

Preventing Substance Abuse in Hispanic Immigrant Adolescents: An Ecodevelopmental, Parent-Centered Approach

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This article discusses the challenges that Hispanic immigrant families face and reviews the potential negative consequences of these challenges for Hispanic adolescents. The article outlines the theoretical background, goals, and intervention components of Familias Unidas, a substance-abuse-prevention program for poor immigrant Hispanic adolescents and their parents. Familias Unidas is an ecodevelopmentally based, parent-centered intervention delivered by way of parent participatory-learning groups, parent-adolescent discussion circles, and periodic home visits. Through participation in Familias Unidas, parents acquire skills for communicating with and supporting their adolescents, managing adolescent behavior problems, and becoming actively involved in their adolescents' social and academic lives, all of which are protective against substance abuse. This article delineates the key intervention principles of Familias Unidas that increase parental involvement and collaboration within the adolescents' family, school, and peer worlds and, as a result, improve adolescents' functioning in these areas.

Keywords: *Hispanic; adolescent; immigrant; substance abuse; prevention; family*

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Immigration can be a stressful experience for children and families. The decision to leave one's homeland is difficult enough, but when the difficulty of this decision is compounded by language barriers and entry into a system that has values that are quite different from those of one's native country, the hardships can seem daunting. Immigrants frequently leave their primary sources of support behind at home and enter a world in which the differences between themselves and others seem greater than the similarities (Breton, 1999). Feelings of being alone and powerless are among the challenges that immigrants face once they arrive in their new homeland. Hispanic immigrants also tend to settle in poor, urban areas, creating economic stress that compounds feelings of isolation and helplessness.

The consequences of immigration extend beyond disadvantage and cultural incompatibilities. Although the immigrant experience begins as a cultural mismatch between the individual and the new host society, the effects of this mismatch reverberate at all levels of adolescents' and families' social environment. Adolescents often quickly adopt the values of the host culture, whereas parents continue to be faithful to the culture of their country of birth. These differences in acculturation create cultural incompatibilities that may bring about conflict between Hispanic immigrant parents and their adolescents. As a result, adolescents may overuse the company and counsel of their peers. Such overreliance on peers places adolescents at risk for drug abuse and other problem behaviors such as conduct difficulties, delinquency, and risky sexual involvement (Fulgini & Eccles, 1993; Perrino, Gonzalez-Soldevilla, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to discuss in detail the challenges that Hispanic immigrant families face, to review the potential long-term consequences (i.e., problems) of these challenges, and to outline a preventive intervention that we have designed to reduce the risk for these long-term problems. We then describe the theoretical background and methods of our preventive intervention.

The Hispanic Immigrant Experience

A sizeable percentage (50%) of today's immigrants in the United States are from Latin American countries (Lollock, 2001). Ways of life in these countries are very different from the United States. In most of these countries, the prevailing cultural orientation places the needs of the family over those of the individual, and respect and obedience are valued as critical aspects of parent-adolescent relationships (Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, & Szapocznik, 2002). Communities and extended families automatically provide social support to their members, and the entire community

monitors children's activities and school performance. Teachers and peers' parents are often neighbors who can be found at the local grocery store or post office.

These ways of life do not match those of American society. As a result of this cultural mismatch, along with language problems and other differences, Hispanic immigrants are often marginalized from mainstream social institutions. For example, immigrants often leave important sources of social support behind in their native countries and find that support is not automatically provided in the United States. Moreover, Hispanic immigrants may have trouble finding sources of support in the United States because of cultural and language barriers between themselves and their more acculturated neighbors. Even in Hispanic neighborhoods, Hispanics who have been in the United States for some time become accustomed to living without abundant, tightly knit support networks. In turn, unavailability of social support may prevent immigrant families from seeking help from others in times of need or crisis.

Lack of social support makes parenting a difficult task in Hispanic immigrant families. Without many friends, extended family members, or other sources of support, parents may respond to normative parent-adolescent disagreement by becoming less invested in their adolescents (Simons, Lorenz, Wu, & Conger, 1993). In turn, lack of positive parental involvement can lead to adolescent drug involvement and related problem behaviors (Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

Lack of awareness of American culture is also a problem for Hispanic immigrant parents. They often do not understand that, in the United States, parental failure to monitor and supervise adolescents is associated with drug abuse and other problem behaviors (cf. Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Mounts, 2001). Without well-informed family and friends in the United States to educate them about American values, Hispanic immigrant parents have no way of knowing that they should monitor and supervise their adolescents' activities and establish relationships with teachers. They may unwittingly contribute to the development of problems in their adolescents simply by not knowing what they need to do.

Additional risk factors are introduced into adolescents' social worlds by the tendency of Hispanic immigrant families to settle in poor, disadvantaged urban areas. Poverty, persistent disadvantage, and lack of opportunity are associated with negative outcomes for adolescents and their families (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Immigrant adolescents living in poor areas are often exposed to large amounts of peer and community drug abuse, crime, and violence (Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, & Serafini, 1996). These experiences may lead some adolescents to believe that these behaviors are

usual or normative. Such community contexts pose yet another risk for drug abuse and other problem behaviors.

*Differential Acculturation and
Its Effects on the Family System*

As noted earlier, children from immigrant families tend to master English and adopt American mannerisms and values long before their parents do (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). This phenomenon, known as differential acculturation, has the effect of bringing the cultural mismatch between American society and the culture of origin into the family system. Traditional parents expect their children to respect them and defer to parental authority, while rapidly acculturating adolescents desire independence, time alone with peers, and freedom to make their own choices (Santisteban et al., 2002). Within the parents' native country value system, adolescent attempts to gain autonomy and self-direction are viewed as deviant and disobedient, whereas within the adolescent's Americanized beliefs, parental demands for respect and deference are seen as unreasonable and overly controlling. The cultural mismatch is subsequently played out within the family boundaries, with cultural differences adding to typical parent-adolescent conflict (Felix-Ortiz, Fernandez, & Newcomb, 1998).

Differential acculturation represents another risk factor for drug abuse and other problem behaviors in Hispanic immigrant adolescents because it creates additional familial conflict and undermines bonding within the family (De la Rosa, Vega, & Radisch, 2000). Cultural conflicts within the family make it less likely that adolescents will seek advice or support from their parents. Instead, adolescents from such families are more apt to seek social support from their peers. Immigrant adolescents experiencing cultural conflicts with their parents may seek out antisocial, aggressive, or drug-using peers as a way of rebelling against the obedience and deference that is generally expected in traditional Hispanic families (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002).

