

Working with Spanish-Speaking Families

A Guide for Service Providers

Tennessee's Spanish-speaking population has dramatically increased over the past ten years. This influx of new families brings the need for a heightened awareness of their cultures and traditions. This Tips and Resources fact sheet provides guidance to service providers working with Spanish-speaking families.

There is great diversity in the countries and cultures of Spanish-speaking families. Families may have relocated to the United States from Central America, South America, or Europe. As a result, language, values, and experience vary widely.

❑ **Language differences:**

- With diversity in the many countries where Spanish is spoken, there are numerous dialects. Slight variations in words change the intended meaning of a message communicated. When translating materials into "Spanish," be aware of this and keep vocabulary basic.
- Informational materials should be simple and brief, so the content is appropriate for people with varying educational levels.
- For agencies distributing translated materials, it is most effective to have Spanish-speaking staff and/or volunteers available. Some agencies that do not have Spanish-speaking staff have identified a bilingual volunteer or a parent who is willing to prepare a message in Spanish on the voice mail answering system. This person might also be responsible for returning calls from Spanish-speaking callers.
- Interpreters and language line options are also useful, keeping in mind that families might not ask personal questions or follow-up with suggested recommendations. A parent or family member must develop rapport and establish a level of trust with a Spanish-speaking provider before effective communication can take place.





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❑ Tennessee Resources

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

www.familypathfinder.org

(615) 322-8529 or toll-free (1-800) 640-4636

Email: tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu

Pathfinder offers, in English and in Spanish, a telephone helpline, a website with a searchable database, and print resources that connect persons with service providers and resources. The website provides a list of Tennessee Statewide Autism Resources. Pathfinder is a project of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The Hispanic Outreach Project, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

www.caminoseguro.org

(1-800) 640-4636

The Hispanic Outreach Project provides a statewide helpline and case management services, a parent support group, community training, and management of the Camino Seguro, a database of bilingual providers in Middle and West Tennessee, with plans to expand to East Tennessee. The Hispanic Outreach Project is part of the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder's efforts to identify Hispanic disability services statewide. Spanish-speaking staff are available to work with families.

Autism Society of America (ASA)

www.autism-society.org

(301) 657-0881; (1-800) 3AUTISM or (1-800) 328-8476

The Autism Society's mission is to improve the lives of all individuals affected by autism. The Autism Society increases public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the autism spectrum, advocates for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and provides the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy. The Autism Society website has information

❑ Cultural differences:

- Time may be perceived differently. For many people in Spanish-speaking cultures, time schedules are flexible and used as a guideline, not as a rule. Be specific about your expectations regarding punctuality for patient appointments.
- During an initial meeting, a provider needs to explain to a family what "professional confidentiality" means in this country, especially as related to immigration status.
- In other cultures, physicians may have personal relationships with their patients. Physicians may spend more time talking about their families and personal lives. Spanish-speaking families who come to the United States may view its medical system as impersonal. They may experience frustration with the differences in the doctor-patient relationship.
- It may be appropriate to educate families about inclusion as a best practice in the disability field. Encouraging an understanding of inclusion rather than separation in schools, the workplace, at home, and in the community may contribute to the overall health and well-being of the family.
- Families and providers typically learn about specific community services through person-to-person networks. Effective bilingual service providers rely on and are well-connected to a Spanish-speaking network of other bilingual service providers. Families are more willing to join support networks through personal connections rather than responding to flyers that require calling someone they do not know for information.

in Spanish on a range of topics, from diagnosis and education to transition planning. The site includes links to additional information and important organizations, and books about autism that are written in Spanish.

Every state has individual ASA chapters which serve designated regions within the state and provide information relevant to that particular area. Some chapters provide workshops, support groups, information sessions, and contacts for local resources. Contact information for the ASA chapters in Tennessee is listed below.

- Autism Society of America East TN Chapter:
www.asaetc.org; (865) 824-2897
Email: asaetc@gmail.com
- Autism Society of Middle TN:
www.tnautism.org; (615) 385-2077 (866) 508-4987
Email: asmt@tnautism.org
- Autism Society of America MidSouth Chapter:
(West TN) (901) 542-2767
Email: autismsocietymidsouth@yahoo.com

□ National Resources

Autism Speaks

www.autismspeaks.org

Autism Speaks was founded in February 2005 by the grandparents of a child with autism. Since then, Autism Speaks has grown into the nation's largest autism science and advocacy organization, dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and a cure for autism; increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders; and advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. The website includes information in both English and Spanish. One of the unique features of this website is a video glossary, where families and professionals can observe behaviors that differentiate children with and without autism. They also provide the Manual de los 100 Dias (First 100 Days Toolkit) created for families whose child has just been diagnosed with autism so they can make the best possible use of the initial period following the diagnosis of autism. You can download this toolkit from the website www.autismspeaks.org/docs/family_services_docs/manual_de_los_100_dias.pdf.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Learn the Signs. Act Early. En Español

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/actearly/spanish/default.htm
(1-800) CDC-INFO or (1-800) 232-4636

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has begun a campaign titled "Learn the Signs. Act Early." This campaign is designed to help families understand appropriate ages at which a child should meet developmental milestones, and what action to take if there are developmental delays. The website also provides information about early warning signs for developmental disabilities, such as autism. There is a website entirely in Spanish with accompanying materials.

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org
(847) 434-4000

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 pediatricians committed to the physical, mental, and social health and well-being of all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. The AAP website has a page dedicated to autism resources that contains publications, videos, and links to other sites for clinicians and families. In addition, the AAP publishes healthcare advice for parents translated on their Patient Education Online site (<http://patiented.aap.org>). The AAP's introduction to autism spectrum disorders, *Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs): An Introduction*, is available in both English and Spanish from the website <http://patiented.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=5669>.

KidsHealth.org

<http://kidshealth.org>

KidsHealth provides information about health, behavior, and development from before birth through the teen years. As part of The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media, KidsHealth also provides families with perspective, advice, and comfort about a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioral issues that affect children and teens. There are sections for parents, for kids, and for teens.

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This publication may be distributed as is or, at no cost, may be individualized so that it includes your organization and its most frequent referrals. For revision information, please contact courtney.taylor@vanderbilt.edu, (615) 322-5658, (866) 936-8852.

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