

# Basic Etiquette in Somali Culture



# Essential Question

How do **cultural norms** and **etiquette** shape social interactions and relationships in Somali culture, and how can understanding these norms enhance our ability to engage respectfully in diverse social settings?

# Learning Targets



- I understand the key aspects of etiquette in Somali culture.
- I recognize the importance of modesty, hospitality, and respectful interactions.
- I can develop skills for navigating cross-cultural social situations.

# Offering to Pay

If someone offers to pay for your meal, it is polite to initially refuse (e.g., “I couldn’t possibly let you do that”) before accepting graciously.



# Attitudes Toward Time

- Lateness among friends is common and doesn't imply rudeness.
- Somalis are patient and have a relaxed approach to time, but punctuality is expected in professional settings.



# Modesty in Dress

- Women wear clothes covering shoulders and knees to respect modesty.
- Women should especially be modest in behavior and dress; showing hair in public can be inappropriate.



# Interactions Between Genders

- Unmarried individuals should keep their distance from those of the opposite sex.
- Open flirting with Somali women by men is considered inappropriate.



# Respectful Behavior

- Avoid showing, pointing, or **exposing the soles of your feet** to others while sitting.
- Respect privacy; ask **permission before taking photos**, especially of women.
- **Offer your seat** to someone older and stand when an elder enters the room.



# Elder Respect

- It is disrespectful to tell an elder what to do or openly disagree with them.
- Always stand when an elder enters a room or you are greeting them.



# The Evil Eye

- Complimenting excessively can invoke the evil eye (“xasad”); avoid repeating compliments.
- Use “Mashallah” (May God bless) to ward off jealousy after a compliment.



# Responding to Compliments

- Show gratitude by responding with an equally respectful compliment.
- If the person is Muslim, wish them Allah's (God's) blessings.



# Hospitality in Somali Culture

- Hospitality is central; being a bad host is shameful.
- Guests are highly respected; offering water is a minimum expectation.
- Guests are always offered refreshments (typically tea); accepting is important for friendship.
- Refusing can be seen as offensive.



# Offering and Complimenting Items

- Extend offers multiple times; initial refusal shows humility.
- Offer everything multiple times in return to avoid misunderstandings.
- Complimenting items **may lead to the host offering them as gifts**; insist on appreciation without accepting.



# Social Visits and Respecting Private Spaces

- Close friends and family may visit unannounced; not visiting for a long time signals relationship insignificance.
- **Social visits** are important for building and mending relationships.
- A Somali home is also a private place for **prayer**; be clean and respectful.
  - **Remove shoes** unless advised otherwise.
  - Visits can last for hours; expect **prolonged goodbyes** as hosts walk guests outside.