The same cultural forces that drive immigrant adolescents away from their parents and toward overreliance on peers may also undercut parental authority and investment. In traditional Hispanic cultures, the family hierarchy is extremely important; parents hold positions of authority and wisdom, whereas children and adolescents are expected to be deferent, respectful, and obedient. Traditional Hispanic parents may not know how to interact with acculturated, independent adolescents. Often, they may attempt to restore the conventional Hispanic parent-child hierarchy, thereby provoking resistance from the adolescent. In turn, parents often interpret the adolescent's resis-

tance as deviant and make additional attempts to restore the traditional hierarchy. This sequence may be repeated a number of times with similar results. When parents realize that continued attempts to reach the adolescent in the only way they know how (i.e., trying to reassert parental authority) are only pushing the adolescent further away, they may become frustrated and ready to give up (Kurtines & Szapocznik, 1996). Through these sequences of mutually aversive interactions, differential acculturation and its effects may lead Hispanic immigrant parents to believe that any overture they make toward their adolescents will backfire. The resulting parental disengagement further increases risks for drug abuse and other problem behaviors (Pabon, 1998; Vakalahi, 2002).

Parental Influences on Adolescents' School and Peer Worlds

So how exactly do parents influence adolescent development, and how do the so-called side effects of immigration (e.g., differential acculturation) affect the functioning in the adolescent's outside worlds, namely peers and school? Furthermore, how do parental isolation and lack of familiarity with American culture place the adolescent at greater risk for drug abuse and other problem behaviors, and how can these risks be minimized? To address these important questions, we will examine the school and peer worlds in somewhat greater depth.

School. Schools are important socializing agents in the lives of children and adolescents, so much so that low academic achievement and lack of school bonding are predictive of adolescent substance use and other problem behaviors (Simons-Morton et al., 1999; Vazsonyi & Flannery, 1997). Hispanic adolescents are at an even greater risk for substance abuse, given the high dropout rates among this population (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Therefore, it is important to recognize school as a critical area of potential risk for Hispanic adolescents and to promote protective factors that may neutralize these risks. Fostering parental involvement in school and parental monitoring of adolescents' homework is likely to promote adolescent school bonding and academic achievement. Through its effects on adolescent school bonding and academic achievement, parental involvement in the school world may be protective against the development of adolescent drug abuse and related problem behaviors.

Immigrant parents, particularly those who are poor and uneducated, are often not well-equipped to work with the school system. Parents with little or no understanding of the American school system or knowledge of English

are unlikely to get involved in their children's school lives. They may not know that direct contact with the school is possible or appropriate. They may not understand the American grading system well enough to read their children's report cards (cf. Rodriguez-Brown & Meehan, 1998). Language problems keep these parents from checking homework because they cannot read either the teachers' assignments or their children's work. The result is parental isolation from the school system.

Peers. Peers are a primary acculturating agent for Hispanic immigrant adolescents. Acculturated peers offer immigrant adolescents a taste of American independence and self-direction. In turn, adolescents from immigrant families often adopt peer-sponsored values, beliefs, and behaviors. The values that these adolescents adopt tend to pull them away from traditional Hispanic cultural values such as respect and obedience (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000). As a result, bonds between immigrant adolescents and their parents may be weakened.

To limit the degree to which peer influences undermine the family, parents must not only supervise but also actively manage adolescents' peer relationships (Mounts, 2001). In the peer domain, parental management signifies knowing the adolescent's peers, participating in social planning, and working with peers' families to create a supervisory network. When parents work actively to do these things, the adolescent's affiliation with positive peers tends to be maximized, while exposure to negative and antisocial peers is limited (Fletcher, Darling, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1995).

Hispanic immigrant parents may not be well-prepared to oversee their adolescents' peer relationships, however. As stated earlier, these parents are unlikely to know that American culture, especially in urban areas, does not generally endorse community supervision of adolescents. They may not understand the importance of knowing the adolescent's peers and of supervising the adolescent's social activities. Immigrant parents also may not understand the risks for drug abuse and other problem behaviors that accompany unsupervised peer activities. Therefore, they may unintentionally place their adolescents at increased risk.

Parental isolation from the adolescent's peer and school worlds has the impact of strengthening the effects of risks in those worlds (cf. Coatsworth, Pantin, McBride, et al., 2002). Adolescents need parental guidance and involvement to successfully navigate the challenging teenage years. When parents do not know with whom their adolescents are spending their time, and when parents are unaware of how their adolescents are doing in school, the risk for drug abuse and other problem behaviors increases.

Ecodevelopmental Theory: Addressing the Challenge of Multiple Risks

In response to these diverse risk factors for drug abuse and other problem behaviors in Hispanic immigrant adolescents and their families, we have developed the Familias Unidas program. Familias Unidas is designed to protect against risk in three primary worlds of adolescence, namely family, peers, and school. The intervention works to neutralize the effects of differential acculturation and of parental frustration and abdication on adolescent development. Familias Unidas also establishes bonds between parents and the adolescent's peer network and between parents and the adolescent's school world.

Familias Unidas is grounded in ecodevelopmental theory (Szapocznik & Coatsworth, 1999), which explains how risk and protective factors in various areas of adolescents' social environments are interrelated. For example, parents whose adolescents are not emotionally close to them tend not to supervise the adolescent's peer-related activities and whereabouts as carefully as do parents who have strong mutual bonds with their adolescents (Ary et al., 1999). In this example, a risk factor within the family, parent-adolescent distance, cascades into risk in the peer world in the form of inadequate peer-activity management and supervision. These seemingly separate areas of the adolescent's life are in fact closely related.

Ecodevelopmental theory is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective, which proposes four levels of the social environment. Each level fits within the next, such that the model can be represented as a set of nested Russian dolls. The macrosystem refers to social and philosophical ideals that define a particular culture or society. For example, American culture places great emphasis on individualism, self-directedness, and independence. Immigrants coming from different cultural contexts are likely to have trouble adjusting to the American social environment and may become marginalized from it.

