



SUPPORTING SPANISH-SPEAKING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Strategies for Professionals

April 1, 2025



WELCOME!

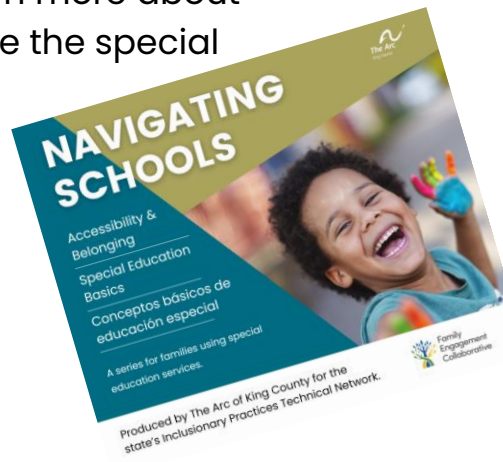
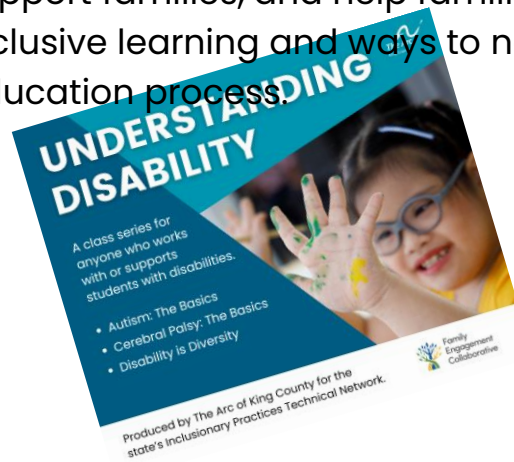
We would love to know who is here today!

Please take a minute to tell us your role/s.

This presentation is part of a series of workshops we are doing this spring as part of the [Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network](#).

This is a statewide collaboration between the [Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction](#), WestEd, and education partners across Washington state.

One of these partners is the [Family Engagement Collaborative](#), and The Arc of King County is part of this collaborative. This spring we are hosting workshops to help educators learn more about disability and ways to support families, and help families learn more about inclusive learning and ways to navigate the special education process.



INSIGHTS ON SUPPORTING FAMILIES

The Arc
King County

For educators who work with students with disabilities.

- Supporting Spanish-Speaking Families
- Supporting Black/African American Families
- Working with Families with High Support Needs
- Supporting AAC Users & Their Families



Produced by The Arc of King County for the state's Inclusionary Practices Technical Network.



ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



Brenda Zacapu

Brenda is the Parent-to-Parent Coordinator for Spanish-speaking families at The Arc of King County. Her passion for helping others began in childhood, where she often served as an interpreter for those around her. From a young age, she realized her calling was to support and assist others. Today, she is dedicated to helping parents navigate forms and offering a listening ear whenever needed. Brenda is also the sister and legal guardian of her adult brother, who is autistic and has cerebral palsy.

Sandra Urite

Sandra is the Multicultural Family Support Program Manager at The Arc of King County. She's from Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she got her degree in Early Childhood and Elementary School Education. She was an elementary school teacher for 11 years before moving to Washington state with her husband in 2001. Here, she continued her education, focusing on services and benefits for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Recently she became a sex educator and trainer focused on developmental disabilities and sexuality. Sandra is the mom of a 22-years-old daughter with Cri du Chat Syndrome and a 20-year-old son.





Agenda

- 1) The Arc of King County:
Who we are
- 2) The Arc of King County's
Programs
- 3) Spanish-speaking families:
cultural characteristics
- 4) Views on disability
- 5) Tips for professionals
- 6) How to contact us

WHO WE ARE ...

The Arc of King County promotes and protects the rights of people with intellectual or other developmental disabilities (IDD) so we can all live, learn, work and play in the community.

