



TIPS FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH HISPANIC FAMILIES

What Hispanic Family Members of Children with Disabilities Are Saying



These tips were developed primarily by Hispanic family members who have personal experience with health care professionals providing care for their children with disabilities. This document is designed to provide guidance about how to more effectively work with Hispanic families. However, it is important to remember that Hispanic culture includes a wide array of national origins, dialects, religions and customs.

COMMUNICATION

- Allow more time for appointments with Hispanic families to provide opportunities for discussion and clarification. This additional time can help ensure they can process and understand the information you give them.
- If possible, ask the family if they need an interpreter before the appointment so interpretation services can be arranged ahead of time.
- When using an interpreter, make eye contact with the family member, not the interpreter. Direct your questions to the family member and give the interpreter time to explain what you are saying and get a response from the family member.
- Only give a Spanish-speaking family member information about their child's medical status or treatment with an adult interpreter present. Doing so can help ensure the family member fully understands the meaning of the information.
- When delivering a diagnosis, offer information about the causes and symptoms of the disability or illness as fully as possible. Do not assume the family member understands medical terms.
- After delivering a diagnosis, offer support by providing information to help them understand what to expect. Let the family member know what treatments, therapies and support groups are available. Provide written information in Spanish about the diagnosis, symptoms and treatments.
- Encourage family members to keep a health record for their child that includes information about the child's medications and dosages.
- Encourage family members to ask questions about any concerns they have about their child, and take time to answer them.





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- Family members may ask you the same questions more than once simply because they do not like the answer you are giving them. This may occur when delivering new information about their child, such as a new procedure that must be done. Be patient and explain the reason behind your answer (for instance, why inserting a G-tube is necessary). If possible, give them some time to process the information before moving forward.
- If the family member is saying “yes” in English to everything you are saying, he or she may not understand you. Some Hispanic family members may not feel comfortable telling you that they do not understand.
- Let families know they can request instructions for their medications in Spanish. Most pharmacies can print the instructions in Spanish.



TRUST

- When appropriate, provide information about programs that can help the family and explain the purpose of those programs. Hispanic family members may have a different understanding about how government services operate, and they may fear that asking for services will result in negative consequences.
- Shaking hands and eye contact are important for building trust with many people in the Hispanic community. These behaviors are especially important when introducing yourself. Not shaking hands may be considered bad manners in many situations.
- Show the family that you are listening. Instead of writing and listening at the same time, show them you are listening to what they are saying by taking a minute to look at them before writing.
- Ask about the child's preferences and personality, and show genuine interest in him or her. Interact directly with the child to help build rapport with the child and family.

CARING FOR CHILDREN AT HOME

- Ask families about any additional treatments or supplements they are giving their child at home. It is common for Hispanic families to use home remedies and natural treatments, such as fish oil, honey, teas and herbs.
- Encourage family members to talk to their babies and toddlers and read books to them.
- Encourage families to take their children outside the home and be active as part of a healthy lifestyle. Explain that isolation can be detrimental to the child's well-being.
- Encourage family members to pay attention to their child's dental hygiene. Considerations may include the length of time a child is fed with a bottle.





DECISION MAKING

- When possible, allow plenty of time for Hispanic family members to make decisions about their child. Most Hispanic people are family-oriented, and decisions are made with input from a number of family members that may include grandmother, godmother, sister, brother, etc. Women will likely consult their husbands about big decisions.

OTHER

- Explain the importance of coming to appointments on time. Hispanic family members may have an orientation to time that is different than that of our health care system. If you explain that an appointment is important and why, it can help them understand the importance of being there at the specified time.
- Ask about medical care that has been done outside your office. Families may go to another provider if they can't get an appointment quickly. Encourage them to see the same primary care provider.
- Families may have children who were born outside the United States, and they may be unsure how to obtain vaccinations for those children. Let them know their children can get free vaccinations at their county health department.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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