The exosystem refers to conditions and settings in the parents' life that do not directly contain their children but influence the children indirectly through their direct influence on parents, such as parents' workplace or parents' social support network. The effects of these exosystemic contexts may enhance or hinder the parents' ability to effectively communicate with, encourage, discipline, and manage their adolescent. Parents with access to sufficient resources are likely to interact positively with their children, whereas parents with few or no resources are likely to be impaired in their parenting skills. For example, parents who abuse drugs and alcohol, who experience too much work-related stress, or who feel isolated are prone to

using harsh and inconsistent family management techniques, which, in turn, are a significant risk factor for adolescent drug abuse and other problem behaviors (Dishion & Patterson, 1997).

Mesosystems refer to relationships between the adolescent's worlds, such as parental involvement in school activities and supervision of the adolescent's peers. "A main principle of mesosystemic functioning is that the stronger and more complementary the linkages between systems, the more positive the influence of mesosystems on a child's development" (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002, p. 115). Like parental social support, active parental involvement in adolescents' school and peer worlds protects adolescents against risks for drug abuse and other problem behaviors in those worlds. The stronger the connections between an adolescent's worlds, particularly between the family and other worlds, the lower will be that adolescent's risk for drug abuse and other problem behaviors.

Microsystems refer to the social contexts in which the adolescent participates directly, such as family, school, and peers. Within each world, the adolescent maintains relationships with a network of people (e.g., parents, friends, teachers). Through these sets of relationships, each microsystem shapes adolescent development toward either health or dysfunction. For example, within the school environment, classmates, teachers, and administrative personnel shape an adolescent's academic performance through encouragement, criticism, and other forms of feedback.

Although all the adolescent's microsystems are very important, the family has the greatest degree of influence over the adolescent. Factors such as family cohesion, conflict, and communication are some of the most powerful predictors of both positive and negative development in adolescence. A cohesive, harmonious, and well-communicating family is likely to produce high achieving and agreeable adolescents, whereas distant, conflicted, and poorly communicating families are likely to produce drug abusing and problem adolescents (cf. Clark, Neighbors, Lesnick, Lynch, & Donovan, 1998). Furthermore, the way an adolescent functions within the peer and school worlds is largely determined by the nature of her or his interactions within the family (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995).

Figure 1 illustrates how ecodevelopmental theory conceptualizes relationships among the four levels.

Ecodevelopmental Theory and the Familias Unidas Intervention

In Hispanic immigrant families, the primary macrosystemic risk factor is incompatibility between Hispanic and American cultures. For example, His-

processes (e.g., moving to a new country with an unfamiliar language and culture) can cascade into exosystemic problems (e.g., lack of social support for immigrant parents) and then into problems within the adolescent's worlds (e.g., involvement with antisocial peers). Therefore, any discussion of the causes of conflict and distance in Hispanic immigrant families must start with macrosystemic factors such as differences in cultural exposure and orientation. For this reason, in *Familias Unidas*, participants are selected based on macrosystemic risk factors (e.g., disadvantage and recent immigrant status) that, if not countered by protective mechanisms, can lead to problems at other levels.

Ecodevelopmental theory holds that parent resources protect immigrant parents from feeling overwhelmed and isolated in their new environment. Therefore, *Familias Unidas* uses a parent-group format to create supportive relationships among socially isolated immigrant parents. In turn, these parents should become better equipped to handle and manage their adolescents.

Because ecodevelopmental theory also focuses on mesosystemic functioning, *Familias Unidas* works to foster connections between parents and the adolescent's school and peer worlds. Parents are encouraged to become acquainted with the adolescent's peers and the peers' parents, so that they know where (and with whom) the adolescent spends her or his free time. Similarly, *Familias Unidas* helps parents to create connections with the school so that they can better supervise their adolescent's academic progress.

Finally, because ecodevelopmental theory considers the family to be the foundation of adolescent development, *Familias Unidas* works within the family world to reconnect adolescents with their parents. Parents are encouraged to listen to and to offer support for their adolescents, as well as to implement developmentally appropriate and consistent discipline. *Familias Unidas* helps to reinstate parents into positions of mastery and authority, albeit in ways that respect the acculturating adolescent's desire for autonomy. See Table 1 for a description of the implications of ecodevelopmental theory for the *Familias Unidas* intervention.

Intervention Format

Having explained the theoretical background of the *Familias Unidas* intervention, we will now describe the details of the program. *Familias Unidas* is intended to provide parents with skills for reinstating their authority, reaching out to their adolescents, and becoming positively involved in their adolescents' lives. Therefore, the program is delivered in a parent-centered format (i.e., working directly with parents).

Table 1. Implications of Ecodevelopmental Theory for the Familias Unidas Intervention

Contextual Level	Mechanisms of Influence	Primary Risk Factors	Intervention Activities	Clinical Findings
Macrosystem: Social-cultural context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specifies which beliefs and behaviors are socially endorsed and which are not • Establishes whether a culture is individualistic or collectivistic • Provides support to individuals endorsing majority values; often marginalizes individuals not endorsing these values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Rapid acculturation of children and adolescents • Lack of parental awareness of American culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating an appreciation of parents' and family's macrosystemic reality increases likelihood of engagement
Exosystem: Parent resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates or inhibits effective parenting through provision or absence of support and coping resources for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental isolation • Parental perceptions of prejudice or discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent support groups • Modeling and feedback in group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support from other parents (in the form of both information and empathy) afforded parents increased mastery • Increased parental feelings of mastery led to better family support, communication, and behavior management, and to more parental involvement in the adolescent's peer and school worlds

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Contextual Level	Mechanisms of Influence	Primary Risk Factors	Intervention Activities	Clinical Findings
Mesosystem: Connections between family and other worlds				
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of competence in the adolescent • Establishment of prosocial behavior and a future orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor grades • Disinterest in academics • Lack of parental knowledge of adolescent's school performance and interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent-school counselor meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased parental understanding of the school system facilitated higher levels of involvement in adolescents' school lives • In turn, higher levels of parental involvement led to enhanced academic performance and greater commitment to schoolwork among adolescents
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization toward prosocial or antisocial activities • Pressure to engage in specific behaviors • Modeling of appearance and conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association with deviant friends • Unsupervised activities with peers • Parental unfamiliarity with adolescent's peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of parental monitoring and peer management • Parentally supervised activity with adolescents, peers, and peers' parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents joined with peers' parents to create a supervisory network • In turn, adolescent's peer activities were monitored and managed, and parents were aware of their adolescent's social involvements • Adolescent's involvement with antisocial peers decreased

