

# Cultural Values

## Background

Latino cultural values play a significant role in the treatment of children affected by trauma and their families. Prior research has indicated that failure to incorporate values into treatment results in higher attrition rates (Sonkin, 1995) and possibly less efficacious treatment (Miranda, Siddique, Der-Martirosian, & Belin, 2005). Service providers working with Latino/Hispanic families must become familiar with the subtle nuances of Latino/Hispanic cultural values and explore how these values may or may not be influencing the course of treatment with the child over time. When possible, practitioners should incorporate them into their treatment plans in order to provide the most efficacious and culturally sensitive treatment to these families.

There is a substantial amount of literature published on Latino cultural values (Lopez-Baez, 1999; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Morales, 1996; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). It is beyond the scope of these guidelines to address and define all of these values. However, these guidelines will focus on the following Latino/Hispanic values which often impact the trauma treatment of children and their families:

- **Familismo** is the preference for maintaining a close connection to the family. Latinos/Hispanics, in general, are socialized to value close relationships, cohesiveness, and cooperativeness with other family members. These close relationships are typically developed across immediate and extended family members, as well as close friends of the family (Marin & Triandis, 1985).
- **Value of Children** reflects the value that Latino/Hispanic families place on children. Parents are often very affectionate with their children. However, in some homes, children are expected to be seen and not heard (Pajewski & Enriquez, 1996).
- **Marianismo** is a gender-specific value that applies to Latinas. *Marianismo* encourages Latinas to use the Virgin Mary as a role model of the ideal woman. Thus, Latinas are encouraged to be spiritually strong, morally superior, nurturing, and self-sacrificing (Lopez-Baez, 1999). Also, Latina youth must remain virgins until they marry.
- **Machismo** is a gender-specific value that applies to Latinos. *Machismo* refers to a man's responsibility to provide for, protect, and defend his family (Morales, 1996). The service providers should be aware that there is currently some debate surrounding the negative connotations of *machismo*, including sexual aggressiveness, male domination, and arrogance.
- **Personalismo** is the valuing and building of interpersonal relationships. *Personalismo* encourages the development of warm and friendly relationships, as opposed to impersonal or overly formal relationships (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

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- **Respeto** implies deference to authority or a more hierarchical relationship orientation. *Respeto* emphasizes the importance of setting clear boundaries and knowing one's place of respect in hierarchical relationship (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). This may be displayed through the family's relationship with the provider and in their openness to discussing family relationships. This dynamic may create a situation where the relationship is not seen as a partnership. Rather, the family may defer to the professional and not express disagreement.



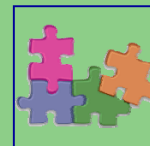
- **Simpatía** ("kindness") emphasizes the importance of being polite and pleasant, even in the face of stress and adversity. Avoidance of hostile confrontation is an important component of *simpatía*. Because of *simpatía*, some Latinos/Hispanics may not feel comfortable openly expressing disagreement with a service provider or treatment plan. This can lead to decreased satisfaction with care, non-adherence to therapy, and poor follow-up.

- **Religion and Spirituality** refers to the critical role that faith plays in the everyday life of most Latinos/Hispanics. Most Latinos/Hispanics are Christian, with the majority belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. However, different groups may have different faith affiliation. As it does for many people, religion offers Latinos/Hispanics a sense of direction in their lives and guidance in the education and raising of their children. Depending on where they are from, they may also seek medical or mental health care from alternative healthcare providers, such as *curanderos*, *sobadores*, and *espiritistas* (Pajewski & Enriquez, 1996).

