

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT



Cultural Wounds, Cultural Strengths – Traumas, Healing & Latina/o/x Intergenerational Wisdom

“We do not have an unhealthy culture. The unwellness in our community comes from colonization, marginalization, trauma, and oppression. Our culture is ancient and powerful. We can live Brown and live well.”

Although Latina/o/x communities have diverse histories and backgrounds, there are some aspects that represent common cultural experiences that in general facilitate a sense of wellness and healing. The strengths of a strong cultural identity, of healthy interdependence and familismo, and an enduring connection to spirituality are Latina/o/x cultural characteristics for both individual and communal healing.

When looking at our trauma, grief and healing, we must always first acknowledge the violent European (i.e., Spanish and Portuguese) invasion and colonization of the region of the world now referred to as Latin America. This region's original inhabitants were the Indigenous peoples. In addition, European colonizers forcibly brought Africans as slaves to certain areas of Latin America. These historical traumas continue to shape our identity. Although we often use Latina/o/x to refer to ourselves (including in this document), we can identify the legacy of European origins and languages in this term that ignores any and all Indigenous roots and ancestry.

The Traumas that Impact Us

Latina/o/x communities in this country are often faced with racist attitudes, discriminatory practices, violence, xenophobia and exclusion in many levels of society. This has always been the case for Latina/o/x populations in the U.S. The Trump-era policy of family separations for those crossing the U.S.-Mexican border, including children held in detention centers, along with the history of ICE raids sometimes resulting in parents being deported, separating them from their minor-aged children are but a couple of examples. Long-standing incidences of police and law enforcement violence and killing are part of our long history of racial trauma, discrimination, and prejudice. These are the cultural wounds we carry. These collective traumas (see [here](#) for more information) can impact the mental health and wellbeing of Latina/o/x to different degrees for different individuals, and they can increase experiences of grief, depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms.

Cultural Strengths that Promote Healing

Latina/o/x people carry intergenerational wisdoms regarding wellness and healing that are part of our cultural strengths. One is a positive and strong sense of cultural identity. Research shows that positive cultural identity can protect against experiences of discrimination. Having a positive identity helps us to connect to others in our community. This communal experience can be an important source of support in healing from trauma. Thus,

maintaining or reconnecting to a sense of cultural identity and rootedness can be important to the healing process. Second is our sense of collectivism, such as familismo. This may also include valuing community wellbeing. Part of our intergenerational wisdom is the passed down practices of relying on a trusted group or family. This group-centeredness is also a connection to Indigenous heritage and wisdoms. Engaging in family and/or community activities, especially those that focus on the betterment of the group or community, may be particularly healing. A third cultural strength is our spirituality, which has continued to be an important part of our identity. Although there are differences in religious and spiritual beliefs in our community, the belief and importance of god or creator is present in the majority of our communities. Finally, prayer, meditation or engaging in other spiritual practices individually or in community can promote us to truly live well. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, see [here](#). To learn about collective trauma, see [this](#). To learn more about how to heal and thrive, go to [here](#).