# Speaking Your Language:

# Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Support for International Students and New Canadians

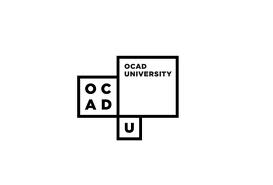
Peer Support Training Guide

*“The training material itself was very educative to me as I learnt that one may need a counsellor not because of a psychiatric situation but more because of huge cultural changes.”*

*An International Student reviewer*

A collaboration between Ryerson University, University of Toronto, and OCAD University

September 2014

**About the Speaking Your Language Project**Ryerson University, University of Toronto and OCAD University are developing, testing and sharing a model for collaboratively providing mental health services to culturally and linguistically diverse international students. Like all students, international students face various issues and challenges throughout their academic careers; however, evidence suggests that this cohort underutilizes mental health care supports available across campus compared to their domestic counterparts. Recognizing the impact differences in language and culture can represent in terms of a barrier to access and understanding, this program aims expand our mental health communities to include international students and new Canadians, increase intercultural competency of mental health care providers, and assist international students in connecting to services and supports.

This project is sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Mental Health Innovation Fund. Information to be disseminated on the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health website [www.campusmentalhealth.ca](http://www.campusmentalhealth.ca)

**Acknowledgements**

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With special thanks to Ryerson University International Student, Deng Thel for input and feedback

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Green, M. & Vigor, J. (2014). Peer Support Training Guide. Speaking Your Language: Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Support for International Students University of Toronto, Ryerson University and OCAD University Partnership. Toronto, ON: Author

**How to Use this Guide**

This guide is intended to supplement existing peer supporter training in order to highlight issues and resources specific to international students. Where possible, co-facilitate activities with student(s). You may also want to invite a counsellor to speak to the group for the Counselling Resources and FAQs section.

To further support your peer supporter’s capacity for mental health intervention, you may want to investigate if a program such as Livingworks’ ASIST or safeTALK programs, Mental Health First Aid, or QPR Triage Training (Question, Persuade, Refer) is right for your campus.

**Facilitator Tips**

* As much as possible, have students generate responses before showing the accompanying slide’s information. The slides have been set up so a headline or question will appear, allowing you to generate responses before moving on to see if there any another not mentioned by the participants.
* Always count to 10 in your head after you ask a question. It takes that long for a person to consider and formulate a response. If no one responds after 10 seconds, offer a clarification, prompt question, or example.

**Training Format**

The training has been broken into three components that could be delivered together or separately, depending on existing training planned, and time. Each segment takes approximately one hour, depending on the size of group and number of case studies. In total training takes 2 – 3 hours

1. Cultural Awareness
2. International Student Issues and Resources
3. Case studies

***Please note that some slides, especially those regarding issues available on campus, will need to be customized.***

**Learning Goals**

* To increase the cultural awareness of student peer supporters by introducing the topics of cultural differences and worldview, generally, and as relating to mental health
* To increase awareness of issues specific to international students, and appropriate referrals and supports

Cultural Awareness

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

* Identify components of culture
* Recognize elements of their own culture and the perspectives of others’ culture
* State ways to be more culturally sensitive and inclusive

**Duration**

60 minutes

**Suggested Pre-Reading for Staff and Students**

[www.intercultures.gc.ca](http://www.intercultures.gc.ca)

What is Culture?

What is Intercultural Effectiveness?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key Learning Points | Elements of culture, including our own culture, is often invisible to us  We approach the world from diverse points of view |
| Materials | Cultural Orientation Worksheet |
| Icebreaker: 10 Min | Introduction Pair Share: Have students discuss in pairs |
| Introduction: 10 Min  Slide  Slide | **Today we’re going to explore elements of culture**  **What is culture?**  Encourage a variety of verbal responses  *“What we do, think, and feel” or “the values, behaviours, practices, assumptions we've learned from our membership in groups that share them (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada)*  **You may have heard this analogy before, but how is culture like an iceberg?**  *Some is above and visible; some is just below the surface, and the vast majority you can’t see unless you go below the surface.*  **What are some of the *visible* elements of culture?**  *Food, music, language, holiday customs, dress*  **What are some of the *invisible* elements of culture?**  *Values, norms, rules, gender roles, importance of time,*  Review visualizing the Iceberg Model of Culture  (“Visualising the Iceberg Model of Culture,” n.d.)**Let’s illuminate some of our elements of culture through an activity** |
| Activity: 20 Min  Physical or worksheet Locating Cultural Orientations | Illustrating culture by locating our cultural orientations   * Determine two points in the room representing the ends of the spectrum. You may need to adapt for visually or mobility impaired participants, such as using/directing an assistant, remaining seated and use their arms as an indicator or completing on paper and discussing. A paper copy is included if necessary. * Have people stand up and move to where they feel they fall on the spectrum, first for their home country, and then for Canada * The facilitators can participate in the activity * Allow for discussion, observations, as the activity unfolds * Probing questions can include:   + How have you adapted to such a big cultural shift?   + How has this shift impacted you?   **As I read the following statements, move to where you feel you fall on the spectrum**.  **In my home country...**  **In Canada....** |

