

Cultural Competency: Effective Child Welfare Practices with Spanish-Speaking Children & Families

Cultural Competency for California's Child/Family Professionals (C⁴ Project)

Participant's Manual

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Table of Contents

Participant’s Manual	Tab 1
Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Content Overview	1
Why Develop Cultural Competence?.....	3
Cultural Norms	7
Attitudes and Behaviors.....	7
Learning About Your Client.....	11
Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers	15
Physical Environment	15
Establishing and Maintaining Rapport	15
Communicating With English Learners.....	17
Working With Interpreters	18
Applying Cultural Competence	21
Culturally Competent Risk Assessment.....	21
Gangs: “The Other Family”	23
Culturally Competent Case Planning.....	24
Choosing Culturally Relevant Services: Activity Instructions.....	27
Child Safety and Case Planning Scenarios	28
Action Planning.....	32
Resources	33
Recommended Print Resources.....	33
Recommended Video Resources	34
Recommended Websites.....	34
Local Immigration Resources	35
APPENDICES	
Presentation	Tab 2
<i>Guide for Forensic Interviewing of Spanish-Speaking Children</i>	Tab 3
CWS Redesign	Tab 4

Introduction

Purpose

This project was developed under a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, for the purpose of improving cultural competence in the delivery of child welfare services. Our goal is to help increase cultural awareness and suggest strategies to better serve the Spanish-speaking clients who need our help. We want to help you provide effective, culturally-competent child welfare services by:

- Increasing your understanding of the values, traditions, history, and beliefs of Latino cultures.
- Providing techniques to improve your communication skills with Spanish speakers.
- Improving your ability to apply cultural awareness and communication skills to the tasks of:
 - Child safety and risk assessment,
 - Placement and permanency planning
 - Family maintenance and reunification
 - Comprehensive case planning, and
 - Choosing culturally relevant services.

Content Overview

Participant's Manual

This Participant's Manual is divided into five chapters, mirroring the content and flow of the training day. The following is an outline of what you can expect to learn from each.

In **Introduction**, you will learn:

- The statistical basis for the need for greater cultural competency in California, especially with regard to our Spanish-speaking population.
- Definitions of "cultural competence."
- The challenges and benefits of developing cultural competence.

In **Cultural Norms** you will learn:

- Norms common to many Latino cultures with regard to family structures, extra-household networks, gender issues, sexuality, religion, and beliefs about health and disability.
- What you need to learn about your clients as individuals in order to provide care that both addresses their needs and draws upon their strengths.

In **Strategies For Overcoming Language Barriers**, you will learn:

- How to make your physical environment more welcoming to Latino clients.
- How to establish and maintain rapport with Spanish-speaking clients.
- How to maximize the comprehension of English learners.
- How to select and work with interpreters.

In **Applying Cultural Competence**, you will learn:

- How conditions of poverty can mimic symptoms of neglect and abuse.
- Situations in which child welfare agencies can become involved with a family due to healthcare beliefs and practices.
- The role of gangs in some Latino communities, and guidelines for working with gang-affiliated clients.
- Factors to consider when developing a case plan for Spanish-speaking clients.
- Factors to consider when choosing services for Spanish-speaking clients.

Resources contains:

- Print and web resources that can help you develop your cultural competency and better serve your Latino and Spanish-speaking clients.
- Local organizations that offer immigration information and assistance.

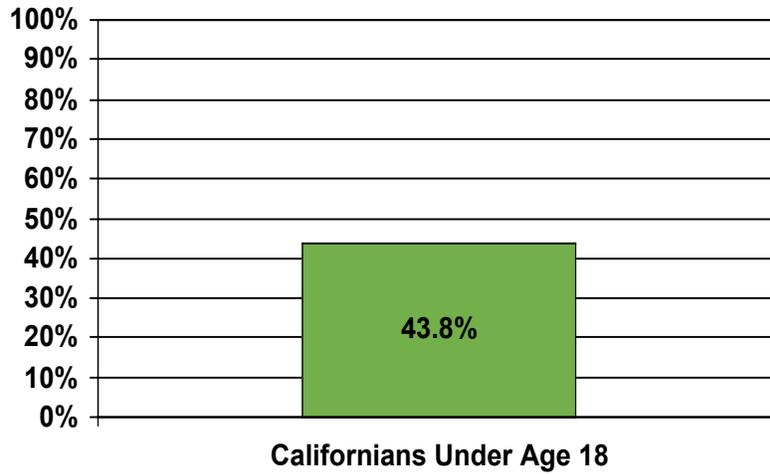
This Manual also contains worksheets and scenarios for use during the training.

Appendices

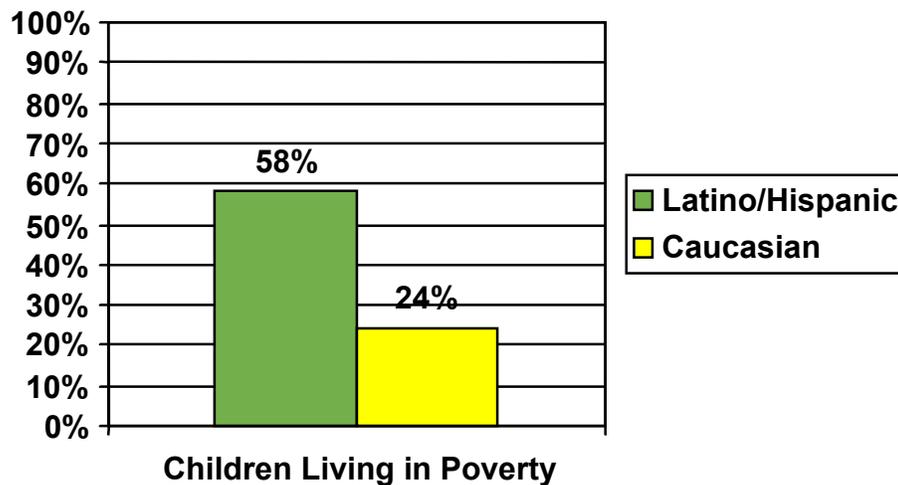
- **Presentation** (Tab 2) reproduces the PowerPoint slides used in the training.
- The ***Guide for Forensic Interviewing of Spanish-Speaking Children*** (Tab 3) has valuable information for working with Spanish-speakers and interpreters when conducting a forensic interview.
- An excerpt from ***CWS Redesign: Conceptual Framework, Fairness, and Equity – Building a Culture of Fairness & Equity in the California Child Welfare System*** (Tab 4), describes the findings of a major project of the State Department of Social and Health Services and stakeholders from all over the state. They assessed themselves and proposed best practices to address the issues of disproportionality and the need for cultural competency.

Why Develop Cultural Competence?

