Strengthening Immigrant Children's Mental Health: Together We Can! Juntos, Podemos!

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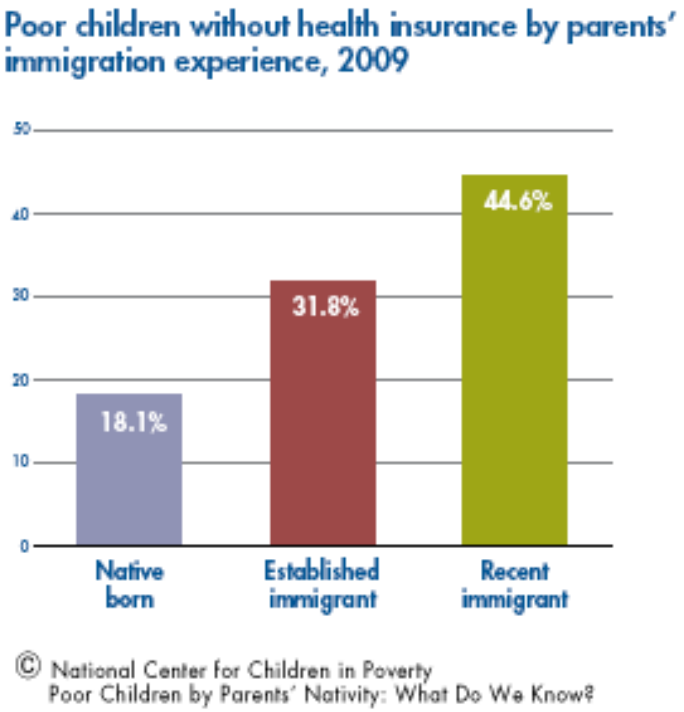
Learning Objectives

* Increase awareness of the mental health challenges faced by immigrant children in the US from diverse countries of origin
* Increase knowledge of effective strategies to work with multiple systems & families to identify immigrant children who can benefit from mental health services
* Increase knowledge of evidence-based mental health service delivery approaches effective for immigrant children & their families

The numbers

* 1 in four children in the US lives in an immigrant family
* 18.4 million children live in an immigrant family
* 30% of immigrant children live below the FPL compared to 19% of US-born children
* Immigrant children are 2x more likely to be uninsured (15%) than non-immigrant children (8%)



Stresses faced by immigrant children

* Family decisions to immigrate may be based on a variety of reasons that cause stress on their children
  * Economic
  * Political
  * Safety

* Act of immigrating itself can cause stress
* Life as an immigrant in an often unwelcoming society exacerbates those stresses

Immigrant vs. non-immigrant

* Mental health is worse among immigrant children than among similar children of US-born parents
* Undocumented children have even greater externalizing problems than US-born or immigrant children with legal documentation
* Non-citizen populations access mental health services only .1 times a year (Kaiser Study)

Reasons

* Many immigrant children have traumatic experiences prior to reaching the US
  * May have been separated from family members for extended periods
  * May have lost family members due to violence , famine, etc., in their country of origin
  * May have personally faced poverty, hunger, drought, violence, sexual trafficking, exposure to war, natural disasters
  * May not have had access to medical or mental health care prior to arriving in US

Reasons

* Many immigrant children have traumatic experiences in the US
  * Parent more likely to be low-income & have menial jobs even if they were professionals in their country of origin
  * More likely to live in sub-standard conditions
  * Likely to face many disruptions
  * May be unaware of or afraid to use existing services
  * May be ineligible for many services/resources
    * If undocumented, ineligible for any government services except public education
    * Even if documented, may be ineligible for government services (for example, adult immigrants are ineligible for federally-funded health care coverage for 1st 5 years in US)

Reasons

* Because children tend to learn English faster than their parents, they are often compelled to assume roles, like translating & serving as intermediaries, that are more appropriate for adults
* Often face in-person discrimination & negative messages about immigrants in the media, school, etc.