Microsystem: Individual worlds

Family

- Family system creates or prevents adolescent problems
 - Communication and support between parents and adolescents promotes closeness and inhibits problem behaviors
 - Adequacy of behavior management and discipline promotes or extinguishes conduct problems
 - Family hostility
 - Poor communication
 - Disengagement
 - Perceived antagonism among family members
 - Communication-practice exercises
 - Support-building activities
 - Supervised leisure-time activities
 - Adolescents and parents reported feeling closer to one another
 - Family members reported having positive experiences together for the first time in many years
 - Adolescents became more cooperative, and parents became more understanding and tolerant
-

Familias Unidas is divided into three parts, namely engagement, skill development, and skill application. Within each phase, change in processes of interest (e.g., parent-peer connections) is brought about through the use of specific techniques. Engagement is achieved by providing social support and validation for the family, including acknowledging the reality in which it exists. Parent skill development occurs by way of group participatory exercises in which trained facilitators introduce family, school, and peer-management techniques and encourage parents to practice those skills with other parents in the group. Skill application occurs by way of planned conversations in which parents teach (i.e., transfer) the skills and information acquired in group to their adolescents.

Description of the Familias Unidas Intervention

The Familias Unidas intervention is currently in its second implementation trial (Pantin, Schwartz, Sullivan, & Szapocznik, in press). The current form of the intervention was modified based on findings of outcome analyses and qualitative evaluations of the first trial. As it was originally implemented, the Familias Unidas intervention was essentially participatory and non-directive (see Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002). One of the advantages of the participatory approach was that it was very successful in increasing parental investment. Disadvantages of the participatory approach include that the intervention lasted for 9 months and that some parents did not complete the intervention. We recognize that the length of the prior intervention reduces its transportability and may have discouraged ongoing parent participation. For this reason, we have built on the statistical and qualitative feedback we received about the intervention to improve it by preserving the essential elements of a participatory approach but also by creating greater structure, incorporating some directive exercises, and reducing the length of the intervention to approximately nine sessions. We believe that these changes will increase the intervention's transportability as well as increase parent participation.

Intervention Characteristics

Participatory learning. The Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire (1970/1983) found that expert-lecture techniques were ineffective in fostering skills in poor and marginalized individuals. Hispanic immigrant parents, in particular, tend to be submissive to the knowledge of experts to the extent that they will often passively listen to the expert without offering much

of their own input. Such passivity works against the establishment of group process and cohesion. In turn, it may inhibit engagement and retention of families into the intervention.

Freire found that a participatory format, in which participants are encouraged to come up with their own ideas and answers, was far more effective with disadvantaged and isolated people than was a didactic-lecture approach. Moreover, clinical sources suggest that the group participatory learning approach is an effective way to work with Hispanic immigrant parents (Breton, 1999; Leon & Dziegielewski, 2000). Therefore, Familias Unidas utilizes a parent-centered, group participatory learning format for the majority of intervention activities. Use of a participatory learning and collaborative format helps to avoid passivity and to establish the participants themselves as the source of the answers they need.

Aside from fostering more efficient acquisition of parenting skills, the participatory learning format promotes group cohesion. Group cohesion is critical to the success of Familias Unidas because the parents themselves provide the majority of feedback to and support for other parents in the group. In a sense, then, through establishing a cohesive group and providing social support for one another, the parents themselves play a significant role in engaging and retaining other parents in the intervention. The group process therefore helps to neutralize risk simply by keeping parents engaged in the project.

Because of its emphasis on empowerment, the participatory learning format places a significant amount of responsibility on the parent participants to contribute to the intervention. For example, although one parent is role-playing a specific skill, other parents are expected to offer constructive feedback and suggestions regarding the content or process of the skill implementation. Parents are also encouraged to provide examples and wisdom from their own parenting and life experiences. The facilitator's role is to introduce the skills and keep the discussion flowing, whereas participants provide most of the feedback and examples.

Engagement. The Familias Unidas intervention is designed to foster protective mechanisms in a stepwise fashion. In sequence, these steps parallel the process by which macrosystem risk cascades to the exosystem and then to the mesosystem and microsystem. As a result, protective processes are introduced so that they will flow from one ecodevelopmental level to the next, neutralizing risk as they proceed. Creating these protective factors begins with the first contact with the family, when the facilitator attempts to convince the family to participate in the intervention. The process of securing the family's participation is known as engagement.

Clinical research has shown that successful engagement is necessary before individuals will play an active role in the program (Liddle, 1995; Szapocznik et al., 1989). The first step in the Familias Unidas intervention was therefore to engage families in the project. In engaging families, facilitators work to establish trust with parents, adolescents, and other family members by ensuring consistent availability, commitment, and support.

Furthermore, engaging disadvantaged and/or socially isolated families often involves visiting the family's home and reaching out to the family on its own terms and within its own environment. A significant part of working within the family's world is conducting sessions in the family's natural environment, such as home, school, and other settings in which family members feel comfortable. Engaging hard-to-reach families, such as the poor, urban immigrant families in our intervention, is most effective when family members believe that the facilitator accepts and understands them within their own worlds. Therefore, facilitators specifically sought to demonstrate empathy and concern for issues that were important to family members and to approach their contacts with the family in terms of those issues. Entering the family's world in this way is known as joining.

When working with Hispanic immigrant families, joining is also a social-cultural and resource-building process. Appreciating the cultural circumstances surrounding each family member's beliefs and actions is a critical aspect of the joining process. At the social-cultural level, entering the family's world requires recognizing the acculturative stress facing both parents and adolescents, as well as understanding differences in parents' and adolescents' behavior in terms of cultural incompatibilities. When family members believe that they will receive help in the form and degree they desire, they are more likely to take part in the intervention.

At the parent-resources level, joining helps the facilitator to become a source of social support for parents. Facilitators communicate support through compassion, empathy, and availability. Through the joining process, the facilitator reassures parents that they no longer have to handle their stressors alone and that a community of support will be created during the course of the Familias Unidas intervention. Facilitators emphasize that the supportive community formed will involve not only the facilitator but also other Hispanic immigrant parents facing similar situations.

In Familias Unidas, engagement refers not only to the first few sessions but to the entire length of participation (cf. Liddle, 1995; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1989). Dropout rates tend to be unusually high in interventions with high-risk individuals and families (Henggeler et al., 1986). Therefore, facilitators must continually monitor each family's attendance, participation, and motivation. Joining techniques must be used repeatedly and at various

points during the intervention to ensure that family members remain actively involved. Repeated offers of support and acknowledgements of the family's cultural and economic realities may be necessary during the entire length of the project.