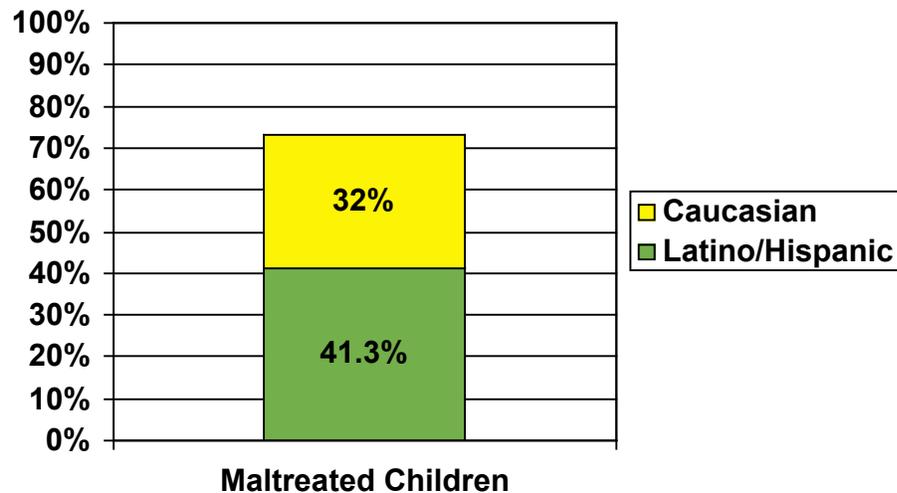
As you are probably already aware, a large and growing segment of the clients of child welfare services in California are Latino and/or Spanish-speaking. The following 2000 census statistics illustrate this point.



Currently in California, nearly 44% of all children under the age of 18 are Latino.



58% of Latino children live in poverty, as compared with 24% of Caucasian children.



Over 41% of maltreated children are Latino, compared to 32% Caucasian. Latino children are also overrepresented in foster care, and they remain in foster care an average of 26 months longer than Caucasian children.

Overrepresentation Within the Juvenile Justice System

A recent study published by the Institute for Children, Youth and Families at Michigan State University concluded that Latino youth are also significantly overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, and receive harsher treatment than Caucasian youth who commit the same crimes. For example, in Los Angeles in 1996-98, compared to Caucasian youth, Latino youth were:

- Arrested 2.3 times as often
- Prosecuted as adults 2.4 times as often
- Imprisoned 7.3 times as often

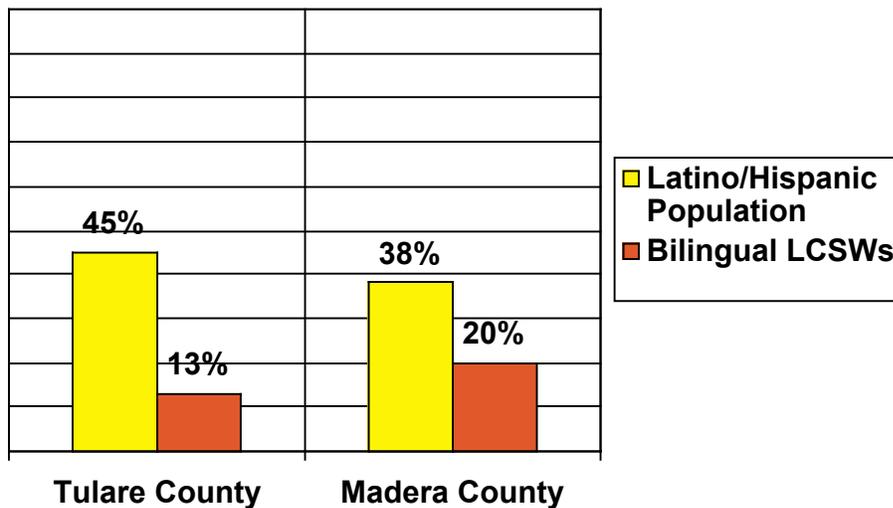
Latino youth charged with violent crimes spent an average of 143 days longer incarcerated than Caucasian youth charged with the same offenses—almost 5 months longer. Anti-gang laws dictate harsher treatment for Latino youths presumed to be gang members, although often this assumption is based on flimsy evidence, and may in fact be mistaken.

The Michigan State study also found that the juvenile justice system failed to provide bilingual services to the degree that they are needed, and failed to ensure cultural competency on the part of their staff.

Inadequate Bilingual/Bicultural Services

Ideally, the population of California social workers would represent the population they serve, and a high proportion of them would be bilingual in Spanish. Unfortunately, that is not currently the case. Consider these statistics:

In Tulare County, in 2004, 45% of the population was Hispanic, but only 13% of LCSWs were bilingual. In Madera County, 38% of the population was Hispanic, and only 20% of social workers were bilingual.



When surveyed, agency directors consistently complain of difficulty in attracting and retaining enough bilingual social workers to serve their client population. This lack is detrimental to the Spanish-speaking people we serve. In addition to the obvious communication difficulties, a 1997 study by the California Department of Finance found evidence that California child welfare staff who have not been trained in cultural differences too often rely on personal bias when deciding whether a child should be removed from the home.

What is Cultural Competence?

This definition was provided by the Child Welfare League of America

“The ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and faiths or religions in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values their worth and protects their dignity.”

The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development offers this description of cultural competence:

“To be culturally competent is to:

- Be aware of your own values, biases, preconceived notions, and personal limitations,
- Actively attempt to understand the world view of your culturally different clients without negative judgments, and
- Actively engage in developing and practicing appropriate intervention strategies and skills for working with your culturally different clients.”

Challenges and Benefits of Developing Cultural Competence

The goal of improving cultural competence would certainly seem desirable, but achieving this goal will present challenges for your agencies. No blueprint exists, although guidelines on best practices are available. You will need to develop your own policies and practices. You will need to reflect deeply on your own personal attitudes and biases, which may be influencing your behavior in ways of which you are unaware.

If you are Latino yourself, or member of another minority, that doesn't mean you don't need to examine your attitudes and biases. Bias based on skin color, class, or country of origin are common to all cultures and social groups.

Developing cultural competence will require an ongoing commitment of resources, and continuous effort. There is always room for improvement. It may require revisions to programs, policies, and procedures, and shifts in organizational culture. It may require expenditure for education.

However, if your agency invests the time and effort required to become more culturally competent, you may find that there are tangible benefits:

- You will better understand, and respond to, the needs of the population you serve.
- You will offer an equal level of service to all children and families, which is an important goal for the state of California.
- Your clients will feel respected and better served.
- You may find that your agency attracts a larger and more diverse group of job applicants to fill vacancies, because your organization is perceived as a safe and supportive work environment.
- Your agency may become a more desirable candidate for funders, who are increasingly including cultural competence in grant guidelines.
- Your agency will be better able to build relationships with organizations that provide services to an increasingly diverse population.

