different cultures other than their own, said Shah. He also recommends that people think about the positives of different cultures and how surrounding yourself with diverse groups of people can enrich your life.

"Sometimes a person might not know very much about geography or history but by mingling and mixing with people from other cultures, they are given the opportunity to possibly learn about the geography, religion and customs of different countries," Shah said.

Shah explained that being open to learning about different cultures also

can encourage people to have diverse friend groups that include people of all different races, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations.

For those who want to learn about other cultures, but do not know where to start, Shah recommends picking up a book and reading about the cultures that interest you. He also suggests people do some research online but cautions people to visit reputable sites. He added that enjoying food from different cultures and regions can be a good way to start learning as well. However, he said the best way to learn is through face-to-face interaction with a person of the culture you would like to learn more about.

Shah emphasized that it is not only adults who should be interested in understanding different cultures but children should be learning too, especially those who live in diverse cities such as Houston.

"It is extremely important for adults to teach kids to be accepting of different [cultures](#) because if children are not taught, then they become more close minded. This can lead to issues at school and bullying," Shah said. "Kids are still forming opinions so it is essential that they are taught to be accepting while they are young."

To help families teach their children how to be accepting of other people, Shah recommends parents or family members sit down and talk with children as well as present them with easy to understand data.

"For example, if you live in Houston, you can visit the website for the recently created Office of New Americans and find lots of facts about the diversity in Houston and present that to your child," Shah said. "If you are able to explain the importance diversity to children and show them how diverse the world is, you are helping them be more open minded toward people of different cultural backgrounds."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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