The Arc is driven by the fundamental belief that everyone deserves to write their own life story. That means:

- Real access to education
- Meaningful employment
- Quality healthcare
- Genuine community connections

At our chapter, we offer information and family support, systems navigation, education & civic engagement support. We also run a supported living program for adults with IDD.



We help (or refer!) on any topic. The most common are special education, housing, and Medicaid long-term supports.

<https://arcofkingcounty.org/>

Need assistance? ask@arcofkingcounty.org



OUR PROGRAMS

- Disability-related workshops, classes and presentations
- Healthy Relationships skill development
- Housing Stability
- Information and Family Support
- Parent to Parent
- Supported Living
- IEP Parent Partner Program
- Silver Tsunami (support for aging families and caregivers of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities)



IT'S NOT THE SAME

Hispanic

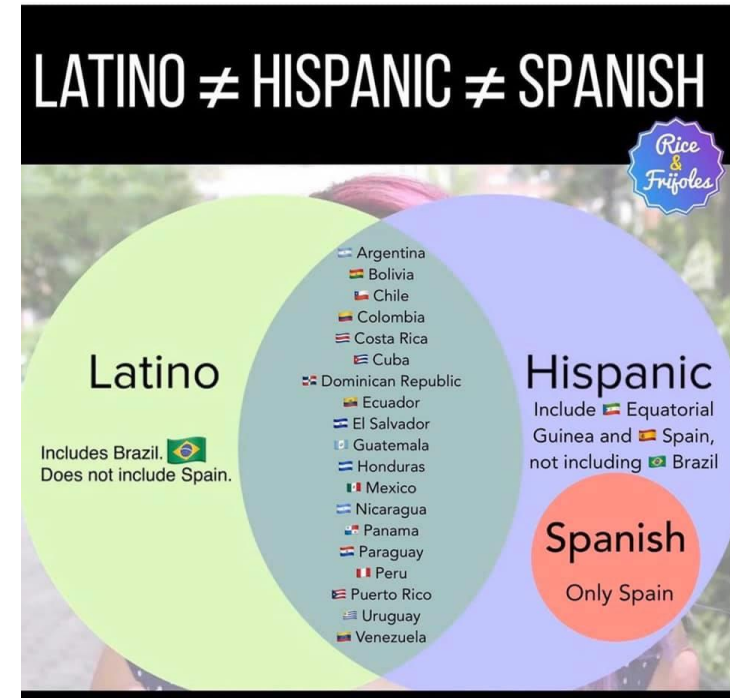
- Describes a person who is from or has ancestors from a Spanish-speaking country or territory
- Excludes Brazil because Portuguese is the country's primary language
- Includes Spain

Latino

- Latino is geographic term, which refers to a person from Latin America or of Latin American descent.
- Includes Brazil
- Excludes Spain

Spanish

- The word "Spanish" refers to both a language and a nationality
- A person who speaks Spanish is Hispanic. A person who is from Spain or has family origins in Spain is Spanish



**And please, remember,
Latino is not a race!**

CHARACTERISTICS

There are about 20 countries where Spanish is the main language. A lot of people assume we're all the same.

There is great diversity between the countries and cultures of Spanish-speaking families.

Some immigrants speak one of the many indigenous dialects.





CHARACTERISTICS

- Differences in the Spanish language. Each country has its own style, tone, and even vocabulary when using Spanish.
- The same word could have a completely different meaning, depending the country. For example: In Mexico, a “torta” is a sandwich, while in Argentina, “torta” is a cake.
- Family ties and extended family relationships are very important.
- In traditional Latino communities (Mexico and many of the Central American Latino countries) there are well-defined gender roles, and the men usually carry the dominant role.
- Religion is very important. Catholicism is the dominant religion.

VIEWS ON DISABILITY

- Some gender differences: Denial of disability for men; “endurance” and acceptance for women
- Some parents believe their child's disability is the result of an external, non-biological force such as mal de ojo (evil eye) or sustos (fright).
- Spirituality may influence family's beliefs regarding disability: “gift from God,” or punishment, shame, etc.



