



Latino Families See Family Unity as the Cornerstone of Flourishing

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Background

What does the concept of flourishing mean for Latino^a families? In what ways are Latino families currently flourishing, and how do systems support or hinder their opportunities to flourish? Those questions are at the center of the Latino Families Flourishing (LFF) initiative, a multi-year effort led by the Child Trends Hispanic Institute and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Strong policies and decision making are driven by high-quality, reliable data. But currently, the data and systems that shape policy, programs, and public narratives too often fail to reflect the complexity of Latino families or capture how they define well-being and success.¹ LFF is building a national data infrastructure that the United States currently lacks: nationally representative data on Latino families' strengths and diversity, and on how systems support or constrain their ability to reach their full potential. We are designing a first-of-its-kind survey focused on family flourishing, and we are designing it to go beyond a descriptive portrait of Latino families. Our survey is set to drive systems and narrative change in support of flourishing among Latino families, not just to mitigate risks or reduce negative outcomes. The goal is to gather data that informs policies, programs, and public narratives shaping Latino families' opportunities to thrive in the United States.

Because we aim to collect data that capture family flourishing as defined by Latino families themselves, we started this effort by talking with Latino parents and primary caregivers to gather their perspectives on family flourishing. This brief summarizes what we learned across nine focus groups that sought to gather information on what flourishing means to Latino families, and what factors contribute to—or diminish—their flourishing. These findings will directly inform the design of LFF's national survey.

To ground the work of the Latino Families Flourishing initiative, we convened nine focus groups of Latino parents and primary caregivers to learn what “flourishing” means to them. Our participants largely described family flourishing as encompassing various interconnected dimensions, including family unity, strong values and morals, economic security, growth within and across generations, biculturalism, and an overall sense of fulfillment. They also recognized that Latino families’ ability to flourish is supported by their powerful cultural and community assets, but hindered by a range of structural barriers.

^a “Latino” refers to individuals who may identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x/e. We recognize that these terms have distinct meanings, and there is no consensus in the field on preferred terminology or the populations they represent. We prioritize the term “Latino” over “Hispanic,” as some communities have critiqued “Hispanic” for [centering Spanish colonial heritage](#) and not fully reflecting the diversity of cultural identities within Latin America. In this document, we use “Latino” to refer to individuals of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Dominican, Guatemalan, and other Central or South American, or Spanish culture or origin. Latino people can be of any race.

Summary of Key Findings

Focus group participants described family flourishing as encompassing various interconnected dimensions, including family unity, strong values and morals, economic security, growth within and across generations, biculturalism, and an overall sense of fulfillment.

- **Latino families believe that unity is at the heart of family flourishing, expressed through love, trust, and collective care.** Unity can manifest in different ways—for example, by helping family members get through difficult times, caring for elders at home, and making decisions collectively.
- **Flourishing families cultivate strong values and a shared moral foundation.** Examples of good morals and values include the centrality of family, respect for elders and authority, having a strong work ethic, and appreciating one's blessings.
- **Economic well-being provides a foundation for security and opportunity.** It includes the ability to independently meet basic needs, provide for children now and in the future, and maintain a sense of financial stability. Financial resources can support other aspects of flourishing, like family unity, by facilitating opportunities to spend time together.
- **Flourishing families demonstrate growth and advancement within and across generations.** Within generations, individual members show growth and achieve their goals through hard work and perseverance. Across generations, families strive to do better socioeconomically than their parents and grandparents while offering future generations an opportunity to do better than themselves.
- **Biculturalism and bilingualism are powerful assets that strengthen family identity and expand opportunity.** Families seek to maintain Latino cultural values and traditions and teach their children about their heritage, while also developing the skills to navigate U.S. systems and institutions.
- **Family flourishing includes a deep sense of happiness, peace, and harmony in daily life.** For some, a sense of fulfillment is connected to faith and religious beliefs.

