Overview:
We’ve all been in situations that have produced misunderstandings. This lesson challenges participants to consider how a mismatch between intent and impact can cause conflict and develop strategies for mitigating problems. They will first learn the differences between intent and impact and then find real-world examples where intent and impact did not match.

Objectives:
As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:
1. Articulate the differences between intent and impact.
2. Recognize the importance of alignment between intent and impact, as well as the risks of focusing on intent only.
3. Identify real-world examples where intent and impact did not match up.
4. Brainstorm strategies for considering impact before acting or speaking.

Time:
1 hour

Group Size:
Entire group

Materials:
“How Intent and Impact Differ and Why It Matters” article from Healthline (in Links and Downloads), a smartphone/tablet/laptop and access to the Internet

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:
- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:
Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:
- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.
INTENT VS IMPACT LESSON PLAN

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Other Skills:

Emotional Resilience

Activity Instructions:

1. Assign the “How Intent and Impact Differ and Why It Matters” article from Healthline for pre-reading.

2. Discuss the reading with participants using the following questions:
   - What is the difference between intent and impact? Why is it important to understand the difference?
   - What are some of the problems that can emerge if intent and impact don’t match during an interaction?
   - What are some strategies you can use to remedy a difficult situation where intent and impact don’t match?

3. Have participants (either individually or in small groups) search on the Internet for real-world examples of cases where there’s a clear difference between intent and impact (i.e., unintentional harm may have occurred). They might consider looking for examples on social media (such as through disagreements that have occurred on Twitter, Facebook, or Reddit) or in more traditional media like news or magazine sites.

4. Once they have found their example, they should write down their answers to the following questions:
   - What happened in this situation? Provide a brief summary.
   - How did the person/people who acted or spoke in a way that unintentionally caused harm react in this situation?
   - How did the person/people who felt the impact react in this situation?
   - What are the contextual factors such as cultural identities of those involved, the power dynamics of the situation, the histories between the parties, etc. that could have shaped the harm experienced?
   - What are the ways that both parties could have handled the situation differently to prevent the conflict?
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5. Then, the facilitator should end by debriefing with the following questions:
   - How did you feel as you were completing this activity?
   - Which scenarios resonated most with your own experiences?
   - What did you learn about intent vs impact?
   - How might you use what you learned in your own life?

Related Tools:
   - Addressing Microaggressions

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