# Locating Cultural Orientations

Individuals and cultures demonstrate a wide range of values and preferences across a variety of cultural dimensions, and individuals within a culture may vary widely from the overall culture.

On the continuum, realizing there are many answers, situations, and no wrong answers, place:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **X for what you feel is Canada’s orientation** | | **🏳 (a flag) for your home countries orientation** | |
| **Time is Punctual**  Events should start on time | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Time is Flexible**  Things happen when they happen | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Individualism** Work is completed and recognized independently | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Collectivism**  Work is done and recognized as a group | |
|  |  | |  | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Professor as Expert**  When writing a paper, it’s best to state expert views and not disagree with the professor | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Professor as Facilitator**  When writing a paper, it’s best to question expert views and include my own | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Surfacing Conflict**  It’s best to address issues directly | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Maintaining Harmony**  It is best to maintain harmony | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Social Distance**  Friendly means making new people feel welcome by saying hi and being polite | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Social Closeness**  Friendly means making new people feel welcome by having them over to my house for a meal | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Emotionally Expressive**  It’s better to openly express emotions | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Emotionally Controlled**  It’s better to keep emotions private | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Mental Heath Discussed**  In my culture, we talk about mental health openly | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Mental Health Taboo**  In my culture, we don’t talk about mental health | |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Medical Model** Mental illness is a medical condition best treated by doctors and psychiatrists | -------------------------------------------------- | | **Social Model**  Mental distress is caused by situations around me, best handled by family, friends, and traditions | |

Created for Speaking Your Language: Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Support for International Students and New Canadians

A partnership between University of Toronto, Ryerson University, and OCAD University

Based on research by Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, adapted from Natalia Dyba, [Natalia.dyba@outlook.com](mailto:Natalia.dyba@outlook.com) as cited in (University of Washington Bothell, n.d.)  
(“Centre for Intercultural Learning,” n.d.; Kongnetiman & Eskow, 2009;)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Debrief: 20 Min  Slide  Slide | **What were some of the biggest similarities you noticed?**  **What were some of the differences?**  **Where you saw major differences, what is your preference?**  **How can we accommodate multiple cultures?**  *Awareness, being aware of differences, checking to see if we understand each other*  **What is missing from our cultural iceberg?**  *Mental health, attitudes towards health and treatment*  **There are vast differences in how our cultures define, view, and handle mental health, which we will explore next.**  (Kongnetiman & Eskow, 2009) |

International Student Issues

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

* Recognize international student issues
* Answer commonly asked questions about counselling
* Refer international students to appropriate resources

**Duration**

60 minutes

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| --- | --- |
| International Student Stressors: 15 Min  Slide | **We are all approaching mental health from different perspectives. We all define it differently, and we all handle it differently.**  **What are some of the stressors we all share as students?**  **What are some of the stressors that some international students might face?**  (Dipeolu, 2007)  **What does your culture see as the causes of mental health issues? How does your culture treat mental health?** |
| Statistics  Slide |  |
| Resources  Activity: 10 Min  Slide | **Resources Available** (Being developed for Ryerson, will need to be adapted by each university)  **Counselling FAQs** (Being developed, may need to be adapted by each counselling centre) |
| Case Study: 30 Min | **Case Study**  Select the cases most relevant to participants and time available.  ***You will need to first research campus resources and response practices.***  You may wish to introduce these individually in training sessions throughout the year, or schedule another time to go through several scenarios. |
| Wrap-up: 5 Min | **How can we support each other, and especially international students?**   * *Be aware and sensitive of cultural differences* * *Appreciate differences* * *Seek out different positions* * *If something seems strange, learn more about it* * *Imagine their position* * *Check in with how students are settling, making friends, etc.* * *Check regarding sleeping, eating habits* * *Let them know about counselling services, groups* * *Explain how counselling and groups work* |

# Case Studies

**Ming**

Ming is an international student you see every week through your work. You have noticed she is looking more and more tired each time you see her.  You wonder if she is not sleeping due to her school work load, and ask her about it. Ming explains that her housing situation is causing to lose sleep and she has been feeling what she describes as “nerves.” She’s also mentioned she has bad headaches and an upset stomach. Her roommates are noisy and stay up all hours of the night. She feels disappointed they haven’t become friends like she had initially hoped. Their behaviour and Ming’s inability to keep up with their conversations has left her feeling disconnected. When you ask her more about who she has become friends with, she mentions she has met a few people by helping out at events for the on-campus LGBTQ group. Her friends from back home have been asking her about her new life in Canada, but she has felt too embarrassed to share her experiences with them.

