

The Decision Tree

Child Indicator Seeds for Success



Why Culture Matters: The Influence Migration & Acculturation on Arab-American Families

Recently there has been much media attention focused on the migration of Syrian refugees to the United States. For the 2016 fiscal year, it is expected that the United States will be increasing the number of Syrian refugees. In addition, the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia has seen an increase in the numbers of children served from Middle Eastern Countries over the last few years.

Currently there are approximately 3.5 million Arab-Americans residing in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau considers anyone who reported being Algerian, Bahraini, Egyptian, Emirati, Iraqi, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Libyan, Moroccan, Omani, Palestinian, Qatari, Saudi Arabian, Syrian, Tunisian, and Yemeni to be of Arab ancestry. Arab Americans are found in every state, but more than two thirds live in just ten states, one of which is Virginia. The five top “Arabic” languages are Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Berber, and Kurdish. While many native Arab-Americans are well integrated into American society, many newcomers are just beginning to adapt to American life.

Moving to another country and raising children in a new culture, such as the U.S., with different cultural values can be complicated, challenging, and stressful. The influences and pressures of acculturation affect every family member and operate in every facet of family life including child bearing, parenting young children, school functioning, adolescence, marriage, the couple relationship and the health and wellbeing of family members. The process of acculturation to the U.S. can be impacted by several factors, for instance, the country of origin, length of stay in the U.S., reasons for immigration, the ability to return or visit the home country, the long-term plans for staying in the U.S., and language issues among others (Al-Subaie & Alhamad, 2000).

Since parenting styles are different across cultures, it is important to distinguish between these differences in other cultures and to examine parenting with respect to other nationalities (Chao, 2000.). Therefore, it is necessary to recognize cultural context issues in regards to the differences of parenting styles and to understand why these differences occur (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009). Arabic society is commonly known as a collective and authoritarian (Dwairy, 2004). Arab immigrant parents typically come from countries where an authoritarian parenting approach is viewed as the norm, where their children must respect and obey these values. (Dwairy, 2004, 2010). Arab immigrant parents tend to hold on to their culturally rooted childrearing values and traditions, while trying to adapt to the mainstream values of the new culture.

The following are insights into the values, beliefs, customs and culture that you may encounter when working with families from “Arabic” backgrounds:

- There is a cultural code among Arab countries regarding keeping emotions hidden and family life is guarded with fierce privacy and seeking help outside the family is seen as unacceptable and shameful (Al- Darkmaki& Sayed 2009, Kobiesy, 2004).
- It is traditional in Arab countries that the husband and father take on the role of the provider and “protector” and that the wife and mother carry out her husband’s wishes as he sees fit. He also acts as the representative of the family to society at large, presenting the family’s beliefs, values and morals (Mourad, 2010).
- It is traditional in Arab countries that the main duty of women is to marry, take care of her children, maintain her home and protect the honor of her family (Aroian, 2006).
- In the traditional Arab family structure, respect is obligatory towards elders (Baraket, 1993) and thus the mother in law has full authority over the wife when the husband is not present. Duty to one’s family is critical, and frequent close contact with the family is still expected even after marriage (Aboul-Enein,

2010). Elder and ailing parents are expected to live with one of their children (normally one of the sons) (Aboul-Enein, 2010).

- Children are often taught from an early age that their actions are a reflection upon the family as a whole, and shame and honor are greatly stressed (Mourad, 2010, Haboush 2007). Barakat (1993) states that because children are taught that family is the most important commitment they have, they often feel “guilt feelings” if they somehow disappoint their parents.
- Sons and daughters are treated differently (Mourad 2010) and are allowed different degrees of freedom and responsibility. While most Arab families deny that sons are more celebrated over daughters, many Arab communities hold more lavish celebrations for sons (e.g. in the United Arab Emirates 2 goats are killed at the birth of a son instead of the 1 when a daughter is born) (Crabtree, 2007).
- Parents treat first-born children in a special way. Axelson (1999) claimed that first-born children “tend to receive more attention, are likely to carry the family’s ambitions, and are assigned a dominant role with respect to later children” (p. 285).

