

# Knowing and serving diverse families

[Art & Culture](#), [Cultural Diversity](#)



The United States is one of the most culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse countries in the world, so it is essential that all service providers know a range of strategies in order to enhance their relationships with families from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is helpful for those seeking to work as service providers to develop a common foundation of knowledge and practical strategies to address the needs of the families they serve, especially when the families' cultural background are different from their own. The textbook *Knowing and Serving Diverse Families* is designed for service providers who are providing early mediation services to families of diverse cultures. It includes ideas and suggestions for fostering cultural appreciation and sensitivity. The strength of the textbook is that it is easy to read and understand, and it offers realistic, common sense strategies to those of us seeking to get a better understanding about diversity. The material in the book encourages the reader to engage in self-reflection in regards to their role and how families might perceive it. It also racially breaks down ethnic diversity amongst American families. The purpose is so that we can work effectively with diverse, multi-need audiences, by knowing effective program planning for diverse people. The authors believe " that individuals are best served by professionals who understand the family, social milieu, and personal dynamics of their individual customer, patient or student" (Hildebrand et al. 5). *Knowing and Serving Diverse Families* has many strengths and serves as good basic information for those interested in working to help others. The textbook is organized into five sections. This organization allows easy reference by the reader wanting to reexamine specific sections of interest. The first section of the textbook provides stories

from service providers who have worked with and interacted with families of diverse cultures. These stories are great and provide an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others. In Section 2 the authors describe the Diversity Wheel and how it can be used to improve cultural sensitivity and awareness about diversity. The Diversity Wheel is a tool that can help to clarify the many factors that define an individual's uniqueness. This tool lists seventeen factors which relate to the service provider's or family's identity (Gruber). The Diversity Wheel allows the service provider to gain an understanding of the basis for expected behaviors within and outside the service provider's own cultural group. This model of developing an awareness and knowledge gained through self reflection can be generalized across various cultures. Section 3 through 5 provide excellent information on respecting cultural diversity when gathering information. The process of initial contact with the family is an important first step in the early intervention process. The area of assessment is another critical area when working with families in the early intervention system. The fourth section of this book provides much helpful information and many tools when preparing for and collecting information about the child's interests, strengths, abilities and personality characteristics. The final section addresses considerations in providing sensitive and appropriate programming for linguistically diverse families. Information about use of bilingual service providers, use of interpreters, and translating materials are discussed in this section. The biggest strength of this material is that it provides many stories from service providers and parents, which makes the material applicable to actual situations Teachers and other professionals that provide services to families

from different cultural backgrounds need to be aware of unique perspectives and communication styles common to other cultures. This is important because one needs to know and understand that often people from different cultures tend to react differently to situations, especially with dealing with subjects that involve anxiety, fear, embarrassment, and anger. Helping professionals need to be sensitive to the different values, experiences, and beliefs that may be held by members of various cultural and ethnic groups. They need to view diversity in a positive manner, because as the authors state " diversity can be a strength" (Hildebrand et al. 14). There is no one set of characteristics that can be ascribed to all members of any ethnic group. Instead, the cultural traits of individuals range from those traditionally attributed to the ethnic group to those that are descriptive of a person who has been totally assimilated into the majority culture. Still we continue to read and hear descriptions about individuals from minority groups that only reinforces existing stereotypes. " The word Stereotype generally applies to social situations wherein a static picture is held of a person, group, race, or issue" (Hildebrand et al. 19). Stereotypes can be harmful when you are trying to help a person out, they are considered to be a group concept, held by one social group about another. They are often used in a negative or prejudicial sense and are frequently used to justify certain discriminatory behaviors. I somewhat agree with the authors that stereotypes can be helpful. Stereotypes are helpful when using prior knowledge and new ideas when judging situations and people. However, we should not assume that because a family is from a certain culture that they hold all the beliefs of that culture. Or as the authors put it " no two are alike" (Hildebrand et al. 4). Yes

it helps that we be familiar with the diverse cultures and traditions that exist but we should never make assumptions about any one person or group. "Diversity is exciting" (Hildebrand et al. 5), and is very useful for those of us that are open-minded. I can see any service provider being anything other than open-minded; since, more than likely they will be working with a diverse population. Many service providers have chosen this career because they intend to practice in a culturally sensitive manner that will allow them to not only respect the diversity of those they are providing services to. Diversity lets us celebrate the richness that cultural and ethnic diversity brings to our society. The authors do try to cover all topics but I believe that they should have elaborated on certain issues a little more. For example, they authors don't bring up how those trying to provide a service should not assume a dominant role in a conversation, because this can place a person or family in a submissive role; in which tension may arise within family members. The authors do acknowledge the importance that language plays in communicating with others, they even write how one should take the time to learn a phrase or word in other languages. Taking the time to learn phrases or words in other language can make others feel as if you really are there to help them (Hildebrand et al. 41). They provides practical strategies that support best practices in assessing young children of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with disabilities. We must remember that it is critical to maintain open, ongoing communication with families from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This communication should be based on each family's method of preferences. Some of the other topics include the uniqueness of each family system, the development of a personalize

relationship with families, and the hiring of staff who will view diversity as an advantage. Characteristics of the family system are often heavily influenced by a family's cultural values and beliefs. Knowledge and understanding of the variety of family structures and systems can increase our ability to respond to the family's needs; therefore, enhancing our effectiveness with the family. Overall this textbook was very useful for me to get a better understanding of diversity in different areas of my life. I can see this textbook being very useful to families and communities within the United States. I think that schools, Head Start programs, early intervention providers, and other projects serving young children and their families would find it very useful. The material presented in Knowing and Serving Diverse Families provides the opportunity for service providers to thoughtfully consider how they and their early intervention programs can better serve families of diverse cultures. For those that learn better from real life scenarios, the stories and information that are shared by service providers and families from various cultures, such as Hispanics, European Americans, African Americans and Native Americans can be very helpful. This section of personal stories from service providers and families serves as an great opportunity to read about the interactions between service workers with families of diverse cultures. I learn greatly from this textbook and I know that many others will as well. Works Cited Gruber, Patricia R. . We All Are Different. 2002. West Virginia University. 02 Nov. 2005 . Hildebrand, Verna, Lillian A. Phenice, Mary M. Gray, and Rebecca M. Hines. Knowing and Serving Diverse Families. 2nd ed. Columbus: Prentice Hall, 2000.