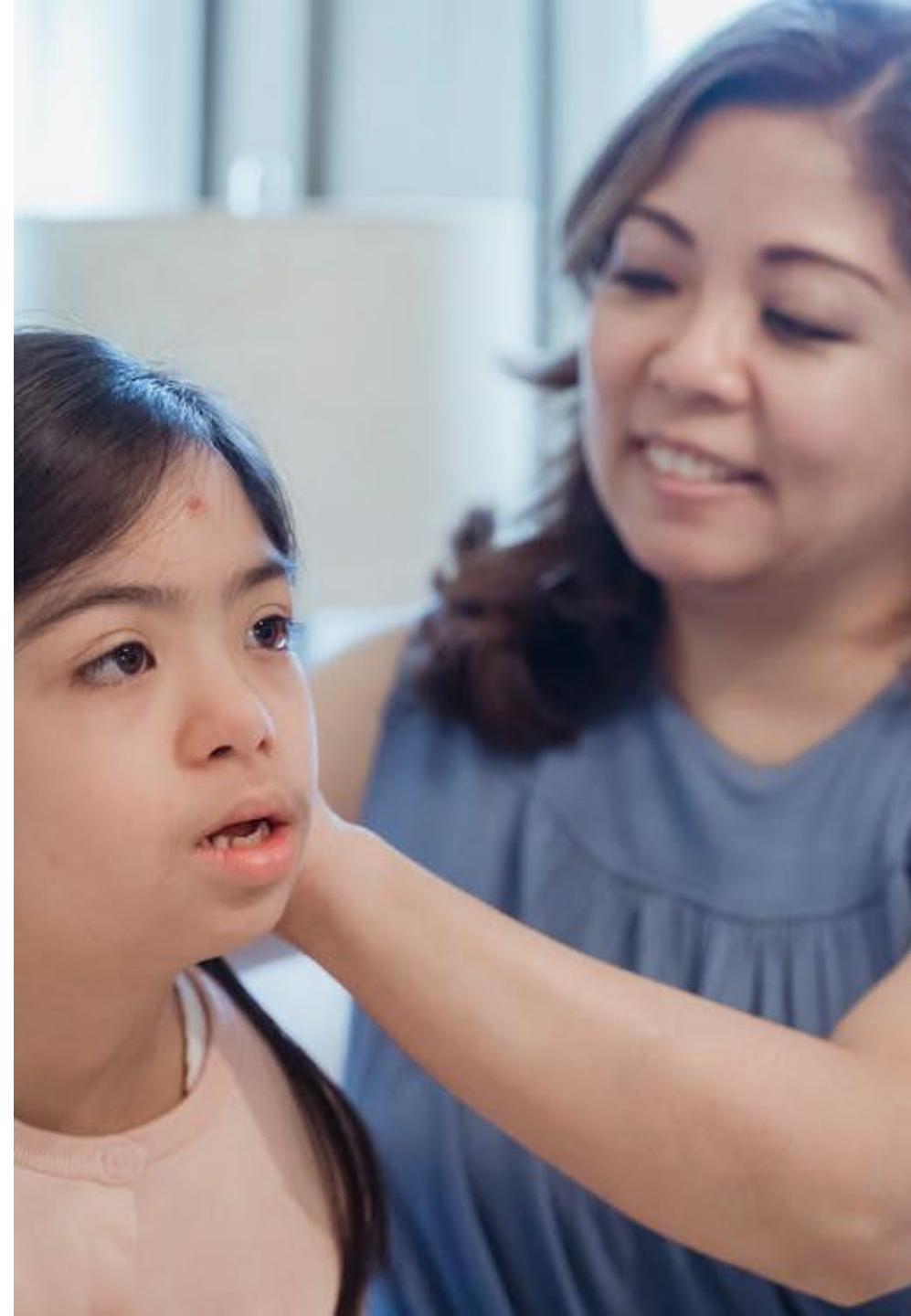


VIEWS ON DISABILITY

- Some families may be overprotective or have low expectations for the person with disability
- Very strong family bonds can become a two-sided coin for people with disabilities: being taken care of vs. becoming independent
- Cultural beliefs place the responsibility for caring for a disabled child or adult on the family, especially mothers (women are seen as the primary caregivers)

