KOREANS

The Korean community in Guilford County is almost exclusively from South Korea, and the community has come as immigrants, based on long standing ties with the United States. Most Korean immigrants are also active Christians, and that connection has been part of their migration to the United States. The Korean community across this country is well established, well educated, and active in business enterprises. Most newly arriving Koreans are easily acculturated through existing well established ethnic communities in the United States.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Approximately one million Korean Americans currently live in the United States, and about 3,000 live in Guilford County.
- 19% of the population of Korean Americans live in the South.
- The Korean alphabet consists of 14 consonants and 10 vowels.
- The Korean educational system is very similar to that of the United States.
- Nationally, Koreans own 20% of all dry cleaning businesses.
- For Koreans, a child’s first birthday is very important. Until recently, the death rate for Korean children under the age of one was very high. As a result, the first birthday marks a major milestone in a child’s life and is celebrated with prayers and feasts. This celebration is known as Tol.

Information included here is provided to help you become more aware of the culture and traditions of your clients, students and co-workers. Please use this only as a guide, keeping in mind that all people within a culture are not the same. Be sure to ask your clients and their families about their specific beliefs, practices and customs. Showing respect and openness toward their traditions will help you build better relationships and provide more effective services.
**Culture**

**Religious Practices & Beliefs** Though most Koreans have a Buddhist heritage, Christianity has become very popular. Korean immigrants are primarily Protestant. There are approximately nine Korean churches in Guilford County. Church is an important community center for Korean Americans, particularly for first generation Korean Americans.

**Social Class** For Koreans, social class is determined by education, familial background, and financial status. Class recognition and discrimination is less of an issue for Koreans. A majority of financially successful Korean Americans are business people, owning dry cleaning businesses and convenience stores. Though these business owners may be in a position of financial superiority to Korean professionals, the professional class (physicians, lawyers, and professors) is considered to be of a higher social status than business owners.

**Education** Korea has the world’s highest ratio of Ph.D.s to the general population, and one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the world. In Korea, parents place great emphasis on their children’s education. Korean children are often sent to Europe, Australia, or the United States for schooling, beginning at young ages. Great sums of money are invested in preparation for entrance exams for secondary schools and universities. Essentially, a high percentage of Koreans are college graduates.

**Time Orientation** Time is a loose construction for Koreans. In elementary and secondary schools, on-time performance has not been emphasized until recently. In the past, as long as the work was completed, timeliness was not a priority.

**Food & Diet** Korean food is very unique and Koreans do not like to go without their traditional food. There are few Korean restaurants except where Koreans form a large ethnic community in larger cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. Therefore, Koreans often eat at Japanese or Chinese restaurants, as the flavor and primary ingredients used in these types of cuisine are very similar to traditional Korean dishes. Due to the scarcity of Korean restaurants in America, most Koreans prefer to eat at home most of the time. Garlic is the ingredient with which most Korean food is flavored.

**Family & Relationships**

Family is of utmost importance to Koreans. The familial structure is male-oriented, and men make the decisions within the family. Parents are often quite strict with their children and individualism is not regarded as a virtue. In fact, Korean children often feel great pressure to accept certain familial goals and aspirations as their own. Hierarchical relationships govern the Korean family, as well as in their general society. Elders are shown deference at all times.

**Greetings & Showing Respect** For Koreans, respect is demonstrated to all elders, regardless of social class. If a businesswoman passes an elderly homeless person on the street, she will demonstrate her feelings of respect using appropriate language and gestures. In contrast to American society, in which respect is horizontal in nature, Koreans adhere to a vertical concept of respect in which hierarchical relationships determine who is worthy of a display of respect. Mannerisms, greetings, and formality of language are all dependent on this vertical concept of respect.
Koreans address one another with varying degrees of formality based on age and social status. When at a gathering of strangers, Koreans will use conversational tactics to gauge the age of the person with whom they are speaking (for example, “When did you graduate from the University?”). Having a sense of belonging to a group is of great importance to Koreans. Within their group (be it a social club, childhood friends, or fellow church members) Koreans feel a sense of obligation to be kind, generous, and loyal. Those who are not members of a given group are viewed as virtually non-existent and not worthy of address.

