

Working with Latinx Families

Best Practices

Stepping into the Culture

The following is a list of important themes and topics which should be considered when working with Latinx clients and their families. It is important to remember that the client is the expert, and it is best practice to always ask about their own interpretations and experience of their culture, beliefs, and values. Clinicians are encouraged to connect with Latinx practitioners who can serve as cultural consultants.

- **Concept: Building Rapport**
 - **In theory:** (“*Personalismo*”) Latinxs prefer to engage with people who show a genuine interest for their needs. Emphasize the relationship over the task involved (i.e. treatment plan).
 - **In practice:** Use a personal approach by either phone or in person conversations, avoid sending letters or flyers. Emphasize the relationship over tasks
- **Concept: Defining Your Role in their life**
 - **In theory:** Have a conversation with your client about your role in their life to help them understand the ways you are able to provide them with support.
 - **In practice:** Compare and contrast your role with that of a teacher/doctor to help them understand your scope of practice and ways you can provide support.
- **Concept: Clinical Perspective**
 - **In theory:** Take a strengths-based approach when working with Latinx Families.
 - **In practice:** Acknowledge the challenges that face Latinx Families and highlight the ways they are resilient.
- **Concept: Family Collaboration**
 - **In theory:** (“*Familismo*”) Latinxs are highly interconnected with immediate and extended family members which means it is important to include and collaborate with as many family members as possible.
 - **In practice:** Be open to meeting Latinx families in their homes, invite family members to sessions, and create an inclusive atmosphere when working with Latinx families.
- **Concept: Role of Children/Youth in the Family**
 - **In theory:** Children are often expected to be entirely dependent on parent’s initially but then to act “grown-up” relatively quickly to take on adult responsibilities.

- **In practice:** Clinicians are encouraged to observe, inquire, and explore the family dynamics to help color the treatment plan and best approaches when working with Latinx clients and their families.
- **Concept: Divided Families**
 - **In theory:** An unknown, but sizeable, number of Latinx families are spread across national borders, with families and parents (in addition to extended relatives) separated by immigration policies and or the reality of migration difficulties.
 - **In practice:** Encourage Latinx families to explore the challenges that come with having a divided family, the safe space to discuss this is important and these concerns deserve special attention.
- **Concept: Acculturation & Immigration**
 - **In theory:** The process of acculturation and immigration is complex, multigenerational, and multidimensional. Understanding and working with a client's level of acculturation and immigration experiences requires a willingness to go through the world with the client's eyes. It is highly suggested that this is discussed with sensitivity and only once rapport has been built, as this topic is taboo to discuss with anyone outside their immediate family.
 - **In practice:** Ask open ended questions and encourage Latinx clients to discuss their process, approach, and perspective on acculturation and immigration.
- **Concept: Attitudes and Beliefs related to Therapy**
 - **In theory:** Therapy is stigmatized in Latinx culture because clients may feel disloyal discussing problems with an individual outside their family. Also Latinx clients may not respond well to discussions about individual goals/desires, particularly if it is perceived at the 'expense' of other family members.
 - **In practice:** Clinicians should begin interactions with informal greetings and casual conversations, rather than immediately delving into the presenting issues. Also engage clients from a collectivistic perspective and help them explore their individual perspective if it is appropriate to do so.
- **Concept: Perceived Authority & Respect**
 - **In theory:** Latinx clients tend to give greater weight to suggestions or advice offered by individuals in positions of authority (i.e. clinicians). Latinx clients may respond negatively or hesitate to criticize or speak negatively of others, which may be interpreted as denial or dishonesty.
 - **In practice:** Be cautious about offering advice, use formal words such as Mr. & Ms. unless explicitly instructed otherwise, and recognize that working with Latinx clients older than you may carry additional challenges related to perceived authority and respect.
- **Concept: Cultural Gender Roles**