Focus group participants also identified a range of factors that support or undermine their attempts to promote their families' flourishing:

- **Flourishing is shaped by multiple interconnected factors.** Many of the same factors that characterize flourishing—such as education, employment, language, and economic security—can be either springboards or barriers to flourishing, depending on the context.
- **Latino families draw on powerful cultural and community assets that function as engines for flourishing.** For example, they encourage the passing down of practices that promote flourishing, such as shared daily family meals. Community networks offer families support through access to information and opportunities and a sense of belonging.
- **Families' agency drives flourishing, even as structural barriers limit their ability to exercise it.** Families overwhelmingly claimed personal responsibility for their families' flourishing. At the same time, they identified several ways in which systems limit their agency, including immigration enforcement and uneven access to safety net programs.

Findings

What family flourishing looks like for Latino families

We asked participants to describe what family flourishing meant to them. Their responses made clear that flourishing is not defined solely by an individual characteristic; rather, it is a combination of values, behaviors, and characteristics across various dimensions.

At the heart of family flourishing is unity, which is expressed through love, trust, and collective care.

Participants described maintaining strong family bonds and showing love and support for one another as key indicators of family flourishing. They noted that family unity manifests in different ways, from helping family members get through difficult times to making decisions collectively. Family unity also means caring for elders within the home and keeping the door open for children to stay in or return to the family home at any age—a characteristic that many felt was distinct to Latino families. One participant explained^b:

"I don't care if you're 1 or 3, 18 or you are 30. I always want you to know that you can come to your parents for support."

– First-generation female participant

Parents and caregivers also emphasized the importance of spending time together, maintaining open communication with their children, and building trust. Everyday activities like having meals together were considered important in creating opportunities for connection.

"When I think about [a] flourishing family, I'm thinking like support, connection, being able to be there for one another and help each other reach goals in life, to help each other reach those together as a family and just have overall good communication and love and support."

– Second-generation female participant

^b Quotes are provided in the language they were shared.

Flourishing families cultivate strong values and a shared moral foundation.

Participants underscored the importance of family members having good morals and values and instilling them in their children. They described examples of what good morals and values meant to them, with several mentioning the centrality of the family, respect for elders and authority figures, and good manners. One participant stated:

"Hay prosperidad en la forma de cómo nosotros como padres hacemos que nuestros hijos aprendan valores, aprendan cada día a respetar más, hacerse respetar también. Yo siento que los valores en la familia florecen, hacen que la familia florezca mucho, el respeto, la comunicación, la obediencia. Como dice usted, hay opiniones, pero yo siento que la religión también fortalece a nuestros hijos."

"There is flourishing in the way we as parents help our children learn values, learning each day to respect others more and to stand up for themselves as well. I feel that values within the family flourish, and help the family flourish greatly: respect, communication, obedience. As you mentioned, there are different perspectives, but I also feel that religion strengthens our children."

– First-generation female participant

Participants also highlighted the value of both education and a strong work ethic. To them, the latter is reflected in taking personal responsibility, working toward goals, exercising self-discipline, and overcoming challenges. They described how families grow by overcoming obstacles and showing resilience in the face of adversity, with some referencing their families' migration journeys and their parents' sacrifices as an example of challenges they overcame as a family.

To some, good morals and values also included appreciating what one has and rejecting economic excess and wastefulness. Some participants saw religion as a core family value, whereas others emphasized spirituality and faith over organized religion.

Economic well-being provides a foundation for security and opportunity.

Participants underscored the importance of economic well-being as an aspect of family flourishing, describing it as the ability to consistently meet basic needs independently, provide for their children both now and in the future, and maintain a sense of financial stability. Homeownership emerged as a particularly salient marker of economic well-being, valued both in its own right and for its potential to support generational advancement.

Participants noted that hard work does not always equate to financial stability or overall economic well-being, and that the middle class is not supported by existing safety net programs. They

assumed personal responsibility for securing their families' financial well-being and generally viewed reliance on government assistance as an undesirable outcome.

While money was not seen as an end in itself, participants did note that financial resources shaped the opportunities available to their children and afforded them greater flexibility and time to spend with family. One participant stated:

"Trabajé mucho por digamos 10 años, y ahora que ya tengo un trabajo mejor, estoy bien económicamente. Ahora puedo pasar tiempo con mi familia, so el dinero me ha dado una comodidad para poder tener tiempo con mi familia."

