

Cultural Do's and Don'ts: Filipino Elderly

- Filipinos place a strong cultural value on respect for age and for the elderly. Young people are expected to show respect to the elderly as well as older members of the family. Older adults should be addressed in polite language, preferably with appropriate titles of respect.
- Filipinos generally have a cheerful and fun-loving attitude towards life. They are often playful, at times cynical or irreverent, joking about their good as well as bad fortune. Laughing during difficult times is an important coping mechanism. However, this sense of humor can sometimes be distracting and unconstructive. Service providers should recognize its limitations and provide a structure where a client with a serious problem is guided towards more reflective thought and self-analysis.
- Discussing a private matter outside the family is generally perceived as unacceptable. To disclose one's problems to a stranger is embarrassing, and may expose the individual and their family to gossip or ridicule. The client therefore needs assurance that everything discussed in a session will be kept in strictest confidence. Or, sometimes a client seeking help may say, "My friend has a problem," for several sessions until trust is established.
- When a favor or service has been received, the Filipino value of utang na loob, literally "a debt from within" or debt of gratitude, dictates that it must be reciprocated. Failure to do so results in feelings of shame or guilt. Clients may express this value through offers of gifts or food. During home visits, it is likely that refreshments and/or food will be served. Such hospitality should be accepted. Service providers with strict rules on accepting gifts from clients may have to reconsider their policies for the sake of culturally appropriate practice.
- When dealing with Filipino couples, interact with both sexes on an equal basis. To defer to the male alone might be considered a personal offense to the wife as well as the husband.
- Filipinos regard confrontational directness as rude and impolite. Try to refrain from probing or asking pointed questions. You might begin with very general questions or "feelers" to determine how receptive the client is to discussing sensitive issues.
- Be aware of overly agreeable behavior on the client's part and determine if this is a reflection of the Filipino value of pakikisama or "smooth interpersonal relations," otherwise known as the "Sir" syndrome. This is done by focusing on the client's evasive or non-committal responses, such as, "I guess so, sir" or "maybe, sir." Inquiries must be used to further explore the meaning of the client's euphemistic verbal responses.
- Filipinos view the world in terms of personal relationships. The extent to which the client is able to personally relate to the thing or person(s) involved determines the success of a business or work relationship. Therefore, the client who needs assistance should be told of the benefits he/she will receive as a result of accessing a service.

Asian & Pacific Islander Older Adults Task Force MENTORS Project

- Because of this "personalistic" worldview, Filipinos have difficulty dealing with impersonal stimuli, e.g., bureaucracy, rules, regulations, or standard procedures. Further complications arise because of Spanish feudal beliefs that social status and position will bypass all rules.
- Some Western/European aspects of privacy are not valued by Filipinos, and great interest is expressed in personal detail. You may be asked personal questions, such as, "Are you married?" or "How long have you been working here?"
- Filipinos are highly sensitive to criticism and are easily humiliated. Criticism of the client or the client's family may be taken as an insult.
- In the face of an embarrassing situation, the client should be given a reasonable way out in order to save "face." Loss of face is very painful, especially when non-Filipinos are involved.
- Always remember that the Filipino elderly are a very diverse group. Since the 1900s, there have been several waves of Filipino immigrants who have come to the United States. These groups differ in educational levels, provincial origin, socio-economic status, reasons for immigration and/or degree of acculturation.
- In general, Filipinos have a relaxed and casual view of time. This results in poor time management (not being on time for appointments) or procrastination. This is part of the "bahala na" belief that "God will provide."

Traditional Holidays

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| January 1 | • Bagong Taon (New Year) - Celebrated with fireworks, music, dancing, and lots of noise to bid good-bye to the old year and any misfortunes that went with it and to welcome the new year with all its bright promises. |
| March/April | • Mahal na Araw (Holy Week/Easter) - Seven days of religious celebration commemorating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. |
| June 12 | • Araw ng Kalayaan (Independence Day) - Commemorates the proclamation of the first Philippine Republic by Emilio Aguinaldo in 1898 after the defeat of the Spaniards in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. |
| July 4 | • Araw ng Pagkakaibigan (Friendship Day) - Celebrates the granting of independence to the Republic of the Philippines by the U.S. in 1946. |
| November 1 | • Araw ng Mga Patay (All Saints Day) - Religious holiday to honor deceased family members and friends; celebration includes sprucing up of burial plots/tombs, decorating them with flowers and colorful plants, prayers, etc. |
| December 16 - 25 | • Araw ng Pasko (Christmas) - Religious celebration starts on December 16 with early dawn mass called "Misa de Gallo," and includes special meals. |
| December 30 | • Araw ng mga Bayani (National Heroes Day) - Celebrated in honor of Filipino national heroes, especially Dr. Jose P. Rizal. |