Results of stressors

* Psychological stress
* Significant family conflicts & lack of family cohesion
* Feelings of isolation
* Emotional & behavior problems
* Potentially severe & long-lasting psychological problems including:
  * Depression
  * Anxiety
  * Post-traumatic stress disorder
  * Suicide
* Physical problems
* Lost sense of safety

Common Reactions to Trauma

Physical Reactions

* Nervous energy, restlessness, jitters, muscle tension
* Upset stomach
* Rapid heart rate
* Dizziness
* Lack of energy, fatigue
* Teeth grinding
* Loss or gain in weight

Behavioral Reactions

* Becoming withdrawn, isolated from others
* Easily startled
* Avoiding places, situations
* Becoming confrontational, aggressive
* Change in eating habits
* Increase/decrease in sexual activity

Common Reactions to Trauma

Emotional Reactions

* Fear, inability to feel safe
* Sadness, grief, depression
* Guilt
* Anger, irritability
* Numbness, lack of feelings
* Inability to enjoy anything

Emotional Reactions

* Loss of trust, self-esteem
* Feeling helpless
* Distance from others
* Intense or extreme feelings
* Feeling chronically “empty”
* Blunted, then extreme feelings

Common Reactions to Trauma

Mental Reactions

* Changes in the way you think about yourself, the world, others
* Heightened awareness of your surroundings (hyper-vigilance)
* Lessened awareness, disconnection from yourself (disassociation)
* Difficulty concentrating

Mental Reactions

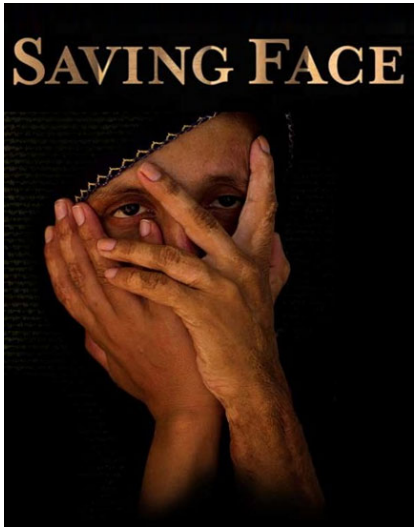
* Poor attention or memory problems
* Difficulty making decisions
* Intrusive images
* Nightmares that impact sleep

Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

* Lack of income or eligibility for insurance to pay for mental health services
* Language barriers
* Cultural barriers rooted in often negative cultural conceptions of mental illness & mental health care
* Lack of adequate #s of linguistically appropriate & culturally competent mental health providers trained to treat immigrant children with mental health problems including trauma, etc. leading to under-identification of mental health needs, under-utilization of services, & inappropriate treatment

Values & Viewpoints

* Time & space
* Fate & personal responsibility
* Face & face-saving
* Nonverbal communication
* Have been silenced
* Stigma
* Confidentiality
* Attitudes & beliefs about providers, interpreters
* Help-seeking behaviors



Values & Viewpoints

Causes of Illness

* Imbalance in body
* Germs
* Spirit possession
* Loss of soul
* Violation of taboo
* Intrusion of harmful element
* Divine decision
* Evil eye

How to Respond

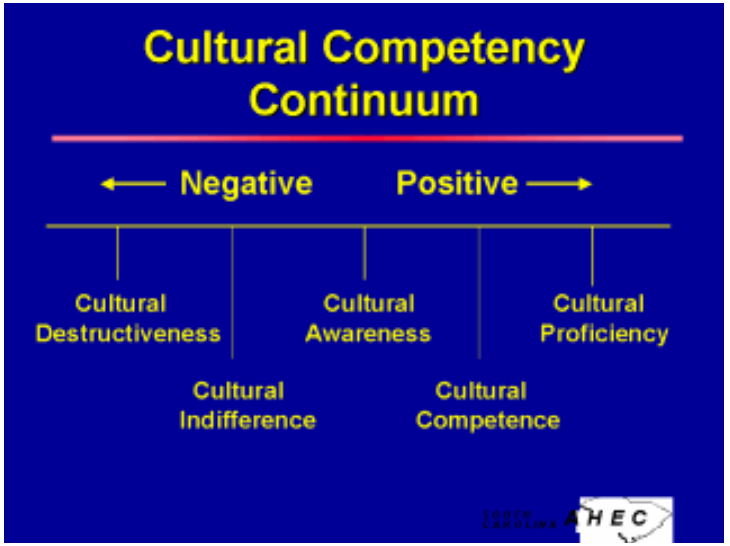
* Restore the balance
* Kill them
* Exorcize it
* Ritual to retrieve it
* Penance
* Remove it
* Acceptance
* Rituals/offerings

