



TOOLKIT TIPS

LATINO GRANDFAMILIES: HELPING LATINO CHILDREN THRIVE THROUGH CONNECTION TO CULTURE AND FAMILY

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Introduction

About 2.5 million children in the United States live in grandfamilies or kinship families, which are families in which children are being raised by grandparents, other extended family members, or adults with whom they have a close family-like relationship, such as godparents. Kinship care is a familiar practice in Latino families. Latinos have a long history of helping raise children in need of temporary or permanent families and exhibit a willingness to assist other families based on a strong value of community and an emphasis on family.

About one in four children in the United States are Latino. Latino children are much more likely than non-Latino white children to live in multigenerational households where three or more generations live, and where the grandparents or other kin may be providing a significant amount of caregiving. This multigenerational caregiving is one of the Latino community's many cultural strengths.

This resource is designed as a quick reference tool for practitioners – including social workers, government and nonprofit workers, and community leaders working with grandfamilies and kinship families who identify as Latino, Latina, or Latinx – to help them provide services in a way that is culturally sensitive and effective. It may also be used as a training tool for professional development. The content is based on Generations United's [complementary toolkit](#), which provides additional detailed information, resources, and infographics. The toolkit also includes definitions and explanations of key terms used in this resource.



Understanding Latino Values

Cultural values are the morals and principles that are generally identified and embraced by members of a specific cultural group. It is important to keep in mind that the term “Latino” encompasses people with many different backgrounds. They can be found at every socioeconomic level and in every region of the United States. They have various nationalities, speak many languages, practice various religions, and originate from many countries. When working with Latino populations, it is important to avoid sweeping generalizations about their needs and histories. Like other U.S. ethnic groups, Latinos have various social, historical, geographical, political, and cultural differences. At the same time, certain aspects of Latino history assist in creating a shared background based on colonization, the Spanish language, frequent Catholic affiliation, and regional proximity, all of which influence values and culture across the Latino community.

The goal of this tool is to provide important background information about the strengths of Latino communities’ cultural values and share examples to promote better understanding and recognition, and to improve service utilization and access.

**For more information,
see the complementary toolkit.**



Familism & Collectivism (*Colectivismo and Familismo*): Collectivism is a cultural value that centers around community rather than the individual. Familism is a cultural value that emphasizes strong ties of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among family members. Latino families are rooted in intricate extended networks of families and friends based on these interdependent belief systems. Latino families have diverse and complex histories that may include traumatic experiences, including those related to immigration and migration. Carrying shared historical trauma often creates a built-in attachment to one another.

“Familism can be both a positive strength and a challenge in that while Latinos place a strong importance on supporting one another, it can often look like we don’t need support from outside providers. The reality is, we do need the support, guidance, and resources just like everyone else.”

— Ana Lora, Grandparent Caregiver

EXAMPLE

Research has shown that familism may be a protective factor for Latino families. Family support has been linked to greater psychological well-being and better health outcomes among Latinos.

The decisions and behavior of everyone in an extended family system are based largely on pleasing the family; decisions are not to be made by the individual without consulting the family. Practitioners' failure to recognize familismo can potentially lead to conflicts, non-compliance, dissatisfaction with care, and poor continuity of care. Including positive family support systems in the provision of care/services will contribute to the success of the Latino individual seeking assistance.



Personalism (*personalismo*): The Latino community values personal relationships over many things, including status, material gain, and institutional relationships. They value personalismo, which is, essentially, “formal friendliness” and can be expressed through warmth that minimizes personal distance. Personal relationships are preferred when accessing services. What may be perceived as appropriate professional distance to some non-Latino professionals may come across as sterile or disrespectful to members of the Latino community.

There are numerous physical aspects to personalismo. Gestures such as proximity, shaking hands, and giving a hug or kiss on the cheek are expected in relationships. It is also important to recognize differences in practices and expectations related to eye contact. While Spanish culture typically affirms direct eye contact, Latino people from small tribal communities may interpret direct eye contact as aggressive. Service providers should be mindful of this as well as the importance of demonstrating warmth and personalism in working with Latino populations, while also balancing the physical aspects of personalismo with agency guidelines related to physical touch.

Latinos may read the neutral or businesslike affect of a western helping professional such as a social worker as negative. If a social worker arrives at a grandfamily's home and immediately launches into a hurried family assessment, the caregivers may experience resentment and be dissatisfied with care. This reduces the likelihood they will follow up on future communications or ask for help when needed. It is important to show respect by taking time with a family and, if possible and desired by the family, communicating in Spanish. Physical gestures such as shaking a hand or placing a hand on a shoulder can help communicate warmth. It is important to prioritize trust when establishing rapport with a Latino family, and this will help as you interact with other individuals in the same community.

EXAMPLE

Respect (Respeto): Honoring or showing someone esteem is the definition of respect. As discussed above, the Latino community is devoted to personal relationships, and respect is essential to maintaining those connections. Showing respect for everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic position in society, is necessary to connect with the Latino community in a meaningful way. Establishing mutual respect with Latino community members will foster open and sincere communication. It will also ensure they will take your information seriously and follow through with guidance you provide. The degree of respeto shown to a practitioner is often a good way to gauge engagement with Latino families.