VIEWS ON DISABILITY

- 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.
- Deciding about services for an individual might be a family decision or might require the involvement of the family.
- The acceptance surrounding a disability and how it is going to be handled might also be a family decision.
- Families may not plan long-term for their loved one with a disability.



VARIED EXPERIENCES

Within the diverse Spanish-speaking community, each person experiences the United States differently—in terms of access to learning English, job and financial security, housing, work visas, and citizenship pathways.

Each of these factors makes each family unique and layered.





TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Make consistent efforts to learn about cultures, identities and beliefs of the families you work with
- Build cultural competency at both systemic and individual levels, so that all families feel welcome in all events and engagement opportunities
- Check for attitudes and biases that interfere with supporting diverse families
- Use a needs assessment to identify barriers that discourage families from accessing services
- Create a warm, safe, and inviting environment where parents will feel welcomed
- Ask the families you work with about issues that are relevant to them
- Listen and learn
- Be flexible
- Use less terminology and jargon
- Avoid acronyms or explain what the acronym stands for



TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Build a trusting relationship with families.
- Encourage families to speak up and ask questions.
 - Often, Spanish-speaking families will just agree with everything, even if they don't understand what is being said
- Focus on improving communication with culturally and linguistically diverse families: respect, empathy and flexibility regarding communication.
- Agencies need to include bilingual/bicultural professionals, and it is important that these agencies and programs are in touch with the norms and cultural values of the population being served.
- Make it easy for families to find important resources in Spanish.



TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Make it easy for families to participate in events. This might require the use of translators or community facilitators.
- Families may be unable to engage due to work expectations, transportation or childcare considerations, or other logistical factors. However, they may also feel disconnected from or distrustful of the agency systems.
- Outreach and education programs can provide information about programs and opportunities available to families. Parents can't ask for a service or support if they don't know about it.
- Be patient: parents can't retain all the information. Repetition can be helpful.
- Remind parents of their rights.



TIPS FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Use the parent's preferred way of communication: Face-to-face, calls or texts, as much as possible.
- Never assume that because families can speak a little English, they don't need an interpreter. Always ask.
- Ensure your materials are reading-level appropriate for the specific community you serve.
- When translating materials keep vocabulary simple.
- Partner with respected community organizations and community leaders that already serve Spanish-speaking families.
- Do not make assumptions about the immigration status of families.
- Avoid asking about immigrant status unless it's relevant to your work. If it is relevant, be highly sensitive in the way that you ask that question.



ABOUT THE USE OF INTERPRETERS

Interpreters often...

- ... Don't know the content/language (e.g., special ed, DDA assessments, disability diagnosis)
- ... Give their own opinions
- ... Do not respect confidentiality

Families often do not know...

- ... The role of the interpreter vs the professional
- ... How to request an interpreter
- ... What to do if there is no interpreter or the interpreter is of poor quality

Professionals should...

- ... Pay attention to the quality of the interpreter
- ... Assess the family's understanding
- ... Reschedule if there is no interpreter or the interpreter is of poor quality
- ... Collect family feedback about the service of an interpreter to ensure quality of the service.

CONTACT US

Information & Referral

English:

Ask@arcofkingcounty.org

(206) 829-7053

Information & Referral

Spanish:

Preguntas@arcofkingcounty.org

(206) 829-7030



Information & Referral

Korean (Email only):

JKim@arcofkingcounty.org



BEFORE YOU GO...

Please let us know what you thought of today's presentation.

Your feedback allows us to understand and improve upon our training.