"I worked very hard for, let's say, 10 years, and now that I have a better job, I'm doing well financially. Now I can spend time with my family, so money has given me a level of comfort that allows me to have time with my family."

- First-generation male participant

Others noted that financial resources allowed them to afford experiences with their families, such as traveling or attending events, that further strengthen family bonds.

Flourishing families demonstrate growth and advancement within and across generations.

According to participants, flourishing families show progression both within and across generations. Within generations, flourishing families are ones in which individual members show growth and achieve their goals through hard work and perseverance. Participants often mentioned this framing in relation to educational attainment, including higher education and developing trade skills, that families perceived as foundational for flourishing. Participants perceived individual family members' accomplishments as shared family successes that uplift the entire family.

"En mi situación, prosperar significa mis hijas poder ir a la universidad, es una gran meta que mi[s] padre[s] no pudieron tener. Yo tuve que hacerlo después de ser madre, so para ver mis hijas, llegar a esa meta ahora y poder prosperar en su carrera, que quieren ser abogada y doctora por lo menos dos de ellas, tengo otra en High School. Eso es algo grande para mí."

"In my situation, prospering means my daughters being able to go to college, it's a major goal that my parents couldn't achieve. I had to do it after becoming a mother, so seeing my daughters reach that goal and thrive in their careers, at least two of them want to become a lawyer and a doctor, and I have another one still in high school. That means a lot to me."

- Second-generation female participant

Importantly, flourishing families also show progress across generations. Participants described how they had strived to do better than previous generations while aspiring to offer the next generation opportunities that they themselves had not had available. To them, this often means attaining higher levels of education and cultivating new skills and knowledge. Such investments allow family members to pursue work that is less physically demanding, offers greater opportunities for intellectual engagement, and provides better compensation. As stated by one participant:

"My parents worked very hard labor-wise. Any job that they've had has always been work with your hands, your whole body, all that ... But they've worked very hard to make sure I didn't have to do that ... So I feel like most families, you know, they do the hard work so their kids can do something different or new."

– Second-generation male participant

In addition to educational and career advancement, participants also emphasized building wealth (for example, via home ownership) as a way to create long-term stability and support future generations. At the same time, participants noted that flourishing might look different across generations, depending on the opportunities that are available. One participant explained:

"I think flourishing changes based on every generation ... I was born in the United States, so I look at it differently. I took from [my parents' first-generation immigrant] mentality and I added the American mentality, which is to grow and to progress and own businesses and own houses, real estate, and that's what I consider flourishing in my current situation."

– Second-generation male participant

Biculturalism and bilingualism are powerful assets that strengthen family identity and expand opportunity.

Participants perceived biculturalism as an important marker of family flourishing. They expressed a desire to maintain Latino cultural values and traditions—like respect, obedience, and good manners—and teach their children about their heritage. Participants, and especially those in the Spanish-language focus groups, described taking pride and joy in celebrating their culture through food, music, preserving the Spanish language, and observing traditions such as *Día de Reyes*,² *Día de los Muertos*,³ and *Quinceañera*.⁴



"Para mí, prosperar en la familia aquí en Estados Unidos es poder mantener la cultura de nuestras raíces, como al hablar español y tener esa cultura no, no nada más, así como la comida y eso, pero los valores que uno tiene como una familia latina."

"For me, to flourish as a family here in the United States means being able to maintain our cultural roots, like speaking Spanish, and keeping that culture alive, not just through things like food, but through the values we hold as a Latino family."

– Second-generation male participant

"Following traditions that have been done through hundreds of years helps flourishing because you're able to keep teaching those traditions to your children, to the children who are the future and keep our community alive."

– Third-generation female participant

Participants' commitment to preserving their Latino culture was coupled with an understanding that learning English and developing the skills to navigate U.S. systems and institutions (e.g., schools and health care) were also essential to supporting their families' success.

Family flourishing includes a deep sense of happiness, peace, and harmony in daily life.

