

## Personal space



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### The emotional reality of cultural rules on appropriate spacing

**Objectives:** Students should be able to describe the type of emotions one may experience when confronted with a new culture or microculture.

This activity can be done in class in approximately five minutes. It simply involves having students engage in a short conversation (preferably standing) with a neighbour.

After students have done this and, unconsciously, assumed the culturally appropriate distance for such a conversation, stop the activity and have them move a few inches closer and then continue the conversation.

- Notice the ways in which they try to reestablish the 'comfortable' culturally appropriate spacing.
- Have students then discuss their reactions.

Relate their discomfort to the fact that cultures differ (within limits) in what they consider appropriate spacing.

- Ask how they might react to a student or a student's parent who assumed a culturally inappropriate distance in a casual conversation.
- How might 'too close' proximity be interpreted?
- How might they react to a parent who came too close?
- How might they react to a parent or student whose own culture had more distant spacing rules?

You can also have students stand at a distance farther than what would normally feel comfortable. This exercise works particularly well in multicultural and multi-gender settings since what is 'comfortable' will vary by ethnicity and gender.

Source: [Culture-More Activities](#), © Carol C. Mukhopadhyay 2006.

## More information

- [What 'personal space' looks like around the world](#)

## Apply

1. What would you need to consider or find out prior to using this resource with a class that includes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students?
2. What would you need to consider or find out prior to using this resource with a class that includes students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
3. What would you need to consider or find out prior to using this resource with a class that includes students with a disability/disabilities?