



A Culture of Life

In every space where people gather—whether to live, learn, or work—there exists a hidden culture shaped by our actions, words, and presence. This activity invites us to slow down and take a compassionate look at the culture we help create each day. Rooted in the principles of Gentle Teaching, we'll explore how to move from coldness to warmth, from isolation to community, and from control to connection. Together, we'll reflect on what's within our power to change—and how even the smallest gestures can make someone feel safe, valued, and truly at home.

Imagining a Culture of Life

A Culture of Life places gentleness at its core, not as weakness, but as a form of justice. It recognizes that nonviolence, compassion, and mutual change are ongoing life-projects. In such a culture, caregivers are servant-leaders who seek transformation in the smallest moments and gestures.

Let's pause to reflect: What is within our power to change—today? Even the smallest shift can ripple outward. But true change begins with us.

Activity

Purpose: To reflect on the culture of your shared space (e.g., group home, classroom, workplace).

- To identify what is within your power to change today.
- To create a shared vision and begin moving toward it—together.

Instructions:

Read aloud, discuss openly, and reflect on each of the following dimensions.

Score yourselves from 1 (COLD) to 4 (WARM) and discuss practical ways to grow warmer together.

1. Cold vs. Warm Culture

COLD: A cold culture separates caregivers from those they serve. It's marked by emotional distance, cliques, and a controlling mindset. It emphasizes compliance over connection and hierarchy over community.

Common signs

- Distinctions like "staff vs. client"
- Rare smiling, warmth, or touch
- People left idle, unnoticed, or unheard
- Environments that feel institutional, chaotic, or uninviting
- Rules on display; relationships rarely discussed

WARM: A warm culture reflects mutual companionship, shared humanity, and a sense of home. Caregivers model servant leadership through consistent kindness—even during hard moments.

Common signs:

- Smiles, calm tones, soothing sounds
- Affectionate, non-intrusive physical contact
- Shared meals, shared joys
- An inviting, personalized environment
- A visible feeling of "we belong to each other"

Score yourselves from 1–4 and reflect:

What small actions can warm our culture today?

2. Ignoring vs. Loving Interactions

IGNORING: When people are walked past, spoken about but not with, or treated as objects of correction—not companions. Even one person left out diminishes the whole.

LOVING: Every interaction reflects safety, presence, and love. Especially with the most troubled person, love becomes more active, not withheld. There is trust, dialogue, and emotional hospitality.

Reflection cues:

- Are greetings genuine and consistent?
- Do we correct with care or with scolding?
- Do we show unconditional love, especially in difficult moments

Score yourselves from 1–4 and reflect:

How can we make every person feel seen, heard, and safe?

3. Self-Focus vs. Community Building

SELF: When independence and compliance are prioritized above all, community tends to fragment. Individual goals are emphasized over collective connection.

COMMUNITY: The group works, learns, and grows together. Kindness, shared responsibility, and co-created experiences define the space. The most vulnerable are embraced, not isolated.

- Daily group check-ins or circle
- Co-learning and shared responsibilities
- Language of “we” more than “they” or “I”
- Celebrating interdependence as strength

Score yourselves from 1–4 and reflect:

What can we do together that would be more meaningful than doing alone?

Final Step: Imagining More

As you have reflected, based on your group discussion, consider adding three other variables unique to your space or community.

- What does belonging look like here?
- How do love and compassion relate in our setting?
- What makes our space feel sacred or life-affirming?

What Did John Say?

The best change starts at the grassroots-- the house in the neighborhood that we are making into a home, the classroom in the schoolhouse where we are teaching people to learn to live together, the workplace where we are shoulder to shoulder with our coworkers. We need to find ways to take control of our own community. We are like yeast in dough— a little speck of yeast soon lifts the mass.

A culture of life is one in which nonviolence is the focus of everyone, and gentleness is seen as an act of justice. It recognizes that all change is mutual and is a life-project. It sees caregivers as servant leaders. It looks for change in the smallest of things.