Cultural Norms

Attitudes and Behaviors

People of a particular culture tend to share certain attitudes and world views, and exhibit these attitudes by their behavior. Attitudes and behaviors common to a culture are referred to as cultural norms. Let's examine some of the norms that typify Latino cultures, and how these norms manifest themselves in the context of working with children and families.

Of course, when we talk about cultural differences, we are by definition speaking in generalities. Your clients are individuals who will vary greatly with regard to:

- The particular country and culture from which they come,
- Their educational and socio-economic background,
- Whether they are from a rural or urban environment, and
- Their degree of adaptation to their new culture.

It is important to be aware of, and sensitive to, these differences.

Family-Centeredness: “Familismo”

The basic social unit of Latino cultures is the extended family. Participation in a large extended family network of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins is a cultural value, sometimes called “familismo.” Some first cousins are so close they call themselves “primos-hermanos” or “primo-hermanas” (cousin-brother or cousin-sister). Close ties even to third or fourth cousins are common.

The family is a key element of personal identity. Individual needs may be secondary to the respect, loyalty, and unity of the family.

A key component of family life is gatherings of the extended family. In addition to marking special events or occasions, there may be a weekly shared meal or barbecue. These will typically include extended family members and any other friends who are visiting them.

Rather than move away from extended family, Latinos migrate towards them. Adult children are expected to continue to be extremely emotionally engaged with their parents and to defer to their authority throughout their lives. By comparison, American culture regards autonomy from parental approval as an indicator of successful transition to adulthood.

This close, extended family can be a great source of support. It can also be a source of stress for young people trying to create their own identities, and a source of conflict when the expectations of parents and other family members clash with the children's desires.

Family Structure

The traditional Latino family is hierarchical. Special authority is given to the elderly, the parents, and males, although mothers generally are also highly valued and respected. Sex roles usually are clearly defined.

Older siblings take on a great deal of responsibility for rearing younger ones. An older sister may function as a second mother. Children are expected to be obedient and are not usually consulted on family decisions. This may contrast with the more egalitarian model of childrearing currently in vogue in America.

Marriage and parenthood commonly are entered into early in life and considered a stabilizing influence. Children are generally welcome, and a source of pride. This valuing of children is a source of strength for the family.

Extra-Household Networks

In addition to extended family, the Latino family unit may include a network of “fictive kin” relationships, such as godparents, who may not be blood relatives. Close friends may also assume pseudo-familial roles, even being addressed as “tío” or “tía” (uncle or aunt). There is also a tradition of relying on neighbors, who can provide the type of support typical of family members. Children may be informally left in the care of extended family members or friends.

These extra-household networks are often bi-national, with people sending financial assistance or traveling to provide or receive familial support. Awareness of the extensiveness of these networks is clearly an asset to a child-welfare worker looking for foster care or permanent placement of a Latino child.

Family Privacy

You may find your Spanish-speaking clients more reluctant to discuss family problems with an outsider. They will turn instead to extended family or friends for advice or assistance, or to a priest.

The emphasis on upholding family dignity may make these clients more reluctant to reveal a situation they regard as shameful, such as domestic violence or sexual abuse.

Gender Issues

Spanish-speakers live in a gendered world. The Spanish language gender-characterizes not only people and animals, but inanimate objects and abstract concepts as well.

In family life, attitudes toward gender and role tend to be traditional. “Machismo” in Spanish-speaking cultures has been well-noted. Men have the greatest authority in the household. The surface presentation of power distribution can be

deceptive, however. Under the veneer of male authority, a more egalitarian approach to decision-making may be taking place.

It is important to note that although we often use the terms “machismo” and “macho” in a negative light, the terms also have a positive connotation in Latin cultures: a man who is strong, responsible, and capable, and who performs the male role successfully in his family and in society.

Latino men are often attentive and nurturing fathers, but are expected to prove their manhood by supporting and protecting their families. This creates added stress in poor families where the man is unable to adequately provide, or must leave his family to provide. It can also create reluctance to report abuse of a child, because it reflects badly on the father who was unable to provide protection.

The parallel to machismo is “marianismo”—the expectation that the woman of the house will be as perfect as the Virgin Mary. Women earn the respect of family and friends for their dedication to their children and husbands. People from traditional Latino cultures may not understand why Anglo-Americans regard it better for a young woman to pursue higher education or move away from her family before marriage. They may not see any good reason why a teenager should postpone marriage and motherhood.

Mothers have special status and are the objects of great devotion. This status is not achieved without a cost, however. The perfect mother is self-sacrificing, placing less value on her own needs as compared to those of her family. This can take its toll on an exhausted or over-stressed mother who feels she must suffer in silence rather than seek relief.

Sexuality

In traditional families, sexual topics are rarely discussed in the presence of children.

In some Latino cultures, not all, females are expected to find a husband at a young age. Also, if a girl is expected to marry a certain man later, the family might consider it acceptable for her to have sex with him prior to marriage, even while still in her early teens. So, while the law regards a sexual encounter between a 14-year-old girl and a man in his 20s as child abuse, the girl’s family might regard it as a good match and push for marriage, not prosecution.

The machismo tradition tends to be intolerant of male homosexuality. However, a man might not regard himself as homosexual if he assumes the dominant role in the encounter. Or, he may not consider himself homosexual if he also has sex with his wife or girlfriend.

This attitude may put him at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS from homosexual activities. If a man is in denial about the likelihood of having a homosexual encounter, he will be less likely to carry and use condoms. And he

will be less likely to benefit from health education programs that target the gay community.

These attitudes may also cause greater reluctance to disclose the sexual abuse of a boy, for fear that he will be regarded as homosexual in his community.

Religion and Spirituality

Traditional persons from Latino cultures may have a profound reverence for God and for other powerful forces they believe exist. They may evoke the Virgin Mary, saints, and angels to intercede for them. They may have a fatalistic view of life, and feel that they must stoically accept God's will for them instead of trying to change it. You may encounter this attitude in domestic violence situations and in other types of familial abuse. They may regard the abuse as their "cross to bear."

The social stigma attached to divorce or the belief that a married couple have been joined by God, no matter what, can also be a factor in keeping people in violent relationships.

Religion can also inform attitudes on health, disease, and disability. They may be interpreted as consequences of God's approval or disapproval of a person's behavior. They may feel that their child's disease or disability was caused by their own behavior. Some peoples believe in a mystical origin of disease, such as "the evil eye," meaning the person was looked upon by a jealous or covetous person. They may seek a spiritual cure, or use folk remedies.

A caveat is necessary here. You can't, of course, assume that just because a person is from a Spanish-speaking country, that he or she is Catholic or holds particular religious or spiritual views. Many religions are represented in Latin American countries.