Many newcomers to the United States struggle with balancing these strong familiar beliefs with having lost their position in their home country. They may be starting over in a new country with nothing but their family and the clothes on their backs. As reported recently in the news, many migrants and refugees of Arabic speaking backgrounds arrive in the United States after prolonged experiences of conflict, trauma, persecution, poverty and displacement. When working with families of Arabic speaking backgrounds, it is important to learn from them, what challenges they face as they transition across two cultures.

The following information regarding the assistance provided to refugees from the State Department may be helpful in supporting families:

- Refugees are sent to nearly every state and to different communities across the country. Syrian refugees have been sent to 138 cities in 36 states since the country's civil war began in 2011. Nationality of origin is not a factor in determining where people are placed. The US government does try to resettle refugees near family if possible.
- The State Department offers financial aid for the first 90 days. Other aid is available for up to 5 years.
- Refugees must pay back the cost of their flight to the U.S. After one of the nonprofit resettlement agencies receives the case of a particular individual or family, the International Organization for Migration coordinates their travel to the U.S. city where they will be resettled. The plane ticket is paid for at that time, but after they arrive and begin working, the refugees must pay back the cost of the ticket.
- Refugees don't get long-term subsidized housing. Each refugee receives a stipend of about \$1,000 to cover their first three months in the U.S. Before an individual or family arrives, the local resettlement organizations work to find a suitable apartment. They ensure the rent will be affordable and are in charge of distributing the stipend to cover the costs of rent for three months. Refugees are not placed in special apartment blocks and do not receive special rates. After three months, refugees are responsible for paying rent as normal tenants in their apartment buildings and are also free to move elsewhere within the city or state or to another state altogether.
- Refugees have to apply for jobs. Resettlement agencies also aid refugees in applying for jobs. Syria was considered a lower middle-income country before the war, and many refugees are educated and trained. But that doesn't mean they can pick up where they left off.

Family-centered services are generally a new concept to families of Arabic speaking backgrounds. You will need to take the time to build rapport and trust with families to determine what their needs are and how you can best work with them.

For more information on the multifaceted beliefs and values of the Arab culture, please reference [Ethnicity and Family Therapy, Third Edition](#). Next month we will be exploring child rearing practices of parents from Persia, an Arab country with many migrants settling on the east coast.

Test Your Inter-rater Reliability

Our state's focus on child indicator ratings has led many to wonder,
"Are we all rating children similarly?"



As part of our efforts to improve results for children, we are focusing each month on increasing our statewide inter-rater reliability. We are using examples of narratives from around the state that ideally will include observations of functional behaviors, parent/caregiver input, results from assessment tools and informed clinical opinion. Below is an example of a narrative from a recent Assessment for Service Planning. Using the limited information provided in the narrative and the process outlined in the child Indicator Booklet talk thru the scenario with your colleagues to determine a rating. The ratings given by the assessment team can be found at the end.

Disclaimer: This activity is for learning purposes only and is not intended to be an endorsement of any particular narrative. It is intended to help you reflect on the questions that follow.

Questions to Consider:

1. Was there enough information provided to determine a rating? What additional information did you need?
2. Was there input into the narrative from all members of the assessment team including the family? Was the family's cultural differences considered?
3. Was the child's functioning across settings in each indicator clear?
4. Were functional skills listed under the correct indicator?
5. How close were your ratings compared to the ratings given by the assessment team? One or two off, in the same color family or way off? Did you agree with the ratings given by the team? Why or Why not?

Faruq's Age: 22 months

Adjusted Age: NA

Referral Information, Medical History, Health Status: Faruq was born full term at his home in Syria with the assistance of a midwife. No complications were reported. Shortly after birth, once mother had recovered, the family fled Syria to seek refuge in a camp in Jordan. They joined Faruq's grandparents, uncles, aunts and other family members. The extended family lived in a tent together until Faruq was 20 months old. At that time, Faruq and his parent's were escorted to the United States leaving behind the extended family members. Faruq's family is currently living in an apartment and have sponsorship thru a community church. The sponsor family referred Faruq to ITC with communication concerns. The parents speak Arabic and must have an interpreter present. Father is learning some limited English. They report Faruq was ill often with vomiting and diarrhea while living in the refugee camp. Mother has continued to breastfeed but recently found out she was pregnant and plans to wean. Father explained it is customary to breastfeed until the age of two or until the mother becomes with child again. Faruq has had some "shots" while in the camp but parents do not know what they were. He is scheduled to see a pediatrician next week. Father expressed concerns about the visit not knowing what to expect. Faruq has not had his hearing checked but parents do not have any concerns.

