



National Hispanic and Latino

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# LATINX YOUTH GANG PREVENTION in School Systems

**TRAINER'S GUIDE**



# DISCLAIMER

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## **Institute of Research, Education, and Services in Addiction (IRESA)**

The Institute of Research, Education, and Services in Addiction (IRESA) of the Universidad Central del Caribe leads the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC. The Center serves as a national subject matter expert and a key resource for the workforce and communities seeking to address mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery support to reduce health care disparities among Hispanic and Latino populations across the United States and its territories. In partnership with state and local governments, mental health providers, consumers and family organizations, Hispanic stakeholders, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) regional administrators, and the MHTTC Network, the Center seeks to accelerate the adoption and implementation of mental health-related evidence-based practices.

## **National Hispanic and Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center**

The mission of the National Hispanic and Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center is to provide high-quality training and technical assistance to improve the capacity of the workforce serving Hispanic and Latino communities in behavioral health prevention, treatment, and recovery. We disseminate and support the implementation of evidence-based and promising practices to enhance service delivery, promote the growth of a diverse, culturally competent workforce, and bridge access to quality behavioral health services. We are committed to increasing health equity and access to adequate culturally and linguistically grounded approaches.

## **The School-Based Mental Health Project (SMH)**

The School-Based Mental Health Project (SMH) of the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC works specifically with schools, organizations, and professionals to strengthen their capacity to provide culturally and linguistically responsive school mental health services. This initiative facilitates training, technical assistance, and capacity-building efforts led by experts in the field. Our goal is to increase awareness to attend to Latino students' mental health needs, promote the implementation of school mental health services that are culturally appropriate, encourage the use of promising and evidence-based practices, and disseminate information on practical strategies and implementation efforts of mental health services within a cultural context.

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# Trainer's Notes

This resource contains four modules that may be delivered together or separately. The goals and objectives are as follows:

**MODULE 1:** Hispanic and Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health

**GOAL:** Help participants understand the importance of the larger socio-political context of Hispanic and Latino group in the United States and the implications for families.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of Module 1, the learners will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of understanding gang involvement in Hispanic and Latino youth
- Identify the risk factors of gang involvement among marginalized groups
- Differentiate gangs from other youth groups and recognize the diversity of the gang experience
- Understand the complex interactions of risk factors for gang involvement among Hispanic and Latino youth
- Identify the impacts of gang involvement and its associated traumas on mental health of Hispanic and Latino youth
- Recognize the effects of intergenerational trauma and related factors on increasing vulnerability for gang involvement

**MODULE 2:** Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social Determinants of Health and Risk Factors Related to Hispanic and Latino Youth Gang Involvement

**GOAL:** Help participants understand the implications of adolescence as a developmental stage and risk taking and how the perceptions of others impact youth.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of Module 2, the learner will be able to:

- Become familiar with the gang joining process and common reasons for joining
- Recognize how and why adolescence represents an increasingly vulnerable time for risky and illegal activities like gang involvement
- Discuss key terms and concepts related to stress and vulnerability in racially minoritized groups (e.g., bias, racism, etc.)
- Understand how acculturation and other stressors of minority groups can impact identity development
- Identify ways that gang culture can alter identity development among Hispanic and Latino youth

### **MODULE 3:** Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs

**GOAL:** Help participants understand the critical role of the schools as both a risk factors and a potential protective factor.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of Module 3, the learners will be able to:

- Consider a public health approach to gang involvement and prevention
- Discuss the role of systems (in the prevention of, and intervention for, gang involvement
- Describe the importance of the school setting as both a protective and risk factor for gang involvement
- Understand how educational marginalization at the systemic level impacts vulnerabilities for gang membership
- Identify the benefits of school-based and community interventions in reducing gang involvement

### **MODULE 4:** Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families

**GOAL:** Help participants understand how cultural considerations may influence treatment engagement as well as explore treatment planning specific to risk factors for gang involvement.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of Module 4, the learners will be able to:

- Become familiar with the common barriers to mental health care utilization among Hispanic and Latino youth
- Recognize the value of a strengths based, preventative, family-focused approach to intervention
- Discuss how school-based services provide a critical point of delivery for therapeutic services
- Describe how Push and Pull factors can align with therapeutic interventions
- Identify the individualize needs of marginalized youth that should be addressed in any intervention plan

# Know Before You Get Started

**Language:** The term Hispanic and Latino are used through this training. Some communities may prefer Latinx or other nomenclature. Trainers are encouraged to match their language to the preferred language in their community.

**Community Information:** As Hispanic and Latino communities widely vary in demographics, historical experience, and immigration status, trainers are asked to learn about the local make-up in the Hispanic and Latino community. Slide #9 is a template with information the trainer should consider gathering prior to training. Trainers are encouraged to customize this slide with information most relevant to their audience.

---

## SLIDE PREVIEW

In \_\_\_\_\_ [insert location], there are \_\_\_\_\_ [insert #] amount of people that identify as Hispanic and Latino

### Important Factors to Consider

- % that are immigrants (If immigrants, from which countries)
- % that are multi-generational
- Any change or trends in size of Hispanic and Latino community
- Neighborhood location
- Any historical trends neighborhood location and/or in immigration patterns

### Personalize it

- What are the local Hispanic and Latino organizations that are important in this community?
  - Who are the leaders and/or trusted members of this community?
  - What are some of the important contributions of the culture to the community?
  - Who are important Hispanic and Latino figures in/from your community?
- 

**Optional Immigration Slides:** Hispanic and Latino communities also vary widely on the number of immigrants and salience of issues related to immigration in the community. Trainers should not assume that immigration is a central issue in all Hispanic and Latino communities but acknowledge that some communities are greatly impacted. An optional set slides is offered addressing stressors specific to the immigration journey to be included as is relevant for each training.

# MODULE 1



National Hispanic and Latino  
**MHTTC** Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
 Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

### Module 1:

Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context  
 and implications for Latino youth mental health



### Acknowledgment

Presented in 2022 by the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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Always use acknowledgment slide on the 2nd slide and add your center's information.

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

**STRENGTHS-BASED AND HOPEFUL**

**INCLUSIVE AND ACCEPTING OF DIVERSE CULTURES, GENDERS, PERSPECTIVES, AND EXPERIENCES**

**HEALING-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE**

**INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THEIR OWN JOURNEYS**

**PERSON-FIRST AND FREE OF LABELS**

**NON-JUDGMENTAL AND AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS**

**RESPECTFUL, CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE**

**CONSISTENT WITH OUR ACTIONS, POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS**

Adapted from: [https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide\\_2019ed\\_v1\\_20190809-Web.pdf](https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf)

Always use Language Matters graphic as your third slide.

### Disclaimer

The National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification. With the intention of both facilitating a fluent reading of text and supporting an inclusive and respectful language, this presentation uses terms that are neutral and inclusive of diverse gender groups and identities. In this presentation, we also use the term LatinX to encompass ethnic identity as well as non-binary gender identification.

We have intentionally chosen the use of Hispanic and Latino to refer to these populations in order to acknowledge and honor the diversity and heterogeneity of people from Latin America. However, we acknowledge that terminology should be uniquely selected based on what works for your community.



# Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

**Module 1: Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health**

**Module 2: Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social determinants of health and risk factors related to Latino youth gang involvement**

**Module 3: Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs**

**Module 4: Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families**

Over the course of this training you will learn about unique risk factors for Latino and Hispanic youth becoming involved in gangs. We will review the historical context and current climate it creates these risk factors as well as understand the pressures and factors that may lead an adolescent to consider gang involvement. We will look at the important and unique role that schools can play as both a protective and a risk factor. And finally you will learn about strategies for support and intervention with youth and families.

In this module we will focus on historical, social, and political factors that have created and sustained risk factors for Latino and Hispanic youth.

## Defining Terms

The term **Hispanic** is used to refer to individuals, and the descents of individuals, from Spanish-speaking countries including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and *other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origins*

**Latino/o** refers to individuals with a Latin American heritage, but not exclusively from Spanish ancestry or have origins in Spanish-speaking countries (e.g., people from Brazil & Portugal).

**Latinx** is a sexual and gender inclusive term used to describe people from Latin America without the applying the gender binary of men & women

See National Hispanic & Latino MHTTC's book *¿Quiénes somos y de dónde venimos? A Historical Context to Inform Mental Health Services with Latinx Populations* for more definitions and historical context. Resource linked [here](#).

**Resource:** See National Hispanic & Latino MHTTC's book *¿Quiénes somos y de dónde venimos? A Historical Context to Inform Mental Health Services with Latinx Populations* for more definitions and historical context.

**Module 1: Hispanic and Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health**

### OBJECTIVES

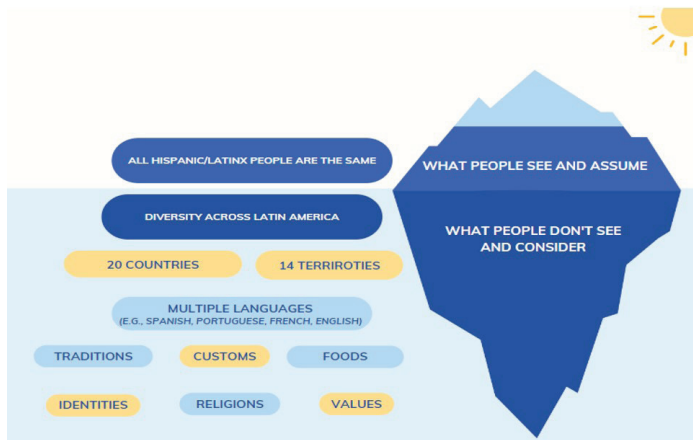
Upon completion of Module 1, the learners will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of understanding gang involvement in Hispanic and Latino youth
- Identify the risk factors of gang involvement among marginalized groups
- Differentiate gangs from other youth groups and recognize the diversity of the gang experience
- Understand the complex interactions of risk factors for gang involvement among Hispanic and Latino youth
- Identify the impacts of gang involvement and its associated traumas on mental health of Hispanic and Latino youth
- Recognize the effects of intergenerational trauma and related factors on increasing vulnerability for gang involvement

In this module we will learn about the importance of understanding the unique risk factors for Hispanic and Latino youth by identifying risk factors among marginalized groups. We will learn about different types of youth groups versus gangs and understand the complex interactions of risk factors for gang involvement. We will consider how trauma, historical, intergenerational, and current, may pose specific risk factors and consider the implications for Hispanic and Latino youth mental health.

As we begin we want to be intentional about the language we use. So let's take a moment to understand the terms Hispanic, Latina/Latino, and Latinx. While sometimes these terms are used interchangeably, Hispanic refers to individuals and their descendants who are from Spanish speaking countries. This includes Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Latina and Latino refers to folks with a Latin American heritage but not exclusively from a Spanish ancestry. This includes people from Brazil or Portugal. Latinx is a term that expands gender inclusivity as Latino and Latina gendered by definition. Latinx provides a non-binary, non-gendered term for individuals descended from Latin American countries.

Hispanic and Latino groups are **not a monolithic population**



Hispanic and Latino groups are **not a monolithic population**. Latin America encompasses parts of North, South, and Central America, and the Caribbean, which consists of 20 countries and 14 different territories.

While most Latin American countries are Spanish-speaking, there are a variety of other languages spoken across these regions including Portuguese, English, French, and other local dialectics.

Across these countries there are a wide array of customs and traditions that are unique to each culture.

Despite these unique cultural experiences, there are some shared identities and experiences among these groups within the US.

It is important check in with your clients and communities about what being Hispanic or Latino means to them.

## Getting to Know Your Community

In \_\_\_\_\_ [insert location], there are \_\_\_\_\_ [insert #] amount of people that identify as Hispanic and Latino

### Important Factors to Consider

- % that are immigrants (If immigrants, from which countries)
- % that are multi-generational
- Any change or trends in size of Hispanic and Latino community
- Neighborhood location
- Any historical trends neighborhood location and/or in immigration patterns

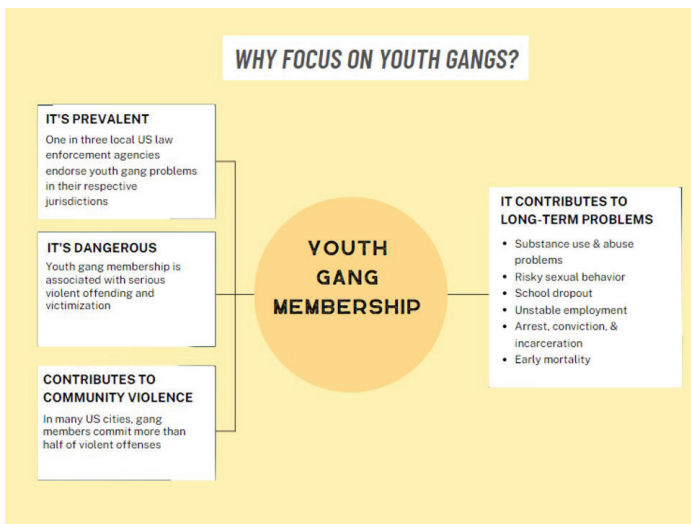
### Personalize it

- What are the local Hispanic and Latino organizations that are important in this community?
- Who are the leaders and/or trusted members of this community?
- What are some of the important contributions of the culture to the community?
- Who is an important Hispanic and Latino figures in/from your community?

**\*It is recommended that trainers complete this sheet ahead of time to understand community and which they're working.**

On this side we can see a little more about who lives our community. (Summarize the slide)

Does this resonate with your experience and our community?



## Why are we focusing on youth gangs?

First youth involvement in gangs is unfortunately not uncommon in the US. One in three local law enforcement agencies describe gang activity in their jurisdictions. Youth who become involved in gangs are at a greater risk of experiencing violence, being victimized, and becoming offenders. Combined, these factors contribute to many long-term problems including substance use, dropping out of school, unstable employment, possible incarceration, and even early death.



Given the dangers associated with gang membership, and the high rates of Latino youth involvement in gangs, it is important to consider the unique factors that may make these communities more vulnerable to gang membership.

Adolescence is universally experienced, across cultures and ethnicities, as a period of heightened identity exploration and development, marked by social instability and conflict, that can result in vulnerabilities to inappropriate risk taking behaviors, peer delinquency, and other negative outcomes

Specifically for Latino youth, this fragile developmental period may be compounded by cultural, social, and educational marginalization, assimilation stress, and other economic and health disparities that disproportionately plague their communities.

US law enforcement data from the National Gang Intelligence Center has indicated that approximately:

- **50% of gang members in the US identify as Hispanic/Latino**
- **41% are adolescents under the age of 18**
- **It is estimated that 1 in 6 Latinos living in US cities identify as gang members**

(National Gang Intelligence Center [NGIC] Full Report link [here](#))

While gang membership varies across demographic groups, Latino gangs are considered among the largest and most active in the US (e.g., MS-13, Latin Kings) and Hispanic and Latino youth are disproportionately impacted by cultural, social, and educational marginalization, assimilation stress, and other economic and health disparities that make them more vulnerable to gang involvement.

## The Importance of Context

There are unique vulnerabilities that make Hispanic and Latino youth more susceptible to gang involvement.

**These vulnerabilities do not stem from Latin American culture.**

These vulnerabilities have been produced and perpetuated by the significant economic and social disparities that plague racial and ethnic minority groups, like Hispanic and Latino communities.

It is not who these groups are, but where these groups exist in our American context that establishes a “fertile ground” for gang development.

**\*Reframing with context\***-- There are unique vulnerabilities that make Latino youth more susceptible to gang involvement. However, we want to be clear that **these vulnerabilities do not stem from Latin American culture**, but instead have been produced and perpetuated by the significant economic and social disparities that afflict racial and ethnic minority groups, like Latinos, in this country. *It is not who these groups are, but where these groups exist in our American context that establishes a “fertile ground” for gang development.*

Many Hispanic and Latino communities are among the various racially and ethnically minority groups that are subjected to disadvantage and marginalization in an American context. These groups are disproportionately impacted by bias, stigmatization, and economic disparities that limit access to resources and opportunities in their communities. This gap in adequate resources has a cascading effect on all aspects of society including under resourced school systems that lead to low education attainment and enrollment among youth. Additionally, these communities suffer from limited access to consistent and quality health care, housing instability, employment discrimination, and neighborhood conditions (e.g., high crime rates, community violence, substance use).

**These shared risk factors create a conducive environment** for establishing a strong **gang culture** as a means for protection, financial security, and belonging.

## Defining Gangs

**Gang** is defined by the National Institute of Justice as “an association of three or more individuals whose members collectively identify themselves by adopting a group identity...whose purpose, in part, is to engage in criminal activity and the association uses violence or intimidation to further its criminal objectives.”

- National Institute of Justice (NIJ); [Link to full definition](#)

Though the term “gang” is used across varying contexts, not all youth who share a collective identity are a gang

There is variability in the gang experience that is influenced by many factors

- Size (# of members)
- Ages of members
- Location/territory (e.g., urban vs. rural)
- Origin
- Objectives & activities
- Level of criminality
- Operating methods

Although the term gang is ubiquitous, there are actually many types of gangs and not all groups of youth who have a collective identity are a gang. Lots of assumptions are made about youth and why they are hanging out together but these assumptions are not always accurate.

Gangs vary by their size, ages of the members, location and origin, their objectives, their level of criminality, and their methods of operation. As a broad term, gang encompasses everything from a group of kids who have formed a small group, wear the same colors, and are experimenting with graffiti and minor infractions, all the way to cartel activity. We must be cautious when assuming all groups are gangs and that all gangs are equally dangerous.



### YOUTH GANGS vs. YOUTH GROUPS

Both are forms of association based on fundamental, developmental needs including identity formation, protection, and social belonging

✓ YOUTH GANGS	✗ YOUTH GROUPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fixed internal rules</li> <li>• Punishment structure</li> <li>• Emphasis on illegal activity</li> <li>• Thrive on conflict</li> <li>• Distance members from mainstream society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g., school cliques</li> <li>• Shared interests and identities</li> <li>• Not centered around illegal activity</li> <li>• Emphasis on social belonging</li> </ul>

At first glance it may seem easy to identify youth gangs. Let's think about some of the cliques from when you were in school. It was not uncommon for a group of students to dress alike and have a shared identity - but they were not all gangs. It is important not to make the automatic assumption that when you see a group of kids that this is a gang or that these kids are involved in criminal activity.

Both youth groups and gangs are forms of association based on fundamental, developmental needs including identity formation, protection, and social belonging.

Gangs differ from other forms of juvenile relation in that they have fixed and defined **internal rules** with an established **punishment structure**.

Juvenile groups become more gang-like when there is an emphasis on illegal activity or rivalry with other groups.

Gangs develop and thrive in presence of conflict that underscores a group's cohesion and shared identity, distancing members from other community, societal, and structural institutions.