Distrust of Government Entities

Some of your clients who have immigrated from other countries may have had bad experiences with government agencies such as police and military. They may associate government entities with corruption and violence. They may distrust authority because of discrimination they have experienced in this country. They may be distrustful because they lack knowledge of U.S. laws and how the U.S. government works.

Some may be concerned that if their immigration status becomes known to a government entity, they will be deported. These factors may present an initial challenge in gaining your clients' trust.

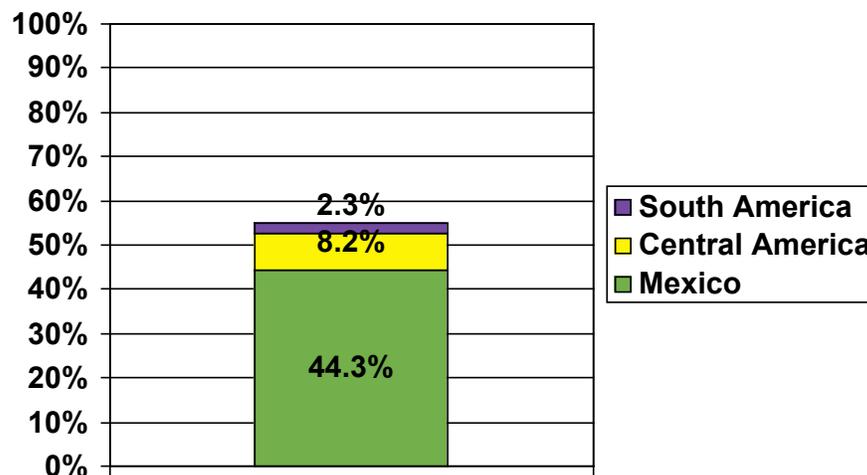
Learning About Your Client

While familiarity with the characteristic attitudes of people from Spanish-speaking countries is an essential element of cultural competence, beware of using them to make sweeping generalizations about your clients.

One problem is that terms used to describe peoples from Spanish-speaking countries, such as Hispanic and Latino, create an impression that these peoples are culturally homogeneous. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. In order to develop a useful profile of you client's background, you will need to gather specific information about your client. The following describes the types of information you will find useful.

Country of Origin

By far the largest group of immigrants in California today is from Mexico. According to the 2000 census, they account for over 44% the immigrant population. When you combine them with immigrants from the rest of Central America, you can account for more than half of California's foreign-born population.



Central and South Americans started entering the U.S. in greater numbers in the late 1970s, and their numbers increased through the '80s and '90s. They were fleeing war, political persecution, and economic hardship, or just seeking to work and make a better life for themselves and their families. Many of these settled in California. For example, over half a million Salvadorans live in Los Angeles.

Cubans have been living in the U.S. since the 18th century. A major influx of immigration immediately followed the Communist revolution in 1959. Another came in 1976 when Castro deported 125,000 political prisoners to the U.S. Most Cuban-Americans live in Florida.

Puerto Rico is an American protectorate, and all Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. If your client is from Puerto Rico you will know that immigration or residency status is not an issue for that person.

There are also a growing number of Spanish-speakers immigrating from other island nations such as Trinidad and the Dominican Republic.

Generation

Is your client an immigrant, or second-, third-, or fourth-generation? If your client is an immigrant, how long has he or she lived in the U.S.? Generally speaking, the longer a person has lived in the United States, the more he or she will have adapted to the new culture.

If your client is an immigrant, briefly explore reasons for immigrating. This information will help you understand the social, economic, and political pressures that may be affecting family life. For example, a person who has fled armed conflict may have post-traumatic stress disorder. Someone who has left an urban area for a rural one or vice-versa may have problems adjusting to the change of lifestyle.

Race and Ethnicity

There is tremendous racial diversity in Latin America. Afro-Caribbean and Black Latinos in the U.S. face special issues: often they are marginalized by white and mestizo Latinos, and also by African Americans. Large numbers of Asians, especially Chinese and Japanese, migrated to Latin America during various historical periods. You can't assume nationality or ethnicity by racial appearance, or vice versa.

Ethnically, many Latin American countries are "melting pots" much like the United States. Various ethnic groups provide a great deal of cultural diversity within national boundaries.

Education

Don't make assumptions about a person's level of education based on his or her occupation or country of origin. Many countries that are economically underdeveloped nonetheless offer good educational opportunities. Often highly educated and skilled people from other countries may work at unskilled jobs here because their credentials are not accepted or their immigration status poses a barrier to employment.

Nuclear or Extended Family

Knowing whether or not the client lives close to extended or nuclear family can give you insights about the possible support system available. Ask who lives in the home, or who is staying there at present.

It may also be useful to ask with whom the children have lived during their lives. Family members other than parents may have filled the role of primary caregiver.

Your Client's Perspective

Ask your client what he or she perceives as the problem, as opposed to what you see as the problem. This may give you a place to start working with the client.

Ask your client what he or she perceives as obstacles in working toward a solution. This can be the beginning of a team effort to solve problems. Also ask what the client sees as his or her personal and family strengths. What is working in the family? You need to know so that you can build on these strengths.

Ask who the client turns to when the family needs help or someone is sick. This can provide insights about the family support system and whether they are more likely to consult a curandero or a physician for medical problems.

Asking these types of questions will help you understand your client's cultural background, establish rapport, and provide care that is suited to his or her needs. It will help you understand where the problems may be, and also what strengths the family can bring to bear to solve their problems.

Strategies for Overcoming Language Barriers

Physical Environment

Some studies have indicated that Spanish speakers under-use social services because they doubt that they will be welcomed and understood there. Your physical environment can help send the message that your agency is a place that welcomes people from these cultures. This will increase their trust and confidence that they will be understood and helped.

You do this by using **cultural signifiers**. Examples of cultural signifiers include:

- **Maps** help immigrants with limited English indicate from where they came and the path their immigration has taken.
- **Photographs or artwork** should be reflective of their cultures and/or countries of origin.
- **Signs** should be in Spanish as well as English.
- If **music** is played in waiting room or while on hold on the telephone, use instrumental versions of Spanish or Latin American music.
- Provide **Spanish-language books**, magazines, and games.
- Provide **culturally-attuned toys**, such as dolls with varying skin colors.

It's a good idea to elicit feedback from Latinos with whom you have a professional relationship about whether you have succeeded in creating a welcoming environment for your Latino and/or Spanish-speaking clients.

Establishing and Maintaining Rapport

Latino cultures value the human quality of being able to relate on a personal level, regardless of social or financial standing. This is called "personalismo." Unfortunately, many Latinos describe Anglo-American professionals with whom they have contact as cold and distant. To establish rapport, it is important to demonstrate warmth and compassion. The following suggestions may help.

Be Aware of Non-Verbal Communication

Body language and nonverbal cues such as eye contact, facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice can express warmth and caring, neutralize power imbalance, and put your client at ease. Or, they can have the opposite effect. So don't overlook these important modes of communication.

