

- May be very different from friends you have had in the past
- Have ambition and courage and are outgoing and adventurous
- Have healthy work habits and strong ethics, and take pride in his/her character
- Enjoy learning new things
- Have found their goals and mission in life

APPRECIATING DIVERSITY

How Can You Strengthen Your Relationship with People from Diverse Backgrounds?

As we have discussed, if you are in the presence of another person, *you are communicating*. It is inescapable. Well, it is also inescapable that we all live in a diverse world with people from different socio-economic, cultural, religious, and ideological backgrounds. The American culture is one of the most diverse of any on earth! We are a nation of immigrants that still welcomes people from all over the world to our shores.

This fact is one of our greatest strengths, because in this country, ideas from all over the world come together in an environment that allows anyone to pursue his or her dreams and ambitions. On the other hand, all this diversity is accompanied by the problems of throwing so many people from diverse cultures together and expecting them to function together as one society. In a society such as ours, it is almost inevitable that prejudice will arise. However, by understanding what it means to live in a diverse society, we can learn how to communicate more effectively and, hopefully, learn more about the cultures and traditions of others.

"I am not a citizen of Athens or Greece, but of the world."
—Socrates

"We don't see things as **THEY** are, we see things as **WE** are."
—Anais Nin

What Are Ethnocentrism and Xenocentrism?

Many people truly believe that they are not prejudiced against any group and that they have no stereotypes in their thought processes about certain groups of people. If we dig deep enough, however, we would find that most of us have some kind of prejudices, and that we all discriminate in some ways. Because many of us have lived in rather homogeneous neighborhoods and primarily hang out with people "like us," we tend to be *ethnocentric*, believing that our particular ethnic background is superior, and tending to stay with "our kind."

Ethnocentrism suggests that we tend to fear people from other ethnic backgrounds, or we lump them together and view them **as a group**, rather than **as individuals**. We don't think that their culture, religion, or race could possibly be as important or worthwhile as our own. Think about the ramifications to your own life if you were judged by "your group" of people instead of as an individual—if everyone judged you *as a woman*, and not as Suzanne; if everyone judged you *as a Northerner*, and not as Joe; if everyone judged you *as a Pentecostal*, and not as Raymond; if everyone judged you *as a lesbian*, and not as Sandra.

Think about the negative terms many people use to describe just a few practices from cultures other than those found in the United States.

"People in England drive on the **wrong** side of the road."

"The Islamic language is written and read **backward**."

"Europeans use the **wrong kind** of money."

"Africans dress **funny**."



Have you ever made a snap judgment about something unfamiliar to you?