*Classifying Gangs on a Continuum*

	Short-lived	Youth	Violent	Criminal
<b>Description</b>	Groups with little organization or structure (e.g., "school gangs")	More organized groups without specific intention for violence (e.g., neighborhood gangs)	Highly organized groups with explicit goal of violence (e.g., Central American "maras")	Highly organized groups structures for criminal purposes (e.g., drug cartels)
<b>Size (number of members)</b>	Small (15-40)	Small-Med (40-80)	Large (100+)	Large (100+)
<b>Territory</b>	Secondary schools, neighborhood	Neighborhood	Neighborhoods, cliques, streets	Large territories (e.g., international)
<b>Origins, objectives &amp; activities</b>	Originate as rivalries among schools in a given area; activities not all antisocial and may include spontaneous "reactionary" violence	Typically arise in situations of exclusion/ structural poverty, organized without supervision to increase meaning & identity; activities mostly antisocial, but not all violent	More advanced versions of youth gangs, committing more explicit violence and complex criminal activity (e.g., profitable illegal activity)	Most evolved gang formation, increased links to organized crime; most activity is in pursuit of profit, reputation, and power. High criminal activity (e.g., trafficking, kidnapping, robbery)

Here we can see a continuum of youth groups with a gang structure to highly organized groups that are large and intent on criminal activity. It is important to note that many gangs that youth become involved in are short-lived, often lasting less than one year.

**Resource:** Definition and classification of gangs executive summary, Department of public security, Washington, DC, 2007



Here we can see multiple groups of kids. At what point is hanging out and dressing alike a problem? Further, we can see how easy it might be to make assumptions about why kids are spending time with each other.



In module 2 we're going to spend some time learning and thinking about bias but we want to briefly touch here on how bias often leads us to make unfair assumptions about groups of kids based on how **we perceive** them not based on their own actions.

## Mental Health Impacts of Gang Involvement

The interacting traumas and stressors of the historical oppression and systemic discrimination endured by Hispanic and Latino people contributes to significant and complex mental health consequences among many Hispanic and Latino youth

In the context of environment, exposures, and traumas associated with gang involvement, Hispanic and Latino youth suffer disproportionately from a variety of mental health conditions including

- **Trauma & Stress Related Disorders**
- **Substance Use Disorders**
- Depression & Anxiety
- Externalizing Behaviors
- Suicidality
- Issues with Identity & Personality Development

Additionally, Hispanic and Latino people tend to experience **delays** and/or **barriers to care** including a lack of culturally appropriate treatment options (e.g., bilingual providers)

Earlier we noted that it's important to address gang involvement for youth because there are serious implications for mental health. Mental health problems can be a factor of why youth are drawn to gangs and mental health problems can also be negatively impacted by their gang involvement.

The interacting traumas/stressors of the historical oppression and systemic discrimination endured by Hispanic and Latino people has created significant and complex mental health consequences among many Hispanic and Latino youth. In the context of environment, exposures,

and traumas associated with gang involvement, Hispanic and Latino youth suffer disproportionately from a variety of mental health conditions including:

- 1) The early & prolonged exposures to various forms of trauma and violence experienced by many gang involved youth contributes to a high prevalence of Trauma and Stress related disorders in these groups. Though often only considered as perpetrators of violence, gang involved youth are also more likely to victims of violent crime, including assault & sexual violence.
- 2) A high level of substance use disorders during adolescence (Cepeda et al., 2012, Knox and Tromanhauser, 1999) that tends to persist into adulthood (Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2014) is also observed among gang involved youth. While substance use has been interwoven into gang culture and is encouraged among many gangs, on an individual level, it can be used as coping mechanism for dealing with untreated trauma.
- 3) Gang involved youth also tend to exhibit high rates of externalizing (impulsivity, hostility) and risk-taking behaviors (substance use, delinquent activity, unprotected sex), which may be predictable expression of untreated childhood trauma, depression, and anxiety experience by many in these groups (Donnellan et al. 2005).
- 4) Depressive and Anxiety disorders are also common among gang involved youth, which may be an adaptable trauma & stress response to environmental conditions.
- 5) Elevated risk of suicide have also been observed among gang involved youth. One study found that those in gangs were 8x more likely to attempt suicide relative to non-gang involved peers (Coid et al., 2013). Increased rates of suicidality among gang members may reflect underlying and untreated psychiatric conditions, as well as fear of violent victimization, violent ideation/rumination, and/or sense of hopelessness about the future.
- 6) In addition to impacting the prevalence of several clinical diagnoses, gang involvement also has a significant impact on the identity & personality development of Hispanic and Latino youth.



## Trauma & Stress

Hispanic and Latino gang-involved youth have often experienced early & prolonged exposure to trauma and violence that contributes to a **high prevalence of trauma and stress related disorders**

Sources of trauma range from acute events to more chronic stressors

- Acute events (e.g., *victimization, physical/sexual abuse, witnessing domestic/community violence*)
- Chronic stressors (e.g., *living in poverty, discrimination, stigmatizing mainstream messaging*)

Some Hispanic and Latino youth have also been subjected to **immigration specific trauma**.

These acute traumatic events and chronic stressors can be both a risk factors and outcomes of gang involvement in Hispanic/Latino youth

Untreated trauma and stress is a significant risk factor for gang involvement. Untreated trauma and chronic stress can create a high need for sense of safety and protection, which is one thing the gangs can offer youth. Sources of trauma may include negative representation and messaging in mainstream media, discrimination, low resourced communities including food deserts, and witnessing violence. In addition to being a risk factor for involvement, gangs may also be a source of trauma and chronic traumatic stress as well. While many youth are attracted to gangs for protection, the reality is that by joining gangs they are at higher risk of victimization. Providing youth with safe spaces and treatment for trauma is a critical point of prevention and intervention.

## Substance Use & Abuse

- Substance use in gang involved youth tends to persist into adulthood
- Substance use is encouraged and reinforced in gang culture
- Elevated substance use in gang culture has been linked to local drug economies
- Hispanic and Latino gang-involved youth may use substances to cope with untreated trauma and chronic stress
- Substance use also elevates the risk of violent and delinquent behaviors, further contributing to risk of gang joining and maintenance

Gang involved youth are more likely to engage in substance use relative to non-gang involved peers. A high level of substance use disorders during adolescence that tends to persist into adulthood is also observed among gang involved youth. While substance use has been interwoven into gang culture and is encouraged among many gangs, on an individual level, it can be used as coping mechanism for dealing with untreated trauma.

## Other mental health effects

Youth gang involvement and its associated adversities have been linked to various other psychiatric morbidities

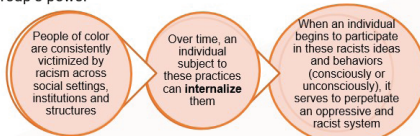
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Externalizing behaviors (e.g., *impulsivity, aggression*)
- Suicidality
- Personality development (e.g., *antisocial attitudes & behaviors*)
- Unstable identity

2013). Increased rates of suicidality among gang members may reflect underlying and untreated psychiatric conditions, as well as fear of violent victimization, violent ideation/rumination, and/or sense of hopelessness about the future.

And finally, in addition to impacting the prevalence of several clinical diagnoses, gang involvement also has a significant impact on the identity & personality development of youth. This becomes especially important as we consider Tobias, discrimination, and stigma that many Hispanic and Latino youth must navigate in their teen years.

## Internalized Racism

An internal experience or process, *resulting from a racist systemic structure*, by which individuals or groups from a racially oppressed background have been forced to support or ascribe to a set of attitudes, behaviors, and/or ideologies that maintain the dominant group's power



Internalization can include negative thoughts about the self (e.g., *self-invalidation, self-doubt, isolation, fear, etc.*) as well as criticizing, invalidating, or finding fault with members of their own racial group

- Examples of internalized racism in the Hispanic and Latino context may include
- The belief that Latin American immigrants are taking jobs away from US citizens
  - A desire for lighter skin (e.g., "whiter is better")
  - Refraining from using Spanish in professional settings
  - Wanting to "pass as White"

Additionally many years at risk for gang involvement have experienced depression, anxiety, or other mental health struggles. Others you may develop anxiety or depressive disorders as a result of their gang involvement. We know that gang involved youth tend to be more impulsive and take more risks, behaviors that are also common in children with untreated childhood trauma.

Gang involved youth also have a higher risk attempting suicide. One study found that those in gangs were 8x more likely to attempt suicide relative to non-gang involved peers (Coid et al.,

We will talk more about implicit bias in module two but it is important to acknowledge the significant contribution of internalized racism on mental health.

Donna Bivens defines internalized racism as "the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power." Or simply internalized racism occurs when an individual begins to believe all of the

negative messaging about their group and think less of themselves as a result.

And as we internalize these messages about our race or our ethnicity we begin to also judge members of our own race or ethnicity. You may hear Hispanic or Latino youth blame immigrants for taking jobs or other stereotypical anti-immigrant accusations. When we dislike ourselves for being part of a group, we attempt to distance ourselves from any connection or reminder and we often turn on others and direct our anger and frustration at them.

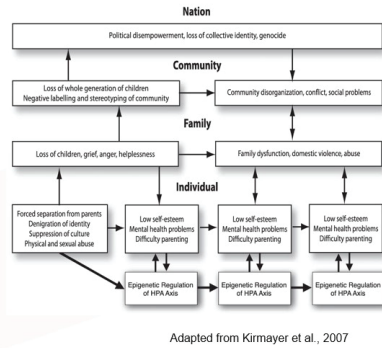
**Reference:** <https://racism.org/articles/race/65-defining-racial-groups/latina-oamericans/314-latinos01a>

## Generational Trauma

**Generational trauma** (*intergenerational, historical*) refers to how the trauma of one generation impacts the health and wellbeing, including emotional and psychological functioning, of individuals future generations

Many Hispanic and Latino individuals in US share some history of

- political violence
- colonialism
- racial discrimination
- immigration stress



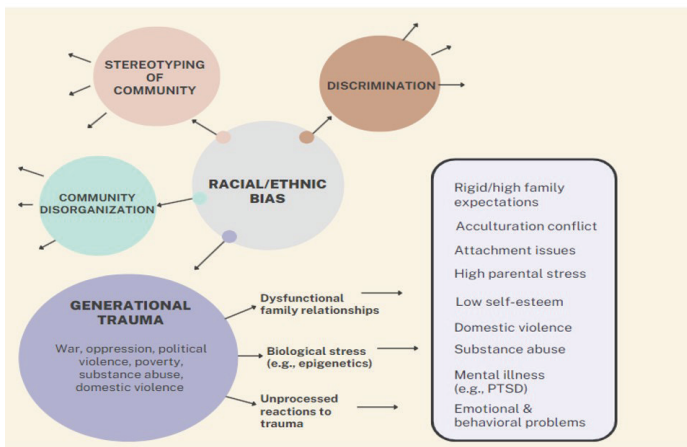
Adapted from Kirmayer et al., 2007

Experiences of trauma, chronic stress, internalized racism, and all the many forms of risk factors that we have talked about apply to all people not just youth. Often parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members have experienced significant traumas related to their Hispanic or Latino heritage. We have begun to understand how generational trauma impacts the descendants of those who have experienced traumas and their history.

Interestingly, scientists have begun to understand how trauma can create changes in

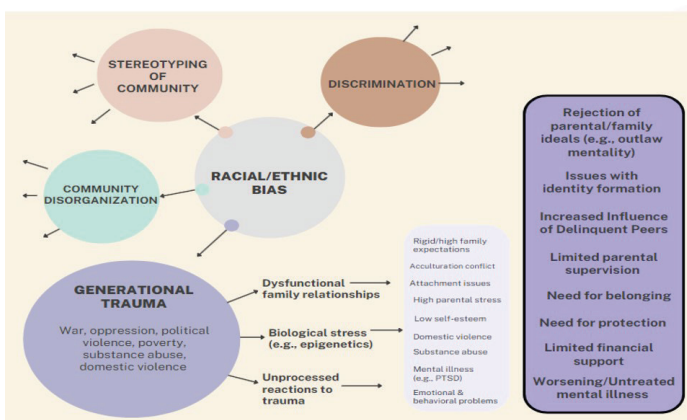
how genes 'turn on' or not - and how they are expressed. These changes can be are passed down through generations and impact how we respond and adapt to stress.

## Impacts of Generational Trauma

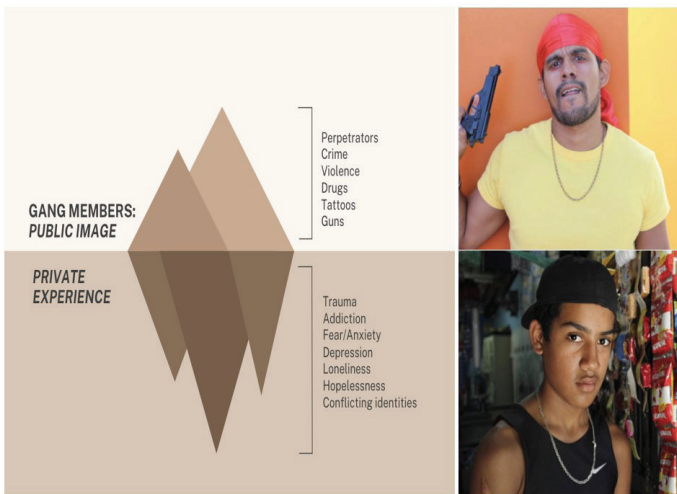


Generational trauma can include experiences of war, political violence, oppression and discrimination, poverty, and substance abuse. Trauma can result in difficult family relationships, biological stress, an unprocessed trauma, or the tendency to react strongly to triggers related to experienced trauma. Youth may experience this as parents who have high stress or rigid expectations or are themselves struggling with mental health or substance abuse.

## Impacts of Generational Trauma



For the youth, this may result in a rejection of their parents ideals and impact their identity formation as they attempt to distance themselves from this source of stress in their lives. As youth become distant from their parents they are more susceptible to the influence of peers. Combined with a need for belonging, and maybe a need for protection, this can be a powerful risk factor for gang involvement.



So why focus on the internal struggles of Hispanic and Latino youth? On this slide we represent the public perception of many of these youth, as involved with crime violence drugs by choice and driving a certain pleasure from it. However, as we have been discussing, many of these youth are struggling with trauma, depression, hopelessness, and attempting to navigate complex situations with little guidance or support. We offer this to encourage others to look beneath the surface and ask what may be going on inside that a youth feels drawn to a game.

**Reflection Question (optional if time):** Think about a time that you were misperceived. A time when someone looked at you and made an assumption that was inaccurate and may be hurtful. How did it feel to be judged?

### Beyond the Individual

Significant historical and systemic factors that have perpetuated cumulative disadvantages in racially minoritized groups.



***“No Statue of Liberty ever greeted our arrival in this country... we did not, in fact, come to the United States at all. The United States came to us.”***

— Luis Valdez, Film Director

Now that we understand why a focus on Hispanic and Latino youth gang involvement is important and the relationship between gangs and mental health, let’s learn about the historic and systemic factors that contribute to the risk factors faced by Hispanic and Latino youth.

## Targeted Disadvantage

Racial and ethnic minority groups, including Hispanic/Latinos, are disproportionately impacted by disadvantaged environmental and community factors that **exacerbate risks for gang involvement**

Consequences of **systemic and institutionalized racism** create the targeted disadvantage including:

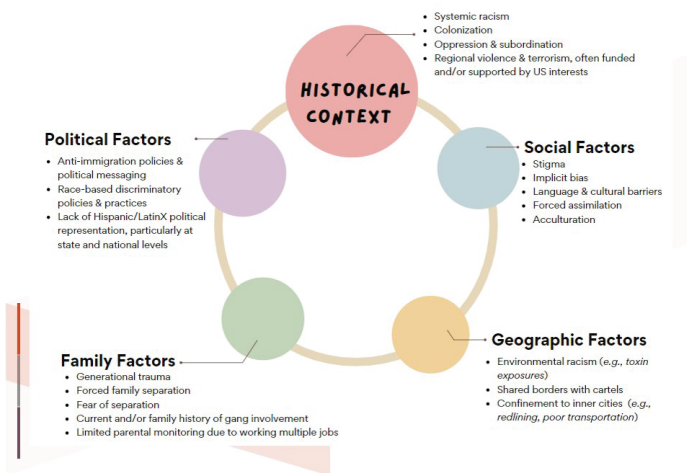
- Concentrated poverty
- Social and geographic segregation
- Limited employment opportunities
- Underfunded institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals)
- High crime neighborhoods
- Over-policing in communities - disproportionate number of males incarcerated

- Social and geographic isolation.
  - Resource-deprived social institutions, such as schools and hospitals.
  - Fewer meaningful employment opportunities because of industrial and manufacturing jobs moving out of the cities during the 1970s and 1980s, coupled with a deteriorating public education system that struggle to prepare students for new high-technology jobs.
  - Rundown and decaying housing.
  - Relatively high rates of crime and violence.
- A criminal justice system that removes a disproportionate share of residents — particularly young men — from the area.

Now that we understand why a focus on Hispanic and Latino youth gang involvement is important and the relationship between gangs and mental health, let's learn about the historic and systemic contexts that have led to where we are today.

- Concentrated poverty in American society means that members of racial/ethnic minority groups are much more likely than whites to live in disadvantaged communities with characteristics that exacerbate risk for gang joining, including the following:





When taking a closer look at these risk factors through the lens of the Hispanic/Latino experience in this country, there are several unique mechanisms by which gang involvement is manifested and maintained:

**1) HISTORICAL FACTORS** – Though a full historical context is beyond the scope of this presentation, there are some important aspects to Hispanic and Latino history that are worth mentioning...

People of Latin America have endured centuries of colonization and

subordination by European and Anglo American powers that continues to present day. The history of Hispanic and Latino migration patterns to US has a complex root in US political and economic interests. For example, consider that from 1981-1990, in a fight against communism, the US intervened in Nicaragua to combat the influence of communism a rising Marxist governmental regimen. This intervention included the economic funding and tactical training of rebel militant groups (Contras) in Nicaragua that committed mass terrorist attacks and human rights violations against Nicaraguan citizens. Many of these trained rebels are now cartel officer and leaders. This is one example, among several, of the US interventions in Latin American that have led to an increased violence, corruption, and conflict in these countries. (NOTE: as immigration reform is an ongoing fight in the US, be familiar with any recent events, court cases, or political decisions that may be impacting your communities at the time of the training.)

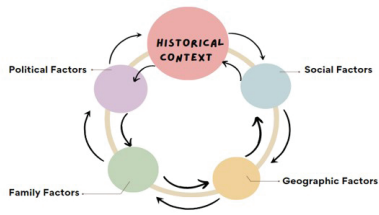
**2) POLITICAL FACTORS** – Current political legislation and its associated implications for Hispanic and Latino people in the US stem from these historically prejudicial practices. Anti-immigration political messaging has been particularly ugly over the last several years, with little recognition that many folks attempting to enter the country today are doing so because they are fleeing violence and terrifying conditions in their home country.

