

Essentials

Family Therapy for Substance Use in Hispanic Adolescents

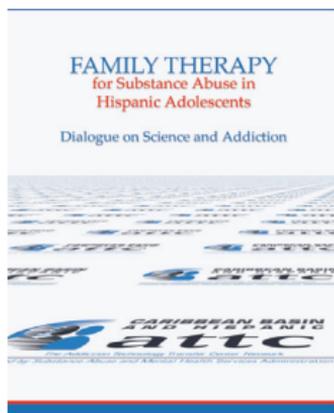


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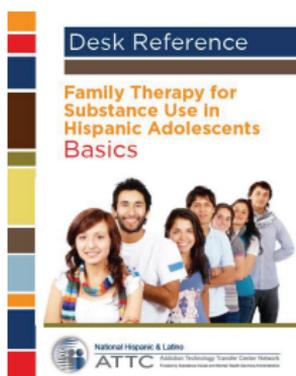
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This manual presents counselor to basic systemic thinking about addiction and the family context of addiction. It also seek to articulate major strengths of family models, the importance of cultural competence in working with Hispanics, and unique aspects of working with adolescents.

This training provides knowledge and materials to teach family treatment concepts, techniques and strategies in a manner that practitioners find useful for their work with Hispanic families with substance using adolescents.



This guide includes condensed information for behavioral health care service providers that may need to assure delivery of cultural competent care to Hispanic and Latino families with adolescents with substance use disorders.

Thinking Systemically

- Family is a naturally occurring unit and the context in which most intense behavior-shaping experiences occur. The child's socialization, and the development of identity and values, takes place within the family.
- Systemic thinking is needed as the service provider attempts to understand the challenges of engaging all family members and begins to strategize about the actions that can help bring about a successful engagement.
- A systemic view requires one to think of the many levels and domains in which the adolescent is nested and the many levels of systemic interactions which are implied. It is essential that the behavior of the youth be understood in relation to these systemic influences.
- When working with the systems perspective in mind, it is the interaction between people that is most important. It is the family process that takes center stage.
- Because the therapist must build a family centered framework, it is important that a family therapist be well trained when working with families of youth who use substances because the work is difficult and when treatment takes a wrong turn, families can drop out prematurely.

Forging a Systemic Therapeutic Alliance

When working with Latino families, the importance of maintaining alliances with each family member is vital but equally important is the balancing of alliances.

As family therapy begins the therapist attempts to build rapport with each member, understand each member's perspective of the family, its difficulties and its strengths, and together they articulate what each member can gain from therapy.

It is important to *INSTILL HOPE* that the family circumstances can improve and that they can work through the problems of the past.

It is also important for the therapist to *VALIDATE* all family members and convey understanding of their unique point of view.

JOINING is a powerful technique that is used to build the therapeutic alliance, which ensures that family members trust the therapist and his/her interventions. Before trying to change the way family members interact, it is important to gain this trust.

Risk and Protective Factors

A number of key risk factors have been identified and separated into domains relevant to the lives of children.

Family level risk factors include:

- Lack of parental supervision
- Conflictual home environment
- Poor bond or attachment with parents
- Ineffective parenting

School-related level risk factors include:

- Behavioral problems in the school setting
- Failure to bond with the school
- Academic failure
- Ineffective and poorly performing schools

Peer-related level risk factors include:

- Bullying
- Values favoring substance use
- Peer pressure
- Antisocial behavior and/or gang involvement

Neighborhood-related level risk factors include:

- Dangerous environment
- Alcohol and substances availability

Known protective in the different domains include:

- Impulse control at the individual level
- Pro-social values at the peer level
- Parental monitoring at the family level
- School bonding and academic competence at the school level

Essential Skills and Competencies

- One of the best tools for changing negativity is through **REFRAMING** and helping family members *experience each other differently*.
- The job of the therapist is to validate the family's frame at the same time that s/he presents a new one. This serves the purpose of creating the opportunity for family members to perceive one another in a more positive way that gives rise to the motivation to connect in a healthier way.
- **RESTRUCTURING** - Family system differentiates through a number of important subsystems. Each subsystem needs particular boundaries and rules that define who participates in each subsystem and how. In a healthy family system, the boundaries are clear.
- **BUILDING COHESION AND INTIMACY** in a highly conflicted family is essential. The therapist must often go back in the history of the family, to a time when family members felt like family, when the parents had very positive hopes and dreams for their children, and when children felt loved and protected.
- The important task for the therapist is to work with the family that to see that negativity and failures are only a layer on top of the ties and connections and not that those difficulties have obliterated the love that existed.
- One important task is often to reshape the communication in the family, moving toward the direct expression of support that still exists.
- It is often through more direct communication that adolescents can talk about their level of frustration with their own behavior or helplessness in the face of substance use disorders.

Targets of Treatment

There are a number of family interactional patterns that must be assessed and considered as targets of treatment. Some of the more specific family patterns are:

- Poor family management skills
- Poor limit-setting
- Inconsistent parenting
- Poor parental monitoring
- Disengaged parents
- Parent substance use
- Parent psychiatric symptoms (e.g., depression)

Some of the processes that must be highlighted and enhanced in treatment include:

- Parents behaving as leaders
- Effectively managing behavior control
- Setting the rules and consequences in an efficient, clear, and consistent way
- Parent figures work together and supporting each other
- A positive emotional connection between family members
- Communication that is clear, direct, and open between family members
- Siblings that share some level of bond due to similar experiences
- Parents that can provide guidance to the adolescent on school/academic, health, and community issues
- Parents are supportive of children, they protect them and the children feel comfortable going to the parents and freely express their feelings and thoughts. They feel loved, supported, and protected at all times

Latino Families

- When working with Latino families it is helpful to be mindful of all the different people that might be considered part of the family and who can therefore be important to the therapy process.
- Latinos reference to familia (family) may often expand beyond nuclear and extended family to include not only parents and siblings, but grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, close friends, and godparents. This bond often creates an obligation felt by fellow members to help and support each other when experiencing challenging life issues.
- Family members can all be highly influential in the lives of the target adolescent. The counselor should work collaboratively with the client to think through the entire network of support and resources that are available to him/her.
- In single parent families or in families in which the parents are overwhelmed by long work hours or having many young children, it may become even more important to search for other empathic and nurturing figures in the adolescent's life, through which the adolescent can experience predictable supportive interactions.
- Hispanics and Latinos tend to be more lineal/hierarchical. Hispanic parents have more of a tendency to view good family functioning as consisting of marked levels of authority (i.e., non-egalitarian/traditional) and submission by the adolescent.
- Familismo is a cultural value that involves individuals' strong identification with and attachment to their nuclear and extended families, and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family.



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Universidad Central del Caribe

PO Box 60327

Bayamón, PR 00960-6032

787-785-5220 ph

787-785-4222 fax

www.attcnetwork.org/hispaniclatino

hispanic@attcnetwork.org

hispaniclatinoattc@uccaribe.edu



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