Closing the Gap When Working with Spanish Speaking Families – In the United States.

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Why is this an important topic in our field?

1. Hispanic/Latino children are the fastest-growing youth population.

2. Hispanic children in America demonstrate a higher prevalence of hearing impairment than other children. The percentage of deaf and hard of hearing Hispanic children is greater than Caucasian children. “Neonatal hearing loss, already one of the most common birth disorders in the United States, is especially prevalent among Hispanic–Americans and those from low-income households.”
Reasons Why Professionals Should Strive to Close the Cultural Gap When Working With Spanish Speaking Families?

Because understanding the culture of those we serve make us better professionals. It will allow us to:

- Recognize a family’s cultural strengths
- Provide appropriate services based on a family’s unique needs.
- Build genuine, respectful relationships.
- Do away with stereotypes.
- Understand that differences are not deficits.

Avoid cultural misunderstandings.
Never Make Assumptions About Cultural Beliefs:
Generalizations can help us to understand behavior and should not be use as stereotypes. The information provided in this presentation aims to provide a means to understand the beliefs and values of Some of the members of the Latino/Hispanic culture that you may encounter in your practice.
Cultural competency and cultural sensitivity is important when working with any population.
Hispanic and Latino are not identical terms. Hispanic, has the broader reference encompassing all Spanish-speaking peoples in both hemispheres and emphasizing the common denominator of language among communities that sometimes have little else in common. Latino—which in Spanish means "Latin" but which as an English word is probably a shortening of the Spanish word latinoamericano—refers more exclusively to persons or communities of Latin American origin.”

(Boston College–Office of AHANA Student Programs)
General Characteristics of the U.S. Latino / Hispanic Population

Language usage
Spanish is the main language spoken in Latin American countries. However, there are other languages and dialects in Latin America. For example, Portuguese is spoken in Brazil. Latin countries have their own Indigenous languages. Some examples are Quichua, Quechua, Quiche, and Aymara. Within the United States, Spanish (or an indigenous dialect) is often spoken at home with English being spoken at school or in the workplace. The native language spoken at home should be taken into consideration when delivering services.
More General Characteristics

- **Race / Ethnicity**
  *Latino / Hispanic is an ethnicity, not a race.* There are several racial categories in Latin America for example: white, black, indigenous, mulatto, mestizo, and Asian.

- **Family**
  There is an emphasis on cooperation and interdependence among family members. It is not unusual to see the extended family included as part of the family unit. Friends can become family through “compadrazgo.” This should be taken into account in the development and implementation of the Individualized Family Service Plan or the Individualized Education Plan.
Greetings
In general, friends and relatives greet each other in Latin America with a kiss, a hug or both.

Personal Space
Hispanics view sense of personal space differently.

Celebrations
It is important to talk about holidays because, although most countries share celebrations across the border, there are certain celebrations that are specific to a particular country.
More General Characteristics

Time
Hispanics tend to be more relaxed about time than Americans. For example, people who are invited for a 1:00 PM event may not begin to arrive until 1:30 PM or later. Keep in mind that this is a generalization. Globalization, assimilation and/or acculturation often change these behaviors. You can gently, and in a nonjudgmental way, educate the families you work with regarding how time is perceived in the USA.
More General Characteristics

Gender and Parental Roles
Gender and parental roles are clearly defined. Typically, the father is the provider and the mother attends to the household and the children. In some families, girls are treated differently from boys with clear gender roles.

Machismo
It is a cultural trait and it varies from country to country, region or social status. In general, the father is the head of the household. He is the wage earner. The mother may be submissive to her husband (remember this is a generalization). However, it is not uncommon to see that as a couple advance in years, the mother slowly gains more control.

Remember: Generalizations can help us to understand behavior and should not be used as stereotypes. These are only generalizations which may or may not apply to the family you are serving.
Cultural Differences in Parenting Styles

- Hispanic women generally breast-feed longer than white women.
- Moms spoon feed their children longer.
- In the Andes, mothers carry their young children on their back throughout the day.
- The practice of binding the baby is common in the Andes.
- Children are allowed to drink coffee.
- It is not uncommon for families to share bedrooms and beds.

*** These cultural differences in parenting styles have been in place for generations and do not negatively affect child development in any way.
“Many of the traditional health and disease beliefs of Latinos are based on sixteenth-century Spanish medicine/religion and influenced by the beliefs of the Aztecs and the Incas. Many but not all Latin people believe that physical and mental illness may be attributed to an imbalance between the person and the environment.” or external forces.

