

Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively

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What We've Learned

Working with Spanish-speaking Families of Children who are Deaf-Blind

Legal mandates and recommended practices in special education require family/professional collaboration in a child's education. Working together requires even more effort when service providers and families have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They may have diverse and sometimes conflicting worldviews. The term worldview describes how a person views the world based on his or her roles, values, beliefs and life experiences.

One of the fastest growing ethnic populations in the United States is composed of immigrants from many Spanish-speaking countries of the world. The Hispanic population includes persons of all races and different nationalities whose cultural heritage includes the Spanish language and Latino culture (Gollnick & Chinn, 1991). Some people with this cultural heritage prefer the term Latino and others prefer Hispanic. The purpose of this information sheet is to identify specific considerations for building relationships between service providers and Spanish-speaking families of children who are deaf-blind.

Build a Positive Relationship

A positive family/professional relationship can only be developed through mutual respect, ongoing communication, shared goals, and concentrated effort. We encourage service providers to refine their interpersonal skills, to expand their worldviews, and to work on developing cross-cultural competence.

Preparation

- Engage in self-reflection and examine your own beliefs about the role of service providers, child rearing practices, and the family's role in their children's education, and expectations of children with disability.
- Recognize there are multiple dimensions to an individual's cultural background that shapes his or her worldview including ethnicity, nationality, race, language, education, profession, socio-economic status, religion and many other factors. For example, a highly educated, professional family from Peru will have different expectations of their child and of the educational system than a poor family from the same

country. Similarly, a middle class family from Puerto Rico may have different values than a middle class family from Mexico.

- **Be careful not to judge the family by your own cultural beliefs.**
- **Understand that some families of nonmainstream backgrounds may have beliefs about the cause of disability, role of families, child-rearing, expectations of service providers, and the role of school that will differ from those of the educational system. For example, a mother may view the child with a disability as a duty and gift from God, or believe that because she was pregnant during an eclipse, the child is blind. A 6-year-old child may still use a bottle and sleep with the parents. A family may view the teacher as the authority on their child's education and be hesitant about making decisions related to educational goals or options. Your role is to listen and accept the family's perspectives. As you develop a trusting relationship with the family, you can provide additional information that may assist the family in understanding other points-of-view.**
- **Identify and discard stereotypes. We all have stereotypes that are based on the media's portrayal of particular groups and our own limited personal experience with individuals who are different from ourselves. We must recognize and challenge our assumptions about a family based on language, ethnicity, lifestyle, and educational or socio-economic status.**
- **Find out about the family's background and obtain general information about that culture by reading and asking service providers or community representatives of that culture. Find out what are common, accepted, and polite practices in communication, child rearing, family decision-making, and working with the medical and educational systems.**
- **Remember that every family is a unique system. Information about a culture only provides a general frame of reference and starting point that should be checked out with the particular family.**
- **If needed, arrange for a qualified interpreter for meetings with the family (see [Working with Interpreters](#)). Determine the family's preferred language and whether you need a Spanish-English interpreter or some other language. For example, some families from certain regions of central or South America may speak an indigenous language rather than Spanish.**
- **If the family speaks Spanish and you do not, then learn greetings and other polite phrases, e.g. "Buenos Días" (Good Morning), "Buenas Tardes" (Good Afternoon), "¿Cómo está? (How are you?), "Gracias" (Thank You).**

Meeting the Family

- **Use greetings and other words you know in Spanish. This demonstrates respect for the family's language and an interest in their heritage.**
- **Begin by having a personal conversation, for example, asking about the well being of the family, commenting about the children, and sharing related information about yourself (e.g., where you grew up, how long you have lived in the area, whether you have children) as appropriate.**
- **Include siblings and other family members in the conversation as appropriate.**
- **Explain the purpose of the meeting and what will be discussed.**
- **Indicate interest in the conversation through focusing on the speaker, facial expressions and gestures.**
- **Be aware of your body language and what messages are communicated. For example, looking at the person with whom you are conversing and leaning toward him or her communicates your interest and attention to the conversation. In contrast, frequently looking at your watch or looking away from the person may communicate a lack of interest or impatience with the conversation. Remember that these examples may have the opposite meaning in different cultures, e.g., looking away from the person may communicate respect.**
- **If the family offers food or drink, be polite and have some. If you cannot have what they offer, ask for a glass of water.**
- **Ask questions to make sure you understand what the family has said and encourage them to ask questions about what you have said.**
- **Be prepared for emotional moments. Be patient and allow the family time to express their feelings.**
- **End the meeting by thanking the family and letting them know what will happen next.**

Help Families Understand the System

All families are overwhelmed by the many systems (medical, educational, and other social services) involved in services for children who are deaf-blind. These systems are even more unwieldy for families who do not speak English or are newcomers to the United States. Even people who are highly educated, speak English, and work in the educational system experience great frustrations when learning about the Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) system or eligibility requirements for trying to access another social service.

- **Based on your role and conversations with the family, identify the community resources that they might want to access. They may not know if they are eligible for social security income and medical or other resources (e.g.,**

Medical, Regional Center and California Children's Services in California).

- Explain our complex educational system to the family and their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Take time to go over essential terms and procedures (e.g., IFSP, IEP) that the family will encounter and help them learn about options for their child's education. Let the family know that their child should receive non-biased assessments in his or her home language by qualified assessors.
- Take time to explain specific terms related to a child's visual impairment and hearing loss. For example, most people do not understand the difference between "legally blind" and "functionally blind" or the difference between types of hearing losses. Similarly, the family needs information and an understanding about their child's prosthetic devices, communication methods, school settings, and educational services to make informed decisions about their child's education.
- Encourage the family to make a list of specific questions to ask their child's medical and educational service providers (e.g., ophthalmologist, audiologist, neurologist, speech and language therapist, and teacher) so they will have a greater understanding of their child's medical and educational needs.
- Help the family prepare for the IFSP or IEP meetings by making a list of the concerns and priorities they have for their child and asking them to invite who they want to attend with them (e.g., members of the extended family who are involved in decision making). Remind them that they have the right to make decisions about their child's education. Be there to support their participation in these meetings.
- Offer the family the opportunity to meet other Spanish-speaking families of children who are deaf-blind so they can obtain family-to family support and benefit from the experiences of others.

Source

Working with Spanish-speaking Families represents a synthesis of information from Project SALUTE's focus groups, National Advisory Committee, staff activities, and a review of relevant literature such as the following bibliography.

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