Shake hands firmly and make eye contact. If the client is of the opposite sex, however, eye contact should be brief. Don't forget to make eye contact even if you are communicating through a relative or an interpreter.

Standing up to greet a client indicates respect. Offering a chair communicates warmth and hospitality. Use a warm, friendly, and moderate tone of voice.

If you are visiting a home, you will probably be offered food or drink as a gesture of hospitality. Not to accept something, even if it is only water, would be considered rude.

Take Time for “Small Talk”

Taking a few extra minutes for casual conversation or “small talk” will go along way to establishing rapport. Attitudes about time vary from culture to culture, and people from Latin cultures are likely to feel slighted if your attitude seems brisk or impatient. In spite of whatever pressure you may feel with regard to your schedule, some minutes spent establishing rapport will be time well spent. It will help diffuse the client/provider power difference so that later you will be able to politely ask personal questions.

Sometimes it may be helpful to talk a bit about your own family and background. A small disclosure such as “I am a parent, too” or “I have experience as an immigrant” can help to develop a relationship and build trust.

Convey Respect

Because of experiences with discrimination, many Latinos involved with the social service system or law enforcement are very sensitive to possible demonstrations of disrespect. Taking into consideration that their visit to your agency may be a source of shame, be sure to convey that you respect the family.

Use the appropriate titles of Mr. or Mrs. when addressing adults. The informality of first names may indicate disrespect to them, not friendliness. Be sure to pronounce their names correctly. If their proper names are Spanish, do not Anglicize them, i.e., call Roberto Robert or Maria Mary.

Educate About the System

Explain what the problem is and make sure they understand why it is important. Greater understanding will increase their ability to help think of solutions to the problem. Provide them with information about the system and the process they are engaged in. Describe the roles of the people involved. Don't make assumptions that they already know.

It may be helpful to explain what you do, and also what you do not do: you are not immigration officials, agricultural inspectors, or law enforcement officers.

If there is any possibility that immigration status may be an issue, deal with it up front. Make sure that your client understands that you do not report to the INS, and that immigration status is not taken into consideration in child welfare issues. If possible, provide information about deportation laws in both English and Spanish. Local sources of immigration information and assistance are listed in the Resources section of this Manual, on page 35.

Don't assume that because your client speaks Spanish, he or she can read the Spanish materials you provide. Level of literacy will vary among your Spanish-speaking clients, just as it does among your English-speaking clients. We will talk more about assessing literacy in the section on case planning.

Assure confidentiality. Explain briefly that what they say to you will be kept strictly confidential, with the exception of your legally mandated obligation to protect children by reporting abuse, neglect, and illegal sexual contact. Don't belabor the point, because it may make your client anxious.

Communicating With English Learners

For most people immigrating to this country, there is a period of time between knowing no English at all and being functionally fluent. Some immigrants never arrive at fluency, but function their whole lives in this country at some place along the continuum of language development.

The best practice, of course, is to use an interpreter with clients whose competence in English is less than complete. However, for whatever reason, you may sometimes find yourself talking with Spanish-speakers who can understand and communicate with you in English, but only with some effort on your part to facilitate that communication. The following are some guidelines.

- Speak slowly and enunciate carefully. This can make all the difference to a language-learners' comprehension.
- Use a limited vocabulary. English is a wonderfully precise and subtle language, rich in verbal alternatives for saying almost everything. But someone just learning the language will only have a limited vocabulary, so be conscientious about using the simplest words and shortest phrases possible.
- Avoid professional jargon, slang, and idiomatic expressions. There are many expressions used in English as verbal shorthand and widely understood, like "no sweat" or "that's a no-brainer." We tend to use these types of expressions unconsciously, but you must make a conscious effort to avoid them when talking with language learners.
- Don't change subjects abruptly. Use a bridge, such as "Now let's talk about school."
- Accentuate the visual. Use gestures, act out behavior, use pictures, or draw on paper or a whiteboard.

- If you are not positive you have understood what was said to you, don't pass on until you are sure. Use paraphrasing to clarify, such as, "You say that your aunt was sick? She had a tumor?"

All of these suggestions will also apply if you are learning Spanish and using it to communicate with your Spanish-speaking client. It would be a good idea to at least learn how to greet people and exchange pleasantries in Spanish, and learn particular terms and phrases relevant to your work.

If you do become proficient in Spanish, it is still advisable to enunciate clearly and not speak too quickly, because your accent and usage may be different from what is used in their region.

Working With Interpreters

When your client speaks little or no English, and a bilingual staff member is not available to take the case, you may need to work with an interpreter.

It is **never** appropriate to allow family members to function as interpreters in the types of cases you are involved with. It is traumatic for children to do it, and adult friends or family members may have their own agendas.

If you have interpreters you use regularly at your agency, meet with them at least annually to discuss:

- What your team expects during an interview,
- What the program coordinator expects, and
- Any concerns or issues the interpreter may have.

If this is not part of your protocol, or if a new interpreter is being used, make time before the interview to discuss roles and expectations.

Introduce the interpreter to the child and family. Have the interpreter explain his or her role in relaying information as accurately as possible. Children and families may become confused about who is conducting the interview. They may tend to talk directly to the interpreter without allowing time for the interpreter to relay information to you.

Once introductions are made, allow some time for the interpreter and the family to establish initial rapport. The interview itself will take a lot longer than usual, because of the time required for interpretation.

Set up the room to minimize distractions. Sit next to the interpreter and across from the child or family, so the person you are talking to can look at both you and the interpreter easily, without having to look back and forth.

Make eye contact with your client when you pose a question or listen to a response, even though the interpreter will need to interpret the question or response. This communicates that you are interested in your clients and what they have to say, even if you can't understand their language.

Use short units of speech when speaking through an interpreter, not lengthy or complex sentences, just as you would when speaking to a language learner.

Selecting and Preparing Interpreters

Select interpreters carefully. Use Spanish-speaking staff members to help in the selection.

Make sure your interpreters are as free as possible from paternalistic attitudes or other biases that could damage your rapport with the client. Look for interpreters who are well-versed in the terms used in child welfare.

Make sure your interpreter understands clearly the boundaries of his or her role. Clients, especially children, can become confused about roles and think the interpreter is performing the interview. The interpreter must be alert to this possibility, clarify his or her role, and maintain that boundary.

Make sure your interpreter understands the importance of confidentiality. Reassure your clients that the interpreter will observe the same standards of confidentiality to which you adhere.

There is a great deal of useful information about working with interpreters in the *Guide for Forensic Interviewing of Spanish Speaking Children*, which is behind Tab 3 in this *Manual*.