**3) SOCIETAL FACTORS** – In the context of these historical traumas and political victimization, Hispanic and Latino people suffer from significant social stigmas and discrimination to create a sense of isolation from, and rejection by, mainstream US society. This may be experienced as Language & cultural barriers, Forced assimilation, Stigma and discrimination, and lack of representation with positive imagery of gang subculture being portrayed in the media.

**4) FAMILIAL FACTORS** – The experience of Hispanic and Latino families in America is often shaped by these socio-political factors that can contribute to significant vulnerabilities including...  
Limited or lack of parental supervision due working multiple jobs due to employment discrimination, lack of opportunity, undocumented status, a current or family history of gang involvement, high incidence of intergenerational households requiring more economic resources from youth, and family separation or fear of separation.

**5) GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS** – The physical proximity of many Hispanic and Latin communities presents unique geographic considerations for gang involvement including shared borders and physical proximity. Many racial and ethnic communities are confined to inner-cities and exposed to more pollution and toxins.

## Risk Factors are Interactive



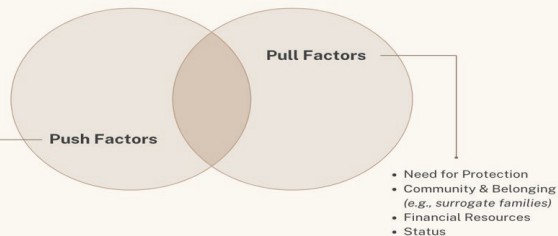
- Collectively, these factors contribute to cumulative stress and trauma on Hispanic and Latino people in the US
- The specific pathways by which these risk factors interact are *unique* across Hispanic and Latino individuals and families (*i.e., not all members of this ethnic group are impacted by the same set of factors*)
- Despite the heterogeneity of experiences in these communities, there are several **common interactions** and **downstream effects** that impact many Hispanic and Latino families in US

These factors, while categorized into separate domains for purposes of organization and clarity, are in fact highly interactive and contribute to cumulative stress on these vulnerable communities. For example, interacting traumas/stressors of colonization, oppression and marginalization/structural discrimination lead to intergenerational trauma. Forced assimilation to the dominant culture can lead to mental health issues with substance use and unstable identity development.

## Push & Pull Factors

**"Push" Factors: Drive youth away from society & family**      **"Pull" Factors: Draw/attract youth towards gangs**

- Stigma & Negative Stereotyping (*e.g., anti-immigrant messaging*)
- Limited Employment Opportunities
- Structural Discrimination
- Lack of mainstream representation

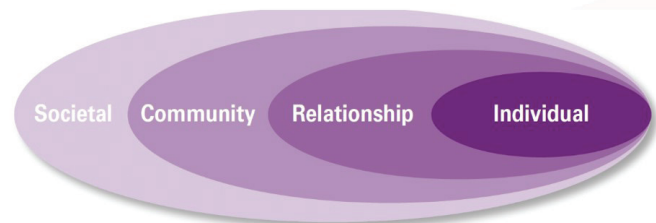


- Need for Protection
- Community & Belonging (*e.g., surrogate families*)
- Financial Resources
- Status

As we start define the various risk factors it is helpful to think of factors in two category. "Pushes" are the negative factors that push youth into gangs; they are found in characteristics or conditions of neighborhoods, families, schools, peer groups and individuals. "Pulls" draw or attract youth to gangs; these include being part of a group and the perceived benefits of a gang lifestyle, such as excitement, the chance to make money, and the perception of protection. Together they can make gangs attractive to some youth.

For example the experience of stigma and discrimination may push a youth away from their school or their neighborhood while a sense of community draws a youth toward the game as it offers something that has been missing from their life a sense of belonging.

## The Social Ecological Model



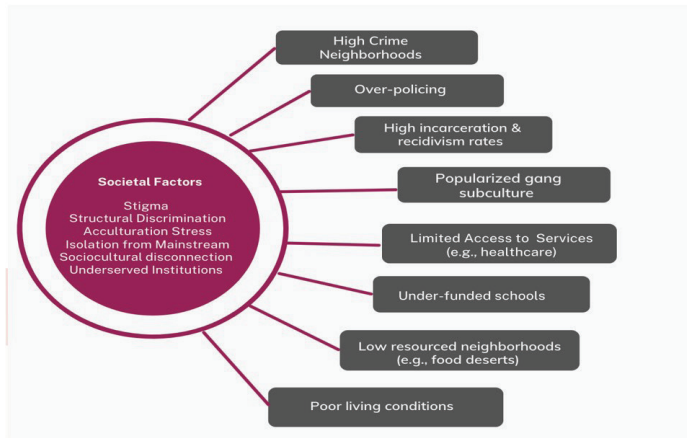
Adapted from Krug et al. 2002

This model represents the multiple levels at which risk factors are present and experienced. The individual is situated within their families and relationships - which are situated within their community - which is situated within the larger society. Each of these levels impacts the other and each may be a source joy and protection or harm and risk.

Applying this model to the risk of gang involvement in Hispanic and Latino youth helps us understand the many complex social risk factors across all levels.



## The Societal to the **Community** Level



Factors that exist on a societal level include structural discrimination, isolation from the mainstream, and a lack of investment in institutions that serve minoritized groups.

These societal level factors are then expressed at the community level through over-policing leading to high incarceration rates, limited access to services like health care or mental health care, underfunded schools, and communities that lack access the public transportation or even grocery stores.

## The Relationship/Family Level

Relationship factors and family vulnerabilities that influence youth gang involvement include

- Single-parent family structure
- Limited parental supervision
  - *Parents forced for work long hours/multiple jobs*
- Forced family separation or fear of separation (e.g., incarceration)
- Family history of gang involvement
- Abuse and/or neglect at home
- Increased influence of delinquent peers

The experience of Hispanic and Latino families in US is shaped by these societal and community level factors. Recall the effects of intergenerational trauma and the stressors that many parents face we discussed earlier. We know that just like with our youth, parents and grandparents are at higher risk for substance use and risky behavior as a result as unaddressed trauma or other mental health concerns. Reduced access to mental health care and other barriers to receiving support and treatment only exacerbate these risk factors at the family level.

In addition because of the economic disparities maintained by social and community factors, many Hispanic and Latino parents must work long hours or multiple jobs resulting in less supervision or even time for connection at home.



## Optional immigration slides start here



If you are training in an area with high immigration these slides will be relevant for your community.

#### Why immigrate?

- Poverty
- Lack of healthcare and/or education
- Violence, often political
- Gender inequality
- Fear of persecution based on gender or sexual identity
- Political corruption

The US immigration process is **complex, expensive, and takes several years**

- Eligibility is difficult - qualifications are strict and spots are limited
- Costs range from \$4,000-\$12,000
- Processing times are typically between 1.5-3 years and up to 10 years

Significant barriers exist to the authorized immigration channels

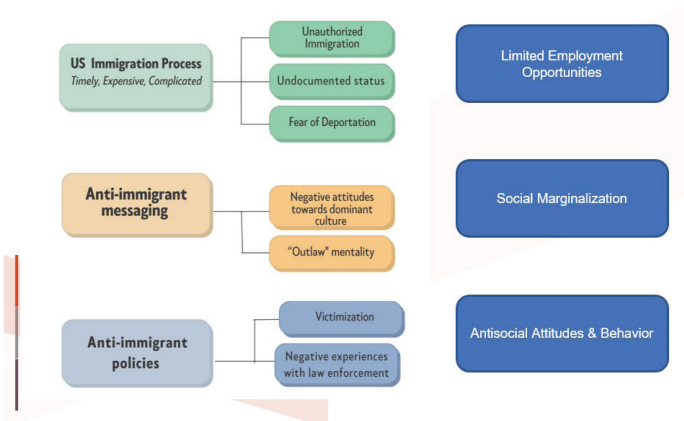
- See the American Immigration Council Fact Sheet ([linked here](#)) for more information on the immigration process and common barriers

Every individual or /family pursues immigration for their own reasons. However, many Hispanic and Latino people immigrate to the US to escape serious and potentially life-threatening situations. Violence comes not just from cartels, but often from corrupt law enforcement and other political structures. Often the choice to immigrate is a last hope of safety for oneself and/or one's children.

Most people are surprised to learn but even if an individual does everything right it can take over a year or two, even up to 10 years for immigration paperwork to be fully processed. When faced

with extreme poverty or significant threats to your safety or the safety of loved ones even a few months wait can feel like a lifetime. In addition to wait times the process is complex and expensive. And there is no guarantee that after waiting months or years and spending \$10,000 that you will be granted authorized access to the US. It is unsurprisingly then that the immigration experience is linked to lower levels of well-being due to family separation, discrimination, loss of social status, and exposure to traumatic events.

#### The Impacts of the Immigration Experience



**Authorized immigration** can be stressful and traumatizing

- *Discrimination, loss of social status*
- *Family separation or fear of separation*
- *Acculturation stress*

**Undocumented immigration** is associated with the same stressors in addition to unique vulnerabilities and traumas including

- Higher risk of victimization
  - *e.g., sexual/physical abuse, exploitation, robbery*
- Traveling/living in dangerous conditions

**All types of immigration** contribute to significant post-migration challenges

- Socioeconomic inequality
- Problems integrating into community
- Stigma associated with “undocumented” status
- Marginalization

This slide summarizes the impacts of the immigration experience that contribute to risk factors for Hispanic and Latino youth becoming gang involved. The stress of the immigration process, often leading to limited employment opportunities; experiencing constant and hateful anti-immigrant messaging contributes to social marginalization; and the anti-immigrant policies that victimize immigrant populations can lead to anger and anti-social attitude toward the dominant culture.

Beyond wait times and cost, the authorized immigration process exposes individuals families to discrimination, loss of social status, fear of separation, and acculturation stress. Those who are undocumented experience all this plus a higher risk of victimization and traveling or living in dangerous conditions with a constant threat of arrest.

Once immigrated people still face significant socio-economic and a qualities that exist for racial and ethnic minoritized groups in the United States. They must navigate the stigma and marginalization while navigating a new

culture and often new language. The accumulated stress can take a significant toll on relationships mental health functioning.

## Undocumented Status

**Undocumented status** results from

- Entry into the US without inspection
- Staying longer than a temporary visa permits, or
- Otherwise violating the terms under which entry was admitted

An estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants are living in US

- 5.6 million (~24%) million are of Mexican descent
- Another 1.8 million (~1.6%) are from Central America

There is a high incidence of undocumented status of self and/or family members in Hispanic and Latino communities

Many foreign-born Hispanic and Latino families living in US are citizens. However, given the barriers associated with the documented immigration process, unauthorized entry and/or undocumented status is common among people from Latin American countries.

Undocumented status is it just a result of entering the US without authorization. It also includes overstaying a temporary Visa or violating terms of the entry. there are many ways in which authorized immigration can become undocumented status.

## Downstream Effects of Undocumented Status

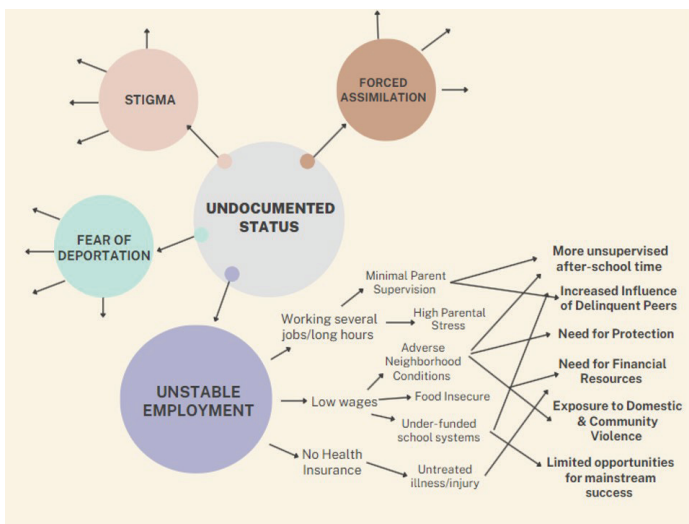
Undocumented status contributes to several common post-migration stressors including:

- Unstable Employment
- Fear of Deportation
- Stigma
- Forced assimilation

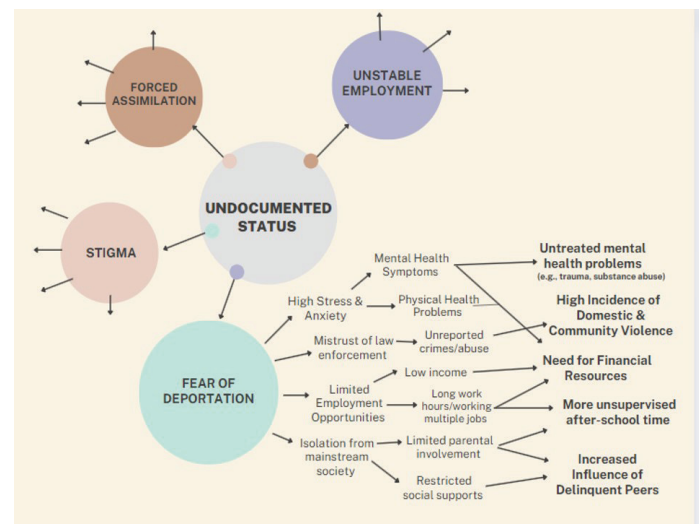
The stressors of undocumented status can contribute to a host of **downstream effects** on social status and wellbeing

These effects tend to contribute to *cumulative stress* and *increase vulnerabilities for gang involvement* in many Hispanic and Latino communities

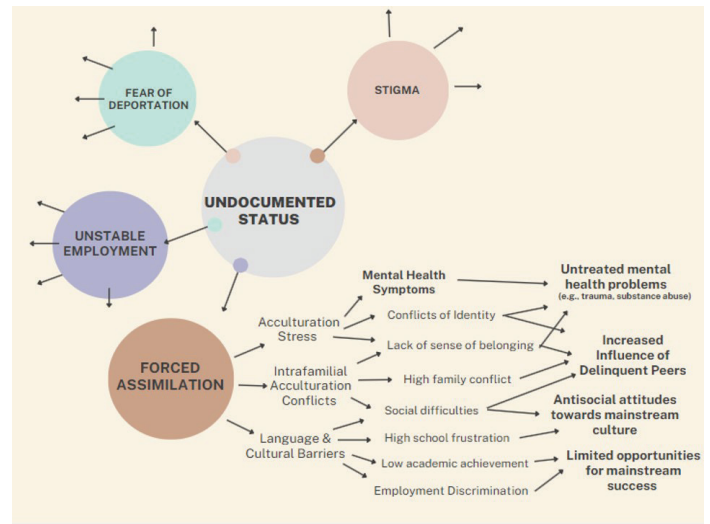
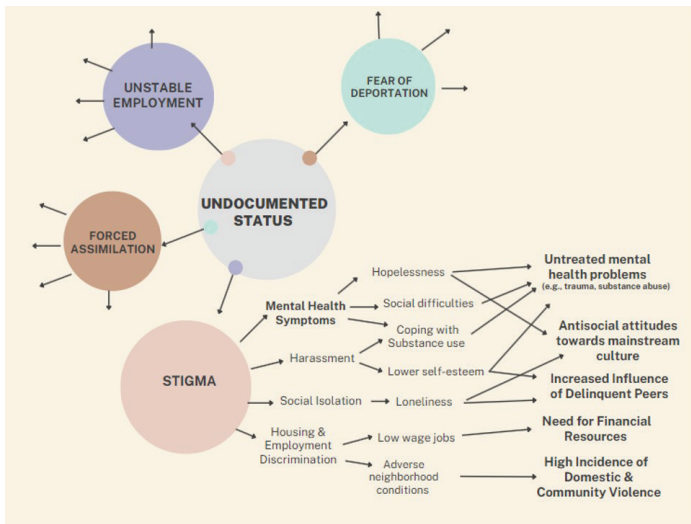
What does undocumented status have to do with increased risk of gang involvement for Hispanic and Latino youth? We see here there are several stressors that result from undocumented status including unstable employment and a host of impacts on emotional well-being. Overtime the impact of these stressors can increase the volume or ability for gang involvement.



Let's take a closer look at how these factors impact Hispanic and Latino youth. Here we see the factors that flow from unstable employment including lack of health insurance, long hours, and low wages. This leads to high parental stress, food insecurity, and lack medical and mental health care. For our youth, this results in more unsupervised time, more pressure to contribute financially, and increased vulnerability to the influence of delinquent peers.



Fear of deportation contributes to a high level of stress and anxiety, mistrust of law enforcement, and isolation from mainstream society. Because of this communities are not able to turn to law enforcement when victimized or use social services when needed. This results in similar risk factors for youth who often experience higher incidences of domestic and community violence which in turn increases the need for safety and protection.

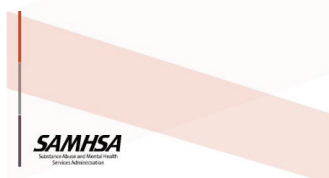


Further stigma associated with undocumented status results from harassment, discrimination, and can exacerbate or create mental health challenges including a sense of hopelessness, loneliness, and eventually lower self-esteem. For our youth, the stigma and discrimination experienced from the dominant culture can create anger and animosity toward that culture. A separation from mainstream culture makes youth far more vulnerable to the influence of gangs.

And finally many immigrants feel significant pressure to assimilate into white American society. Pressure to do so is called acculturation stress, where the stress experienced by trying to become like the dominant culture and leave one's own culture behind. This struggle between holding to one's own culture we're adopting characteristics of the new culture can cause significant conflicts between parents and children. The resulting conflict within the family can be a push factor that separates the youth and their family and community, creating a need for belonging.



**Optional immigration slides end here**





## Main Takeaways

- Hispanic and Latino groups are **not a monolithic population**, but many have shared experience
- Youth gang membership is prevalent in US and has dangerous, long-term consequences
- Hispanic and Latino youth are disproportionately impacted by cultural, social, and environmental marginalization that increases risk factors for gang involvement
- Not all groups that hang out together and shared a collective identity are gangs
- There are significant mental health impacts of gang involvement
- Internalized racism and generational trauma contribute to risk factors for mental health problems and gang involvement
- Risk factors for gang involvement extend across the societal, community, family, and individual level

In this module we have explored social, historical, political, and geographical factors that create a unique risk factors for Hispanic and Latino youth. From this module we hope but you have learned that Hispanic and Latino groups are not a monolithic population. There are many cultures and languages and ways of being in the world that make up the large umbrella Hispanic and Latino cultures. We contribute to the misunderstanding and marginalization of Hispanic and Latino youth when we assume that a Mexican heritage is just the same as a Cuban heritage as a Brazilian heritage as a Guatemalan heritage.

In the next module we will take a closer look at implicit bias and how it shapes our perceptions of others. We will then learn how our perception of others impact our behavior even when we are not consciously aware of it.

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# MODULE 2



## Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

### Module 2:

Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social Determinants of Health and Risk Factors Related to Latino Youth Gang Involvement.



