

Additional Webinar Q & A's

Please Note: PACER's multicultural advocates responded to participant's questions regarding the May, 2008 webinar presentation content. There was not time to respond to the following related questions during the live webinar. It is important to read these responses in the context of the entire presentation. It is also essential to understand that all families are different, even within a specific culture. Rather than making assumptions at an individual family level, it is always appropriate to ask questions to increase understanding.

1. Could Dao Xiong share some examples of nonverbal interactions and their meaning within the Hmong culture?

In Hmong communication, cultural courtesies may interfere with clear communication if you attach inaccurate meaning to non-verbal communication. A smile may mean enjoyment or agreement, or it may just be a courtesy indicating interest, or that they are about to speak. In a similar way, laughter does not necessarily indicate the listener found what was communicated to be enjoyable or humorous, but may merely be a way to indicate active listening. Do not take offense when laughter seems inappropriate.

It's important to keep in mind that in communicating with Hmong families, you may not assume that smiling or laughter or other nonverbal communication indicates approval or agreement. Do not assume the same meaning for smiling and laughter and other nonverbal communication as in the western American culture. In this case, the words that are spoken will be more accurate. You may need to restate or repeat the question to check for your understanding of the response.

2. How do I show respect for a cultural tradition or practice when it goes against the law or is not a "proven practice"?

Whenever there is a question of legality, it is important to refer back to the supervisor of your program regarding policy and procedures, and the specific steps you should take in response.

In regards to "best" or "proven" practices, professionals have the responsibility to share their knowledge about research-based practices and interventions, as well as the potential benefits of their use. It is the family's responsibility to choose how they will act upon the information they receive.

Many families may keep information about their cultural practices private, but if they do share information and choose to make a practice a part of the Individual Family Service Plan (e.g., the use of massage); the professional can indicate on the IFSP that the family is the responsible party for this intervention. Even then, it is important for professionals to share information about other options which have shown to benefit children. Try to explain these options and benefits in ways that will make sense to the family.

3. How do most cultures feel about sign language as a way to teach children to communicate?

A family's willingness to consider the use of sign language will be dependent on a variety of factors. It will be necessary to identify gaps in knowledge and provide the information the family needs to make a well-informed decision when they are ready. Immigrants from countries where there were no services for the deaf will not have had the opportunity to see deaf individuals use sign language in the community and may not see the potential benefits for their child and family.

The challenges to learning and using sign language may seem overwhelming if there is a second spoken language used by the family and their community. The family will need information about research-based outcomes regarding language acquisition, as well as an explanation about how ASL interpretation is provided as an accommodation in America, particularly in school programs as the child enters school.

Most importantly, try to meet the family where they are at; provide them with a little information at a time; and offer ongoing opportunities for choices.

4. Can Lucy Favorite please share more information about the role of grandparents in Native American families?

In traditional Native American families, grandparents often take on the role of elders. Their position is seen as one of wisdom and knowledge. In addition, the grandparents may take on major portions of the day-to-day parenting role, using it as an opportunity to pass on the traditions of the culture. In the absence of blood-relative grandparents, an extended-family member may fill this role.

Parents will often defer to the authority of the elder in decision-making regarding the children, and will want to include them in meetings or to confer with them after meetings before making decisions. Many Native American parents would never disagree with an elder in front of strangers or non-family members, so it is important to provide the opportunity for private communication as well.

5. How can I make referrals to PACER's multicultural advocates?

We encourage professionals to refer parents to PACER to speak with a multicultural advocate. When a parent calls, they will be connected to an understanding parent advocate who is also the mother or father of a child with special needs to discuss their concerns, explore choices, and learn where to find the help they may need. They may also request family-friendly written materials in a language they understand.

PACER's multicultural parent advocates assist people in Minnesota's African American, Hispanic-Latino, Somali or Ethiopian, Native American, and Southeast Asian communities. Call PACER Center at 952-838-9000 or 1-800-537-2237 and ask to speak with the appropriate multicultural advocate.

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