Applying Cultural Competence

In a previous section we discussed cultural influences that are shared by many Spanish-speaking peoples. Now we are going to talk about how aspects of these cultural differences can affect the child welfare work that you do, such as child safety and risk assessment, placement, choosing services, and developing comprehensive case plans.

Culturally Competent Risk Assessment

Don't Confuse Poverty With Abuse or Neglect

In the area of child safety and risk assessment, practices and attitudes can be misinterpreted by those who have not learned to be sensitive to cultural differences. A major pitfall is misinterpreting the symptoms of poverty as indications of abuse or neglect.

Recent immigrants are often poor, and live in crowded conditions. Indicators of neglect, such as a child regularly sent to school without a jacket in cold weather, or with little or no lunch, may actually indicate need.

In crowded conditions, children may share beds with others out of necessity. This should not be misinterpreted as an indication that sexual activity is taking place. This intimacy may also cause a child to observe adult sexual behavior when the adults think the child is sleeping. If a child exhibits a knowledge of adult sexual behavior beyond what is appropriate for the child's age, it may be a result of crowded living conditions, not sexual abuse of the child.

It may be useful to ask a child, "Where do you sleep? Who sleeps with you?" Ask parents, "Who else lives in your house? Is anyone else staying with you now?" or "Who looks after the children while you work?" Other people living in the home can have a positive or negative impact on the functioning of the family.

Children may live for a time with other extended family members, either to help those family members or to help their own parents cope with economic hardship. This is very acceptable in the cultural context and not regarded as harmful to the children.

Beliefs About Disease and Disability

We have previously mentioned beliefs about disease and disability as an area where some Latinos may have different attitudes and practices than those of their new culture. These attitudes are affected by a number of factors, including education, country of origin, number of years living in the U.S., and exposure to a different health care system prior to moving to the U.S.

Generally, more educated immigrants and those who have had more time to adapt to their new culture subscribe to the modern biomedical model of health and healthcare. But others may be strongly influenced by a religious perspective, where illness or accidents are a judgment or warning from God. The “treatment” in this case may be prayer, making offerings, visiting a shrine, offering a mass, and/or making a promise to God.

Some may carry a tremendous burden of guilt because they believe their own actions caused their child to be born with a disability. Others may believe in supernatural causes of disease and disability, and employ mystical or magical methods of treatment. Mental illness, in particular, may be attributed to possession by malevolent spirits, and referred to a spiritual healer.

Local “curanderos,” or healers, often employ a combination of herbal and folk remedies, and magical or mystical practices. Sometimes the treatment provided by folk healers can leave bruises that might be misinterpreted as signs of abuse. Examples of this are cupping, where cups are placed against the skin and heat applied to create suction; and massage, which might be vigorous enough to create bruises.

Folk, religious, or magical remedies may be used in place of needed medical care. Besides being easily available and culturally familiar, the services of a neighborhood curandero or sobador (massage therapist) are very inexpensive in comparison to a visit to a clinic. You may just need to explain to the parents the importance of the needed care and help them get insurance, or find medical services that are available on a sliding scale.

Another problem exists because many prescription drugs can be easily purchased over the counter in Latin American countries. Your clients may overuse or misuse these prescription drugs without the advice of a physician.

Cultural Norms Regarding Discipline of Children

Cross-culturally you will find a wide range of standards with regard to physical punishment of children. A parent who comes from a different culture may have grown up in an environment where hitting a child with a belt or shoe was regarded as a justifiable and appropriate response to misbehavior. It may be helpful to ask a parent, “What are your beliefs about the discipline of children? What methods are used in your home?”

Laws about child abuse and neglect are different in different countries. A parent may have no idea that such physical punishment is regarded as abusive and is therefore illegal in the state of California. In a situation like this, educating the parent may be all that is necessary. The parent needs to learn that these forms of discipline are unacceptable here, and to learn what alternatives might be used. Include grandparents, if they reside in the home.

The goal is to be sensitive to the attitudes and practices of different cultures, and the effect of economic conditions, so you don’t mislabel behavior as abusive due to your own prejudices and stereotypes. This does not mean, however, that

abuse, neglect, or any other form of child maltreatment should be tolerated for cultural reasons. Abuse is still abuse, and intervention is necessary to protect children.

Gangs: “The Other Family”

The Historical Role of Gangs

Youth gangs have been present in the United States as early as the 1700s. By 1850, New York City had more than 200 active gang wars. Gangs emerged from the difficulties most immigrant ethnic groups encountered with adjustment to a new way of life, poverty, discrimination, victimization, and their struggle to survive.

Although gangs historically consisted of Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Polish youth, by the mid-1900s, four-fifths of all gangs were either African American or Latino. A 1998 national gang survey found that 48% of gang members were Latino, and 34% were African-American. The overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos is not attributed to a special predisposition to gangs, but rather to their living in conditions of social and economic neglect.

Unfortunately, what began as a legitimate way to protect themselves, their families, and their ethnic identity has been transformed to a serious social problem in many communities.

The Allure of Gangs

Gang membership is a form of resistance to the mainstream culture. Gang members may feel that their gang affiliation is a valid expression of their cultural identity, and that it preserves their identity.

The gang may serve as a replacement or extension of the family. It provides belonging, acceptance, and protection from real or perceived threats. Members long to feel connected to something, and the gang provides that connection.

Gang membership is secretive and may seem exciting. It can provide a feeling of importance, enhance status, and improve self-esteem. Where there is a lack of better alternatives, gangs offer young people social opportunities and something into which they can channel their energies.

Working With Gang-Affiliated Clients and Families

Gang membership heightens the risk of criminal activity, substance abuse, and becoming a victim of violence. It also places the gang member’s family at greater risk of violence. It creates obstacles for professionals who work with families: secretiveness, divided loyalty, and resistance to change.

Be aware that gang membership can be multi-generational. Youth can inherit a gang affiliation and way of life from parents or other family members.

When working with families where gang affiliation is a factor, it is important not to disrespect the gang, because loyalty may run deep. If you come off as strongly anti-gang, they may cut off communication immediately. It is not necessary to appear approving of gang involvement, but try to remain objective and non-judgmental.

Try to educate. Ask gang members to consider what real benefits they receive from gang membership, at present and in the future. Ask them to compare this with the risks to themselves and to their families.

Culturally Competent Case Planning

The following are some particular issues you may need to consider when creating comprehensive case plans for your Spanish-speaking clients.

Language

The language issue, of course, is paramount. In creating a case plan for these clients, you have to locate services that are accessible to Spanish-speakers, or speakers of your client's indigenous language.

Literacy

As mentioned before, one of the issues you need to consider with all your clients is their degree of literacy. For example, clients who can not read well will have trouble with the homework involved in parenting classes. You might interpret a parent's non-response to a notice sent home as indifference, when in fact it was due to the parent's inability to read or fully comprehend what was written to them.