Parent support groups and skill development. In Familias Unidas, engaging and retaining parent participants is accomplished not only through joining but also through building parent support networks. Parent support networks are groups of parents who meet weekly to discuss and practice parenting skills and ways to become involved in adolescents' lives. In building parent support networks, facilitators encourage each parent to explore commonalities with other parents in the group. Parents not only practice the skills and techniques in group, but they also help one another to master the concepts taught in the intervention. In this way, Familias Unidas provides parents with social support and counsel from other parents. For example, two parents might role-play an interaction in which one parent assumes the role of an adolescent. The role-playing parent provides feedback as to which types of statements are likely to be effective and how best to meet the typical needs of an adolescent. Such activities both relieve parents' feelings of isolation and make it more likely that parents will use the Familias Unidas skills and techniques with their own adolescents.

Home visits. Familias Unidas extends beyond skill development in group sessions. Once each skill has been introduced in the group format, facilitators conduct home visits to help family members to implement the skills in the service of strengthening existing relationships. Like the group sessions, home visits center on the following three target relationship areas: parent-adolescent, parent-school, and parent-peer. Parent-adolescent relationship interventions target the family world, whereas parent-school and parent-peer interventions facilitate connections between the family and the adolescent's outside worlds.

Aside from the initial home visit, which focuses on engagement, each home visit follows a standard format. The facilitator asks the parent to initiate a conversation with the adolescent about the topic or skill addressed in the previous group session. For example, in the communication home visit, the facilitator may ask the parent to bring up a sensitive topic that may have led to conflict and turbulence within the family in the past (e.g., disrespect), but to address it from an understanding and empathetic point of view (e.g., "I understand that, for you, this behavior might be normal because some of your friends do this"). The facilitator validates effective use of the intervention skills, using statements such as, "I think you said that in a way he can relate to

it—is that right, Juan?” By modeling the intervention skills during these conversations, parents transfer (i.e., teach) these skills to the adolescent. Calling on parents to transfer skills to their adolescents has the effect of returning the parent to the role of authority figure and knowledgeable expert and restoring some of the family hierarchy lost through acculturation.

During each home-visit conversation, the facilitator praises effective use of the target skills and intervenes to rephrase negative or undermining statements. When the conversation has been completed, the facilitator asks parents and adolescents to express their feelings about the exchange and to enumerate perceived barriers to implementing the target skill outside of the *Familias Unidas* context. As each barrier is listed, the facilitator helps the family devise a way to circumvent it. In this way, home visits provide family members with an opportunity to practice and solidify the intervention skills.

Parent-adolescent discussion circles. At some points during the intervention, parents are asked to carry out focused skill-implementation conversations with their adolescents during group sessions. These sessions are called parent-adolescent discussion circles. During each parent-adolescent conversation, other parents and adolescents, along with the facilitator, (a) identify and rephrase negative statements and (b) provide feedback as to the effectiveness and tone of the conversation. In this manner, the group process is brought to bear on the family world. Feedback from other Hispanic immigrant families, along with other families' modeling of positive dialogue, may help each parent-adolescent dyad acknowledge and correct the problems in their relationship.

Specific interventions into the school and peer worlds. In the area of parent-school connections, facilitators arrange meetings between parents and their adolescents' school counselor. In these meetings, parents have the opportunity to practice monitoring adolescents' scholastic progress and establishing working relationships with school officials. Facilitators also conduct home visits to ensure that parents are monitoring their adolescents' homework and to offer social support. The combination of support for parents and increased parental involvement in adolescents' school lives is likely to promote improved academic performance (Juang & Silbereisen, 2002).

In the parent-peer domain, facilitators encourage parents to plan supervised activities with their adolescents' peers (and the peers' parents). These activities can include picnics, field trips, attending sporting events, or other related activities. During these excursions, parents become acquainted with their adolescents' friends and with the friends' families. Establishing linkages between participating parents and peers' parents creates natural parent

support networks that can continue beyond the intervention. The connections established with friends' parents to monitor adolescent activities might develop into support sources for the parents themselves. In addition, sharing leisure activities together provides Hispanic immigrant parents and adolescents with a chance to enjoy time together without the pressures of monitoring homework, assigning chores, and implementing discipline. The adolescents who participated in the Familias Unidas intervention often reported that they had never enjoyed their parents' company as much as they did during these supervised leisure activities.

Specific Session Content

The Familias Unidas intervention consists of group sessions, parent-adolescent discussion circles, and home visits. The first home visit occurs prior to group work and is focused on joining and engagement. The remaining home visits are interspersed between group sessions to help parents apply the skills they have acquired in group. The current version of the intervention consists of 13.5 hours of group work (nine 90-minute sessions), four parent-adolescent discussion circles, and four 1-hour home visits.

Engagement home visit. Participation in Familias Unidas begins with an engagement-focused home visit. This visit involves four tasks on the part of the facilitator. These tasks all involve joining the family and recognizing its relational and environmental realities. As we have mentioned, securing a family's participation requires that the facilitator enter the family's world and convince family members that they have something to gain from participating in the intervention.

First, this first home visit involves explaining the format and goals of the intervention so that family members understand what they are being asked to do. Facilitators highlight the risks that accompany adolescence in American society and delineate the ways in which Familias Unidas addresses these risks (i.e., by connecting Hispanic immigrant parents to their adolescents and to the adolescents' peers, peers' parents, and school world). Facilitators outline the specifics of Familias Unidas, namely the group participatory-learning format, parent-adolescent discussion circles, home visits, supervised peer activities, and parent-school meetings, and they assure the family that the facilitator will be available to provide support when necessary. The family is likely to be encouraged by the intervention description and offers of support, given that the parents whose adolescents have been selected for participation tend to be in search of help with managing their adolescents.

Second, the facilitator attempts to build on the family's initial encouragement by illustrating the benefits available through participation. These benefits are framed in terms of the particular risks and stressors facing a given family. For instance, in engaging a family in which the adolescent spends significant amounts of time with peers whom the parent does not know, the facilitator might explain to the parent that participation in Familias Unidas can help him or her to better manage the adolescent's peer relationships. Similarly, in working with a family whose adolescent is failing in school, a facilitator would likely emphasize that the parent could learn to collaborate with teachers and school counselors to monitor and improve the adolescent's academic performance. In combination with explaining the Familias Unidas program and its objectives, highlighting potential benefits should provide hope that the intervention can help the parent to connect with the adolescent and with the important areas of her or his life.