Overcoming the barriers

* Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.
* Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
  * Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, S. Covey
* Practice “cultural reciprocity”

Cultural Continuum

* Cultural Destructiveness
* Cultural Incapacity
* Cultural Blindness
* Cultural Pre-competence
* Cultural Competence
* Cultural Proficiency



Culture

Culture shapes status, relationships and social behaviors with regard to every aspect of life

- Justice for individual vs. group harmony
- Willingness to question authority

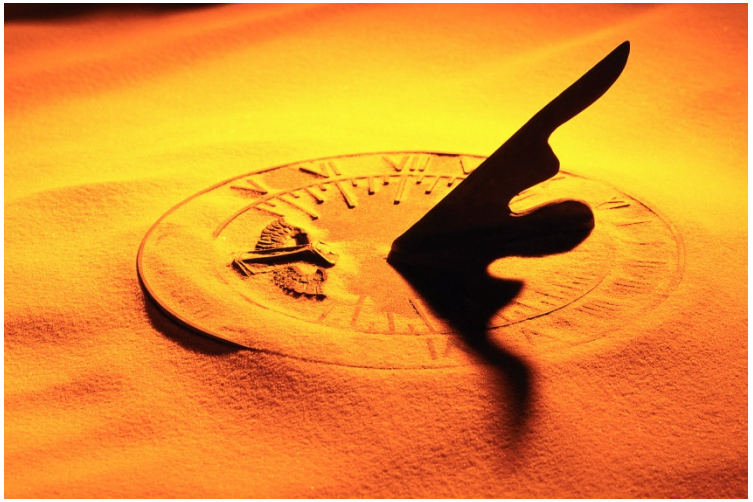
People from various backgrounds communicate and process information differently

- Rational vs. intuitive
- Linear vs. circular
- Abstract vs. concrete
- Time-bound vs. not

Cultural Reciprocity

- A process, not an outcome
- Cultural reciprocity is about relationships… learning about the other, sharing about oneself
- You can only practice cultural reciprocity if you listen with the heart… for the heart… and share your heart.

Examine cultural values: Time



* What does it mean to be “on time?”
* How do you feel/react when someone arrives late to an appointment? Why?

Communication

* Verbal communication
  * Rates of speech
  * Voice modulation
  * Pauses
  * Use of silence
  * Time between Q&A
* What is rude? Polite?

Communication

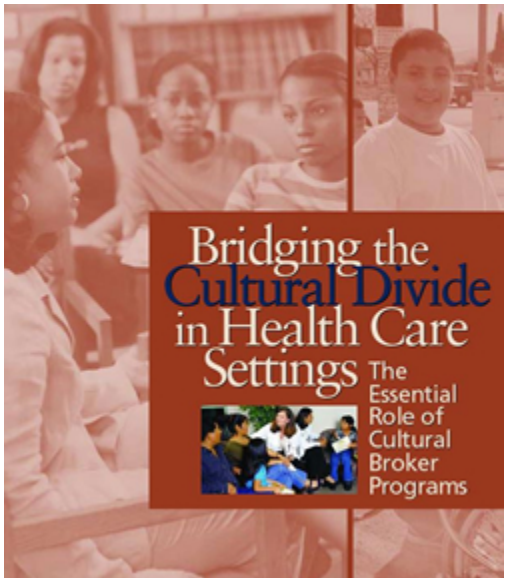
* Nonverbal
  * Body language
  * Eye contact
  * Proximity
  * Deference
  * Respect

Ten Strategies for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Cultural Scanning

* Is the behavior
  * Innocent
  * Ignorant
  * Insensitive
  * Racist
* How to respond? Do we
  * Know the person
  * Value the relationship
  * Have a history