The degree to which Latinos/Hispanics endorse these values is highly influenced by their acculturation level and generational status. For example, Latinos/Hispanics who are more acculturated into the United States' mainstream culture may not identify as strongly with these Latino/Hispanic values as compared to their less acculturated counterparts. Similarly, older generations of Latinos/Hispanics (first- or second-generation) may identify with these Latino/Hispanic values more strongly than younger generations. Given the dynamic process of acculturation and family members belonging to different generations, it is not uncommon for Latino/Hispanic families to have intrafamilial value differences: family members differing in their endorsement of Latino values (Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980; Szapocznik, Kurtines, Foote, Pérez-Vidal, & Hervis, 1986). Research has shown that intrafamilial value differences often lead to more familial conflict and poorer mental health in the child (Félix-Ortiz, Fernandez, & Newcomb, 1998; Ying & Han, 2007). Thus, when working with Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma, it is important to understand these value differences among family members given that they may exacerbate the trauma symptoms of the child.

## Statement of the Issue

Similar to other ethnic groups, Latinos/Hispanics have a unique set of cultural values that shape their behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and overall worldview. Not surprisingly, when trauma occurs in a Latino/Hispanic family, these values shape their reaction to the trauma, psychological consequences, coping responses, and meaning attributed to the trauma (Mennen, 1994). Thus, it is pivotal for service providers working with Latino/Hispanic children affected by trauma and their families to become familiar with these values. By developing familiarity with these values and incorporating these values into treatment, service providers can ultimately help these families process the traumatic event from their unique worldviews.



## Recommendations from the Field



- **Become familiar with Latino/Hispanic specific values and the moderating factors that may lead to value differences among family members.** Evaluate how the Latino/Hispanic specific values fall within your worldview (see APA, 2002 for more information).
- **Conduct a Latino-value focused assessment and feedback session on these values.** Please refer to the Resource section below for three assessment scales used to assess Latino/Hispanic values (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Marín, Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, & Pérez-Stable, 1987; Ramirez & Carrasco, 1996). Practitioners should understand that cultural values emerge in subtle ways over time and the assessment is ongoing throughout treatment (see “Assessment” priority area for more information).
- **Assist families in understanding how their Latino/Hispanic values shape their perceptions about the trauma, their psychological response and approach to treatment.**
  - ⇒ *Familismo*: In cases of intrafamilial abuse, how has the child’s immediate and extended family reacted to the child’s disclosure of the abuse? How has the betrayal of a family member affected how the child perceives his/her family? Did the child’s allegiance to the value of *familismo* prolong the child’s disclosure of the abuse?
  - ⇒ *Marianismo*: Are the females of the family reluctant to engage in treatment because they feel that this is the suffering they must endure (“*Esto es una cruz que debo de llevar*”—“This is the cross that I have to bear”) (Garcia-Preto, 1990)? In child sexual abuse cases, how is virginity being perceived? Does the family feel that the child’s virginity has been taken away? Is there a concern that the child will not marry well because she has “lost” her virginity?
  - ⇒ *Machismo*: In male cases, is the child suppressing/underreporting his traumatic symptoms in order uphold the value of appearing as a strong male? Is the father reluctant to participate in treatment because he does not want to be perceived as being vulnerable? Is the non-offending father feeling overly responsible for failing to protect his family?
- **Assist families in reframing their perceptions of Latino/Hispanic values that may be hindering the child from processing and integrating his/her traumatic experience.** Service providers working with Latinos/Hispanics should never attempt to change their patients’ values. When appropriate, service providers can help the family reframe their perceptions regarding their values if these perceptions are impeding the child’s healing process. Examples of reframing Latino/Hispanic value perceptions include:
  - ⇒ *Familismo*: In cases of intrafamilial abuse, helping the child understand how his/her disclosure was a heroic act and not a betrayal to his/her family. The child’s disclosure essentially protected other family members from undergoing his/her trauma.
  - ⇒ *Marianismo*: In child sexual abuse cases, helping the family members understand that virginity is a virtue that is consensually given and cannot be taken away. Given the strong religious and spiritual orientation among Latinos/Hispanics, often involving spiritual/indigenous leaders from the community (i.e., priests, pastors, *espiritistas*, *curanderos*, etc.) to discuss the topic of virginity can be helpful.
  - ⇒ *Machismo*: Educating the child on normal emotional responses to a traumatic event. Educating the non-offending father on the secrecy and manipulation surrounding most abuse cases which may have prevented him from recognizing the abuse that was taking place.