#### Acknowledgment

Presented in 2022 by the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND ACCEPTING OF DIVERSE CULTURES, GENDERS, PERSPECTIVES, AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THEIR OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH OUR ACTIONS, POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

Adapted from: [https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide\\_2019ed\\_v1\\_20190809-Web.pdf](https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf)

Always use acknowledgment slide on the 2nd slide and add your center's information.

Always use Language Matters graphic as your third slide.

#### Disclaimer

The National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification. With the intention of both facilitating a fluent reading of text and supporting an inclusive and respectful language, this presentation uses terms that are neutral and inclusive of diverse gender groups and identities. In this presentation, we also use the term LatinX to encompass ethnic identity as well as non-binary gender identification.

*In alignment with funder, use latino & hispanic, but we acknowledge....*

We have intentionally chosen the use of Hispanic and Latino to refer to these populations in order to acknowledge and honor the diversity and heterogeneity of people from Latin America. However, we acknowledge that terminology should be uniquely selected based on what works for your community.



# Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

**Module 1:** *Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health*

**Module 2:** *Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social determinants of health and risk factors related to Latino youth gang involvement*

**Module 3:** *Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs*

**Module 4:** *Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families*

**Module 2:** *Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social Determinants of Health and Risk Factors Related to Hispanic and Latino Youth Gang Involvement*

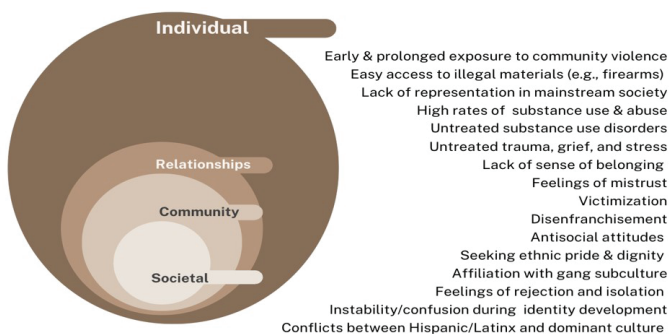
## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of Module 2, the learner will be able to:

- Become familiar with the gang joining process and common reasons for joining
- Recognize how and why adolescence represents an increasingly vulnerable time for risky and illegal activities like gang involvement
- Discuss key terms and concepts related to stress and vulnerability in racially minoritized groups (e.g., bias, racism, etc.)
- Understand how acculturation and other stressors of minority groups can impact identity development
- Identify ways that gang culture can alter identity development among Hispanic and Latino youth

## The Individual Level

The disadvantages and adversities that emerge at the societal, community, and family level generate individualized risk factors for gang joining among many Hispanic and Latino youth



In the last module we learned the larger context that are Hispanic and Latino youth exist within including the historical, social, and political factors that have shaped past and current experiences of Hispanic and Latino families.

In this module we will consider vulnerabilities associated with adolescence as a developmental period and how this can contribute to risk factors for gang involvement.

Further, we will take a closer look the impact of bias and biased behavior on our youth.

In this module you will learn why adolescence can be a particularly vulnerable time for risky and illegal activities. You will learn about acculturation and assimilation, why adolescence is an especially vulnerable time, and how implicit bias affects our youth. You will then learn how these factors may contribute to youth joining and staying in a gang, staying in the gang, in addition to what motivates youth to leave a gang.

In module one we learned about the historical, geographical, political, and social factors that impact youth and families. These are the ‘big picture’ factors that influence the experiences and opportunities of our youth. We often think of these factors as surrounding an individual. This graphic challenges us to picture those factors as something the youth carries inside them, impacting how they think and feel.

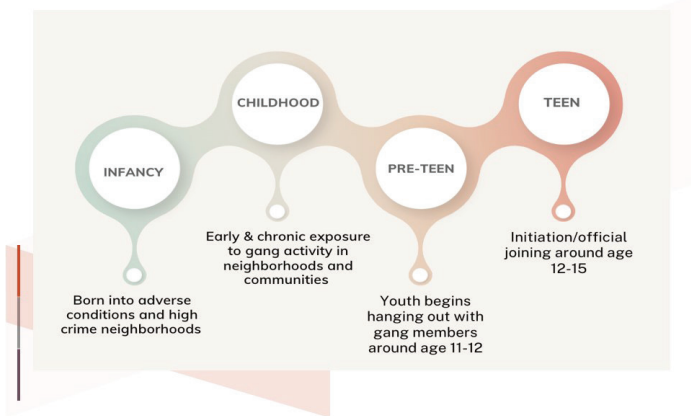
In this module we focus on the individual - what are the factors, specific to adolescence, that may affect a youth’s desire - or a least willingness - to join a gang?

Let’s first consider adolescence and why brain changes make youth more vulnerable to others’ influence.



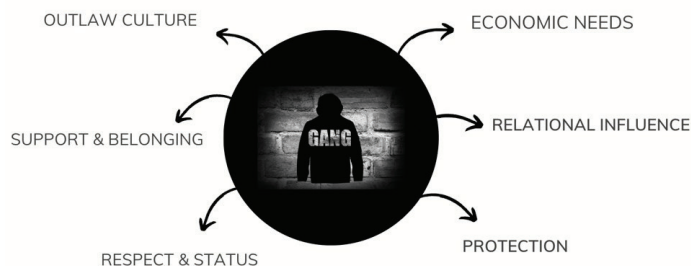
So far we've simply talked about gang involvement. Gang involvement includes three stages. First joining a gang— what are the initial risk factors and vulnerabilities that led to an openness to joining again. Once in the gang, there are maintenance factors that keep a youth from leaving. These may be the same or different from the factors that caused them to join in the first place. And finally we'll look at the decision to leave the gang.

### Gang Joining Process



There are essential factors throughout childhood that can become risk for gang involvement. Being born into adverse conditions and high-crime neighborhoods is a risk factor that can be present in infancy. And childhood chronic exposure to gang activity a neighborhood or the community puts youth at higher risk for future involvement. Early exposure to gang members as a risk factor for early joining, defined as joining around 11 or 12 years old. The peak ages for gang-joining are between 13 and 15 years old when gang affiliation and the process of protecting territory can also foster a sense of identity and pride rooted in the connection to the community.

### COMMON REASONS FOR GANG JOINING

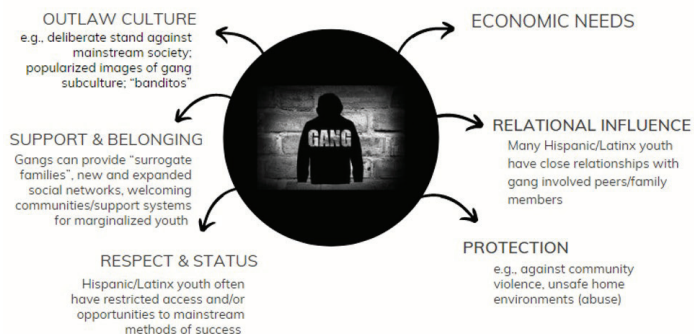


Common reasons for joining a gang can be grouped into six categories: outlaw culture, a sense of support and belonging, attainment of respect and status, economic needs, relational influence of peers, and a need for protection.

Let's take a moment and think about what we've learned up until now and how they contribute to these six factors.

*[NOTE: have participants generate a few ideas in each category before proceeding to the next slide.]*

## COMMON REASONS FOR GANG JOINING



Experience of stigma and discrimination contribute to a youth wanting to take a deliberate stand against the mainstream society. In this way outlaw culture can feel like an expression of your power, freedom, and a stand against oppressive authority.

Marginalization many of youth experience contributes to a need for support and belonging - which is heightened in families that are unable to spend time together due to long work hours or other pressures.

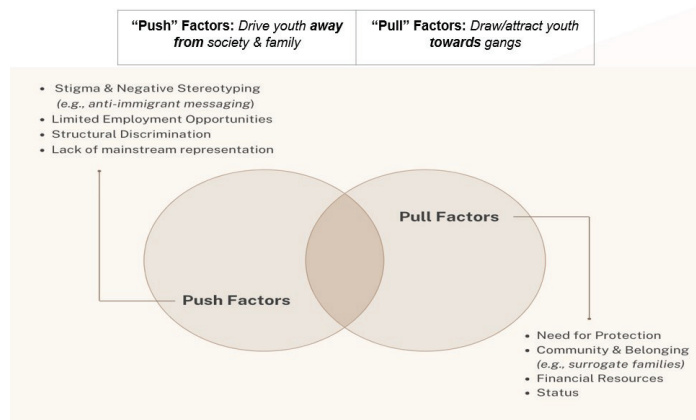
Like all of us, Hispanic and Latino youth want to feel respected but instead are often faced with negative stereotypes and assumptions about them based on their race. Gangs offer status, respect, and a sense of success as you proceed through the gang hierarchy.

The economic pressures faced by many families who live in marginalized communities experience unstable employment or low wages which has many youth to prioritize making money by any means possible.

Adolescents are especially vulnerable to peers and if family relationships are lacking, or youth are otherwise lonely they become more vulnerable to the influence of peers who would victimize them or pull them into gang activity.

And finally all of these factors can create a feeling of not being safe and a need for protection.

## Push & Pull Factors



Let us remember the push and pull factors we reviewed in module 1. The "pushes and pulls" — that make gangs attractive to some youth. "Pushes" are the negative factors that push youth into gangs; they are found in characteristics or conditions of neighborhoods, families, schools, peer groups and individuals.

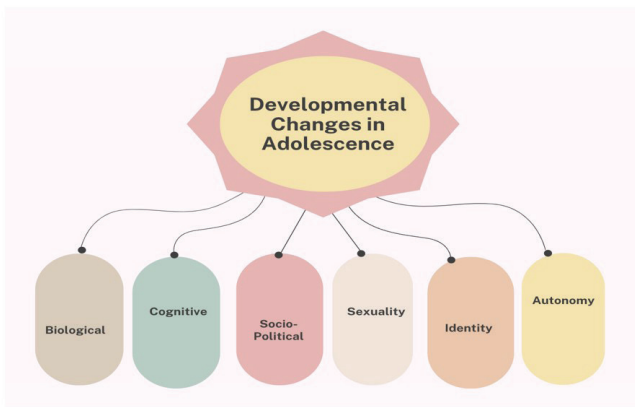
"Pulls" draw or attract youth to gangs; these include being part of a group and the perceived benefits of a gang lifestyle, such as excitement, the chance to make money, and the perception of protection.

Relationship/Family Level Factors Can Increase Risk of Gang Involvement

RELATIONSHIP FACTORS	GANG-JOINING RISK FACTORS
Single-parent home (maternal only)	→ Lack of paternal figure/male role model in the home
Limited parental supervision	→ More unsupervised after-school time
Forced family separation/fear of separation	→ Need for protection & belonging
Current/family history of incarceration	→ Normalization/reinforcement of anti-social behaviors and attitudes
Current/family history of gang membership	→ Family influence/pressure
Abuse and/or neglect at home	→ Need for protection & acceptance
Increased influence of delinquent peers	→ Peer pressure & increased delinquent behaviors (e.g., substance use, crime, violence)

In addition let's remember the relationship and family level factors we discussed and module 1. Here we see how each relationship factor can become a gang joining risk factor. For example, limited parental supervision means more unsupervised time after school - the time when most crimes are committed.

*[Note: review factors that are most relevant for the community]*



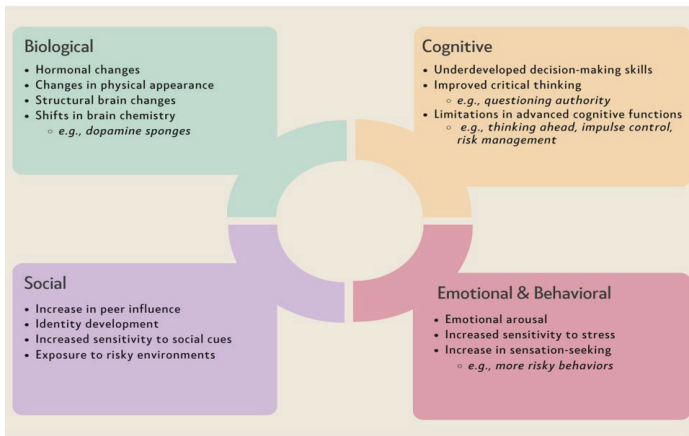
Adolescence is a critical stage across a variety of developmental domains in the context of the historical and systemic inequalities facing minoritized youth - Hispanic and Latino teens) - adolescence can represent an increasingly vulnerable time for risky and illegal activities, including gang membership.

The job of adolescence is to figure out who we are and who we want to be. Identity development is the major task of teenage years. In addition there are significant biological and cognitive changes that are occurring at a rapid rate. Teens are exploring their sexuality, their

feelings about the world, their sense of how they fit into the world, and have a strong desire for independence and autonomy.

These developmental changes are interactive and cumulative, impacting neurobiological, psychological, social, and behavioral functioning.

## Interactive Developmental Changes in Adolescence



Many changes that adolescents experience are developmentally appropriate but can be problematic. For example teens are infamous for their sense of invulnerability and lack of long-term planning or thinking about future consequences.

It is helpful to categorize the developmental changes the four areas biological, cognitive, social, and emotional/behavioral. Biologically the adolescent brain is experiencing a reorganization of a neuronal connections and significant hormonal changes. Importantly, levels of dopamine in the teenage brain are highest

than at any other point across lifespan. Dopamine is the reward drug. Our brains want dopamine and they get dopamine when we feel rewarded - whether it's a compliment from a valued peer, feeling of success, or a rush of pleasure. This makes teens especially vulnerable to peer pressure.

Cognitively critical thinking skills begin to improve but are underdeveloped especially in early adolescence. Throughout these years, teens will develop better impulse control, risk management, and planning ahead but these skills are not automatic and take practice. This is why adolescents often seem

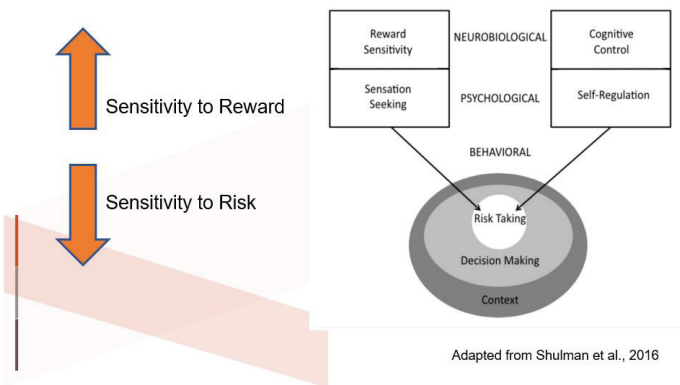
unaffected by warnings of long-term consequences such as if you don't do well in school then one day you won't be able to get good job.

Social interactions take on heightened importance and adolescence as you work through their identity. Teenagers are especially sensitive to social cues and heightened susceptibility to peer influence. Feelings of belonging in the home and in the community can help protect from negative peer influences.

And finally due to brain and hormonal changes as well as increased sensitivity to stress, teenagers are often feel strong emotions which they sometimes struggle to handle. It is also common for teenagers to engage in more risky or sensation-seeking behavior.



## Dual System Systems Model of Adolescent Development



This model highlights how developmental changes during adolescence increases sensitivity to REWARDS and decreases sensitivity to risk.

This increased sensitivity to reward yields more sensation seeking, leading to more risk taking behaviors. The type of risk-taking behavior is dependent on the adolescent's CONTEXT (e.g., what is risky in their environment/culture) and this is where the environment can contribute to heightened vulnerability for joining gangs.

## Adolescence & Identity

Adolescents become more future-oriented, yielding more thinking about their future selves

- *Who am I? Who am I going to be?*

An important part of identity development is establishing a racial/ethnic identity

Multiple dimensions of establishing a racial/ethnic identity	
Racial Centrality	How important is your race/ethnicity in your identity?
Private Regard	How do you feel about being a member of your racial/ethnic group?
Public Regard	How do you think others view your racial/ethnic group?

Adapted from Sellers et al., 1998

Racial/ethnic identity formation can be particularly challenging for teens growing up in immigrant or minoritized groups (e.g., Hispanic and Latino families)

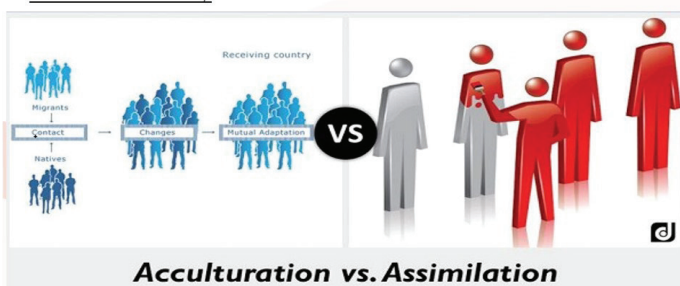
As we mentioned the job of adolescence is to develop our identities, including how race and ethnicity will be incorporated into our self concept. In establishing a racial or ethnic identity, teenagers need to consider how important is their race or ethnicity is to their identity? How do they feel about being a member of that racial or ethnic group? And how do they think others view this group? When adolescents are surrounded by negative messaging and experiences of discrimination, this can impact how they incorporate a racial or ethnic identity into their self concept.

If they strongly identify with their race and are hearing constant negative messaging about that race then many teens will assume, unconsciously, that they also must be bad people. However if teens set aside their racial or ethnic identity, they often experience a disconnection from their families and communities which heightens the need for a sense of belonging.

## Acculturation & Assimilation

**Acculturation:** member of minority cultural group accepts customs of larger community/majority culture, while retaining some of their own customs and traditions.

**Assimilation:** groups or individuals of minority group absorbs all aspects of dominant culture and do not retain any of their own customs/traditions



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This process of incorporating one's racial identity can take the form of acculturation or assimilation. In acculturation a person blends some elements of the majority culture with some of their own customs and traditions. The degree to which this happens can take many forms and can continue to shift over years as people have an evolving relationship with culture and identity.

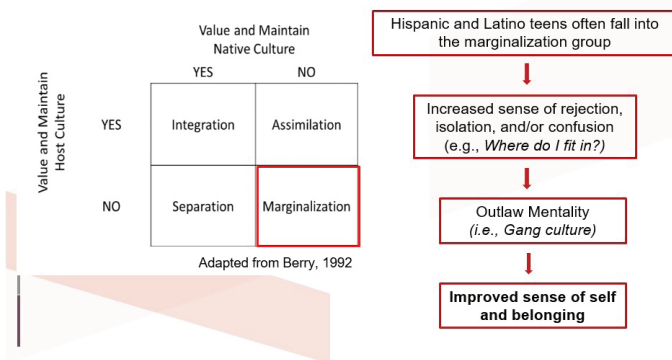
In assimilation a person does not retain any of their own customs or traditions and absorbs all aspects of dominant culture.