Another aspect of flourishing described in the focus groups was a general sense of fulfillment. This was often explained as feelings of happiness, peace, and harmony within the family, reflecting an overall sense of balance and contentment in daily life. In the words of one participant:

"Las condiciones de vida no es solo tener una casa bonita, sino tener un lugar donde reine la paz, donde existe el amor, donde todos los que vivimos en la casa ... podemos tener esa armonía de hogar, porque hacemos nada con tener muchas cosas materiales y no tener felicidad, no tener vida."

"Living conditions aren't just about having a nice house, but about having a place where peace prevails, where there is love, where everyone who lives in the home can experience that sense of harmony. Because having many material things means nothing if there is no happiness, no life."

– First-generation female participant

In some cases, participants connected fulfillment to faith and religious beliefs, viewing spirituality as a source of guidance, strength, and inner peace that supports both individual and family well-being.

The core elements of Latino family flourishing are consistent, even though their expression changes over time.

Overall, focus group participants shared similar views on family flourishing, regardless of gender, income, or primary language spoken. Spanish-speaking groups more prominently discussed topics related to culture and language, but they were also discussed in the focus groups conducted in English. Seeing personal growth and success as aspects of flourishing especially resonated among women and in groups conducted in Spanish. Fulfillment was also salient in discussions among Spanish-speaking participants, as were religion and faith.

A common thread across all focus groups, and regardless of how participants specifically defined flourishing, was that families saw flourishing as being dynamic. While the key elements of flourishing are the same across generations and stages in life, the way in which they manifest may differ depending on context, life circumstances, and opportunities available. As one participant shared:

"I think work ethic looks a little bit different for the new generations. They worry more about taking care of their own self, mind, body, and soul outside of their job and outside of their education. And I think that that's a nice thing. I can't make myself feel that way, but for my kids, I see that that's a nice way to be heading."

– Third-generation female participant

Other elements of flourishing mentioned by participants

- Education in its own right (i.e., not just as a shared value, goal, or pathway to economic well-being)
- Physical and mental health
- Community participation
- Freedom and safety
- Children reaching developmental milestones

Facilitators and barriers to family flourishing

In the focus groups, parents and caregivers also provided their perspectives on what factors either promote or hinder flourishing. Participants identified a range of factors—from cultural values and community ties to economic stress, discrimination, and immigration enforcement—that either support or undermine their efforts to promote their families' flourishing.

Flourishing is shaped by multiple interconnected factors.

Participants described how many of the same factors they used to characterize flourishing—such as education, employment, language, economic security, and health—can represent either springboards or barriers to flourishing, depending on the context and opportunities available. For example, child care can support flourishing when it is accessible by allowing parents to pursue work

or education, but it can also present a barrier to flourishing when it is financially or geographically out of reach or does not meet families' needs. Participants also noted that the challenges their families face are often interconnected. For example, language barriers limit job opportunities, while financial stress undermines parenting quality and mental health. As one participant shared:

"If the parent has a financial constraint or is burned out, they're probably not going to be an effective parent because they're just so stressed and overwhelmed about what's going on ... so it is kind of interrelated about being financially burdened and then the mental."

– Second-generation female participant

The compounding effect is most pronounced among families with low incomes, who identified the broadest range of simultaneous barriers across housing, food, employment, health, and child care. Families struggling to make ends meet face tradeoffs that ripple across domains. For instance, parents may work long hours across multiple jobs to provide financially for their families; in turn, this limits the amount of time they spend with their children. One participant explained:

"I know growing up my parents were always busy working and stuff, so they were never involved in my life. So, I've made it, you know, a thing in my life where, you know, I was going to be there for my kids ... I was involved in my son's band activities and my daughter's volleyball activities ..."

– Second-generation male participant

Latino families draw on powerful cultural and community assets that function as an engine for flourishing.

Participants described how their own Latino culture is an engine for flourishing and emphasized their role in keeping their Latino roots alive. For example, they discussed how Latino values are passed down across generations and are enacted through parenting practices that promote flourishing in everyday life (e.g., through daily family meals, by teaching their children to speak Spanish). As one participant shared:

"I think it's on us to try to keep our cultures living, right, like as a living thing. It cannot die. We cannot let it die because of perception or stereotypes. I think we have a very powerful culture to share...I think it's on us to pass that on to and within our families, the love for our culture and the love for our community and the love for our language and the love for everything that our past Latinos did and fought for. We need to carry that for everybody that's coming after us."

