**Mindfulness**

Cooking Matters volunteers and staff often come from different communities and social backgrounds than our class participants. Sometimes because of these differences, miscommunications can occur in class. Although everyone may come to class with good intentions, sometimes we can say hurtful or oppressive comments without realizing we are doing so. This activity will help identify how good intentions can have a harmful impact.

All of the following statements were made by volunteers/staff during a Cooking Matters class. Respond to each one stating what the intention behind the statement might have been, why the statement might have been harmful to the participant or their learning, and how you might have addressed the statement while giving feedback to the volunteer/staff.

1. “How many children do you have? Wow, how old are you?”
2. “Have you ever tried the pre-made pizza crust at Trader Joes?”
3. “I only buy organic produce.”
4. “You must know how to make tofu taste good!” (Directed at a person of Asian descent)
5. “What is your favorite Christmas food?”
6. “This would taste really good with rum in it”
7. “Walk up to the front of the room so you can see what we are doing.”
8. “Does your husband. . . ?” (Directed to a woman when a man and woman come in to a class together)
9. “If you give me your number, maybe we can get together and talk about it.”
10. “French fries aren’t a good food choice.”
11. “Oh, bread has too many carbs in it. You shouldn’t eat that.”
12. “I would never make crab cakes with imitation crab.”

**Some ideas to reflect on:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Statement | Good Intention | Harmful Impact |
| 1 | Seems like a good way to connect with someone | It is possible that asking about children could bring up unpleasant memories/feelings for a participant. Some people have been separated from their families, for any number of reasons.  |
| 2 | Pre-made pizza crust at Trader Joe’s may be good, inexpensive, easy-to-prepare for a meal. | Trader Joe’s stores are largely placed in wealthier neighborhoods, which restricts access for a number of our clients. The same is true of other stores that are located predominantly in well-off neighborhoods, or that are attractive because of good quality, but may be inaccessible to clients because of cost (i.e., Whole Foods, etc.). |
| 3 | Organic food can be considered healthier than conventionally-grown food.  | Organic food is not available at all stores, and is more often available at higher-priced stores that are more often located in wealthier neighborhoods. If available at a location a client shops, organic produce may be prohibitively expensive. |
| 4 | Volunteer is trying to connect with the participant. | Inappropriate to make an assumption about a participant based on their race. |
| 5 | Seems like a good way to start a conversation. | Could be alienating if a participant does not celebrate Christmas.  |
| 6 | You are exploring different uses and preparations for foods, and perhaps connecting with some participants about shared tastes, or even careers (if someone is a bartender, etc…)  | Alcohol can be inappropriate for a number of reasons. Some cultures do not allow alcohol, so this discussion can be alienating or offensive. Participants may be struggling with issues of alcohol abuse, which can make the topic difficult. Even if there is no one to whom it is offensive, talking about alcohol is off-topic and takes away from the purpose of the class.  |
| 7 | You want everyone to be able to see what you are doing, and the closer they are the easier this will be. | Could leave people out of the class if they are unable to stand up or come forward due to physical disabilities. Statement could also be directed at somebody with impaired vision, in which case you would be singling them out in a way that could be uncomfortable.  |
| 8 | You are making conversation, relating to the participants.  | You are making assumptions that two people coming together are married. Alternative relationship status is possible, and assuming marriage can be offensive and alienating. Additionally, this (or other assumptions about relationships) assumes a certain sexual orientation.  |
| 9 | You think you might be able to help this person find a resource, solve a problem, etc. | There is a power dynamic that exists between participants and volunteer instructors. It is inappropriate to ask for personal information of any kind from a participant. It is also inappropriate to give your personal information to them. |
| 10 | We are teaching healthy habits, and eating French fries is not one—everyone knows that! | There is no such thing as a bad food! Everything is ok in moderation, and even foods we consider unhealthy can be part of a healthy diet, as long as they are not overused. |
| 11 | “Oh, bread has too many carbs in it. You shouldn’t eat that.” | There is no such thing as a bad food! We should not be judging what participants are eating based on our personal nutrition habits.  |
| 12 | You are stating your preferences about food taste and quality. It might start a good discussion! | Ingredients like fresh crab are prohibitively expensive to many of our participants. As volunteers, we should be ready to suggest alternative solutions that will work in recipes, even if it would not be our first choice. |

 (From Solid Ground, the Cooking Matters lead partner in Seattle)