The pressure to assimilate can be high, especially for youth who have experienced stigma and discrimination because of their race or ethnicity. It can be very tempting to leave all aspects of the minoritized group behind and join in with the group that is dominant in the culture. However having to separate from a part of oneself often leaves a sense that something is missing or that we are not fully ourselves.

Image from here -- <https://iteducationcourse.com/acculturation-vs- assimilation/>

## Berry's Model of Acculturation

How do teens from racially/ethnically minoritized groups manage the pressures adapting in the dominant culture during identity development?



The Berry model of acculturation helps us understand the intersection of valuing and maintaining host culture with valuing and maintaining native culture. Marginalization occurs when neither the native or the host culture is embraced. This leaves youth outside of both and contributes to a sense of isolation and even confusion. Many teens often wonder – where do I fit in? For some teens, gang culture and the outlaw mentality can provide a sense of self and belonging that is missing as one falls between two cultures. This sense of community can be a powerful draw.

[Highlight marginalization = I don't fit in either -> outlaw culture, need for belonging]

<https://open.maricopa.edu/culturepsychology/chapter/berrys-model-of- acculturation/>

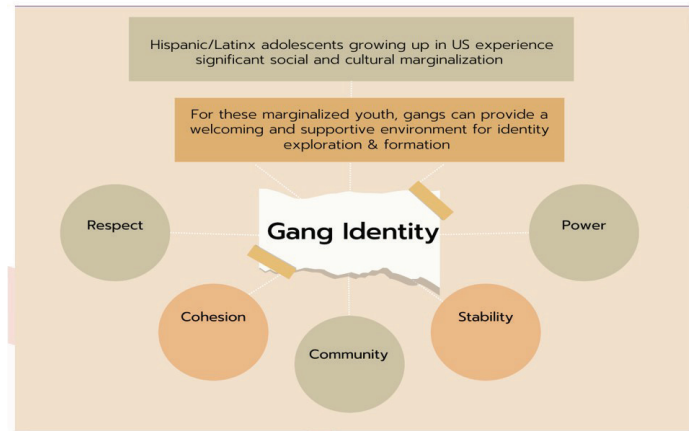
Reflection: *Have you ever felt that you did not belong? How did it impact what you did? How you felt?*

**I AM NOT MEXICAN. I AM NOT GRINGO.  
I AM NOT CHICANO. I AM NOT GRINGO  
IN THE U.S. AND MEXICAN IN MEXICO.  
I AM CHICANO EVERYWHERE. I DON'T  
HAVE TO ASSIMILATE TO ANYTHING.  
I HAVE MY OWN HISTORY.**

– CARLOS FUENTES

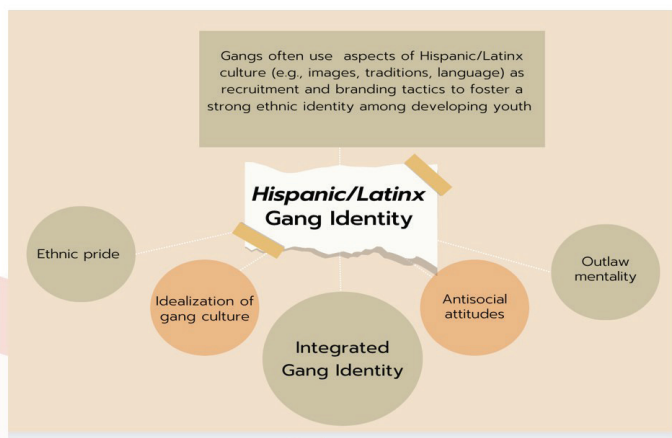
Take a moment to have the audience connect with the discomfort or feeling that others don't want you or that you don't belong with the goal of increasing empathy for youth who are struggling for acceptance.

## Hispanic and Latino Gang Identity



As we've noted, adolescence identity formation is highly influenced by social environment. As teens initially interact with gang members they may experience an increased sense of respect, power, stability, and community. As the gang identity takes deeper root, gang activity becomes a way of life. Over time, the gang member's individual identity slowly erodes, replaced by an assigned or assumed gang identity.

## Integrated Gang Identity



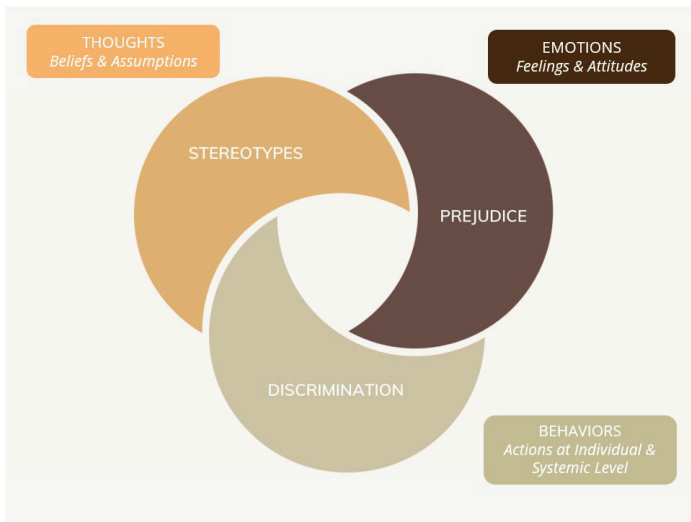
a sense of ethnic pride and dignity fostering an idealization of gang culture and identity. Further, acceptance into the gang promotes an integrated gang identity. As the Hispanic and Latino youth identity more with gang culture, they become more stigmatized by, and ostracized from, mainstream society. This perpetuates gang joining, maintenance, and barriers to gang desistance.

Hispanic and Latino gangs capitalize on this fragile developmental period and socio-political context of growing up as a Hispanic or Latino youth in American culture. Gangs often use important aspects of Hispanic and Latino culture (e.g., images, traditions, language) as recruitment and branding tactics to foster a strong ethnic identity among developing youth. For example, La Raza was a popularized phase among Mexican culture that is now the name of a Mexican-American gang.

The intertwining of traditional Hispanic or Latino cultural elements into gang identity creates

*[Quote] "Over time, the gang member's individual identity slowly erodes, replaced by an assigned or assumed gang identity...[as] his or her identity becomes more interwoven with the gang identity, such that threat to the gang begins to be perceived as a threat to the individual's core identity" – p. 85, Malec, 2006*





A main pressure to assimilate - and leave behind or deny one's culture - comes from how others see us and the assumptions that are then made about us. Stereotypes are how we THINK about others because of the group we associate them with. Stereotypes can be either positive and negative and while they may seem harmless they are often hurtful and always reinforce the habit of assuming someone is just like how you assume their group to be.

Prejudice is how FEEL about others and by definition is always negative. Prejudice is when we assume others have negative traits or we

take an action against another person because of the group we associate them with.

Both stereotypes and prejudice underlie racism.

## Racism Defined at 3 Levels

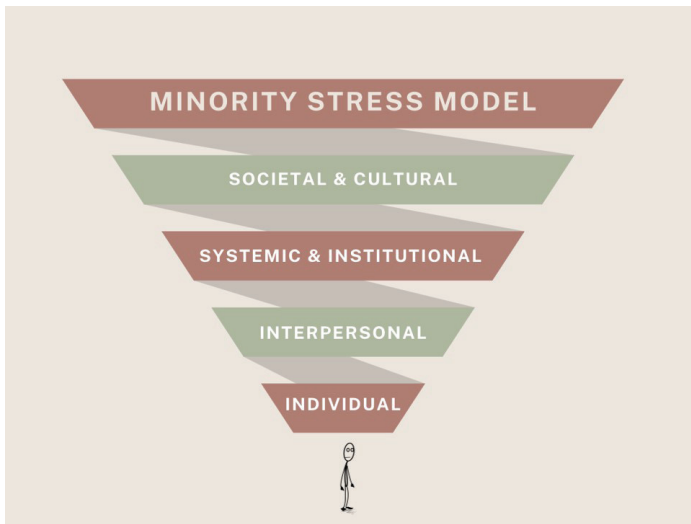
- Institutionalized:** system that results in differential access to goods, services, and opportunities in society by race
- Personally-mediated:** the differential assumptions about the abilities, motives and intentions of others by race and the differential actions based on those assumptions
- Internalized:** BIPOC people accepting falsehoods about the inferiority of their own abilities and intrinsic worth

SAMHSA  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (Jones, 2000)

Racism is a broad term that describes oppressive action from a place of power toward another racial group. This process occurs on multiple levels and it is important to understand how racism can manifest in different ways.

Dr. Camara Jones outlined a framework of racism, occurring at 3 levels. These include: Institutionalized racism which refers to a system that results in differential access to goods, services, and opportunities in society by race. Personally-mediated racism involves the differential assumptions about the abilities, motives and intentions of others by race and the

differential actions based on those assumptions. Internalized racism describes people believing falsehoods about the inferiority of their own abilities and intrinsic worth.



The minority stress model describes the sources of stress experienced by those who are minoritized (or marginalized) in our society. Societal and cultural stress occurs as a result of navigating the unspoken cultural expectations of dominant Eurocentric White culture. We are surrounded by all sorts of images and ways of thinking from movies, books, TV, and other media that are filtered through a White lens and depict Eurocentric values as the norm. This constant messaging impacts not just how White people view others but how BIPOC view others and themselves. When a person internalizes all the negative messaging about their own race

- a form of self-hatred - can emerge. You'll remember this is Jones' 3rd level of racism.

These pervasive messages are encoded in our systems and institutions, like our education system, and harmful messages lead people to deny and exclude those who are not like us – often through subtle and nuanced processes.

When students cannot see themselves reflected in the institutions around them, the underlying message is that they do not belong.

How we see each other and what we expect from each other, say a lot about how much or how little we value the other person - Like a Latina student being

encouraged to take less demanding classes.

And at the bottom of the pyramid we see the individual struggling to thrive in the context of harmful systems and messages. It is demoralizing to be surrounded by messages - implicit and explicit - that they are not as capable or as valued. For some, this becomes internalized racism where they believe the negative messaging about their group and/or themselves. Individuals who experience a high level of racialized stress are more prone to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Perceptions of others + Lack of conscious awareness = BIAS

"When I started coming to the U.S., they were offering me only the typical stereotypical roles: the druggard, the criminal, the gang member, or in the best-case scenario, the gardener or the cook. I was fed up with all these roles that were always the same. And I promised I would try to change the image of Latinos in Hollywood."  
 - Eugenio Derbez, Actor

Curious to learn more about bias?  
 Check out <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/index.jsp>

We've mentioned implicit messaging a few times now - messages that we send and receive without realizing it - like clutching your purse when a hispanic teenager walks by. This happens as a result of implicit bias which is prejudiced or stereotype-based perceptions or responses that operate without conscious awareness. Bias is about the snap judgements we make – judgements which are subtly but strongly influenced by pervasive negative messaging.

## How Bias Shows Up

What does bias look like in everyday actions?	
<b>Misperception of Emotions &amp; Expression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceiving neutral faces as angry</li><li>• Rating perceived anger as more intense</li></ul>
<b>Expectations &amp; Over-monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Watching some groups closely for bad behavior</li><li>• Ignoring behaviors of other groups</li></ul>

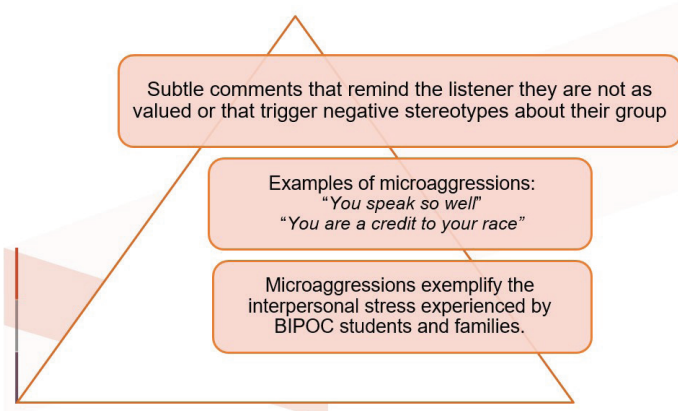
There are many ways that bias shows up in our everyday actions - Interpreting how other people feel is one way that bias can cause us to miss interpret the intentions of other people. Multiple research studies have examined how our implicit biases affect the way we interpret others' emotions by having participants watch both faces slowly morph from happy to angry or angry to happy. Participants' level of bias toward the group they were watching predicted seeing anger earlier and rating the anger as more severe. In everyday life, this means the tendency to assume others are angry - or more angry than they really are.

**Reflection Question: How do you react when you think someone is angry with you? What implications could that have for interactions with others at work? at school? In community?**

In another study, researchers used software that tracks where participants are looking – or eye gaze tracking. They asked teachers to watch a video of a classroom with 4 children - a Black girl, a White girl, a Black boy, and White boy. They then told the teachers to be on the lookout for trouble - the teachers watched the black boy for significantly more time than the other students even although all children were coloring quietly throughout the video.

**Reflection Question: How does the tendency to over monitor connect to disproportionate discipline rates?**

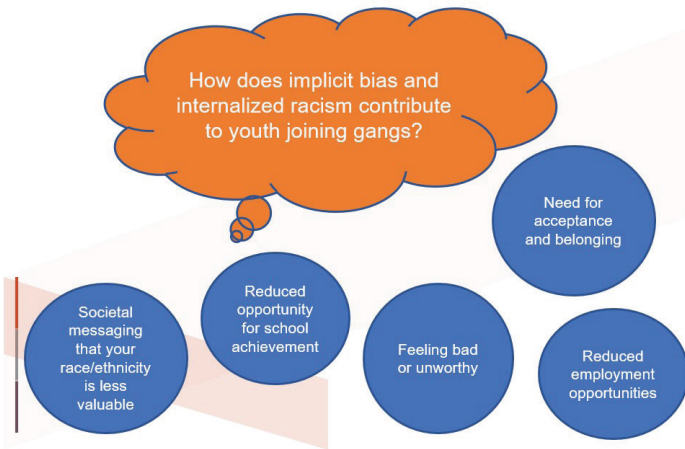
## Microaggressions



One of the ways that people experience bias is through micro aggression. micro aggression are subtle comments that remind the listener if they are not valued or that trigger negative stereotypes about their group. Microaggressions leave a clear impression—that the individual hold a bias and may not be a safe person. Repeated experience of microaggressions can be othering and contribute to the sense of isolation within a community.

[Video links as additional resources  
Microaggressions like mosquitos (2 min) <https://youtu.be/nQ9l7y4UuxY> Microaggressions in the classroom (18 min) <https://youtu.be/ZahtlxW2CtIQ>]

## Discussion Question



Have the group generate some ideas about implicit bias and internalized racism contribute to youth joining gangs.

Example) Impacts feeling about oneself, feeling the world doesn't like you, feeling the need to be seen as tough, believing they must be bad because so many others think that or because of their ethnicity.

If not mentioned, draw out:

- Societal messaging that your race/ ethnicity is less valuable
- Other people treating you as if you are bad or unworthy
- Reduced opportunity for achievement in school and work, at a time in life when the need to feel accepted and belong is strong.

“While our culture, traditions and religion may differ, we pride ourselves on working hard, educating ourselves as much as possible, striving for better lives for our children, loving our often large and blended families, and sharing as much of our history and customs as we can with anyone who chooses to really see us. We are not so different after all. **People simply need to see us for who we are and not who they expect us to be.**”

— *Natalie Morales*  
*Actress and Director*

Wanting to be seen and heard as our authentic selves is a human trait shared across cultures. Stereotyping and bias come from our expectations of others and are not based on who the person is. We need to take care that we are not contributing to the marginalization of the youth and families that we work with.

In this module we learned about the factors that put adolescents at risk for joining gangs.

## Main Takeaways

- Adolescence is a time of change, figuring out who we are and who we want to be
- How others see us and how we see ourselves and those who look like represented, impacts how we feel about ourselves
- Feeling isolated, unworthy, unsure of who you are, and/or anger or resentment at the unfair treatment all contribute to the push - pull factors that put Hispanic and Latino youth at risk for joining gangs.

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# MODULE 3



National Hispanic and Latino  
**MHTTC** Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
 Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

### Module 3:

Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs



### Acknowledgment

Presented in 2022 by the National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the view of TTC Network and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

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Always use acknowledgment slide on the 2nd slide and add your center's information.

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND ACCEPTING OF DIVERSE CULTURES, GENDERS, PERSPECTIVES, AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS PARTICIPATING IN THEIR OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH OUR ACTIONS, POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

Adapted from: [https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide\\_2019ed\\_v1\\_20190809-Web.pdf](https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf)

Always use Language Matters graphic as your third slide.

### Disclaimer

The National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification. With the intention of both facilitating a fluent reading of text and supporting an inclusive and respectful language, this presentation uses terms that are neutral and inclusive of diverse gender groups and identities. In this presentation, we also use the term LatinX to encompass ethnic identity as well as non-binary gender identification.

*In alignment with funder, use latino & hispanic, but we acknowledge....*

We have intentionally chosen the use of Hispanic and Latino to refer to these populations in order to acknowledge and honor the diversity and heterogeneity of people from Latin America. However, we acknowledge that terminology should be uniquely selected based on what works for your community.



# Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

**Module 1:** *Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health*

**Module 2:** *Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social determinants of health and risk factors related to Latino youth gang involvement*

**Module 3:** *Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs*

**Module 4:** *Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families*

In modules one and two, you learned about the many contextual factors that increase the risk of gang involvement for Hispanic and Latino youth. Module one focused on historical, societal, and environmental factors and the impact on youth mental health while module 2 framed factors specific to adolescence and how stereotyping and bias can impact a youth's sense of self.

In this module we will discuss the role of the school system as a critical point of prevention and intervention for gang involvement.

## Module 3: Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs

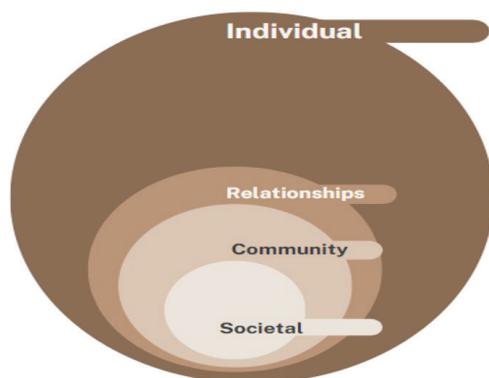
### OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of Module 3, the learners will be able to:

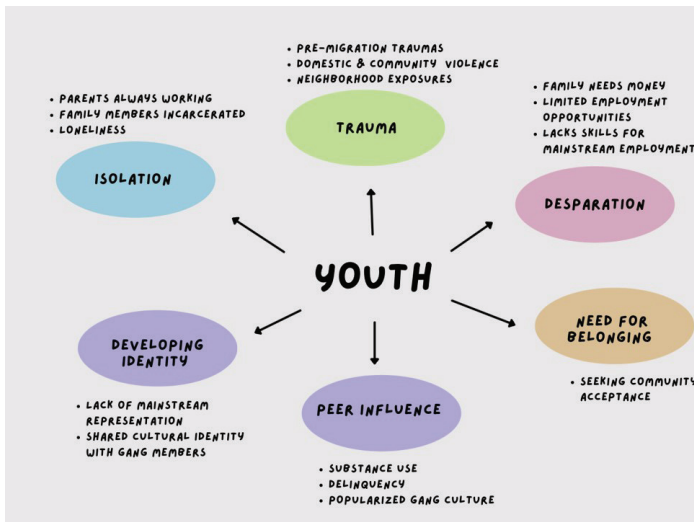
- Consider a public health approach to gang involvement and prevention
- Discuss the role of systems (in the prevention of, and intervention for, gang involvement)
- Describe the importance of the school setting as both a protective and risk factor for gang involvement
- Understand how educational marginalization at the systemic level impacts vulnerabilities for gang membership
- Identify the benefits of school-based and community interventions in reducing gang involvement

In this module, we will consider the importance of a public health approach to gang involvement and examine the critical role of schools as both a protective factor and a risk factor. We will take a closer look at how youth are marginalized within a school setting and how that contributes to risk factors for gang involvement.

