



Tip sheet: Questions to ask for culturally safe, trauma-aware care

“Only the person receiving care can tell you if it feels culturally safe”

Cultural safety and trauma-aware practice are about seeing each older person as an individual, respecting their background, and understanding how life experiences shape their preferences. The best way to know what matters is to ask, listen, and respond with respect.

Use this tip sheet for some simple, respectful questions you can use when planning and providing care to ensure that older people feel safe, included and supported. You can use the questions during conversations, care planning or during daily care routines. These questions are a good tool to use to regularly check-in with the older person and see if any of their needs have changed and if the care that they are currently receiving meets their needs.

This tip sheet also includes some guidance on questions to avoid and suggests a more appropriate way to ask those questions.

Questions to guide culturally safe, trauma-aware care

Before beginning a conversation to understand an older person’s cultural preferences in their care, take time to ensure they feel comfortable in the environment and that their communication preferences are respected.

About communication	▪ are you comfortable having a chat with me in this setting or is there somewhere else you would feel more comfortable? ▪ what is the best way for me to communicate with you? ▪ would you prefer this information in another language or format? ▪ would you like me to arrange an interpreter or support person? ▪ how would you like me to address or greet you?
About advocates, family and community	▪ who would you like involved in your care and decision-making? ▪ would you like me to help you stay connected with your family, community, Country or Island Home? What is the best way for me to do that?
About safety and comfort	▪ what would help you feel most safe and comfortable here? ▪ is there anything you would like me to do differently to respect your privacy? ▪ are there people, routines or places that make you feel connected and supported?

About trauma awareness and healing	- are there any experiences or situations that might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe? - how can I support you if you ever feel distressed? - what helps you feel calm and in control?
About cultural identity and preferences	- are there any traditions, foods, or routines that are important for you? - are there particular holidays, rituals or spiritual practices you'd like supported?

Questions to avoid

Respectful care is also about the questions that you *should avoid*. Some questions can feel intrusive, judgemental, or unsafe, especially for people with past experiences of trauma, racism, or discrimination.

Avoid asking...	Ask instead...
Overly intrusive or personal history questions, such as: - What trauma have you been through? - Why did you come to Australia?	- Are there things that might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe that I should be aware of? - Is there anything about your background or experiences you would like us to know so we can support you better?
Stereotyping or assumption-based questions, such as: - All people from [X culture] believe this, don't they? - But you don't look like you are [X]	- Everyone has different experiences and preferences, and I would like to understand yours if you are comfortable. What traditions or customs are important for you? - How would you like me to acknowledge and support your identity?
Questions about religion, politics or family that feel judgemental, such as: - Why doesn't you family visit more often? - Do you still do that tradition?	- Who are the important people you would like involved in your care? - Are there cultural or spiritual practices you would like us to support?
Yes / No questions that close conversations, such as: - Do you have any special needs? (yes/no) - Is there anything cultural we should know? (yes/no)	- Are there particular needs or preferences we should know to make your care more comfortable? - Many people I care for have customs or practices that are important to them. What is important to you?