The subject of literacy is always a little delicate, because it is common for adults with limited literacy to feel shame about it. An indirect line of questioning may help you learn at what level they are functioning. The following are examples of questions you might use:

- "Have you had the opportunity to go to school?" (but school attendance alone will not necessarily indicate literacy)
- "Do you read at home? What do you like to read?"
- "Do you want to fill out this form yourself, or would you like help?"
- "Do you want to read this, or would you prefer that I explain it to you?"
- "When we need to give you information, shall we mail it, or would you prefer that we call you?"

If you determine that literacy is limited, your case plan will have to be adapted accordingly. Also, find out if there is a family member or neighbor available to read important communications to them.

Educational and Mental Health Needs of Children

Consider whether the language issue creates special learning needs for the children. Is the child in an educational environment appropriate for his or her English skills? Is a learning disability suspected? If a learning disability is suspected, the child needs to be tested in both languages.

You may also need to consider the mental health needs of children.

Transportation

Transportation may be a problem. Are services in Spanish available within a reasonable distance from their home? Are services covered by their insurer available within a reasonable distance from their home?

Extended Family

Include all relevant parties in your plan. This may mean extended family members. Exercise caution, of course, if the case involves domestic violence.

Immigration Status

Immigration status is a significant issue to consider in case planning. For example, an undocumented family will not be eligible for low-income housing.

If you have undocumented teenagers in foster care, it is important to have their status cleared up before emancipation. Such teens are eligible for permanent residency, a green card. This is referred to “special juvenile immigrant status.”

There are sources of immigration information and assistance listed by county in the Resources section of this Manual, on page 35.

Incarceration of Parent

Immigration status is very significant when a parent is incarcerated. Upon release from prison, the parent will be deported, with a stiff penalty for returning to this country. This will definitely impact a family reunification plan!

Placement Considerations

California law regarding foster placement gives preference to kinship care. Studies have indicated that placing children with family members minimizes both adjustment difficulties and placement instability.

Latino children are often informally placed in kinship care during times of family and/or financial crisis. Kinship and the extra-familial relationships we spoke of earlier are an excellent source of temporary or permanent placement possibilities, especially for difficult-to-place children and older children.

The downside for the relatives providing care is that they often don't receive as much government assistance as non-related caregivers. Caseworkers acknowledge that kin foster parents request and are offered fewer services than non-kin foster parents. They know that kin will continue caring for children even without close attention from the agency, so they feel less obligated to assist kin.

Another possible downside is that there is evidence that parents may pursue reunification less vigorously if the child is in the care of a relative. Family members often see no reason to pursue adoption, or they may be reluctant to hurt the feelings of the natural parents. And caseworkers often fail to speak to family members about the option of adopting.

Cultural Relevance of Services

A major element of case planning is finding and/or choosing services that meet your clients' needs. With Spanish-speaking clients, culturally relevant services will be more likely to accomplish the goals of the case plan. Culturally relevant services will have the following characteristics:

- Spanish is spoken.
- Staff members are bilingual and bicultural.
- Staff is knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of recent immigrants.
- Agency is located near where clients live.

Guidelines for Risk Assessment and Case Planning

- Always be aware of the discrepancy between the client and yourself with regard to privilege and power, and make efforts to level that imbalance.
- Be thorough. Don't just talk to the family members with whom it is easiest to talk. Use an interpreter if necessary.
- Learn about the client's history, which may affect current behavior.
- Ask about extended family or friends who may be able to provide support.
- Be knowledgeable about the ways that poverty, overcrowding, and different health practices can mimic symptoms of abuse or neglect.
- Focus on the family's strengths, not just deficiencies, and apply these strengths to working on problems.
- Don't excuse actual abuse on the grounds that it is a cultural practice.

Choosing Culturally Relevant Services: Activity Instructions

Do this activity with people who work in your area.

Step One: Brainstorm a list of all the agencies to which you refer clients to obtain services. One person should write these down on a flipchart page or pages.

Step Two: Consider the criteria that make a service culturally relevant and a good fit for Spanish-speaking clients. Go through your lists, discuss each agency, and rate each one on a 1 to 5 scale. 1 would be a poor choice for your Spanish-speaking clients, and 5 would be an excellent one.

Step Three: Look for areas of strength and weakness. Select one person to report for your group.

Child Safety and Case Planning Scenarios

Scenario 1

12-year-old Julio's family recently immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico. One day his PE teacher noticed bruises on his back and down the spinal column. The counselor was contacted about the possibility of child abuse and a conference was held with Julio. Julio denied that he had been hit by his parents and refused to remove his shirt. Since there was still considerable doubt about whether this was a case of child abuse, it was decided to let the matter drop for the moment, but keep alert for other signs.

Several weeks later, after four days of absence, Julio returned to school. His PE teacher again noticed unusual bruises. When this was reported to the counselor, the counselor immediately called CPS to report suspected child abuse.

A social worker, Mr. Phillips, called the family and arranged to visit them late one afternoon. Julio's mother, Mrs. Alarcon, greeted Mr. Phillips at the door. She seemed nervous, tense, and frightened. Her English was poor, and it was difficult to communicate with her. Since Mr. Phillips had specifically requested to see Mr. Alarcon as well, he inquired about his whereabouts. Julio responded for her that his father was still at work. The rest of the interview was conducted in Mrs. Alarcon's broken and halting English, with Julio helping translate.

When Mr. Phillips asked about the bruises on Julio, Mrs. Alarcon did not seem to know what he was referring to. When Mr. Phillips explained in detail the reason for his visit, Mrs. Alarcon seemed confused, denied that Julio had any injuries, and denied that they would hurt him. She looked down as she said this, making no eye contact with Mr. Phillips, which made him suspect that she was lying. When Mr. Phillips asked Mrs. Alarcon why Julio had been absent from school, she said that he had been ill with a fever. But she had taken him to the curandera, and now he was perfectly well.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Is this a clear case of child abuse? What evidence do we have that Julio was beaten at home?
- 2) Can you argue that it is not a case of child abuse? What are some possible explanations?
- 3) What other information would you like to obtain in order to properly assess the case?
- 4) How could Mr. Phillips have handled this case better?

Scenario 2

9-year-old Maella and 7-year-old Reymundo attend school sporadically. When they do attend, they often arrive at school dirty and unkempt. They seem tired and sometimes fall asleep in class.

Letters written in English and Spanish have been sent to their home regarding the truancy, but there has been no response. The home phone number listed on their school registration has been disconnected.

A teacher questions Maella about her home life. Maella says that her father is in jail. Her mother and her older brother have moved to another city for work, and her older sister is not around very much. A grandma takes care of Maella and Reymundo.

The teacher is concerned about their truancy and the apparent physical neglect, and contacts CPS. A child welfare worker plans a home visit.

Discussion Questions:

1) If this were your case, what questions would you have? What would you be looking for when you visit the home?