## What I Carry with Me



Recall that this figure that helps us conceptualize the weight of factors at the societal, community, and relationship level that impact a youth. While we cannot see these when looking at a student, how that student is treated in their close relationships and by those around them, how they are perceived by others, and how their race or ethnicity is talked about impacts a youths' internal experience and sense of themselves.



As we begin this module, let's remind ourselves of the factors influencing youth gang involvement.

**\*If part of a series, brief link back to mod 2.  
\*If stand alone, take a minute to describe the various levels of context.**

Many factors contribute to a youth's willingness or desire to join a gang. Unresolved trauma creates the need for safety and protection and limited economic opportunities for minorities communities can create financial strain or desperation. Feeling isolated as a youth

attempts to navigate multiple cultures can lead to need for belonging and acceptance, and as you are working through their identity, understanding who they are and who they want to be, they are increasingly vulnerable to peer influence during this critical developmental period.

## Public Health Approach

- Need a comprehensive, community wide strategy
- Collaboration between health, education, justice, labor & urban planning
- Multiple community level factors
- Alternatives to juvenile incarceration



To truly address gang activity in a community requires a public health approach involving all major social systems including education, justice, housing, healthcare, and social support services. Collaborations between agencies can improve support and reduce the possibilities of youth or family getting caught between systems. There are many community-level factors that allow and maintain gang presence and it is important to take a community-wide approach. In particular, alternatives to juvenile incarceration are critical to breaking the cycle of gang involvement. While common wisdom might suggest that a "scared straight" tactic of harsh

punishment for even first-time offenses will reduce future criminality the reality is that many youth find and join gangs while incarcerated.

One study in Texas found that 40% of incoming youth had a gang affiliation while 70-80% had affiliation upon release. Rather than reduce the likelihood of future offending, juvenile incarceration seems to further marginalize youth and exacerbate many of the factors that led to them offending in the first place. Further marginalization will only increase the risk for gang involvement (CDC & NIJ report, 2013).

## Prevention Community

Address economic disparities

Connect with cultural pride and positive identity

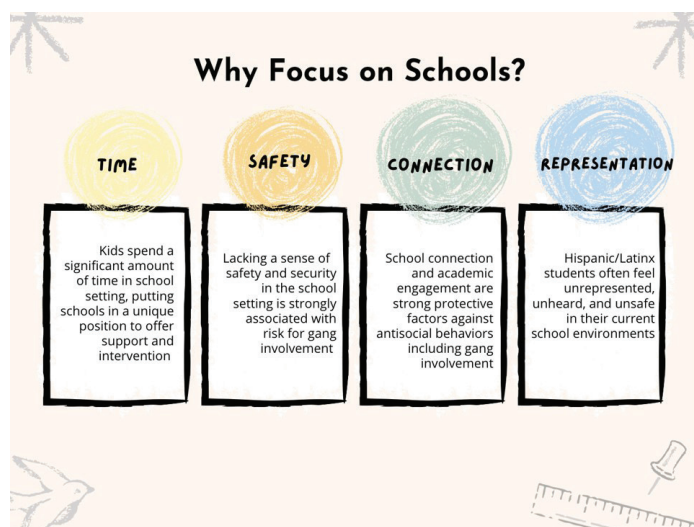
Strengthen connection to family and community

Educational attainment

When thinking about a public health approach, considerations of socioeconomic factors is critical. The longing to be a part of the American Dream, and the feelings of shame, lack of self worth, and lack of meaning that come from being poor and excluded, lead to increased risk of gang involvement and greater likelihood of staying in a gang once joined. The largest contributor to the unmet needs of Latino youth is economic disparities, many of which have been perpetuated through government policy, the media, and cultural expectations. Connecting with cultural pride and positive identity can help dampen the effect of gangs who intentionally

use cultural imagery and icons to draw youth in. As we have noted throughout these modules, a sense of belonging is critical to prevention. Strengthening connections to family and community is an important prevention strategy. For the disenfranchised Latino youth, the gangs can become a refuge—a place where they are understood, accepted, and receive the recognition that was often lacking at home or in mainstream society.

And finally educational attainment and belonging in school can counteract most of the risk factors associated with gang involvement. Let's now look more closely at schools.



Schools are a powerful point of prevention and intervention from early childhood through adolescence. The 'job of youth' is school and youth spend a significant amount of time in this setting. Because youth spend a large portion of their days in school they are uniquely positioned to support and intervene. Schools have the potential to be a protective factor. When students feel safe, connected, and see themselves represented in the educators and educational materials around them they receive clear message that they are valued and wanted and that space.

Alternatively, schools can often be a risk factor. We know that not feeling safe at school is strongly associated with risk for gang involvement. Educational marginalization and the lack of support and academic opportunities exacerbate many of the risk factors that we have discussed. First, marginalization increases feelings of isolation. Second, youth who are not successful at school reasonably worry about their future and often turn to other ways of earning income. Needing to pay bills and buy food or otherwise support your family is a powerful incentive to become involved in criminal activity if it is your best opportunity for support.

## Schools as Risk and Protective Factors

RISK FACTOR	PROTECTIVE FACTOR
Lack of Representation	Positive Relationships
Lack of bicultural/bilingual educators	Adults providing structure, boundaries, and support
Limited Hispanic/LatinX material in curriculums	Mentorship and prosocial role models
Limited Resources & Funding	Sense of Belonging & Protection
Overwhelmed & underpaid educators and administrators	Opportunities for peer connection & support
"Not my job" attitude toward prevention and intervention	More supervision and security
Lack of mental health professionals in school setting	Less "downtime" and exposure to antisocial activities
Marginalization & Stigma	Attention & Engagement
Internalized stigma and negative messaging about the future	Individualized assistance and educational support

Here we can see how each element can be both a risk or a protective Factor. For example, relationships and representation can be a risk factor when there is a lack of bicultural or bilingual educators and limited representation of Hispanic and Latino students in materials. The opposite of that is mentorship support and positive adult role models.

Limited resources and poor funding contribute to overwhelmed educators who do not have the time or energy for individualized attention. Further, overwhelmed educators may feel that addressing individual needs and feelings of

students is simply beyond their job. Many low-resourced schools also have a lack of mental health professionals in the school setting, reducing opportunities for individual intervention. Rather, when schools are well-funded, teachers have the time and energy to address each student individually and promote engagement of the whole student body.

### Main Message:

A sense of safety and belonging in school is a powerful intervention



What is absolutely key to understand is that student perceptions about their personal safety are powerful predictors of gang-participation rates, even when community characteristics such as concentrated poverty and community social disorganization are taken into account. When youth feel safe at school they have a lower need for protection. However when youth feel unsafe, marginalized, or otherwise threatened the need for a sense of safety and protection is increased.



## Gangs in Schools

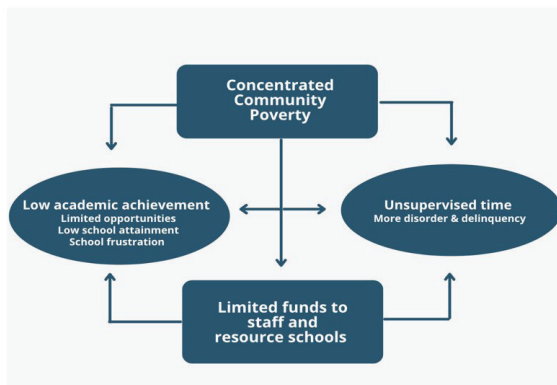
- Studies found principals deny or do not recognize a gang problem in their schools
- Systematic self-report gang-involvement and victimization surveys should be used
- Fear is likely both a product of and a cause of gang problems in schools and communities

A key issue in schools is leadership not recognizing gang activity as a problem on their campuses. In one study youth self-reports revealed that about 10 percent of all schools had a gang problem. However, only one-fifth of the principals of these schools indicated that their schools had a gang problem. (CDC & NIJ, 2013)

This is critical because if school leadership does not notice or acknowledge a problem then the problem cannot be addressed. Experts recommend self-report and surveys of victimization be used to supplement administrators perceptions of gangs in schools to obtain a more accurate picture of student experiences that may not be known by school leaders.

Gang presence at school can create fear which prompts more youth to join as their sense of safety is comprised. The more youth that join gangs, the greater the gang presence on campus, creating more fear. Left unchecked, this cycle can create serious issues for schools.

## Schools as Risk Factors



This diagram helps orient us to the school level characteristics that contribute to the risk factors.

At the top we see concentrated community poverty, while there is some variation between states, a large portion of school funding still comes from property taxes. This means that schools in low socioeconomic areas receive less funding while schools in high socioeconomic areas have much more robust funding. This funding structure is an equity issue as it maintains the status quo and results in the least amount of resources being allocated to those who have the greatest need. Limited school

funds is associated with low achievement and more unsupervised time - as well as a general decrease in student's sense of safety.

Let's take a look at each of these factors.

## Underfunded Schools

The school environment plays a major role in increasing risk of gang involvement

- feeling **unsafe and/or unsupported** at school is a primary risk factor

Difficulty staffing and resourcing schools limits feelings of safety and support among students

- Insufficient resources
- Poor physical spaces (old/disrepair)
- Overly harsh disciplinary practices
- Over reliance on school security
- Limited extracurricular activities
- High suspension environments



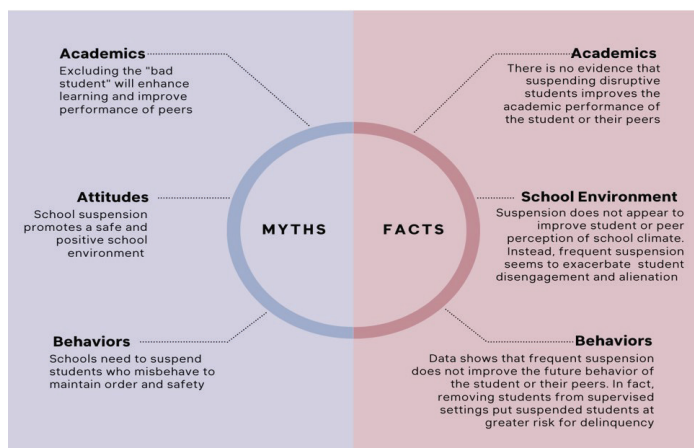
Lack of financial resources results in larger class sizes and impacts the ability to recruit bilingual and bicultural teachers, the ability to provide individualized services, and have robust libraries of materials that reflect the student demographics. Buildings are often older or in disrepair - again sending the message that school is not a priority.

Further, lack of after school programming and limited extracurricular activities leads to less supervision after school time - when students' potential exposure to negative peers increases. Finally, schools with stressed and overwhelmed

teachers and administrator tend to be high suspension environments with an over reliance on suspension as the primary form of discipline. Removal from school via suspensions further increases unsupervised time for students with working parents.

Resource: Improving school safety through school climate transformation [https://selcenter.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/08/SEL\\_Reimagining-School-Safety-A-Guide-for-School-and-Communities\\_ADA-2.pdf](https://selcenter.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/08/SEL_Reimagining-School-Safety-A-Guide-for-School-and-Communities_ADA-2.pdf)

## The Truth about Suspension



You've probably heard the idea that removing "troublemakers" from the classroom is good for all students - it teaches the student that their behavior is not acceptable and removing them makes the other students more productive without the distraction.

But is that true? Years of research has repeatedly demonstrated that suspensions do not improve the behavior of the student who was disciplined OR their peers who were not disciplined. While suspension is a consequence, it does not teach the student coping skills or new behaviors and therefore does nothing to prevent

similar behavior in the future. Some students who are beginning to feel marginalized may even prefer suspension to going to school. Further, peers (who are not suspended) rate their school climate, including safety, as worse in schools with high suspension rates.

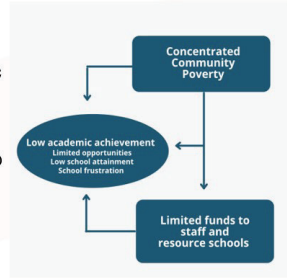


## Barriers to Academic Achievement

The lack of culturally inclusive educational resources exacerbates language and cultural barriers to academic achievement among Hispanic and Latino youth

Low academic achievement contributes to

- Greater educational frustration
- Low school attainment
- High truancy and dropout rates
  - *Latino youth have highest school dropout rates in US*
- Limited opportunities for mainstream success



Limited materials doesn't just mean fewer academic resources, but also fewer opportunities to see yourself reflected in the curriculum. These less than ideal learning conditions contribute to low academic achievement, school frustration, and a general sense that education is not a priority for students in that neighborhood. Combined with the financial pressure that many families face, youth are often faced with the difficult choice of attending school or getting a job to help with family finances.

Poor funding also means fewer educational materials overall and a lack of culturally inclusive materials specifically. In module 2 we talked about the importance of seeing yourself represented in the mainstream world as important for a sense of belonging.

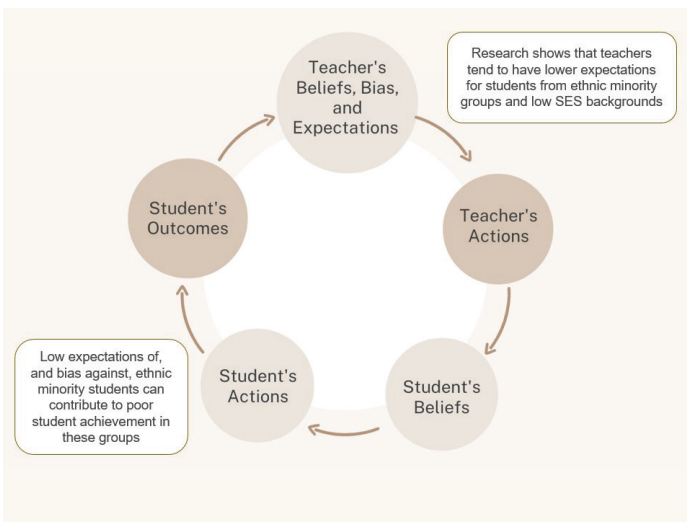
**YOU ARE NOT LUCKY TO BE  
HERE. THE WORLD NEEDS  
YOUR PERSPECTIVE. THEY  
ARE LUCKY TO HAVE YOU.**

– ANTONIO TIJERINO

*What are the implicit messages students receive about themselves when they are not represented in the educational materials used in their school?*

All students have worth and no student should be made to feel that they do not belong in an educational environment that is for everyone.

[Reflection question: What are the implicit messages students receive about themselves when they are not represented in the educational materials used in their school?] teachers and administrator tend to be high suspension environments with an



Similar to not seeing oneself reflected in education materials is the impact of bias on teacher expectations. We know that teacher expectations contribute significantly to student achievement. Teachers who have group-wide high classroom expectations are associated with warm and supportive climates, positive student relationships, clear learning goals, and more academic challenge. The classroom environment and teacher beliefs influences a student's belief about their own ability - which in turn influence the student's action such as spending extra time studying.

Think about a time when you were asked to complete a task that you did not feel capable of. Did you try to avoid it or get it over with quickly? What were your emotions or anxiety level when engaging in the task? [Pause for reflection and a few responses]

Now think about a time you were asked to complete a task that you felt confident you could handle, even if it was hard. What changed in how you approached the task?

When we reflect on our own experiences it is easier to see how teacher expectations can impact student learning.

Research consistently shows that teachers tend to have lower expectations for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and racial or ethnic minority groups. This is especially problematic as the lower expectations are not based on the student's skill or performance but on judgement that were made about them before they entered the classroom.

## Unsupervised After-School Time

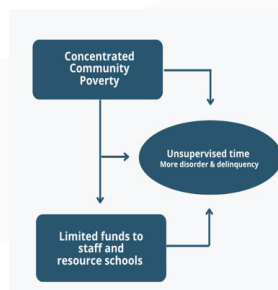
High truancy and dropout rates, limited funds after-school and extracurricular programs increases unsupervised time.

After school time peak hours for juvenile crime

- 1 in 5 juvenile crimes occur between 3-7 pm
- Risk of violent juvenile victimization also increases during the four hours after school compared to late night hours and non-school days

More unsupervised time increases

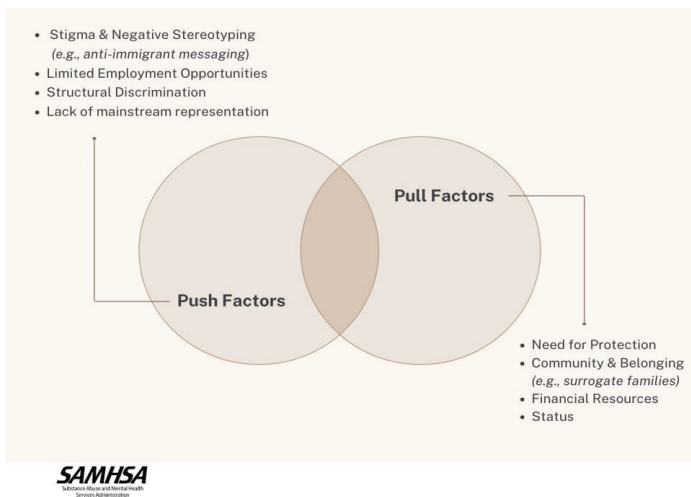
- Substance use
- Delinquent activity
- Exposure to gang activity in community
- Influence of gang-involved peers



Unsupervised time, whether after school or during school hours because of suspensions, increases the risk for youth substance use, engagement in criminal activities, exposure to gangs, and exposure to gang involved peers. Not only do one in five youth-involved crimes occur between 3 and 7 PM, but the hours after school represent the highest risk of youth victimization even when compared to late-night hours and non-school days.

Further we are missing opportunities with a lack of after-school programming. Recall in a module one we talked about connecting the sense of

cultural pride as a protective factor for youth. After school clubs can be instrumental in providing opportunities for youth to explore their own culture, participate in culturally valued activities, and develop meaningful relationships with adult mentors and peers.