Traditional Korean greetings are formal and governed by rules of respect based on age appearance. Koreans use two languages: one that addresses horizontal peers and persons of lower status, and one that addresses those in a position of respect and higher age. Age is the most significant factor in determining the level of respect to be conveyed in a greeting. It is traditional to bow when greeting elders and to use titles such as “Dr.,” “Mr.,” and “Mrs.” in order to demonstrate appropriate respect. It is rude to address an elder as “you.” Korean men may shake hands as a greeting. The traditional handshake is conducted with a light grip and eyes averted. Women do not typically shake hands with men but instead will use a slight nod to convey a greeting. More physical greetings, such as hugging and kissing, are inappropriate.

Gestures and non-verbal communication are very important in Korean culture. Eye contact is not considered necessary, and prolonged direct eye contact during conversation is even considered impolite. The social norms governing the greeting of elders are quite specific and include the use of formal language. For example, when offering a drink to an elder, a younger Korean person will say “drink, should we give?” rather than “would you like a drink?” Bodily contact and public displays of affection are not acceptable gestures in Korean culture, although you may observe members of the same sex holding hands as they walk down the street in a show of friendship. The open hand or middle finger is used for pointing as opposed to gesturing with the index finger. It is considered impolite to enter a room without knocking or to enter someone’s home without removing your shoes.

Koreans are very private people who do not like to seek medical attention. Self-expression is not counted as a virtue among Koreans and, therefore, many Koreans feel that medical problems should be kept to oneself. Furthermore, Koreans do not like to discuss things that are distressful in nature; they would prefer to go without necessary health care.

Language barriers pose a problem for Koreans seeking medical attention. Additionally, the act of asking for help from a stranger is considered bold by Koreans and is often avoided. Many Koreans in Guilford County do not have health insurance and cannot afford to pay medical bills without insurance. The Korean value of belonging to a group also poses an obstacle to health care in that Koreans prefer to seek help from within their social group.

• Use pictures to help explain medical procedures.
• Encourage Korean patients to bring a trusted friend or family member to the appointment.
• Locate Korean physicians and
healthcare providers within the community as Koreans are a private people who prefer to visit a Korean healthcare provider.

**SHARING COMMUNITY**

Korean Association  
4411 West Market St., #302  
Greensboro, NC  
(336) 708-3000

The Greensboro Buddhist Center  
2715 Liberty Road  
Greensboro, NC 27406  
(336) 272-6297  
Fax: (336) 272-1607

Korean First Presbyterian Church  
318 Stage Coach Trail  
Greensboro, NC 27409  
(336) 632-1585

Korean Presbyterian Church  
3523 Johnson Street  
High Point, NC 27265  
(336) 841-8439

Korean United Methodist Church  
2504 E. Woodlyn Way  
Greensboro, NC 27407  
(336) 852-8535  
Fax: (336) 852-8575

Korean Language Society of Greensboro  
Faith Presbyterian Church  
6309 West Friendly Avenue  
Greensboro, NC 27410

**HOLIDAYS & CELEBRATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOLAR CALENDAR</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Year's Day</td>
<td>Jan. 1-2</td>
<td>Korean observance of the anti-Japan movement against the Japanese colonialism of March 1, 1910</td>
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<td>Independence Movement Day</td>
<td>Mar. 1</td>
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<td>Arbor Day</td>
<td>Apr. 5</td>
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<td>Children's Day</td>
<td>May 5</td>
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<td>Memorial Day</td>
<td>June 6</td>
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<td>Constitution Day</td>
<td>July 17</td>
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<td>Liberation Day</td>
<td>Aug. 15</td>
<td>Korean Independence Day</td>
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<td>Foundation Day</td>
<td>Oct. 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas Day</td>
<td>Dec. 25</td>
<td>Christian holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LUNAR CALENDAR</strong></td>
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<td>New Year's (Seol-nal)</td>
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<td>The first day of the first month and the day before and after</td>
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<td>Buddha's birthday (Seokka Tanshin-il)</td>
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<td>The eighth day of the fourth month</td>
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<td>Harvest Moon Festival</td>
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<td>Thanksgiving (Chuesok)</td>
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<td>The fourteenth through the sixteenth day of the eighth month. During this holiday, families visit the graves of their ancestors and pay their respects to the dead.</td>
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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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