Third, the facilitator identifies the family's perceived barriers to involvement in the intervention. Describing the intervention and its possible benefits may increase the family members' motivation to participate, but if the family is plagued by hopelessness and parental abdication, these obstacles may still prevent the family from being successfully engaged. Perceived barriers to participation are often expressed as negative or despondent statements such as "He's a lost cause" or "What good would it do anyway?" The facilitator must identify these barriers and tailor the potential benefits of participation to the specific barrier statements made by family members (cf. Liddle, 1995). For instance, in response to a parental statement such as "I don't think I could ever reach Carlos again; he's all wrapped up with his friends," a facilitator might return to the peer-management skills that Familias Unidas fosters in parents, and to the potential for those skills to restore the importance of family in the adolescent's life.

Fourth, the facilitator attempts to secure the family's commitment to participate in the intervention. Provided that the first three tasks have been completed successfully, obtaining the family's formal agreement to take part should be fairly straightforward. If necessary, the facilitator can restate the objectives or potential advantages of participation and reassure the family that he or she will be available to provide support and guidance whenever it is required.

Parental investment group session. The first group session is devoted to introducing the participatory learning format, building group cohesion, and presenting the array of problems that Familias Unidas is designed to prevent. The facilitator encourages parents to describe the problems that they wish to address and the goals that they would like to achieve through the intervention.

As parents enumerate their problems and objectives, the facilitator helps to identify commonalities among parents. For example, two parents struggling with seemingly unmanageable adolescent peer networks may be encouraged to collaborate in finding a way to manage their adolescents' social relationships. The parents' common issue is used to form an alliance between them and to establish each parent as a support resource for the other.

Focusing on the long-term consequences of parental helplessness and abdication during the first session provides parents with urgency and motivation to become reinvested in their adolescents. Combined with restatements of the intervention objectives, highlighting long-term risks and the intervention's ability to reduce those risks are likely to keep parents engaged.

"Adolescent worlds" group session. Once parents are aware of why their participation in Familias Unidas is important, they are ready to focus on the worlds in which adolescents are embedded, on the risks posed by each world, and on the role of parental protective mechanisms in each world. The facilitator presents oral and visual information (e.g., descriptions, statistics, graphical summaries) about risk and protective factors in the family, peer, and school worlds. He or she stresses the fact that many protective factors in all three worlds are directly related to parental involvement. The primary reason for presenting this information is to empower parents and to remind them of the major role that they can play in shielding their adolescents from drug abuse and other problem behaviors. As a result, parents' feelings of hopelessness may be replaced by a commitment to reinvest themselves in their adolescents' lives. Such rededication sets the stage for the introduction of specific skills through which protective mechanisms can be invoked.

In the spirit of parental rededication and empowerment, the facilitator asks parents what specific roles parents can play in protecting their adolescents from risks in the family, peer, and school worlds. Parents often mention techniques such as communicating with and offering support to their adolescents, managing behavior problems, direct involvement with the adolescent's school, and supervision of adolescents' peer relationships. The facilitator validates each parental suggestion and, once key processes in the adolescent's family, peer, and school contexts have been enumerated, he or she informs parents that the remainder of the intervention will focus on fostering and enhancing the skills and processes that the parents have listed.

Family communication group session. The first parenting skills fostered in Familias Unidas center on parent-adolescent communication. The facilitator encourages parents to enumerate reasons why communication is important between parents and adolescents, as well as to list key aspects of effective

communication (e.g., openness, honesty, and listening skills). Parents watch a video of a successful parent-adolescent dialogue and are instructed to role-play a conversation as though they were speaking with their own adolescents. As one parent is role-playing the conversation, another parent assumes the role of the adolescent. The parent playing the role of adolescent takes on as many of the adolescent's characteristics as possible, to maximize the realism of the role-play.

Involvement of other parents in the role-plays serves three important functions. First, parents are provided with opportunities to practice communication skills as they would use them with their adolescents. Second, the parent playing the role of adolescent comes to more closely understand the mind-set of an adolescent (and therefore to better appreciate the issues in her/his own family). Third, the collaborative nature of the role-plays fosters group cohesion and creates an atmosphere of mutual helpfulness. Through all three of these functions, the role-plays decrease parents' frustration and instill hope for positive change.

Parent-adolescent discussion circle: Communication. Following the group session focusing on communication skills, facilitators offer parents an opportunity to implement the new techniques in dialogue with their adolescents. As part of the discussion circle, adolescents are asked to tell their parents about their experiences and the risks they perceive in their own lives. Parents are encouraged to elicit this information from their adolescents in a nurturing and supportive manner and to respond with empathy and interest. Similarly, adolescents are encouraged to be open and candid with their parents. Toward the end of the session, adolescents are excused from the group, and the facilitator, along with other parents in the group, provides guidance and feedback regarding the direction, openness, and effectiveness of each conversation.

The benefits of this discussion circle exercise are threefold. First, in many Hispanic immigrant families, acculturated adolescents and traditional parents clash over a wide variety of issues, rendering effective discussion difficult. The parent-adolescent discussion circle encourages a form of open and sincere dialogue not normally possible in contexts of differential acculturation. By implementing their newly acquired communication skills, parents are able to reach out to their adolescents in an accepting, nonaccusatory way. In turn, the adolescents are more likely to be receptive to parental overtures and to be willing to express themselves openly. Thus, this exercise promotes parent-adolescent communication and bonding.

Second, by observing a given parent-adolescent dyad and constructively commenting on their interactions, other parents and adolescents in the group

can vicariously practice the communication skills acquired in group. That is, offering guidance and feedback helps to strengthen each family's own mastery of the skills. Moreover, each dyad's interactions serve as a model for the other families in the group, such that observing other parents implementing the skills provides each parent with examples of how to communicate with her or his adolescent.

Third, the parent-adolescent communication exercise helps Hispanic immigrant parents understand the acculturation process and its effects on adolescents. By listening openly and nonjudgmentally to their adolescents' experiences of acculturation and the risks that accompany it, parents can transform themselves from angry or hopeless opponents to caring and invested allies. By understanding the adolescent's experiences and needs, parents can come to appreciate what they need to do to provide the support and guidance that their adolescent requires.

