

## CULTURAL AWARENESS EXERCISE

### What is meant by “*culture*?”

Specific groups of people that are set apart or distinguished by:

- Customs
- Beliefs
- Language
- Dress
- Habits & Behavior
- Ideology
- Social Norms

If you think of the area in which you live as a culture in itself, there would be a number of mini-cultures that exist within that larger culture. What are some you can think of? One way to think of this is to identify groups, clubs or nationalities. Another way to think of it is in terms of the various roles you fulfill. For instance, most of us could say we’re “Okies.” Teenagers could probably say you’re “students.” I can say I’m a First Offender’s Program facilitator. In the spaces below, write down two or three of these “mini-cultures” to which you belong.

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Now, thinking about parents and teenagers belonging to different “mini-cultures,” list several things you think your parent or teenager experience as a result of belonging to that mini-culture. In other words, if you’re a teenager, think about the culture your parents belong to, and if you’re a parent, think about the culture your adolescent is a part of. Discuss & determine if you’ve each made accurate assumptions.

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### Cultural Awareness Exercise (continued)

Ask participants to think about ALL the different groups to which they belong. Another way to think of this might be to consider all the different labels that could be applied to them, or all the different roles they fulfill in their lives. Advise that we’re going to ask everyone to identify one that applies to

them as we go around the room once or twice, and we'll list them all on the board. The leader can start by listing a group to which s/he belongs, such as FTOP leader, counselor, 'Okie,' etc.

*If the group is very small it will require several contributions from each person.*

Once there are at least 20 (30 or so is ideal) labels/groups listed, ask if, just looking at the list, they would think there are more similarities or differences among all the mini-cultures listed. Discuss this in terms of common hopes, dreams, fears & goals until the group realizes that we probably have a lot more in common than that which sets us apart.

Asking how the culture of parents differs from that of teens can initiate a discussion to help teens & parents better understand the world the other lives in and could lead to making the point that most of parents' lectures, nagging, etc., arise out of some sort of fear for their children.

### **Stereotypes**

This is a good time to introduce the idea of stereotypes by asking if there might be any commonly-held beliefs about any of the groups listed on the board. Ask what a 'stereotype' is, how they come to exist and what keeps them alive.

### **Prejudice**

Ask what the word 'prejudice' means to the group and how it's related to stereotypes.

A good category to examine in terms of stereotypes and prejudices (because it's usually non-threatening to the group as most, including the leader(s) share it) is "Okie." Ask what ideas people in other parts of the country have about people in Oklahoma. Ask them how they feel about it. Ask how they feel about being judged or labeled in this way.

From here the group leader can ask the juveniles what groups exist in their schools that are subject to stereotyped beliefs and prejudices and a discussion can be facilitated about what fuels those beliefs and how it might feel to be a member of one of those groups.

### **Discrimination**

Help the group determine that discrimination is the acting out of prejudicial beliefs. The leader might ask for examples of discrimination the group has seen practiced against certain groups in their schools and/or social scene.

A dramatic adjunct to this is to mention that in almost all of the horrendous acts of violence that have been perpetrated at some of the schools across the country, the common denominator was that the people committing that violence had been ostracized, bullied or ridiculed repeatedly over a period of time. The point should be made that *this in no way justifies the acts*, but to remind each of us that we have the power to make a difference in the life of someone every day simply by acknowledging their existence as a human being, worthy of respect and consideration. To put it another way, we can all be instrumental in reducing prejudice by ignoring stereotypes and being willing to get to know other people as individuals, not just as representatives of a certain group. Simply saying "Hi" or "What's up?" to someone in the hall, asking them what they thought of the algebra test, or if they're going to the assembly next hour, even if that person appears different from us, can start to form the threads of connection that all of us need and want.