Daily Activities and Routines: Faruq likes to play by his mother with the toys his church family has provided including blocks, shapes in a box, books, crayons and paper. Mother reports he is not sure what to do with many

of the toys but enjoys looking at the books. She does not read English so she makes up stories based on the pictures. Outside of the apartment, there is a playground. The family has recently started taking Faruq for sliding, swinging and running. He enjoys his bath time. He stays at home with mother while father seeks employment. Faruq is babbling saying baba, he has said ummi (mama) about 2-3 times only but not on purpose. He is not consistently pointing or vocally indicating his wants. He understands “no” and shakes his head for “no”. He does wave for bye.

Family Concerns: Faruq’s family is concerned with his limited use of words and how it may get worse now that he must learn a new language as well. They report he is not saying words and is getting frustrated and aggressive when he can’t get what he wants. This upsets Faruq’s father. He reports Faruq is disrespecting the family by showing bad behavior. They would like him to call them “Ummi” and “Abbi” (mother and father).

Family Priorities: Faruq’s family’s priority is for him to develop appropriate communication skills so he can be able to communicate his needs and wants during his daily routines and community outings without getting frustrated. They want Faruq to be able to go out in public at the playground without getting upset and displaying inappropriate behavior in front of others.

Family Resources: Faruq’s family is new to the US. The only resource they have available to them is their church family. They need assistance in obtaining food and ongoing housing. Father continues to look for employment but is concerned about being displaced from their home if he does not get rent money. He is also concerned that his extended family is still in Jordan and does not know Faruq’s mother is with child. It is customary for the grandmother, aunts and cousins to assist once the baby arrives.

Developmental Levels: Cognitive- 18 months Gross Motor- 18 months Fine Motor- 18 months
Receptive Language- 18 months Expressive Language- 10 months Social/Emotional- 15 months
Adaptive/Self Help- 20 months

Social/Emotional Skills including Positive Social Relationships: Faruq is a shy little boy who was evaluated at the center with his mother, father and member of their church congregation (who provided transportation). An interpreter was provided for the assessment. Faruq’s father did most of the speaking. Faruq stayed very close to his mother but did make occasional eye contact with the new adults in the room. He was aware of the conversation around him and would look towards his father when he spoke. He eventually warmed up and separated from mother’s side to participate in the activities. Even during play, his eyes immediately looked towards his father when he spoke. He was very cooperative and transitioned well between activities. Father reported Faruq enjoyed playing with his cousins. They have always lived with extended family. Since coming to the United States, father reports Faruq has difficulty separating from his mother. He is learning to wave bye and understands the word “no” and will shake his head in response. Father reported Faruq has unacceptable temper tantrums that he believes are related to missing his grandparents and cousins who are still in Jordan. Faruq self soothes by sucking on the collar of his shirt. He communicates his feelings with body language, facial expression, tantrums and vocalizations.

Of concern: Faruq is not yet using any words or approximations to communicate his feelings or communicate with his parents. He only briefly engages in constructive play with evaluators before needing to check in with his parents. Faruq appears to have a high anxiety for new environments, including unfamiliar adults. He makes limited eye contact.

Child's Development in Relation to Other Children the Same Age:

Acquiring and Using Knowledge and Skills, including early language/communication: Faruq is a quiet child who learns by observing and listening to others. He imitates actions of his mother such as cooking. He has toys at home, but mother reported he does not play with them. He enjoys looking at pictures in the books. Father reported toys are novel to Faruq. They did not have any in the refugee camp. Faruq had a doll that was passed down from his cousins that he played with at times. Faruq is curious and attempts to imitate actions. When a crayon was placed in his hands he imitated making strokes and the examiner modeled with hand over hand. Faruq quickly responded to his name when called by his father. When the examiner called his name, he looked towards the floor. Father reports Faruq will respond to directions related to his daily routine such as when it is time to lay down. He does understand some common objects and their actions. When given a doll and brush he was able to brush the doll's hair. He is reported to have a few sound combinations that he uses combined with gestures to communicate with his mother. He does not consistently have a name he uses for his parents.