A grandparent caregiver may place high value on ensuring their grandchildren are taught about manners and courtesy as tantamount to respect. They will teach them when to use “Usted” vs “Tu,” (the formal and informal words for the English pronoun “you,” which in Spanish have specific formal/informal uses that must be learned in order to show deference). A high value is placed on deferring to elders and showing respect to persons of a higher status. Latinos will often say of a child who has learned these social lessons: “Es un niño bien educado.” (“He is a well-educated or well-mannered child.”) As a helping professional, acknowledging and affirming when the children demonstrate respect to their elders may help build connections with a Latino family.

EXAMPLE

Spiritual Beliefs: Latino religious affiliations and spiritual practices require significant attention because they impact many aspects of community life. For example, Catholicism often plays an active role in helping Latino newcomers transition to this country, as Catholic churches provide social networks that connect to their countries of origin.

While the Catholic Church has tremendous influence among Latinos, religious and spiritual beliefs among them are wide ranging. Among Latinos, spirituality can take the form of religion, folk beliefs, and/or the practice of folk medicine. Folk medicine has a variety of definitions in its modern context. It can refer to: 1) specific healing (or spiritual) practices of ethnic group members; 2) the use of medical practitioners outside of the Western medical establishment; and 3) remedies that can assist with healing. Freedom is also often associated with spiritual beliefs in Latino communities.

Even while struggling to keep up with doctor’s appointments, supporting her grandchildren’s education, and managing complex relationships with her grandchildren’s parents, grandparent caregiver Arianna prioritizes attending church services and activities three times a week. In working with Arianna, practitioners should recognize that church may play a critical and highly valued role in building and preserving social networks with other Latinos.

EXAMPLE

Practitioners should be mindful and inquire about a client's religious/spiritual practices during the assessment to gain greater awareness of the family's beliefs and practices regarding wellness. Latino subcultures vary in these practices. It is important to get some background or understanding of the communities you work with.

Language: Although we lack similar data for grandfamily caregivers, 85 percent of Latino parents report using Spanish with their children. Many Latinos in the U.S. are bilingual in English and Spanish; however, there are members of the population who do not speak either language. Recent Latino immigrants may primarily or solely speak Indigenous languages. Providers should not assume that the Latino individual speaks Spanish and should be aware that Spanish may not be their traditional language. It is also important that practitioners do not assume English is not preferred. This could be harmful to relationships. Newly arrived families may have spent countless hours and much money to learn English before coming to the U.S. and pride themselves on being able to communicate without assistance in English.

For practitioners, two recommended actions are to clarify with the family regarding which language they are most comfortable using and to make diligent efforts to accommodate their preference. At the heart of effective service provision is the ability of providers and clients to communicate with each other and comprehend the nuances of shared language. The availability of Spanish-speaking staff to provide orientation materials, answer questions, teach foster care and adoption preparation classes, and conduct interviews and home visits is a huge step towards cultural competency.

When social worker Annie learned she would be working with a Latino grandfamily newly arrived from Guatemala, she arranged for a Spanish-speaking interpreter to join her on her first visit. When she arrived, she was surprised to learn the family primarily spoke Mayan and knew little Spanish.

EXAMPLE



Seven Ways to Promote Culturally Responsive Services

- 1. Offer Flexibility:** Offer Latino clients flexibility and accommodation in engaging, convening meetings, or doing home visits. Flexibility in timing and accommodation are paramount to building a trusting relationship between provider and client and are in alignment with creating an atmosphere of personalism and respect.
- 2. Build Trust:** Develop and demonstrate trust-building practices. Developing confianza (confidence or trust) in the ability and intentions of practitioners is the key to a strong working relationship. Trust can be built by demonstrating warmth and kindness and offering small courtesies.
- 3. Share Timely Advice:** Once you've built genuine trust, provide pertinent insights and information when necessary. Follow through on what you said you would do. Let them know you are a person of your word.
- 4. Use a Strengths-Based Approach:** Offer clients a respectful chance to share their beliefs and needs. Sharing appropriate social and cultural resources can be helpful for Latino clients in need. Utilize family members to provide support and communicate as much as possible to the caregivers in their life.
- 5. Consider Spirituality:** Consider using faith-based and/or Indigenous healers. Collaborating with Indigenous and religious leaders may assist in decreasing the limitations of available medical care. Latino immigrants may especially be attracted to complementary health treatments because they are both culturally familiar and accessible.
- 6. Decrease Systemic Barriers and Stigma:** Individuals who experience poverty are simultaneously affected by contextual stressors such as unemployment, lack of economic power, lack of childcare, poor housing, neighborhood stressors, language difficulties, and/or cultural barriers. Practitioners should aim to reduce social/systemic stressors by offering bilingual, bicultural support and using community facilitators such as promotoras (health promoters) who are familiar with the community's needs.
- 7. Strength-Based Screening:** Consider including a strengths-based screening of structural determinants of health when working with Latino clients.

Learn more about grandfamilies and find additional resources at gu.org, grandfamilies.org, and gksnetwork.org.





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