Cultural Myths and Their Impact on a Child’s Development in the At-Risk Family

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The CRADLES Project

The Collaboration to Reduce Abandonment & Deliver Local Education & Supports (CRADLES). Project serves women in Travis County who are either pregnant or have a child under the age of three that have a risk of separation from the parent because of various social risk factors including substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration or other serious physical or social problems.

CRADLES ensures that these infants and young children have safe, nurturing and permanent homes: provides interventions that prevent abandonment, provides approaches to reunify parents and young children who are separated and insures that the child/children have a permanent home if the parents are unwilling or unable to care for them. The project provides intensive and comprehensive case management and parenting education in an in-home visiting setting. Families are seen on a weekly basis.
Overview

Culture is a combination of thought, attitudes, beliefs and values. In addition, there are also myths, old wives tales and “dichos” that are part of every culture.

When these two factors collide in an at risk environment, the development of the child could be compromised.

For the purpose of this presentation we will use the word “Assumptions”
Activity

Getting to Know You
Parent educators and service providers who work with families that are affected by HIV, drug addiction and/or incarceration, also face cultural issues when working with, not only the client, but the family with whom they live.

It is important to gain some cultural competence and find a better approach to interacting with these families in a culturally sensitive way.
Session Objectives

- Participants will get a glimpse at cross cultures and how each influence a child’s development.
- We will look at the myths, old wives tales and “dichos” and find a happy medium in parent education.
- Learn how culture influences three domains of development: socio-emotional, language and cognitive development.
- Understand the importance of respecting culture in the environment of the parent and child.
Growing up Latina - Leslie

- Growing up in El Paso, Texas
- Two full time working parents
- Raised by Grandmother Herlinda
- My own cultural myths
- Typical Hispanic upbringing with some progressive influences
Growing up in San Antonio, Texas
A mother in her teens
23 yrs in the Armed Forces
My own cultural myths
Parenting 6 children
**Myths across Cultures**

- Why is it important to know cultural myths when working with high risk populations?
  - Allows parent educator to understand dynamics of family
  - Allows parent educator to recognize potential for bias and assumptions they may have
  - Knowledge of myths allows parent education to more effectively diminish their impact on the family

- In what ways might a child’s development be hampered by these myths?
  - Social-Emotional
  - Language
  - Cognitive Development
Cultural Myth #1
You can spoil a baby by holding him/her all the time
Cultural Myth #1

- In these environments, children are confined to one area of the house.
- Usually contained in a high chair, crib, car seat, exersaucer, etc.
- Developmental screenings conducted by a social service agency may result in developmental delays that are also a product of the family dynamic and culture.
Science vs. Myth

- Parents need to understand the importance of research
- No research based evidence to support claims of “spoiling” infants ages 0 – 12 months of age
- Assumptions made by parent can be damaging to gross motor development and social/emotional development
Cultural Myth #2

“Breastfed babies are too clingy/dependent”
Cultural Myth #2

- Breastfed babies will not sleep through the night
- Infant will be exposed to a part of the body that is seen as sexual, or private
- Women in a relationship may not breastfeed because they fear it interferes with intimacy
- “Breastfeeding is Gross”
Cultural Myth #3

Children should be seen and not heard
Cultural Myth #3

- Damaging to the social/emotional, language & cognitive domains of development
- Over riding theme across all cultures
- Since basic needs of family are primary focus, a child’s feelings and how they are affected by removal and reunification are not addressed
- Parents ask: “Why should we talk to children?”
Myth # 3

- Parents are not made aware that reunification is just as traumatic as removal.
- Children demonstrate behaviors that are mistaken for defiance.
- Following reunification parents reprimand because they are unable to acknowledge that children experience stress.
- Gender bias and parental misconception.
Harmless or Harmful?

Some myths are harmless.
Example: The idea that a mother will explode if she were to get wet post partum is only harmful in certain situations.

If you do not need to address the myth, simply leave it as an expression of culture. Address when necessary or as a general discussion with parent.
Meeting in the Middle
Building a Parenting Partnership

- Acknowledge the love the parent has for their child/children
- Build trust
- Focus on the positive
- Make and keep eye contact with parents at all times
- Get on the child’s level and model appropriate interaction for parents, utilize the parenting skills you discuss during interactions so parents can see they work
Using Appropriate Parent Education Strategies Combined with Child Development to Help the At-Risk Family

- Trust building with parent
  - Observe the home culture and environment
  - This may take several visits before rapport is established

- Ask open-ended questions
  - Allow parents to share what they learn
  - Discuss the most difficult part of parenting
  - Find out about their parenting strategies
Using Appropriate Parent Education Strategies Combined with Child Development to Help the At-Risk Family

- Use a culturally sensitive strategy in developmental screenings of children ages 0 - 3
  - Wrap around services
  - What does current research tell us?

- Therapeutic play – Increases coping skills for child

- Mentoring parent – Increases parenting skills and positive experiences for parent and child
In conclusion…

Culture is not just about ethnicity, it is also about our social norms, thoughts, ideas and personal experience in the family.

It is important to recognize and respect cultural myths while at the same time providing accurate child development and parent education.
References


Internet Resources


- ZERO TO THREE
  Home visiting: Supporting Babies and Families where they live
  www.zerotothree.org
- Child Welfare Information Gateway
  *Parent Education and Support & Parent Child Interaction Therapy with At-Risk Families*
  [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

- *Children’s Bureau Express*
  *Strategic Therapeutic Parenting for High-Risk Families*
  [www.cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov)

- **FUNDERSTANDING**
  *Vygotsky and Social Cognition*
  [www.funderstanding.com](http://www.funderstanding.com)

- Kidsneeds
  *The Implications of Culture on Developmental Delay*
  [www.kidneeds.com](http://www.kidneeds.com)