– First-generation female participant

The strong sense of community that characterizes the Latino culture functions as a powerful source of informal support, providing access to information, resources, and opportunities (e.g., translation

support, grassroots food distribution, job referrals), and promoting a sense of unity and belonging. These assets are particularly prominent among Spanish-language participants. Two participants described this saying:

"...como familia, también inmigrante latino, debemos también entender que a través de la unión viene la prosperidad y que no solo tanto en nuestra familia, sino apoyarnos como unión, como raza, como etnia."

"...as a family, as Latino immigrants, we must also understand that prosperity comes through unity, not just within our own family, but by supporting each other as a community, as a race, as an ethnic group."

- First-generation female participant

"Even when the world is crumbling around us, we are good at gathering and sharing and moving from place to place and making it work."

- Third-generation female participant

For some, faith and religion provide moral grounding and serve as a source of strength in the face of adversity. Some also noted that role models within their community provide a pathway to flourishing, while others described the presence of "gatekeepers" or a lack of representation of Latino community members as barriers to flourishing. One participant shared:

"I'm in the legal profession. I went to law school, but I didn't have a Latino professor, I don't think, throughout my entire educational career... So just getting people that look like us, talk like us, have the same cultural experience, and who have 'made it' and can pass down the knowledge of where to [and] how to get to the next level."

- Fourth-generation or higher male participant

Families' agency drives flourishing, even as structural barriers limit their ability to exercise it.

Participants overwhelmingly claimed personal responsibility for their families' flourishing. Two participants described this attitude:

"I think that it has to ... start with your family. I don't expect anybody else to set any goals or help my family flourish other than [me]. It comes from within."

- Second-generation male participant

"Cada familia busca su propia prosperidad. Hay manera de poder lograr lo que tú quieres, pero si tú no quieres prosperar, ahí te quedas estancado."

"Every family seeks its own prosperity. There is a way to achieve what you want, but if you don't want to prosper, you'll stay stuck right there."

– First-generation female participant

At the same time, focus group participants pointed to several ways in which systems limit their agency. Of foremost importance to many was the role of immigration enforcement. Participants shared how enforcement activities create a pervasive sense of insecurity that affects not only families with unauthorized members but also legal residents and U.S.-born citizens. Many participants also described facing racism and discrimination across settings: in schools, workplaces, and policing, but also in political rhetoric. These experiences shaped their access to opportunities and hampered their sense of safety and belonging. Two participants shared their experiences:

"It almost hurts to say it, but it's literally contradicting everything that you're seeing on the news. We're not here to rape or murder or steal jobs or any of that. People that come here are just, Latinos especially if they come here, it's for a better life... Give somebody a chance and you you'll be amazed at how much you can learn from each other ... we're all human. Just treat us that way that's all. That's all we ask for."

– First-generation male participant

"I think [what Latino families need right now to flourish] is just a sense of security. You know, being able to go to the grocery store without being [afraid] of being picked up just cause the way you look ... I'm born here like I said, but it's in the back of my mind. I travel with my passport card. I travel with a copy of my birth certificate on my cell phone because you just don't know."

– Second-generation male participant

Participants saw value in existing safety net programs, but some considered them to be out of reach, especially for those with an unauthorized family member. Still others noted that existing programs are too restrictive in their eligibility criteria and leave out working middle-class families who are above the income threshold but still struggling. One participant explained this perspective:

"Para que sí podamos prosperar mejor, [el gobierno debe] ayudar también a la 'middle class' porque ya ni la 'middle class' la está haciendo...está todo bien caro..."

"To really be able to prosper, [the government] should also help the middle class, because not even the middle class is flourishing ... everything is so expensive"

– Second-generation male participant

Conclusions

Overall, our focus group findings with Latino families indicate that many see family flourishing as multidimensional, multigenerational, and dynamic. The elements of flourishing identified by Latino parents and caregivers—family unity, shared morals and values, growth and mobility, economic well-being, biculturalism and bilingualism, and fulfillment—are interconnected and can be mutually reinforcing. For example, knowing two languages can open employment opportunities that bring financial stability, which, in turn, supports family unity. Family unity and economic mobility can bring a sense of fulfillment and having shared values and morals can foster family harmony.



