Building Strong Foundations: Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers within a cultural context

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- A home with five bedrooms:
- A home with four bedrooms:
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“Mohammed doesn’t know how to take turn”

“Lee Xiong has a thread tied around his neck”
Communication across cultures

• Understanding what I am saying
• cultural beliefs/practices x best interest of child
• work with me when I am in their home
• missed appointments
• Ahmed does not want to work independently
Communication ...

• ensure that they understand us
• respect her x stay true to our beliefs?
• respect for elders -- support us
• family members x appointments
• autonomy x doing for each other and being close
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Babies should sleep...

Age when babies begin feeding themselves ...

When they start potty training ...

Whether to go to childcare/cared by family ...
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The adults in our lives taught us right from wrong, how we care for ourselves and others, what to wear, how and what to eat, when and where to sleep.
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The adults in our lives helped us learn what to celebrate and how.
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Culture influences every aspect of human development, including how infant mental health is understood.
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Culture provides children with a sense of belonging and identity which lasts throughout adulthood: by honoring connection to families, seeking to preserve family culture caregivers more effectively meet the needs of children and families.
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Culture also defines the coping mechanisms, childrearing beliefs, & expressions of love & nurturing that promote a child’s mental health.
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• Young children develop encouraged to be independent and self-reliant

• Young children are fragile and depend on adults to care for their needs - one might view it as overprotective
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Baby’s exploration and play is guided and supervised, relational factor is important:

children understand themselves as part of their families, families are close knit
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- Baby’s exploration is encouraged by exposure to books, educational toys, use of colors, stimulating objects. Important: reach independence
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• Elders and family hierarchies are respected: multi-generational approach, elders, formal communication, deference and politeness

• Families are nuclear and expected to be independent thinking, encouraged to develop own traditions, freedom is prized
American mainstream culture relies heavily on verbal explanation to communicate meaning, usually based upon scientific facts, or logic.
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• African-American, Hispanic cultures rely on observable events, objects, people, interpretation of natural forces, spiritual attributes

• The look to convey meaning and use the “I mean it!” voice

Adults may interpret differently depending on own cultural or language experiences (van Kleek, 1994)
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Why understanding and respecting cultural beliefs and values of diverse families is important:

• facilitates truly collaborative goal-setting &
• is key to effective and higher utilization of early intervention services among an increasing diverse population in the US.

(Arcia & Gallagher, 1993; Arcia, Keys, Gallagher, & Herrick, 1993; Bennett, Zhang, & Hojnar, 1998)
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Bridging the gap in shared knowledge:

1. Self-awareness of one’s own cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs;

2. Willingness to explore the cultural knowledge of others in the full context of their personal and shared histories, assumptions, goals, beliefs, and practices.
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- Important Consideration in Observation:
  
  - Keep child’s culture in mind
  
  - Is it normal development/appropriate parenting within child’s home culture?
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• Important Consideration in Observation:

  - Is observation grounded on sensitivity to and knowledge of a family’s culture?

  - Is it based on comparison of normative development vs. more serious need?
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- **Identification: children’s behavior should be investigated further if:**
  - is unusual for the child or causes parents and other caregivers to perceive the child as ‘difficult;’
  - Makes satisfying interactions with others difficult;
  - Is observed in multiple settings by multiple people; and
  - Persists over time.
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