Family communication home visit. Once parents and adolescents have practiced their communication skills in group, facilitators conduct home visits to initiate individualized conversation exercises and provide feedback. The facilitator asks parents and adolescents about their experiences and feelings about the discussion circle exercise and offers validation and support for family members' viewpoints. After the family has expressed its responses to the discussion circle, the facilitator asks the parent who participated in the group session to explain to the adolescent the elements of effective communication. As stated earlier, placing the parent in the role of teacher and expert has the effect of restoring some of the parental authority lost through the acculturation process.

Once the parent has explained the concept of effective communication to the adolescent, the facilitator asks the dyad to demonstrate their communication skills by starting a conversation about a topic of importance to the parent and adolescent (e.g., school grades, peers, and family rules). The primary objective of this home visit is to assess the family's ability and willingness to utilize the communication techniques fostered in group during everyday discussions and in addressing parent-adolescent issues and disagreements. Reactions to the discussion circle offer the family an opportunity to vocalize perceived barriers to effective communication, whereas the conversation offers a behavioral measure of communication barriers. In combination, the family's reactions and the results of the conversation help the facilitator to guide the family in addressing the obstacles in implementing effective communication skills outside the Familias Unidas context.

Family support and behavior management group session. Work within the family world continues with a group session centering on parental support and its protective value. In keeping with the participatory learning format of the intervention, the facilitator asks parents to offer reasons why family support is important for adolescents, to list aspects or components of a supportive relationship, and to enumerate ways in which parents can offer support to adolescents. Using the material provided by parents, the group is encouraged to devise enjoyable and collaborative homework assignments that will demonstrate and enhance each parent's support for her or his adolescent. Parents are encouraged to choose activities that the adolescent values and enjoys. Examples of homework assignments might include completing a puzzle together, planting a garden, or attending a baseball game. Regardless of their content, the homework assignments are designed to show adolescents that their parents value and support them.

After parents have mastered crucial aspects of building relationships with their adolescents (i.e., communication and support), the focus of group work shifts to using these skills to manage and prevent behavior problems. Parents are encouraged to provide examples of important behavior management techniques (e.g., supervision and firm, consistent discipline), and the facilitator illustrates how these techniques can be used to address adolescent problems. Each parent is encouraged to role-play these skills in group, with another parent adopting the role of adolescent and assuming specific behavioral difficulties that the target parent's adolescent is displaying. These role-plays provide parents with an opportunity to practice instrumental behavior management techniques while continuing to communicate effectively and to offer guidance and support.

Family support and behavior management home visit. Following the behavior management role-plays in group, facilitators conduct home visits so that parents can utilize these management techniques with the adolescents themselves. The goal of this home visit is to increase the likelihood that parents will utilize constructive behavior management skills in the future. The facilitator asks the parent to initiate a conversation with the adolescent about a specific behavior problem. During this conversation, the facilitator reinforces successful use of behavioral control skills. When parents and adolescents exhibit high levels of negativity and blaming, the facilitator may restate the importance of communication and support in behavior management and other disciplinary issues. In addition to offering feedback on the conversation, the facilitator asks parents how they would handle specific adolescent conduct problems that may arise in the future. The facilitator then can reinforce aspects of the parent's proposal that are likely to be effective and offer constructive feedback regarding aspects of the plan that may not work.

School bonding group session. Following the behavior-management home visit, the intervention focus turns to the school world. As a first step in educating parents about the importance of school in adolescents' lives, facilitators offer examples of how scholastic achievement and interest in academics have the potential to protect adolescents from drug abuse and other problem behaviors. After discussing the protective role of school, the facilitator poses the question of how parents can promote academic bonding and success. The facilitator then asks parents what they are currently doing to implement the suggestions they have enumerated. For example, if one or more parents indicate that promoting school involvement should take the form of helping with homework and scheduling regular meetings with guidance counselors, the facilitator will ask group members if they are currently taking these steps with their own adolescents. The suggestions offered by parents may motivate parents to participate proactively in their adolescents' school lives. In turn, this motivation sets the stage for acquiring specific school involvement skills.

School counselor meeting session. Role-playing of parent-school involvement is facilitated through a group meeting with a guidance counselor from the adolescents' school. The meeting begins with a presentation by the counselor, informing parents of adolescents' academic needs, services available through the school to help address those needs (e.g., counseling, remedial education), and the various avenues through which parents can be involved in and monitor their adolescent's school performance and interest. The counselor then engages in role-plays with groups of parents, with non-participating parents providing feedback and suggestions regarding the parent-counselor discussions. Through these role-plays, parents adapt their communication skills for use with school personnel, and they learn what questions they need to ask (e.g., inquiring about their adolescent's academic progress and classroom conduct) to obtain information about the adolescent's school world. During this meeting, parents also have the opportunity to request individual conferences with their adolescent's teachers from the school counselor.

The general purpose of the school counselor meeting is to provide parents with skills for participating in their adolescent's school world and establishing collaborative relationships with school personnel. Meeting and role-playing with the school counselor helps to relieve parental frustration associated with wanting to facilitate improved adolescent school performance yet not knowing how to accomplish that.

Parent-adolescent discussion circle: School bonding. Following the meeting with the school counselor, the facilitator asks the parents and adoles-

cents to reflect on the knowledge gained from the school-oriented sessions and to identify perceived barriers to proactive parental involvement in the adolescent's academic life. As each barrier is enumerated, the facilitator works with the group to formulate a strategy for circumventing it. For instance, if a parent is hesitant to visit the adolescent's school because of language difficulties, the facilitator might offer to accompany the parent and serve as a translator. The discussion circle is therefore designed to increase parents' ability, willingness, and confidence to interact directly and constructively with school personnel. When parents become more positively involved in the adolescent's scholastic world, school-based protective factors (e.g., bonding to school) are promoted, and risks associated with school failure and disinterest are reduced.

Parental monitoring group session. Following the school-focused home visit, the intervention focus shifts to the peer world. Facilitators help parents to understand the critical role of peers in the development of prosocial and antisocial behavior. Parents are also encouraged to discuss the important functions that parental monitoring and management play in adolescents' peer selection and affiliation. Through these focused group discussions, parents come to appreciate that becoming acquainted with their adolescent's peers, and with the peers' parents, fosters the development of a supervisory and management network. They also become aware that establishing such a network discourages adolescents from associating with antisocial peers.

