

## Discussing Family Violence with Recently Immigrated Hispanics

Behaviors related to marriage and families in the Hispanic community are influenced by cultural values, beliefs, and customs. Marriage education practitioners who understand cultural themes and the various stressors recently immigrated Hispanic families face have an opportunity to discuss family violence (FV), bringing awareness of the issue to the Hispanic community. In a marriage and relationship education program, family violence can be addressed directly as a stand-alone session or integrated throughout the curriculum with respect to communication, emotion regulation, self-awareness, decision-making, and conflict-resolution. **NOTE: Marriage education practitioners are strongly encouraged to consult with local domestic violence experts since discussing a sensitive issue like family violence may put couples at risk.**

Tips for addressing family violence with recently immigrated Hispanic couples include:

1. Identify the stressors arising from living in a new country. Engage couples in a discussion about their experience living in a different country. Talk about feelings of isolation (from family and friends in their country of origin) and the role this may play in the couple's relationship. Provide opportunities for couples to compare and contrast their social support network in their country of origin with their support in the United States, and brainstorm ways they can find more community and social support. Use the marriage education group as an example of a support network on which couples can rely.



2. Create opportunities to talk about the “*orgullo*” (pride) they have for their family. Most Hispanic couples view marriage within the context of the family – including children and extended family – instead of just the couple. Help couples identify the hopes they have for their family (especially their children), and address the impacts and consequences of family violence (i.e. potential legal consequences, academic and social impacts on children, etc.). Discuss the importance of sustaining a healthy relationship and identify ways to build a healthy family environment to help children succeed. **NOTE: When discussing the potential consequences of family violence, educators should be aware of FV laws in their states and be well informed about referral resources in the community.**
3. Discuss the influence extended families have on the couple's interactions and in their decision-making. Many Hispanic families adhere to the cultural concept of “*familismo*,” which stresses family loyalty, obedience and

respect of authority figures in the family, and sacrifice for the family. *Familismo* can either be a protective factor against family violence or it can normalize it within the family. Help couples recognize how their families influence their relationship, both positively and negatively. Facilitate conversation around what it might be like to make decisions against family violence that may be in direct contrast to what is accepted or tolerated in their family of origin. Incorporate activities encouraging couples to work together to set respectful boundaries with family members and to make healthy decisions for their relationships.

4. Involve participants in activities and discussions about the different roles each plays within the family. Help participants identify any changes in roles that may have occurred over time and/or as a result of moving to a new country. For example, address how dynamics might change if both partners find it necessary to work outside of the home and/or if children are relied upon to translate documents and navigate systems that pose challenges to parents because of language barriers. Encourage couples to talk about how this may lead to conflict in their relationships and brainstorm ways they can work together to renegotiate roles within the family.
5. Identify what “*respeto*” (respect) means to them. In general, respect is highly valued among Hispanics. Encourage participants to define what respect means to them and how they think respect is demonstrated. Provide opportunities for couples to work together to identify what their expectations are for family members in showing respect for one another. Discuss how mutual decision-making and using

the conflict-resolution skills presented during the marriage education program are ways of showing respect in a relationship.

## Conclusion

Healthy marriage programs are in an ideal position to bring awareness about family violence to the Hispanic community. Many newly immigrated Hispanics may not know what constitutes family violence in the United States, and cultural concepts and individual family values may perpetuate unhealthy behaviors. Engaging in conversations and facilitating activities within the cultural framework of Hispanics opens the door to addressing a topic not often discussed. Facilitating dialogue about family violence with participants also engages them as collaborators, mutually responsible for bringing awareness about FV to their families and communities. Although addressing family violence is important, it is a sensitive topic, and discussions may bring up issues between couples that marriage educators are not equipped to handle. Marriage education programs should be sure to engage local experts and to have protocols in place to refer participants to additional support services, if needed.

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## Additional Resources

- [Understanding Family Violence within Recently Immigrated Hispanic Communities](#)
- [Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative Curriculum Modules](#)
- [Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence \(National Resource Center on Domestic Violence\)](#)
- [Good Marriages Make Happy Children \(Imago Relationships International\)](#)
- [The Facts on Preventing Violence Against Women and Children \(Family Violence Prevention Fund\)](#)