Dougy Center: The National Grief Center for Children & Families

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Changing the Landscape of Grief Support for Latino Families

In the United States, between 2010 and 2020, the Latino community increased by 23%, making it one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the country (Brookings, 2020).

Despite this growth, there are few truly bilingual/bicultural services available for Latino children and families who are grieving a death.

This resource is a compilation of tips and suggestions from a Grief Out Loud podcast interview with Cristina Chipriano, L.C.S.W.-S., F.T., Director of Training and Program Equity at Dougy Center. You'll find our full conversation in Episode 287: Changing The Landscape Of Grief Support For Latino Families.

A note about language:
No single term can fully capture the rich diversity of the Latino/x community. We have chosen to use "Latino" in this resource, as it reflects the identities and language expressed in the interview.

Dougy Center: Why is it so important to talk about creating more culturally relevant grief support for Latino families?

Cristina: Given the demographic changes in the United States, services are needed and they're needed in many, many languages for us to stay relevant for the populations we serve in our communities. We also know that communities of color and historically marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by grief.

Dougy Center: Given that communities and cultures are not monoliths, but rather composed of individuals with unique histories and experiences, do you see culture and grief influencing each other specifically within the Latino community?

Cristina: Absolutely. For all cultures there are cultural values present for folks that are conscious and unconscious. No two people subscribe to the cultural values in the same way, but we still see them show up.

When I think about the Latino community, some of the cultural values related to grief that come to mind are: **1) *Orgullo*, which is pride.** Pride in family, country, and self. With that comes the need to keep everything within the family. There's a saying in El Salvador, which is where my family is from, that is "Dirty laundry is washed at home." As much as grief is universal, there's this piece of, "We don't take this outside of our family." **2) *Familismo* and the way in which family is defined.** When I talk of family, I'm thinking of my parents, but also my tías and my uncles and my cousins. I'm easily talking about 100 people in my family, which is very different than what I would say the Western norm is when we talk about family. We see that for some folks living in the U.S., their family members

Improving Latino families' access to grief support

- Increase the number of fully bilingual support services and providers
- Be aware of language differences — in Spanish there is no word for "grief"
- Recognize and honor cultural values
- Advocate for employers to provide sick leave/ PTO to attend support groups or therapy
- Offer services at times that accommodate shift and weekend work hours
- Be thoughtful about service location — is there accessible, affordable transportation available?

are still in other countries, and there's an inability to physically see them. I can't count how many families I've worked with throughout the years, who have not been able to go back home for a funeral or had to have a funeral in the states without family support, because they were in another country.

Dougy Center: How do other unique cultural aspects in the Latino community affect both the experience of grief and the ability to find and access grief support services?

Cristina: I can't tell you the number of times I've heard, both in my own family and the families that I work with, "It was the will of God," or "This was meant to be." And then at the same time, "But we will always, always, always remember who they are." I never met my grandfather and yet I know all the stories of his childhood. I know how we are similar. I know how we are different.

There is this presence of legacy and storytelling from generation to generation. I think that's pivotal. Many of our families live in dual language homes, where kids are learning and probably preferring English, while, at least in first generation homes, the parents or grandparents preference is Spanish.

When we talk about grief, we're talking about the language of the heart so it's imperative for providers to be aware that they are serving multi-generational, bilingual families and everyone within a family is going to prefer one language over the other.

> **It takes courage to make that first call for help. But that call is a step toward healing, strength, and resilience.**

> **For many, there's a loss of what 'family' means when loved ones are far away. But in grief support groups for Latino families, people build their own support system—a new kind of family.**

Dougy Center: What advice do you have for those who provide grief support services for Latino families?

Cristina: I always try to remember that every member of that family is sitting in the room in an attempt to support the other family member. For example, if a child has died, and there are two parents and a sibling, the dad will say, *I am here for my wife*. The wife will say, *I am here for my child*. And the child will say, *I'm here for my parents*. It's been my experience that no one in that dynamic has said, I'm here for myself. Everyone's trying to support someone else in their family.

I sit with that because I can't take the approach that you're here for your own grief support and you get to express your own grief needs because that's taking a very individualistic approach when we're trying to support the family. I'm mindful of my language and frame my work as helping the entire family, not just a collection of individuals.

> There's a stigma that exists within the Latino community around seeking support outside of family, but finding a community that understands your grief can be life-changing.

Dougy Center: What's one hope you have around changing the landscape of grief for Latino families?

Cristina: It's my hope that every family has access to, or the ability to access, grief informed support in the language of their heart, by providers who get it.

Thank you for taking the time to read through these reflections on changing the landscape of grief support for Latino families. If you need additional resources or would like to learn more about our Esperanza Program for Spanish speaking families, please contact Dougy Center at dougy.org, help@dougy.org, or 503.775.5683.

Find a variety of Dougy Center resources and activities in Spanish for people who are grieving at dougy.org/recursos.

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Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

Dougy Center's practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what they have learned from more than 65,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or dougybookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.

About Dougy Center

Founded in 1982, Dougy Center provides grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. Dougy Center provides support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children in grief.

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