Discussion questions:

1. What issues might Ming be experiencing?
2. What cultural elements might not be visible?
3. How could you respond in this situation?
4. What resources could you introduce her to?

**Oreah**

Oreah is an international student from Nigeria. He is the only son of his parents. His father is successful engineer and wants Oreah to study mechanical engineering. Oreah is not interested in mechanical engineering. He wants to study English literature. Oreah is very afraid of his father but still decided to pursue what he wants to study. He transferred successfully from the Engineering program to English literature without informing his parents. He is not doing well in the Arts programs and has started smoking marijuana. Oreah is getting frustrated easily and has shown sign of aggressive behavior. He is not taking care of himself. He is suffering from extreme guilt but very afraid to tell his parents the truth. He does not want to see a counselor as he feels “a real man never cries in front of anyone”.

Discussion questions:

1. What issues might Oreah be experiencing?
2. What cultural elements might not be visible?
3. How could you respond in this situation?
4. What resources could you introduce him to?

**Maria**

 University of XYZ is hosting their annual seven-day long international students’ orientation (additional fees are charged to the participants). Marcos is one of the new American students who is going through gender transition. Marcos prefers to be called Maria although she has not changed her name in her legal documents.

Other new international students and some volunteers are having difficulty to understand Maria’s gender identity. They are avoiding Maria in group projects and activities. Maria locked herself in the bedroom and refused to join rest of the orientation. She is very upset and afraid that she will never make any friends in Canada, and won’t leave her room.

1. How could you respond in this situation? Should you speak to other new students?
2. Does this situation raise any issues for you? If so, how can you better understand this situation?
3. How can you help Maria?
4. What other resources could you introduce her to?

**Azin**

You have been given a referral from a fellow student staff with the following background information. Azin is an international student who started her science program in September feeling very confident about her academic abilities.  She was top of her class in high school, and received a distinction award from the principal.  Since starting her program in September, Azin has learned that her father is ill and will have a major surgery soon.  She wishes she could return home, but her parents have made it clear she must continue studying and earn good marks. Her ability to concentrate in class has been lacking, and she says she is now very stressed about her marks, especially her liberal electives, and has asked you what a “paper mill” is.   In addition, Azin knows the surgery will be expensive, and her family will not be able to send her as much money.  She has become concerned about covering the cost of his tuition for the next semester.

Azin has come to visit you during your work hours, and the only thing she asks is “Do you know where I can find a job?”

1. What issues do you see in this scenario?
2. What are some of the risks in this situation?
3. How could you respond?
4. What resources could you introduce her to?

**Li**

Li is a mature international student who recently arrived in Toronto with his wife and three year old.  Before his arrival, Li wrote to his graduate supervisor saying how honored he was to be accepted in the program, and outlined the details of his arrival.   The supervisor filed away the email anticipating Li would be in touch when he was settled in.  Weeks later, well into the beginning of the term, Li had not yet reported to the lab. The graduate administrator noted he was showing up for classes, but Li mentioned that instead of going to lab hours, he had been looking for a safer apartment for his family, and child care so his wife can look for work. Li had passed his supervisor in the hall many times, but did not know the proper way to address her, and felt it would be rude to approach her.  His graduate supervisor felt that Li didn’t seem very enthusiastic or driven to excel in such a demanding program and was put off by his lack of motivation.  On the other hand, Li felt that it was very rude that the supervisor had not been there to meet him upon his arrival, that she had not formally introduced the lab team, and had not yet been invited to dinner at her home.   Finally, the supervisor initiates a meeting where she expresses her disappointment in his lack of initiative, to which Li has very little to say in response. Instead, Li left the meeting more anxious and uncertain about his academic path and his family’s future in Canada.

Discussion questions:

1. What issues might mature students face?
2. What are the differences in the cultural expectations between Li and his graduate supervisor?
3. How could you assist Li in navigating in this situation?
4. What resources could you introduce him to?

**References**

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