2) What services might be available to provide support for this family?

Scenario 4

The Morales family are immigrants from Nicaragua. Their five children generally come to school properly dressed for the weather, and carrying lunches. But there are periods during which they arrive at school unkempt, without jackets in cold weather, and with no lunches. The eldest, Guillermo, is often truant. When questioned about his truancy he says he needs to care for his mother, who has “nervios.”

In addition, the children show signs of physical abuse. One of the girls discloses to a teacher’s aide that the previous night, her father had come home drunk and pulled her and her sister from their beds and beat them with his belt because the kitchen was not clean. Both girls have visible bruises from the beating. She says that lately their father has been drinking a lot and seems always to be angry, and she is afraid of him. CPS is contacted, and removes the children from the home.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What other information would you like to obtain about this family?

- 2) What barriers might exist in working with this family?

- 3) What elements would you suggest for a case plan for this family?

- 4) What steps would you take to involve this family in the case planning process?

Resources

Recommended Print Resources

- Child Molestation and Sexual Abuse Interviewer's Guide, 1999.
- Pence, D. (1997). Observations from the Field. Child abuse investigators must consider cultural issues in interviews. *The National Child Advocate*, 1(3), 31-32.
- Anderson, K. (2000). The Values of Differences: Appreciating Cultural Inclusion. Workshop presented at the Sixteenth National Symposium on Child Sexual Abuse, Huntsville, Alabama.
- Fontes, L. (1999). Working with Latino families on issues of child abuse and neglect. *The National Child Advocate*, 3(2), 3-7.
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- Geshke, Nancy, Shanti, L. A., and Salazar, Jose C. *Essential Spanish for Social Services*, Living Language (Random House), 1998.
- Community Resources Mapping: Knowing Your Youth Services Landscape*, School & Main Institute, 2003
- Stresino, Edward. *Child Abuse Phrase Book: Family Social Worker Interview Manua/Manual Bilingue Para Familias*, University of New Mexico Press, 2002
- Harvey, William C. *Outreach Spanish*, Barron's Education Series, 2000
- Jarvis, Ana. *Spanish for Social Services*, 6th Edition, Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000
- Doak, Cecelia, Doak, Leonard, and Root, Jane. *Teaching Patients With Low Literacy Skills*, 2nd Ed., Lippincott Co., 1996

Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group. *CWS Redesign: Conceptual Framework, Fairness, and Equity – Building a Culture of Fairness & Equity in the California Child Welfare System*

Velasquez, Arellano, & McNeil. *Chicano/a Psychology and Mental Health*, Laurence Erlbaum & Associates, 2004

Tello, J., and Carrillo, R. *Men of Color and Violence*, Springer Publishing Co., 1998

Gibbs, Jewelle Taylor, and Larke, Nahme Huang. *Children of Color: Psychological Interventions With Culturally Diverse Youth*, pp. 215-263 and 305-332, Jossey-Bass, 1998

Recommended Video Resources

Hispanic/Latino culture: A perspective from history and child welfare (Spaulding for Children Series #87), Spaulding Institute for Family and Community Development, 1994.

Recommended Websites

Child Abuse Training & Technical Assistance Centers
<http://cattacenter.org/>

Child Abuse Mandated Reporter Online Training
<http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/mr/>

Spanish Child Abuse Mandate Reporter Online Training
http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/mr/docs/traingen_sp.html

National Alliance for Hispanic Health
<http://www.hispanichealth.org>
Useful series of publications is available through Publications link.

CASA NET Resources: Cultural Competency Resource Library
<http://www.casenet.org/library/culture/latino-culture.htm>

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice at the Hunter College School of Social Work
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>

Fairness and Equity Cultural Competency in Contra Costa County
www.sfsu.edu/~bayacad/CCC_BAA_REPORT_final3.pdf

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Division of Cultural Competency
<http://www.xculture.org/training/overview/cultural/assessment.html>

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice: Cultural competence in the field of child welfare
<http://www.air.org/cecp/cultural/default.htm>

National Center for Cultural Competence
Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development
<http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/>

California Department of Social Services
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/default.htm>

U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children
and Families
<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/>

The National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute: “Un Hombre Noble”
<http://www.nlffi.org/index/htm>

California Dept. of Social Services: Forms and Publications translated into
Spanish
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/SpanishTra_275.htm

The Committee for Hispanic Children and Families
<http://www.chcfinc.org/>

Local Immigration Resources

Central California

Good News Center

Kings County
1638 N. Dinuba Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93291
(559)-713-1200
Emergency assistance, shelter, food, counseling and immigration services

O.L.A. Raza

115 West Main, Suite C
Visalia, CA 93291
559) 627-6291
Citizenship and immigration assistance

Catholic Charities

Monterrey County
1705 Second Avenue
Salinas, CA 93905
(831)422-0759
(831)422-0609 (hotline)
Counseling, emergency assistance and immigration assistance

Catholic Charities

Santa Cruz County
406 Main Street
Watsonville, CA 95076
(831)722-2675
(831)722-2791 (hotline)
Counseling, emergency services and immigration assistance

Catholic Charities of Fresno

Fresno County
149 North Fulton Street
Fresno, CA 93701
(559)237-0851
Citizenship preparation, health care, English language training and immigration

Porterville Office

Tulare County
1309 West Main Street
Building B
Porterville, CA 93257
559 781-5555

Farmersville Office

Tulare County
468 East Visalia Road
Farmersville, CA 93223
559 594-4932

Frente Indigena Oaxaqueno Binacional

(559) 499-1178
2014 Tulare St
Fresno, CA 93721
Contact Person: Nayamin Cosio or Leoncio Vasquez

Southeastern California

Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services

San Bernardino County
1450 North "D" Street
San Bernardino, 92405
(909) 388-1243

Citizen preparation, counseling, cultural orientation, elder services, emergency assistance, employment services, information/referrals, translator/interpreter services and immigration services.

Catholic Charities

Imperial County
250 West Orange Avenue
El Centro, CA 92243
(760) 353-6822

Immigration services and representation for non-detained undocumented immigrants. Will represent persons applying for asylum. May charge a nominal fee

Catholic Charities

Riverside County
12540 Heacock St., Ste 5
Moreno Valley, CA 92556
(951) 485-7792

Emergency services, counseling and immigration assistance

Corona/Norco Settlement House

Riverside County
507 South Valencia
Corona, CA 91720
(951) 736-2210

Emergency services, counseling and immigration assistance

Sources

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Villarruel, Walker, et al. *Donde está la justicia? A call to action on behalf of Latino & Latina youth in the U.S. justice system*, Institute for Children, Youth, and Families, Michigan State University, 2002.

The Other Family: How Gangs Impact Latino Families and Communities. A report by HACER (Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research), Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at University of Minnesota, 2005.