With this in mind, let's take a look again at the push and pull factors and the school's role.

*[If you haven't done previous modules, spend a few minutes reviewing this slide review if a stand alone. You can use the script below from module 1]*

It is helpful to think of factors in two category. "Pushes" are the negative factors that push youth into gangs; they are found in characteristics or conditions of neighborhoods, families, schools, peer groups and individuals. "Pulls" draw or attract youth to gangs; these

include being part of a group and the perceived benefits of a gang lifestyle, such as excitement, the chance to make money, and the perception of protection. Together they can make gangs attractive to some youth.

For example the experience of stigma and discrimination may push a youth away from their school or their neighborhood while a sense of community draws a youth toward the gang as it offers something that has been missing from their life a sense of belonging.

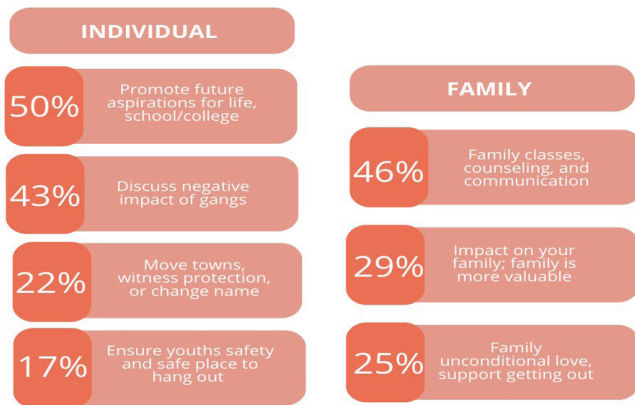
### Push and Pull Factors in School Environment

Push Factor	School Support
<i>Stigma and Negative Stereotyping</i>	Confronting bias and increasing cultural inclusiveness
<i>Limited Employment Opportunities</i>	Academic achievement; College preparation
<i>Structural Discrimination</i>	Eliminating disproportionate discipline practices
<i>Lack of Mainstream Representation</i>	Culturally inclusive educational materials
Pull Factor	School Support
<i>Need for Protection</i>	Increasing feelings of school safety
<i>Community and Belonging</i>	Inclusive climate and positive relationships
<i>Financial Resources</i>	Career support and/or vocational programs
<i>Status</i>	Feeling valued and respected by adults and peers

Here we see each push and pull factor paired with the school support to help counter that factor. For example stigma and negative stereotyping can be addressed by increasing educator awareness of bias with skills training to address bias in the classroom and increasing the cultural inclusiveness of our educational materials. Structural discrimination can be addressed, in part, by eliminating disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices in favor of consequences that promote responsibility to the community and connection with the school. Vocational programs and career support can help students who are facing

economic pressures to help provide for the family. And for no cost at all making each student feel valued and respected decreases the need to seek status outside of the school building.

## Youth Recommendations



In 2021 a youth survey was released that described what gang involved youth say would help them more and what would be important factors in their decision to leave the gang. For themselves, they said they need aspirations for life and have reasons to believe that the future can be better. A close second was wanting more discussion of the negative impact of gangs - on themselves and on their families. From their families, they want more communication and access to family classes or counseling - in addition to feeling unconditional love and being offered support to get out of the game.

Source: *How to Help Me Get Out of a Gang: Youth Recommendations to Family, School, Community, and Law Enforcement Systems* Jill D. Sharkey, Skye W. F. Stifel, and Ashley M. Mayworm University of California, Santa Barbara, California 2021

## Youth Recommendations



In the community they identify opportunities to stay busy such as getting involved with sports or other activities and help with getting jobs. Youth identified teachers as an important source of relational support in schools and said they could use extra help, noting that teachers can help you stay in school and graduate.

Source: *How to Help Me Get Out of a Gang: Youth Recommendations to Family, School, Community, and Law Enforcement systems* Jill D. Sharkey, Skye W. F. Stifel, and Ashley M. Mayworm University of California, Santa Barbara, California

## Facility to Community Transition Prioritized Supports

Youth vs Stakeholders

- | Youth                         | Stakeholders                         |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1.Support from family         | 1.Community resources/svcs           |
| <b>2.Education support</b>    | 2.Collaboration b/w partners         |
| 3.Positive peer support       | 3.Probation/parole case mgmt         |
| 4.Self: Youth as a support    | <b>4.Facility education programs</b> |
| 5.Community support resources | 5.Treatment (in-facility)            |

Unruh, 2005

Many youth who have already joined (“staying” stage) may have had contact with juvenile justice already. Here we see a contrast between what youth say they need to be successful versus what adult stakeholders feel is important for youth. The adults, such as parents and probation officers, identify community resources as the top need, followed by a collaboration between various partners in the community. Education programs in the facility were listed 4th, but the connections with school outside of the facility is not on the stakeholder list. Contrast this with a list from youth to identify education support as the second most important need and transitioning from a juvenile facility back into the community as the top need identified with support from their family.

Many youth fall through the cracks when transitioning from placements back to school. This is a critical transition point where youth can plug back in to schools and course correct or leave school and disconnect.



## Current Research School Based Curriculum

Few curriculums with demonstrated outcomes **BUT**

- Limited number of studies conducted
- Difficulty studying community based, highly individualized, multi-component programs
- Need for longitudinal data – *The sleeper effect*

outcomes for community-based, highly individualized, multi-component programs. The key to being effective and working with youths is to individualize the intervention to the youth. However, this presents a challenge when comparing interventions. Further, there is what is known as a sleeper effect – gains that are seen 3 to 4 years after participating in the program with no effects in the first 1-2 years. Most research studies only collect data for one or two years following the intervention and therefore may miss the sleeper effects.

So since schools are an important point of prevention and intervention, are there school based programs that are effective at addressing gang involvement?

Unfortunately there are few curriculums with demonstrated positive outcomes but this does not mean that there have been a lot of studies and the programs don't work. RATHER there are few studies of existing programs. This means that research may have yet to find effects of school programming.

There are some difficulties in determining

## Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

Universal Intervention

Classroom Based

Social Skills Instruction

Problem Behavior in Elementary School

Rates of Conduct Disorder\*

Arrests\*

\*Persisted until the end of high school

PATHS or promoting alternative thinking strategies is a universal, classroom- based, social skills instruction program for elementary school students (through 6th grade). While not specific to gang involvement, PATHS promotes emotional and social competencies and reduces aggression and acting-out behaviors in elementary school-aged children. Children who participate in the Paths program show reduced problem behavior and demonstrate lower rates of conduct disorder and fewer arrests until the end of high school.

self-control, social competence, positive peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. (Greenberg, M. T., & Kusché, C. A. [2006])

The curriculum focuses on emotional literacy,



## Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program

- Geared toward middle school
- Skill building, strengths-based approach
- Led by law enforcement officers
- 13 skill based lessons
  - Analyze info and develop realistic beliefs
  - Developing realistic goals
  - Verbal and Nonverbal Communication
  - Refusal skills
  - Conflict resolution
  - Anger management techniques

GREAT or Gang Resistance Education and Training is a school-wide program geared towards middle school students and is specific to reducing gang involvement. The curriculum takes a strengths-based approach to skill-building and has lessons based in developing realistic goals, improving communication, refusing peers, and anger management.

It is important to note that the GREAT program is designed to be led by law enforcement. Any community considering this curriculum must think carefully about the relationship of local law enforcement to the community and the appropriateness of law enforcement officer led training in schools. For many students, officers in uniforms with badges and weapons can be an unnerving and at times triggering presence.

We include information about this program not as an endorsement but rather so that you have an understanding of the program design should you come across it in schools or as a suggested prevention strategy.

## Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program

### What changed?

- Increase positive attitudes toward police
- Decrease positive attitudes toward gangs
- Increased resistance to peer pressure
- More frequent use of refusal skill
- Increased resistance to peer pressure
- Lower rate of gang membership

**At 1 year → 54% reduction in odds of gang membership**

Results of this program have shown a change in attitude towards police and a decrease in positive attitudes towards gangs. Youth showed a resistance to peer pressure and more frequent refusals of peers. Overall, there was a significant reduction in the odds of gang membership one year after the program. It should be noted that this program is intended for middle school and the most common ages to join a gang are 13 through 15.

No effect was found for self-reported delinquency, empathy, risk-seeking, and conflict resolution.

## Restorative Practices

- Focuses on relationships
- Focuses on WHY the behavior happens – the underlying cause
- Focuses on repairing harm
- Focuses on taking responsibility for harm done

*"We are all individuals; we are all human beings; we are all connected together; and we all have the same rights, the same freedom."*

— Sylvia Mendez

One school-wide program that has shown promise in improving school climate, strengthening relationships between educators and students, and students with each other, is restorative practices. Restorative practices are much more than an alternative to traditional discipline. Restorative practices, when done correctly, are a school-wide shift to how we think about our interactions with students and creating an environment where all students feel valued. When a student has harmed another, whether with words or actions, the focus is on taking responsibility and repairing the harm rather than removal from the environment. In this way the student feels the emotional and psychological consequences of their behavior and must take responsibility for repairing the hurt they caused.

## Connection with gangs

- Keeps the youth connected to school
- Builds sense of community
- Improves future achievement and sense of opportunity
- Improves school safety perceptions for the youth and others

So why would restorative practices be one prevention and intervention strategy for youth at risk for gang involvement? Because restorative-practices focuses on relationships and community, students become more connected to their school, to their teachers and administrators, and to their peers. This provides the sense of community and belonging, that when absent, is a risk factor. Further, restorative practices can increase the sense of safety at school which we have identified as a critical factor in a youth's willingness to join a gang.

## Who leaves?

- Less frequent delinquency
- More prosocial peers
- Less unstructured socializing
- **Less anger identity**
- **Levels of self-control**

Most cited reason: Tired of gang lifestyle and desire start a family.

*"It wasn't what I thought it would be."*

And finally, what motivates the youth to leave a gang? We find that youths who have engaged in fewer delinquent acts and have more prosocial peers are more likely to leave the gang. Further, identifying less with anger and improving levels of self-control are also associated with choosing to leave a gang. The most common reason cited for leaving is that they were tired of the lifestyle and wanted to start a family.

Importantly, anger identity and self-control can be addressed through counseling in addition to symptoms of trauma.

Contrary to popular belief, leaving a gang does not always mean experiencing violence. Overall, only 20% of participants in the survey experienced any kind of violence when leaving the gang. Researchers also found that for both males and females, being attacked by one's own gang was uncommon (14% to 17%), but being attacked by a rival gang was somewhat more common (35% to 40%) meaning that the highest risk after being assaulted is staying with the gang.

Schools play an important part in every youth's life. Schools can be a source a pain and disappointment or school can be a place where youth can explore their culture, feel valued, see themselves in a brighter future, and celebration of diversity. The stronger the connection to school, the less likely a youth is to become involved in gang activity.

“

**We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community - and this nation.**

**CÉSAR CHÁVEZ**

## Main Takeaways

- Schools can be a risk factor when poorly funded, lacking cultural inclusivity, and rely on harsh discipline strategies that alienate and marginalize students without promoting behavior change
- Schools have tremendous opportunity to be protective factors and to provide intervention
- Connection to school provides a sense of belonging, positive peer relationships, decreased unsupervised time, increased opportunity for the future, increased earning power after high school

In this module we've explored the critical role of schools in either preventing gang involvement or being a significant risk factor for gang involvement. In the next module we will focus on working one-on-one with youth to address factors that put them at risk for future gang activity.

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# MODULE 4



National Hispanic and Latino  
**MHTTC** Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

## Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

### Module 4:

Cultural Considerations when working with Latino youth and families



### Acknowledgment

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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HEALING-CENTERED AND TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

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PERSON-FIRST AND FREE OF LABELS

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## Disclaimer

The National Hispanic and Latino MHTTC recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification. With the intention of both facilitating a fluent reading of text and supporting an inclusive and respectful language, this presentation uses terms that are neutral and inclusive of diverse gender groups and identities. In this presentation, we also use the term LatinX to encompass ethnic identity as well as non-binary gender identification.

*In alignment with funder, use latino & hispanic, but we acknowledge....*

We have intentionally chosen the use of Hispanic and Latino to refer to these populations in order to acknowledge and honor the diversity and heterogeneity of people from Latin America. However, we acknowledge that terminology should be uniquely selected based on what works for your community.



# Latino Youth Gang Prevention in School Systems

**Module 1:** *Latino Youth Gang Involvement: The unique context and implications for Latino youth mental health*

**Module 2:** *Joining, Staying, and Leaving: Social determinants of health and risk factors related to Latino youth gang involvement*

**Module 3:** *Best Practices for Culturally Inclusive, Evidenced-Based Youth Gang Prevention Programs*

**Module 4:** *Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families*

Over the last three models we have learned about the social, political, and historical context that creates a targeted disadvantage for Hispanic and Latino youth. We have learned how adolescence is a particularly vulnerable time as teenagers navigate they're developing identities and are particularly vulnerable to peer influences. We've learned how schools can be critical points of intervention and providing future prospects as well as a sense of belonging.

In this module we're going to focus on working with the individual youth and strategies for treatment planning.

## A Focus on Mental Health Working with Hispanic and Latino Youth



**Module 4:** Cultural considerations when working with Latino youth and families

### OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of Module 4, the learners will be able to:

- Become familiar with the common barriers to mental health care utilization among Hispanic and Latino youth
- Recognize the value of a strengths based, preventative, family-focused approach to intervention
- Discuss how school based services provide a critical point of delivery for therapeutic services
- Describe how Push and Pull factors can align with therapeutic interventions
- Identify the individualize needs of marginalized youth that should be addressed in any intervention plan

In this module we will first consider common barriers to accessing and utilizing mental health care in Hispanic and Latino communities. We will learn the value of a family-focused, strength-based approach to intervention and how schools can increase access to services. we will revisit push and pull factors to understand how they can be used in treatment planning for the individualized needs of each youth you are working with.

Addressing mental health and improving well-being can be key factors in preventing and intervening with youth at risk for gang involvement or who are already gang involved. As we discussed in the first module, many Hispanic and Latino youth who become involved in gangs have a history of untreated trauma and many also suffer from depression or anxiety. Youth do not have to have a diagnosable disorder to benefit from individualized counseling sessions. Counseling can be an opportunity to explore self concept, improve self-esteem, and develop coping skills to combat the frequent negative messaging, experiences of discrimination, and impact of stigma and bias.



## Background

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in this country

Latinos are the least likely to utilize mental health services

### Logistical barriers

- Cost/Insurance issues
- Transportation/accessibility
- Unfamiliarity with the system
- Limited services in native language

Latinos are the largest ethnic minority in the United State, but also the least likely to utilize mental health services. There are a number of reasons for this. Mental health services outside of the schools typically require a copay or a per session fee. Further, finding and scheduling with a therapist can be a confusing process that discourages many people from engaging in services. Agencies providing services are not always accessible by public transportation and many areas lack services offered in a language other than English.

## Barriers Cont.

- **Fear of system involvement**
- Lack of bicultural services
- Stigma
- Prior treatment experiences

### Fear of Disclosure

- Peer, family, and community stigma
- Concerns about undocumented status
- Fear of deportation of self or family

In addition to language, many areas have a lack of providers that are bicultural. Treatment engagement for Hispanic and Latino youth is enhanced by the presence of bilingual, bicultural therapists and therapeutic relationships that incorporate cultural values. Prior positive experiences with treatment enhance treatment engagement. However, for many of our youth and families prior experiences have not been supportive and lessen the chance that they will return for future services. In many communities there is a stigma associated with engaging in mental health services that can prevent youth and families from participating. In many Hispanic

and Latino communities self- reliant attitudes are valued and cultural differences impact the recognition of mental health issues.

And finally, for some families, there is a fear that engagement in treatment will result in further system involvement that could lead to a questioning of their immigration status and possible deportation.

## Treatment Engagement Issues

### Common Issues

- Negative experience with therapy
- Fears about medication
- Denial of severity

### Issues Specific to JJ Involvement

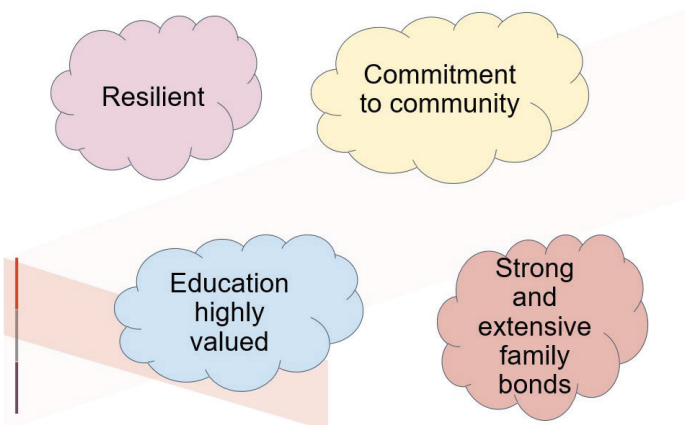
- Court ordered therapy
- Fear information will be used against them in court
- Fear of peers finding out – *Tough front*
- Fear of immigration status being questions for self or family

are in therapy this can be even more a factor for youth in the justice system where an appearance of strength is critical to gain respect.

Many people associate mental health services with medication and are uncomfortable with medication for emotional concerns. It will be important to help youth and families understand that medication is only appropriate in some circumstances and that many people who take advantage of mental health services do not take medication.

For youth who are already involved in the justice system there can be fear but any conversation with a counselor could be used in court against them, and while many adolescents are uncomfortable with their peers finding out they

## Strengths Based Approach



We talk so much about targeted disadvantages and all that our youth and families have to face, we sometimes forget to focus on strengths. Hispanic and Latino culture has many strengths to draw from.

**Reflection question: Here are a few strengths we've highlighted - what strengths have you noticed?**

## Prevention: Family

- Strong family functioning:
  - Warm affective bonds
  - High monitoring
  - Consistent discipline
- Families living in high-risk neighborhoods
  - Build networks of social support
  - Foster family-community ties



We mentioned commitment to family as a strength and families have the potential to be strong protective factors and are a critical point of intervention. We know that strong family functioning can be a significant protective factor. Strong family functioning includes warm bonds, high monitoring, and consistent discipline. Even for families who are living in high-risk neighborhoods, building networks of social support and fostering community ties can greatly reduce the risk of youth becoming involved in gang activity.

## Intervention - Family

- Address factors that influence family participation
- Focus on anticipated benefits from the program
- Directly address logistical barriers
- Bond with clinician is key
  - Acknowledge difficulties with attendance and participation
  - Validate and be flexible

If you have the opportunity to work with the whole family first consider addressing factors that might influence the family's participation. Focusing on the anticipated benefits can help families feel that you are there to help and not to focus on "what is wrong with them or their child".

As with all adolescents, family tensions can increase significantly in Hispanic and Latino families during teenage years. Struggles with acculturation or assimilation often further strain parent-child relationships and generational disconnects can increase feelings of isolation while reducing opportunity for cultural pride.