Our participants described flourishing families as those characterized by multiple features that research has shown are related to positive outcomes. Strong family relationships characterized by warmth, support, and active communication are related to positive behaviors,⁵ better mental and physical health,^{6,7} and better-quality romantic relationships later in life.⁸ At the same time, having shared values and beliefs among family members is a foundation of strong family functioning and cohesion.⁹ Many of the values that participants identified as important are ones that have been traditionally considered characteristic of the Latino culture, for example, *familismo* (prioritizing family unity and loyalty), *respeto* (respect), and being *bien educado* (having good manners), and that have been linked to positive educational, mental health, and social outcomes.¹⁰

Participants' perceptions about the benefits of bilingualism are also supported by abundant research showing that bilingualism boosts cognitive function,¹¹ creativity,¹² socio-emotional development,¹³ and professional and economic outcomes.¹⁴ Likewise, economic stability and well-being are closely related to family dynamics. When families do not have to worry about meeting basic financial needs, they experience lower stress,¹⁵ more positive couple relationships,¹⁶ and warmer, more involved, parenting.¹⁷

While parents and caregivers affirmed a personal responsibility to ensure their families can flourish, the systems that shape family life (e.g., education, health, economic, care) can either expand or suppress families' capacity to exercise that responsibility by creating opportunities or barriers.

Methodology

Study recruitment

We recruited participants through the AmeriSpeak® bi-weekly multi-client Omnibus survey. Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population.^c It collects basic demographic information to support fast, cost-efficient subpanel sampling for a wide range of communities. The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. As a multi-client Omnibus panel, AmeriSpeak® panelists are regularly invited to participate in a range of studies based on each study's specific population of interest, which varies by client and research question.

To support panel recruitment for this study, NORC invited AmeriSpeak® panelists self-identifying as Hispanic to complete screening questions to determine eligibility for the focus groups, which required being a parent or primary caregiver of a child or young adult (infant through age 29) who lived with them at least half the time. Those who met the criteria were then asked about their interest in participating in focus groups for LFF. NORC provided the Child Trends study team with the names and contact information for 144 eligible respondents interested in participating in focus groups.

Participant characteristics

A total of 61 parents or primary caregivers (32 women and 29 men) participated in focus groups. Participants lived in 16 states^d and ranged in age from 21 to 66. More than half (57%) were 20-44 years old. Approximately two thirds (65%) identified as White, 13 percent identified as Black or African American, and less than 10 percent identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, or as Asian Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.^e Nearly three quarters of participants (70%) were born within the 50 U.S. states or Washington, DC.

Participants' children spanned early childhood through early adulthood, with the largest shares having a child ages 6-12 (46%) or 13-17 (30%); 21 percent had a child ages 18-26 and 5 percent had a child ages 27-29. Just over half (56%) reported annual household incomes under \$60,000 and about half (51%) said their household had difficulty covering normal expenses like food, clothing, or rent in the past year.

Data collection procedure

^c More information about AmeriSpeak® is available [here](#).

^d Participants lived in Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington.

^e Note that these race categories were not mutually exclusive and that some participants identified more than one racial background.

The Child Trends study team conducted nine virtual focus groups from September 29 to October 15, 2025. Groups ranged from five to nine participants and were stratified by language and, where possible, gender and income. Discussions centered on caregivers' perspectives on family flourishing, including how they define it, what promotes or hinders it, how systems shape it, and their sources of strength and support. Child Trends' Institutional Review Board (FWA 00005835) approved all study procedures.

Data analysis

Two lead coders developed an initial coding scheme from themes identified during data collection, then refined it inductively. They worked with two additional bilingual team members to code all transcripts in Dedoose, in the language in which data were collected, and review code application for accuracy.



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This brief was developed using AI-assisted writing tools for drafting and editing, including help drafting key takeaways and structuring the findings sections. The research, analysis, conclusions, and final content reflect the work and judgment of the authors, and all facts have been independently verified by our team. [Claude Sonnet 5, Anthropic]



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