Building Connections with Hmong Families:

Culturally Competent Approaches to Child Development
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Supported by: Mai Chang (Arc Advocate)
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Arc Greater Twin Cities
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State systems grants support local work around the promotion of early screening and intervention around the CDC’s “Learn the signs. Act early.” campaign.
History and Culture

- Hundreds of years living in remote parts of East and Southeast Asia
- Farming way of life
- Clans
  - 18 mainstream Laotian clans
  - Close family structure
- Strong belief of ancestral lineage
  - All members of a clan are believed to be descendents of a single ancestor
Complex family system

• Hierarchy
  • Gender, age, social status
• Clan/Village leader ➔ Elders ➔ Parents ➔ Married adults ➔ Children (all kids and unwed adults)
• Spiritual Leaders (Shaman)
• Hierarchy dictates decision making
  • Younger generation look up the tier for support/information/guidance
Shamanistic belief system

- Strong spiritual connection to ancestors who govern and guide families through life
- Belief that spirits or ancestors can cause sickness, disabilities, and disease
- Many turn to Shamans for guidance
- Strong belief of karma
- The need for the body to be intact at death for reincarnation
Role of Children

- Many children = many helping hands
- Help in the fields
- Older children babysit younger children
- Continue family lineage
- Children expected to care for parents in old age
- Can make or break a family’s status
Secret War in Laos

- Support of US against communism in Laos
- Exodus to the United States and beyond
Holding onto Culture

- A whole new world
- Being relevant with American society while preserving own culture
- Belief system still maintained
Congenital disability VS acquired disability
Hmong view on disability

• Typical life of someone disabled/special needs
• Birth to death with family
• Responsibility of disabled passes from parents to siblings
• Not expected to marry or be independent
• There is still a lot of personal shame and embarrassment.
• Old views of disability
How do people with disability fit within Hmong families and community?

- Burden to family and possibly to future family if person with disability marries
- Lack of understanding
- Fear of judgment
- Changing ideas
How do Hmong parents view child development?

- Physical development plays a big role in Hmong child development.
- Healthy physical growth = good child development.
- Very little emphasis put on anything else
Where do Hmong families get their information and support?

- Immediate family ➔
  - Parents/Grandparents/Elders
  - Siblings
  - Aunts and Uncles
  - Cousins (also considered as siblings)
- Shaman ➔
- Medical Professional/Internet
How can professionals best approach families about developmental concerns?

- **Education/Awareness**
  - Thorough explanations
  - Have visual aids, if possible
- Nod and agree = being polite NOT that there is understanding
- Understand they are regular families with little medical backgrounds
Mainhia and Yia

Fonte (age 13)
Maly and Eddie

Jiena (age 8), Eddison (age 6), and Mason (age 2)
How can professionals, educators, and healthcare providers build the best relationships with Hmong children and families?
Awareness:

- Cultural awareness and a simple “Nyob Zoo”
- Generational differences
- Allow families to speak
- Offer visual aid and through explanation
- Allow trusted family members to be present and possibly interpret for them (if non English speaking)
- Be understanding of parents wanting to seek own family support before final decision-making
Be open to spiritual treatment
Resources available to Hmong families:

- Hmong Helping Hands
- The Arc Greater Twin Cities
- Learn the Signs. Act Early.
- Help Me Grow
Hmong Helping Hands

Mission:
To support, educate and empower families of chronic illnesses and disabilities while dispelling stereotypes and stigma within the community.
Hmong Helping Hands
The Arc Greater Twin Cities is a non-profit grassroots advocacy organization serving the seven-county metro area.

- Services span the lifetime
- Issues range from early intervention, education & the transition to adulthood to employment, housing, health care access, guardianship & more

www.arcgreatertwincities.org
Mission
The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, actively supporting them and their families in a lifetime of full inclusion and participation in their communities.

Programs & Services The Arc offers:
- Abuse Prevention & Awareness
- Advocacy
- Common Connections (mentoring)
- Information & Assistance
- Lifetime Assistance Program
- Networking/Support Groups (including Hmong groups)
- Self-Advocacy
- Sibshops/Sibling programs
- Public Policy Advocacy

www.arcgreatertwincities.org
Individual Advocacy

• Ongoing work with a family or individual on an identified disability-related issue

• Advocates work with families and individuals to identify critical needs & develop an individualized plan of support

• Advocates also provide coaching around problem-solving, communication, advocacy skills & mentoring to help parents increase their skills

www.arcgreatertwincities.org
It's time to change how we view a child's growth.

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

NATIONAL CENTER ON BIRTH DEFECTS AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Milestone Moments

One Week

Newborns begin to turn to the sound of a parent's voice during the very first week!
Talk to your baby to help her learn your voice.

www.cdc.gov/actearly
What is Help Me Grow?

• Help Me Grow provides resources for families to look at developmental milestones
• State-wide referral system
• School district will provide confidential screening or evaluation at no cost.
• For Minnesota children from birth to five-years-old, if found eligible, can receive services in their home, child care setting or school.
• These services are free regardless of income or immigrant status.

www.helpmegrowmn.org
Conclusion

- War refugees and now American citizens
- Culture still very ingrained
- Beliefs slowly changing to include the disabled
- Relationships built by being culturally sensitive and aware
- Families only want their children to be happy and healthy just like everyone else.
Hmong LTSAE materials

Coming soon!

- Milestone Moments brochure
- 1pg development flier

Visit www.lend.umn.edu
Speaker Information

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Webinar information

This webinar has been recorded and can be found at:

www.lend.umn.edu

Under webinar tab

All materials from the webinar, including translated LTSAE materials, will be available here.
Thank you