Peer supervised activity. Once parents have understood that they should supervise and direct their adolescents' peer networks and are motivated to do so, they are provided with an opportunity to practice peer monitoring and management skills. The peer supervised activity is a planned outing in which parents join their adolescent, one of the adolescent's peers, and the peer's mother or father in a leisure activity (e.g., picnic, bowling trip, or a day at the beach). This activity has three principal objectives. First, parents are given a chance to meet and connect with their adolescents' peers and the peers' parents, thereby establishing a preliminary link with the adolescent's peer world. Second, parents are encouraged to collaborate with peers' parents in building a supervisory network so that both sets of parents (i.e., the adolescent's and the peer's) can work together in managing the peer relationship. Third, the leisure activity affords adolescents and their parents an opportunity to share enjoyable and age-appropriate activities. For example, a bowling trip provides adolescents and parents with a chance to bond, and sharing such activities together can help to close the relational gap created by differential acculturation.

When these three objectives are met, the peer supervised activity has the effect of providing Hispanic immigrant parents with a sense of mastery. By establishing supervisory and management networks with peers' parents, parents regain influence over the adolescent's peer relationships. In combination with parent-adolescent bonding through leisure activities, this newfound influence over the adolescent's peer world serves to reinstate parents as important, knowledgeable, and influential authority figures and support sources within the family. For this reason, the peer supervised activity is a major turning point in the intervention.

Parent-adolescent discussion circle: Peer management and monitoring. Because the peer supervised activity represents a major landmark in the change process facilitated by the Familias Unidas program, a subsequent discussion session is allocated to monitor the family's progress and to address any issues or barriers encountered during the peer supervised activity (or in the peer world generally). The facilitator helps the group to devise plans to handle each obstacle or issue raised in the peer world. For example, if an adolescent is associating with a friend whose parents are either inaccessible or unwilling to collaborate in building a management network, the facilitator may suggest involving the parents of another friend in supervising that relationship. As the barriers to monitoring and management are addressed, parents are increasingly empowered in becoming connected to the adolescent's peer world.

At the end of the peer management and monitoring discussion circle, the facilitator helps the families in the group to plan and carry out a supervised peer activity on their own. During this homework activity, parents have the opportunity to further solidify their peer monitoring skills and to create and reinforce parental supervisory networks. This activity also provides parents and adolescents with additional opportunities to bond with one another.

Parental investment and involvement home visit. After the supplementary peer supervised activity has been carried out, facilitators conduct another home visit to review, practice, and troubleshoot the parents' newfound connections with their adolescent's family, school, and peer worlds. As with the previous home visits, perceived barriers to involvement are enumerated and addressed. The facilitator emphasizes the importance of maintaining connections with the adolescent's worlds and secures the family's commitment to do so. Therefore, this home visit is somewhat of a checkup.

Youth drug use (attitudes, beliefs, intentions) and peer pressure group session. Having addressed substantive issues in each of the adolescent's worlds

(i.e., family, peers, and school), the intervention focus returns to some of the key long-term outcomes that Familias Unidas is designed to prevent—alcohol and drug misuse. Parents are encouraged to discuss their own views and attitudes toward substance use and abuse and to identify what they are currently doing to instill antidrug and antialcohol beliefs and intentions in their adolescents. Traditional Hispanic parents may not understand how to communicate with their acculturated adolescents about drugs and alcohol (or even that they need to); therefore, role-plays are utilized, with other parents assuming the role of adolescent, to provide each parent with opportunities to practice discussing substance use with his or her adolescent. The facilitator, along with group parents observing the role-play, guides each parent to utilize previously acquired communication, support, and behavior-management skills to effectively address the sensitive topic of drug and alcohol involvement. In each role-play, the facilitator and nonparticipating parents intervene to rephrase negative statements.

The group also evaluates the effectiveness of each parent's discussion. The parent role-playing the adolescent, for example, might comment on how persuasive, convincing, and supportive the discussion was, along with offering constructive suggestions. Specific aspects that the group evaluates from each role-play include emphasis on the dangers and risks inherent in drug and alcohol involvement, communication of parental values concerning substance use, and instruction about refusal skills.

Parent-adolescent discussion circle: Youth substance use. Following the drug-use group session, facilitators conduct a parent-adolescent discussion circle to offer parents a chance to talk to their adolescents about drug and alcohol use. The facilitator instructs parents to initiate the conversation and intervenes to rephrase negative statements. As in the group session, parents are encouraged to utilize skills acquired earlier in the intervention (e.g., communication, support, behavior management). As part of the conversation, parents address the three topics covered during the group session (i.e., dangers, parental attitudes, and refusal skills). This conversation has the effect of transferring parental knowledge and attitudes to the adolescent, thereby further portraying the parent as a well-informed expert. At the end of the conversation, the facilitator instructs the parent and adolescent to devise a plan for continuing to discuss substance use and to practice refusal skills.

Summary group session. The Familias Unidas intervention concludes with a group session dedicated to solidifying parents' commitment to continue utilizing the skills acquired in the intervention. Parents discuss which techniques seem to be effective and which do not. In group, facilitators and

other parents offer suggestions for improving the usefulness of skills with which parents feel they have been unsuccessful. The facilitator helps each family to devise ways to utilize these suggestions and to solve problems that have arisen during the course of the intervention. At the end of the session, parents are encouraged to reaffirm their pledge to continue utilizing the intervention skills and to serve as a resource for each other.

Conclusion

This article outlined the Familias Unidas intervention, which is designed to target cultural and ecodevelopmental risk factors that predispose Hispanic adolescents to problem behavior and substance abuse. We outlined how ecodevelopmental theory is used as a foundation for the design and implementation of the intervention. Based on ecodevelopmental theory, the intervention is designed to foster communication and cohesiveness within the family, to facilitate parental connections to the school system, and to create supervisory networks with peers' parents. In turn, these strategies may have the potential to offset substance-abuse risks associated with disadvantage, parental isolation, and differential acculturation. By way of the participatory learning format, parents can be helped to acquire the skills for communicating with and supporting their adolescents, managing adolescent behavior problems, and becoming actively involved in their adolescents' social and academic lives. Furthermore, simultaneous intervention into multiple levels of context (i.e., exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem) helps prevent macrosystemic and cultural risk processes from trickling down into the other levels of context. The combination of a multidimensional focus, parent empowerment, and culturally appropriate intervention activities may help to offset the risks associated with immigration, financial difficulties, and differential acculturation vis-à-vis Hispanic immigrant adolescents. As a result, the intervention may help to reduce the likelihood of substance abuse in this population.

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