Involving the whole family is an especially effective form of therapy for all teens but particularly for youth who are already gang involved.



## Multisystemic Therapy (MST)

- Intervention for high-risk youth and juvenile offenders
- Focused on youth 12 – 17
- Home based delivery model
- Therapists work with 4 – 6 families
- Average treatment length is 4 months
- Focus on strengths and empowering families

One intervention that has been found to be particularly helpful is based on serving the whole family. Multisystemic therapy (MST) has shown promise with youth who are acting out or already involved in the justice system. MST takes a wraparound approach to working with the entire family, as well as providing in-home services, substance abuse intervention, and even help with family household management, and connecting families with community services. MST takes the approach that no one factor is most important and that families do best when they receive help in all the areas that are creating stress within the family system.

MST was specifically developed for youth at high risk involvement in the justice system and is focused on adolescents. MST is a community-based alternative to incarceration for juvenile offenders, using a combination of empirically based treatments (such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, parent behavioral training, and/or home-based contingency-drug treatment) to address multiple factors — family, school, or peer groups, for example — that are related to delinquent and violent behavior as well as gang involvement.

Because MST is so intensive, therapists typically only work with four to six families at one time and the average treatment length is 4 months. This makes MST an expensive therapy program for agencies to fund and therefore less common.

## Multisystemic Therapy (MST)

### Youth

- 54% fewer Rearrests
- 75% fewer violent felony arrests
- 54% fewer out of home placements

### Family

- 40% reduction in sibling arrest rates
- 55% reduction in sibling felony arrest rates
- 94% fewer caregiver felony arrests

This intensive wraparound approach pays off. Youth who engage and multisystemic therapy have 54% fewer new arrests and 75% fewer new violent felony arrests. And it is not only the youth who benefit. Because MST focuses on the whole family system reductions in sibling and parent arrest rates have also been found. Incredibly caregiver felony arrests dropped by 94%.

## School Based Services as One Solution

Schools are a critical point of delivery for therapeutic supports



MST is a great model but as we noted it is expensive and therefore not used that often. It is also only appropriate for youth who are already involved with the justice system or were becoming involved in gang activity. We also noted logistical barriers of cost and transportation as reasons why some Hispanic and Latino families do not use mental health services in the community. Service delivery in schools can address some of these foundational barriers. Because students are in school all day and typically the family lives in the same neighborhood as school, transportation is not an issue for the youth and not as often an issue for the parents. Further, services at school, if provided by school clinicians, are provided at no cost to the family.

**Schools are the primary mental health service provider for children.**

**60-80% of children who receive mental health services do so in schools.**

(Burns et al., 1995; Green et al., 2013)

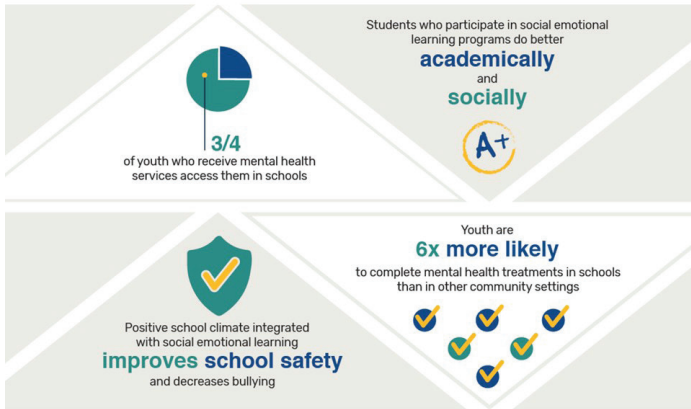
**20% of students receive some form of school mental health services annually.**

(Foster et al., 2005)

Service provision in schools is not a new strategy. Upwards of 80% of children who receive any mental health service receive it in schools. One in five students receive some form of school mental health services every year and we anticipate this number will only grow in the years following covid as youth are experiencing significant increases in trauma, anxiety, and depression.



## School Mental Health Matters



Schools are in a great position to notice the first signs a student may be struggling emotionally as mental health challenges often first emerge at school (Richardson, Morrissette & Zucker, 2012). School-based services are often the more accessible and less stigmatizing than other community mental health services which means more students engage in the supports - In fact youth who receive mental health treatment in schools are six times more likely to complete treatment than students who see a provider in the community.

## Tier 1 Social Emotional Learning

- ★ Improvements in social and self-awareness, decision-making capacity, and relationship skills (Durlak et al., 2011)
- ★ Better academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011; Kase et al., 2017)
- ★ Fewer special education referrals and decreased need for restrictive placements (Bruns et al., 2004)
- ★ Fewer disciplinary actions (Flannery et al., 2014; Taylor et al., 2017)
- ★ Increased student engagement and feelings of connectedness to school (Murray, C., & Greenberg, M. T., 2001).

One strategy is to provide services to all students - called universal or tier 1 services. Not only are the general effects positive, but we see several effects that align with risk for gang involvement.

**Reflection question: Looking at the benefits of social emotional learning listed here, in what way can you see SEL programming decreasing risk for gang involvement?**  
*[Highlight academic outcomes, feelings of connectedness, fewer disciplinary actions]*

### Push and Pull Factors on Individual Level

Push Factor	Therapeutic Intervention
Stigma and Negative Stereotyping	Addressing self concept and internalized racism
Limited Employment Opportunities	Exploring interests and opportunities
Structural Discrimination	Addressing feelings of marginalization
Lack of Mainstream Representation	Supporting exploration of cultural pride; Having representative therapy materials
Pull Factor	Therapeutic Intervention
Need for Protection	Addressing threats to safety and/or effects of trauma of feelings of safety
Community and Belonging	Improving relationships and exploring community connections. Family work
Financial Resources	Problem solving and planning skills
Status	Exploring relationships and where needs are coming from

So now that the youth has decided to engage in therapy, how do you decide what to work on? In the previous module we considered how schools could address push/pull factors. Now let's consider how push/pull factors can be addressed in therapy.

While the risks and consequences of gang activity can feel overwhelming when planning treatment with a student, ultimately we think of these services in the same way we think of others - what is the main need and how do we meet that need that adaptively?

Working with the student and their family you will discover which push or pull factors are most impactful in that youth's life at that time. By understanding the greatest push and pull factors, you can align your therapeutic interventions to address those factors. For example, many youth are struggling with negative stereotyping and discrimination. While we cannot prevent youth from ever having that experience again, we can help them develop coping strategies and most importantly explore what this means for their self concept. Remember in earlier modules we talked about internalized racism? Therapy can help students feel validated in their experiences and help them to not internalize stereotypes and negative messaging.



## Assessing Individual Factors Consider...

*What was the main reason for gang involvement in the first place?*

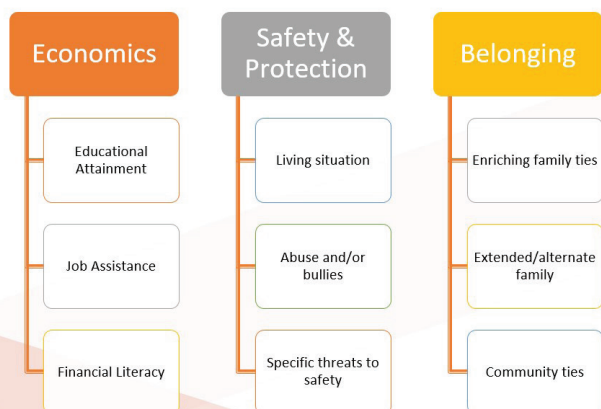
*What need is being met by the gang?*

*How needs be met in a more adaptive way?*



Throughout the training we have discussed general risk factors, we can use this understanding of possible risk factors to work with the youth and family to understand which factors are the most pressing or significant for them.

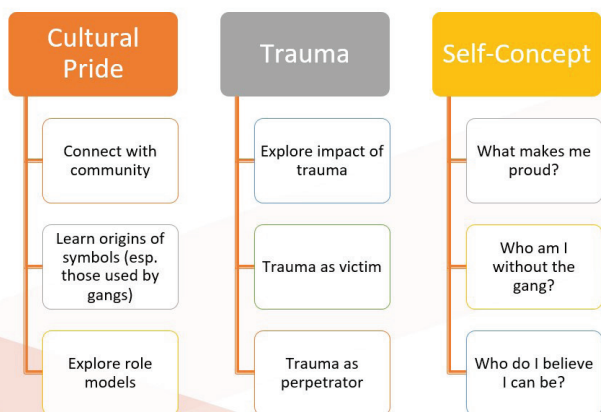
Helpful questions to consider and explore with the student and their family include what was the main reason for being drawn to the gang? What need is being met or could be met by gang involvement? What is making it difficult to walk away? Then consider how can we help students meet that need in a more adaptive and supportive way.



Here we see the risk factors that we have been talking about throughout these modules. Under each one are actions that can be addressed in therapy. The first step is to understand which of the six factors is most pressing or having the largest impact.

Is it economics? Challenge the idea that gangs make you rich (e.g., you don't make money while incarcerated) and help the student develop realistic plans for the future with attainable action steps. Simple things can make a big difference - how do you complete a job application? What type of job might you want?

Or maybe the student has concerns for their safety and are drawn to gangs for protection. Are there specific threats that need to be addressed? Have they experienced bullying or abuse? Do they live in a high-crime area in a state of chronic stress? There are many therapeutic interventions to help youth manage traumatic stress.



How about cultural pride – we noted earlier that gangs have intentionally co-opted cultural symbols to confuse gangs with culture. How might you work with a student to disentangle what is cultural pride and what is being used by the gang?

Trauma is an all-too-common experience for our students. treating trauma is an important step in reducing risk for gang involvement. Beyond trauma, years of isolation, stigma, stereotyping, and confusing messages about your racial or ethnic identity can have a serious impact on self concept and make a youth more vulnerable to

peer influences. How would you explore self-concept with a student?

## Discussion Question

What kinds of interventions and/or supports would you recommend if the primary concern in a student's life is...

- Safety?
- Belonging?
- Trauma?
- Self-concept?

Let's take a minute and practice pairing a need with an intervention. One way of prioritizing needs is to use the magic wand question - **if you could magically change one factor in a youth's life, which would it be? What would change as a result?** Walk through each factor - What would change? What would get in the way?

The question is not what is the most important, but rather, **what change would have the biggest impact on the other factors?**

For example let's consider a student who has been subjected to bullying at school. The student has developed significant anxiety as a result and has begun to use substances to cope with anxiety. As a therapist you could address the substance abuse and work on reasons to stay sober. You could also address the anxiety the student is experiencing and give them coping strategies that provide relief from the inner turmoil. Which approach do you think would have the biggest impact?

*[Have participants generate ideas for interventions that could address each risk factor]*

## Culture influences the way distress is experienced and expressed

Comfort with disclosure differs

Comfort with emotional expression differs

Meaning made of distress differs

Often manifested through physical symptoms or somatization

Consider - *how is stress communicated to others - verbally and non-verbally?*

Culture also plays a part in how we experience and how we express distress. These differences occur not just across cultures but can differ from family to family within cultures. Families and cultures have significant differences in level of comfort with disclosure and emotional expression. In some cultures, expressing emotion openly is acceptable and expected. In others, composure and an unbothered stance is valued.

Remember that emotions can be manifested through physical symptoms and this is particularly true for cultures and families that

less comfortable with the open expression of distress. You may talk with a parent who denies their child is experiencing any anxiety but will willingly talk about the frequent stomach aches they seem to have. It would be inappropriate to interpret this as a parent who refuses to see anxiety or doesn't care about anxiety. Rather consider that the family may frequently experience emotions as physical symptoms and be genuine when they report no anxiety symptoms. As a clinician we know the different ways that emotions can be expressed. Explore this with your students and your families before making assumptions about levels of distress that may or may not be present.

One question to ask youth and families is – how stress is communicated to others?

2 (BQ: Guarnaccia et al., 2003; Guarnaccia et al., 2005).

Violence & other trauma exposure also influence the way distress is expressed



In addition to cultural differences in the way that distress is expressed, exposure to violence or other trauma can also influence the way that we express our distress. Violence-exposed youth may exhibit challenging behaviors as a result of living under adverse conditions. Exposure to violence and poverty can cause students to feel stressed, anxious or generally unsafe. Some students may cope with feeling unsafe by presenting as “tough” to protect themselves from victimization. The “tough front” may then lead to behaviors such as reacting to social conflict with aggression. Though these reactions may be linked to feelings of unsafety that would be addressed by compassionate supports, instead they are often followed by disciplinary referrals.

## Tough Front

- Often adaptive for the environment
- Self protection often underlies the need to appear tough
- What other function could the behavior be serving?
- What cultural facets may impact the need for a tough front?

It is critical when working with students who have been exposed to violence or trauma that we consider all possible explanations for behavior and not jump to the conclusion that the student is simply bad or defiant or oppositional or doesn't care. In all cases we need to consider that being tough and denying emotions may be protective and adaptive for that individual and understand that it does not reflect what's going on inside.

### **Reflection Question:**

***What are some less obvious ways you have seen stress or distress expressed?***

Remember, adolescence is a time of identity exploration and definition.

Kids 'try on' different personalities and are figuring out who they are.

How will they incorporate (or not) elements of their culture of origin?

*For youth, the tension between peers' White and/or Eurocentric cultures and their parents' culture can be a significant factor in identity development.*

As we talked about cultural expression of distress we should recall that the work of adolescence is identity development and that it is natural for teenagers to try out different personalities as they figure out who they are. One of those personalities might be a tough kid. This does not mean that is who this individual will be for the rest of their lives, but it does give you something to explore when addressing self concept, identity, and future aspirations.

## Culturally Inclusive Approach

- Ask questions about backgrounds and beliefs
- Ask how emotions and stress are expressed in the family
- Ask how they view the issue that is bringing them to therapy - what do they think is the cause?
- Monitor yourself for assumptions you may be making
- Understand clients may need time to feel comfortable
- Be curious and interested to learn!

Throughout these modules we have talked about culturally inclusive approaches - what does this look like in a therapeutic setting? First and foremost, culturally inclusive approaches mean asking questions not making assumptions. Spending more time gathering information about how emotions are experienced or how distress is expressed can be important to understanding family functioning and ultimately the students functioning.

A great question to ask is "how would you describe the problem?" or "What do you think is causing this problem or would make this

problem better?" or "Why do you think your parents wanted you to come to therapy?"

Understand that it may take time for clients to feel comfortable talking about their feelings in general and to a therapist in particular, especially if that therapist is of a culturally different background. Allow students and family time to become comfortable with you and with disclosures and discussions of emotion.

Curiosity goes a long way in building rapport and expressing a genuine interest in learning about others.



## Many Countries



## Many Cultures

embrace learning from the youth and families we work with. And in all we must embody cultural humility.

There are several great culturally inclusive interview guides and resources to help build our skills. Let's take a look at a few.

### Culturally Responsive Interview Guides

- [Cultural Formulation Interview from the DSM-5](#)
- [CAMINO](#) (Community and family support, Acculturative Stress, Migration history, Idioms of distress and resilience, Native language and preferences, Origin)
- [Clinical Ethnographic Interview](#)
- [Assessment Algorithm](#)

### Sample Questions from the CAMINO

- What does family mean to you?
- How do you think being an immigrant has affected the way others treat you?
- How do you understand what is happening to you?
- How do others describe what is happening to you?
- How have your nerves been affected (by the migration experience)?
- What do you think is the cause?
- What do you think could help you?

*Sensitivity to cultural values and nuances is more important than cultural match.*

To be culturally inclusive does NOT mean that you know everything about every culture. It does mean that we recognize others may have different perspectives, values, and ways of being in the world from our own and that we must be open to asking questions and learning. If we were to give you a list of 'this is how Colombians feel' or 'this is how Guatemalans see the world', we would be engaging in the same stereotyping that we have warned against throughout the modules.

Instead, we must develop skills in being flexible with our approach to working with others and

On this slide are several guides that are helpful in conducting culturally responsive interviews. [Note: the link for each guide is embedded in this slide]. This is not an exhaustive list, but they are ones that have been found to be particularly helpful. You should review each one to see which fits your needs and style best.

What does a culturally responsive interview look like? Here are sample questions so you can get a sense of the style.

**[Reflection Question:** *In what way are these questions different or the same from your typical interview questions?*

Silva, M. A., Paris, M., & Añez, L. M. (2017). CAMINO: Integrating context in the mental health assessment of immigrant Latinos. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 48(6), 453.



## Learning more about working with Hispanic and Latino Youth

[Educational Resource List from the NHL MHTTC Network](#)

[¿Quiénes somos y de dónde venimos? A Historical Context to Inform Mental Health Services with Latinx Populations?](#)

[Webinar: School as Client Mental Health Services for Diverse Population in the School Culture](#)

[Intersectionality and Interrupted Learning: The Impact of Adversity and Trauma on Academic Achievement for Latinx Youth](#)

historical factors that have impacted Latinx populations from Central America and Mexico. The authors also include tips for working with families from each country.

The third resource is a webinar designed to help clinicians learn a common language between mental health and school communities, understand mental health is important in school settings, and why it is important that mental health providers understand how to engage the Hispanic and Latino community.

And the final resource takes a close look at how adverse life experiences and trauma impact academic achievement for Latinx youth.

### Main TakeAways

- Many Hispanic and Latino families experienced significant barriers accessing mental health services
- Helping families address those barriers is an important for treatment engagement
- School clinicians can play an important role in addressing the risk factors for gang involvement by tailoring interventions the risk factors most impacting that Youth and Family
- Culture impacts how we experience and express distress. Understanding that not everyone expresses distress and the same way his key do not stereotyping student Behavior.
- A culturally inclusive approach critical to building relationships and maintaining report to ensure the best treatment engagement possible

interest in learning more and honing your skills.

Thank you for your time and attention. Our contact information is on the presentation slides.

In addition to interview guides, there are many excellent resources available to learn more about working with youth and families of Hispanic and Latino descent.

The first link is to a page maintained by the national Hispanic and Latino MHTTC Network, the sponsors of this curriculum. The page includes multiple resources for educators and mental health clinicians working with Hispanic and Latino clients.

The second resource provides a particularly extensive look at the social, political, and

historical factors that have impacted Latinx populations from Central America and Mexico. The authors also include tips for working with families from each country.

The third resource is a webinar designed to help clinicians learn a common language between mental health and school communities, understand mental health is important in school settings, and why it is important that mental health providers understand how to engage the Hispanic and Latino community.

And the final resource takes a close look at how adverse life experiences and trauma impact academic achievement for Latinx youth.

In this module we have explored working with individual families and students. The biggest takeaway is to individualize treatment and not make assumptions when working with families from other cultures.

Over these four modules we hope that you have gained an appreciation for the diversity of Hispanic and Latino cultures as well as the many political, social, and historical factors that shape the stress experienced by families both native and immigrant.

We hope this training has only sparked your

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