Of concern is Faruq does not have any real words in his native language or in English. He did not imitate words or name desired items or pictures from a book when asked. He does not have a name for his mother or father. He does not play appropriately with toys.

Child's Development in Relation to Other Children the Same Age:

Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs: Faruq manipulated the environment without difficulty during the assessment. His family lives in a second floor apartment and he is able to go up and down the stairs holding a parent's hand. He climbs well and is able to get onto an adult sized chair. Parents report he kept up with his cousins back home and they have taken him twice to the playground at their apartment complex. He used both hands well together during the assessment but was not able to manipulate many of the toys. He was able to turn the pages of a picture book.

Mother reports that Faruq helps with dressing by removing his socks but needs help with other tasks. She reports sock removal is a new skill for him since coming to the US. In Jordan, he was always bare foot. Faruq is still breastfed but will be weaned as his mother suspects she is pregnant. Father reported Faruq will begin eating the same diet as the family which consists mostly of rice, vegetables and fruit. Although Faruq sleeps with his parents, he does have his own crib that was provided by the church. Father reported it is customary for many family members to sleep in the same bed in their country. Faruq wakes up during the night to nurse. Faruq does occasionally babble to try to get his needs met. He will sometimes point but often tugs on his mother. When his needs aren't met he demonstrates temper tantrums.

Of concern: Faruq is not using any words/approximations to communicate his needs and wants. He relies heavily on physical gestures to communicate those needs, often crying which leads to periods of frustration when unable to successfully meet his needs.

Child's Development in Relation to Other Children the Same Age:

Assessment Team Ratings:

Social/Emotional Skills including Positive Social Relationships: Rating 2: Faruq is beginning to show some of the early skills that are necessary for development of more advanced skills.

Acquiring and Using Knowledge and Skills, including early language/communication: Rating 3: Faruq uses many important skills that are necessary for the development of more advanced skills; he is not yet showing skills used by other children his age in this area.

Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs: Rating 4: Faruq shows occasional use of some age expected skills. Child has more skills of a younger child in this area.



Determining the outcome ratings requires teams to synthesize an enormous amount of information about a child's functioning from multiple sources and across different settings to identify an overall sense of the child's functioning at a given point in time in three outcome areas.

- Faruq's parents identified practices that some may question and may result in skills many may not feel are typical for his same age peers. This is where culture comes into consideration.
 - In a collective society, emphasis on close connections and collaboration over personal self-development is thought to be fostered by family routines such as co-sleeping, weaning at older ages, emphasizing obedience toward adults, and playing collectively (Schulze et al., 2001).
 - Some of the behaviors displayed by Faruq are accepted and expected by his family's culture. When determining how to weigh culture vs development compared to same age peers, it should be noted at this time Faruq is new to this country and has very limited interaction with same age peers. His parents report he played well with his cousins at home. As Faruq becomes more involved in activities outside of the home such as playground, church nursery, etc., the behaviors related to cultural influences will impact his development greater when compared to same age peers. In addition to the cultural expectations we must consider when determining ratings, Faruq has had limited experience due to being in a refugee camp. For children showing delays due to lack of exposure, we do not make adjustments in the rating when comparing to typical peers.
- [Cultural Goggles: Everybody Got "Em"](#) a webinar to explore the way your cultural "goggles" enhances or inhibits your ability to develop cross cultural relationships in service delivery. Key definitions were defined; a look at current Virginia demographics and predictions made about populations you may begin to work with. A three prong model was used to discuss strategies for effective communication and suggest ways to apply this new knowledge to your work in cross cultural service delivery.
- Use the following checklist to test your awareness and acceptance of the Arabic culture: [Cultural Competence Checklist Personal Reflection](#).
- An interpreter was used for Faruq's assessment. Do you know how to pick a good interpreter or how to inform an interpreter of your expectations? Here is a useful evaluation form: [Interpreter Evaluation Form](#).
- Are you interested in sharing and learning more about the experiences of other providers who are addressing cultural values and differences? Check out the Early Intervention Strategies for Success Blog [Are Cultural Differences Truly Developmental Delays?](#)