Many Latino/Hispanic religious and health beliefs blend Catholic traditions and the religious beliefs of the African slaves who were brought to Latin America. These beliefs may affect a family's understanding of disability, illness, who provides care and the resulting treatments.
Tips When Working with a Spanish Speaking Family

- Shake hands with family members and refer to the adults as Señor (Mr.) or Señora (Mrs.) as a sign of respect unless you are told it is not necessary.

- Hispanic people may avoid eye contact with people they view as authority figures as a sign of respect.

- Nodding doesn’t always indicate understanding. It could simply mean they are listening so ask them open ended questions to ensure understanding.
Tips When Working with a Spanish Speaking Family – continued

- Some families prefer that the providers coming into their home are women especially if they are working closely with the mother and the child without other adults in the household.

- Families may be very sensitive to your reactions regarding what they are going through and to your behavior toward their children.

- It is not uncommon for a family to not attend meetings if their children are not included.

- If you are offered coffee, a drink, or food and do not want it, let the family know that you really appreciate their kindness and hospitality but just had a drink or ate before you came to the house.
Tips when working with diverse cultures

- Research the history of the culture. *(Learn as much as you can about the population you work with for example songs / rhymes / games)*

- Do not make assumptions. Leave stereotypes at the door and beware of hidden biases.

- When in doubt, ask; you can learn a lot from the families you work with.

- Look for the unique cultural and spiritual strengths of the families you work with.

- Form relationships with key members of the cultural group you work with (interpreters, educators, spiritual leaders etc.) who can help you navigate the culture and provide ongoing consultation.

- Seek ways to participate with the community during both celebrations and tragedies.

*(Based on the recommendations from the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention)*
Final Recommendations

- It is highly recommended that any assessment be conducted in the family’s language of origin. If the clinician does not speak Spanish, then the use of a Spanish speaking interpreter will be necessary.
- Have high expectations for all the families you work with
- Do not judge a family’s ability to learn information about hearing loss and/or nurture their child’s development by their language, culture, or literacy level.
- Remember that culture can shape an individual’s concept of disease, disability, and treatment
- Finally, be patient with yourself –

*CULTURAL COMPETENCE IS AN ONGOING PROCESS!!!*
Always remember.......  

Treat people as individuals with the dignity and respect they deserve. Ignoring the differences among culturally diverse populations can become a barrier between providers and patients/clients/families. Lack of cultural competence may lead to ineffectiveness and sometimes even to negligence.
Suggested reading

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures by Anne Fadiman

The family portrayed in this book is not Hispanic, is Hmong. However the book depicts the plight of many cultural diverse families dealing the health care system.
Handout

What is an Interpreter?
A person who facilitates accurate communication between people speaking different languages and to ensure understanding. Use interpreters to communicate with the family and when performing assessments and evaluations.

What is a translator?
Translators convert written materials from one language into another. They must have excellent writing and analytical ability, and because the translations that they produce must be accurate, they also need good editing skills.

What is a cultural broker?
Jezewski (1990), defined culture broking as “the act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change.” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).
Handout–Tips when working with diverse cultures

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- When in doubt, ask; you can learn a lot from the families you work with.
- Look for the unique cultural and spiritual strengths of the families you work with.
- Form relationships with key members of the cultural group you work with (interpreters, educators, spiritual leaders etc.) who can help you navigate the culture and provide ongoing consultation.
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Handout - Never Make Assumptions About Cultural Beliefs:

Culture is learned, never rigid and is constantly changing. It must be passed down from one generation to the next in order to continue. Factors like globalization, education, migration, changes to religious affiliation as well assimilation into a new country influence how and if cultural beliefs and values are passed down to the newer generations.

Customs and values can vary widely from country to country or from one region to another within a country due to factors such as: age, socioeconomic status, country’s history. gender, religion, geographic location, level of education and ethnic or racial identification and ancestors country of origin (among others). For example: not all Latinos celebrate cinco de Mayo, use healers or eat tacos.

Many times professionals choose to guess or assume cultural customs and values based on previous experiences or information gained from another person. When in doubt, it is best to ask the family being served.

**Generalizations can help us to understand behavior and should not be use as stereotypes.** The information provided in this presentation aims to provide a means to understand the beliefs and values of Some of the members of the Latino/Hispanic culture that you may encounter in your practice.
Handout - Never Make Assumptions About Cultural Beliefs-2:

It is problematic to try to describe an entire cultural group because it may create or reinforce stereotypes. We must remember that even though Latinos share many characteristics, the terms Latino and Hispanic stand for a large and varied group of individuals. Countries and regions have different languages and dialects and are often ethnically and racially diverse
Reference list