- **In theory:** *Machismo* and *Marianismo* are terms intended to describe a full range of traditional gender roles. Some *Machismo* qualities may be: hardwork/economic success, authority in the family, physical strength, masculinity while some *Marianismo* qualities may be: nurturance, fertility, sacrifice for family, and religious piety.
- **In practice:** clinicians who challenge client's ascription to traditional roles may be rejected, it is advised to help the client broaden their concept of their gender role while affirming the positive qualities of it.
- **Concept: Cultural & Religious Beliefs**
 - **In theory:** Latinx clients may express beliefs based from their religious faith and often with themes of *Fatalismo* or a concept of viewing life from an inevitable nature of occurrences (i.e. "*Si Dios Quiere*").
 - **In practice:** Look for verbal or behavioral clues which indicate a sense of powerlessness and tap into cultural values that may help encourage the client towards change.
- **Concept: Communication Styles & Approaches**
 - **In theory:** Latinxs may avoid conflict and assertive communication styles may be perceived as too direct and off-putting.
 - **In practice:** Encourage Latinx clients to increase their ability to advocate for themselves in a way that feels comfortable to their communication styles. Be prepared to have conversations backfire or tensions arising, as the client will deny identifying problems or reject strategies that would require them to bring up difficulties.
- **Concept: Discussing Risk Behaviors**
 - **In theory:** Latinx clients may be hesitant to discuss risk behaviors of their own or their family members.
 - **In practice:** It is important to remind clients about the priority of their safety and address risk behaviors in a clear manner. Remind clients and their families that these are standard questions that are asked to everyone to help keep people safe.
- **Concept: Proximity & Touch**
 - **In theory:** Latinx clients (both male and female) are often comfortable with much closer physical proximity even in new relationships.
 - **In practice:** Physical contact such as a handshake or hug may help build a strong therapeutic relationship.
- **Concept: Time Orientation**
 - **In theory:** Time and punctuality may be flexible with Latinxs, and a hurried pace is not advised.
 - **In practice:** Offer to meet evenings and or plan to spend time before and after the session as needed. Make yourself flexible and allow the opportunity to reschedule as needed.
- **Concept: Working with a Translator**

- **In theory:** The presence of a qualified translator is very important, and highly appreciated by clients and families.
- **In practice:** Translators who have an understanding of the culture greatly facilitates the process of building trust with Latinx families.
- **Concept: Accepting Gifts/Food**
 - **In theory:** Latinx clients may choose to show their appreciation by offering food and or gifts.
 - **In practice:** For the client, if their offer of food or gifts is rejected, it may be perceived as a rejection of themselves. It is appropriate to accept small tokens of appreciation as deemed appropriate by the clinician. It is encouraged to respectfully reject grandiose and/or inappropriate gifts and explain that the relationship is important but does not need to be fostered with physical/tangible gifts.
- **Concept: Role of Children/Youth in the Family**
 - **In theory:** Children are often expected to be entirely dependent on parent's initially but then to act "grown-up" relatively quickly to take on adult responsibilities.
 - **In practice:**
- **Concept: Common Traditions & Holidays**
 - *Bautizo (Baptism):* considered essential for the entire family, as the community takes responsibility for raising the new child.
 - *Quinceanera (Coming of Age Celebration):* This event symbolizes both the womanhood of the 15 yr. old and the family's position/well-being.
 - *Compadre/Comadrel (Godparents):* godparents play a role not only at baptism but throughout the child's life, and this relationship between the godparents and parents is highly valued and used for natural supports.
 - *Navidad/La Noche Buena/Posadas (Christmas):* Christmas is a month-long holiday where communities celebrate together at home and at church.
 - *Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe (Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe):* For Latinx Catholics, this is a highly holy day- a mix of national pride and religious devotion.
 - *Dia de Las Madres (Mother's Day):* significant day given the role of mother's in Latinx culture.
 - *Dia de Los Muertos/Novenario (All Saints Day & Funerals):* Latinxs pay respects to one's elders who have died and also highly value attending funerals which traditionally are held for 9 days.

Resources

The Workgroup on Adapting Latino Services. (2008). Adaptation guidelines for serving Latino children and families affected by trauma (1st ed.). San Diego, CA: Chadwick Center for Children and Families

Israel, N. (2013). Engagement Strategies: Latino/Hispanic caregivers and multicultural youth. San Francisco, CA: The San Francisco Department of Public Health

Falicov, C.J. (1998). *Latino Families in Therapy: A Guide to Multicultural Practice*. New York: Guilford Press. In paperback, 2000.