*Padres sanos, hijos honrados.\**

## Resilience

- Latino/Hispanic children can be positively affected by the reaction and support they receive from their immediate family members, extended family members, and friends. Latino/Hispanic non-offending parents, especially mothers and other extended non-offending family members, such as grandparents and aunts/uncles, are typically readily available to engage in the therapeutic process with the child to help him/her overcome his/her trauma.
- Because religion/spirituality is a central factor in the lives of most Latinos/Hispanics, it often serves as a protective factor. The child and his/her family will often use their religious/spiritual beliefs to find a meaning/purpose in the traumatic experience. In addition, it is often their religious/spiritual beliefs that give them faith and strength to continue with life’s difficult challenges and find meaning and purpose in their lives.



## Family/Youth Engagement

- Telephone the family before they attend their first session. The telephone conversation should focus on answering any questions that they may have about the upcoming session. This telephone conversation helps develop *confianza* (trust) between the service provider and parents. Additionally, it begins to develop an alliance with the parents which is very important when working with children.
- Exemplifying traits of *personalismo* is important when establishing rapport with the child and the family. Appropriate self-disclosures made by the service provider may help the family perceive the therapist as more personable and approachable.
- Exemplifying traits of *respeto* is also important when establishing rapport with the child and the family. Service providers working with Latinos/Hispanics should acknowledge the hierarchical relationships that may exist within the family and the respect that is given to those with more authority. At initial sessions, address adults with formal titles, such as, *Doña*, *Don*, *Señor*, or *Señora* which symbolize a sign of respect for them regardless of the service provider position/title. Also, follow a hierarchical approach to greetings, starting with adults first and then children. Professionals may need to openly invite and encourage collaboration and highlight the parents’ roles as experts on their children.

## Community Examples/Best Practices



- **Culturally Modified Trauma Focused Treatment (CM-TFT)** – Developed by Dr. Michael de Arellano, CM-TFT was developed for use with Latino/Hispanic children and is based on Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), with the addition of modules integrating cultural concepts and values throughout treatment. For more information, contact Dr. Michael de Arellano at [dearelma@musc.edu](mailto:dearelma@musc.edu).
  - ⇒ Website: [www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/promising\\_practices/cmtft\\_general.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/promising_practices/cmtft_general.pdf)
  - ⇒ Address: Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Medical University of South Carolina, 165 Cannon Street, MSC 852, Charleston, SC 29425
- **The Chicago Child Trauma Center at La Rabida Children's Hospital (LRCH)** - serves inner-city African Americans and other Chicago-area children exposed to traumatic events including medical trauma, sexual abuse, witnessing violence, and complex trauma. For decades, LRCH has been a leader in the development and provision of abuse- and trauma-related psychological services for children. Their work integrate cultural values throughout treatment
  - ⇒ Website: [www.larabida.org](http://www.larabida.org)
  - ⇒ Address: 8949 S. Stony Island, Chicago, IL 60649
- **Under the Rainbow at Mt. Sinai Hospital** - Under the Rainbow (UTR) provides treatment for most childhood disorders and specializes in the evaluation and treatment of child abuse and neglect. Under the Rainbow offers evaluation of abuse and neglect, Zero-to-Five developmental evaluation, and parent training for behavior management problems. Spanish-speaking therapists offer individual and family therapy for monolingual Spanish-speaking clients living in the Pilsen-Little Village area and integrate cultural values into treatment.
  - ⇒ Website: <http://sinai.org/services/psychiatry/childBehavioralHealth.asp>
  - ⇒ Address: California Avenue at 15th St., 5th Floor Nurses Residence, Chicago, IL 60608

## Resources

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*\*Dichos translation: Healthy parents raise honorable children.*

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