Cultural Brokers

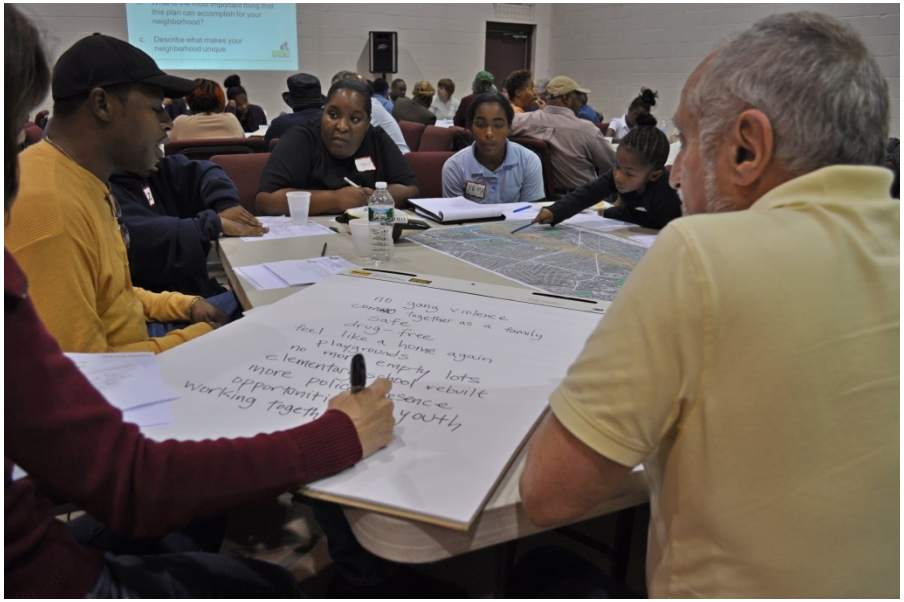


- Identify partners with legitimacy with families & targeted communities.
- Ensure partners are representative of the community.

Cultural Liaisons

- Knowledge of:
  - Values, beliefs & practices within their cultural group
  - Service delivery systems they have learned to navigate

Gathering Community Knowledge



- Communities know:
  - Their history: where they have been
  - Their culture: who they are
  - Sacred places
  - Dangerous places
  - What is important to them

Cultural Mediator

- Helping service delivery systems:
  - Establish and maintain trust
  - Build meaningful relationships
- Helping immigrant families understand service delivery systems & access them

Catalyst for Change

- Helping service delivery systems:
  - Recognize the barriers to participation
  - Make changes to address barriers
  - Engage immigrant families & youth in all processes

Listen with the heart… for the heart

* Engage immigrant parent leaders:
  * Identifying strengths & needs
  * Developing plans including selecting interventions
  * Implementation including engaging other parents
  * Evaluation
* Provide the needed resources to support their active participation!

Evidence-Based Interventions

* Cultural Adjustment & Trauma Services (CATS)
* Coffee & Family Education & Support (CAFES) group intervention
* Caring Across Communities Comprehensive School-Linked Mental Health Program
  * Project Shifa (Children's Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts)
  * Bridges Program (NYU School of Medicine)
  * Refugee & Immigrant Youth Mental Health Project (Chicago)
  * Tan Am Inner Peace Project (San Jose, California)
  * Empowerment Across Communities (Portland, Maine)
* School-Based Mental Health Program for Traumatized Latino Immigrant Children (www.nctsnet.org/nctsn_assets/Articles/29.pdf)
* Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (www.rand.org/health/projects/cbits/publications.html)

Resources: Working with Immigrant & Refugee Families on Mental Health

* Child Welfare Information Gateway, US DHHS
  * https://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/cultural/families/immigrant.cfm
* American Psychological Association
  * http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/immigration-psychology.aspx
* National Center for Mental Health Promotion & Youth Violence Prevention at EDC
  * http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/sites/default/files/root/strategies_for_engaging_immigrant_and_refugee_families.pdf
* NAMI Multicultural Action Center
  * www.nami.org/TextTemplate.cfm?Section=Multicultural_Support1&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=55786

Resources

* National Center for Cultural Competence (http://nccc.georgetown.edu/)
  * Cultural broker guide
  * Cultural & linguistic competence self-assessment for:
    * Family organizations
    * Disability Organizations
    * Individual mental health practitioners
* National Family Voices (www.familyvoices.org)
  * Growing your capacity to engage diverse communities (https://org2.salsalabs.com/o/6739/images/CommunityBrokers_04-27-2009.pdf)