

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CARING FOR CHILDREN

Ecuador's a different country with different traditions and ways of doing things than most of our volunteers are used to—different, not wrong. Please keep that in mind.

A few things that volunteers are always wondering about, questioning and/or are surprised by:

- babies/toddlers are fed rather large portions of food, a lot more than a small jar of baby food—some of the reasons for this are because they feed them fewer times a day; they feed them different types of food; they think that a chubby child will be healthier than a skinny child; they don't want anyone thinking their child is malnourished; they don't want anyone think they're too poor to provide adequate food for their child
- sometimes the children seem to be force-fed—some of the reasons for this are because they feel a child needs to eat even if he/she doesn't like the food; because there just aren't enough workers to feed the children on multiple schedules; they feel that the children need to learn to eat when it's time to eat; they don't want the children to go to bed hungry because they were throwing a tantrum during feeding time—however, we do not condone force-feeding when it's really forced, so if you see this happening, please notify the Project Directors
- children are bundled up in multiple layers of clothing, often to the point where the child is sweating a lot—some of the reasons for this are that they believe that if you're exposed to cold air that you'll get sick; there's no indoor heating and it can get quite cold, especially for young children; culturally, Ecuadorians just bundle up more and frankly think that Americans running around in short-sleeve shirts with no sweater or jacket in cool weather are kind of crazy, but take a look at average Ecuadorians on the street, and you'll notice that they're dressed more warmly than we are; it's a cultural habit, at least in part—if a child is sweating profusely, ask if you can unbutton their sweater, or remove one layer of clothing, and then if you're asked to re-dress the child or dress a child more warmly, do so; after all, it's a chance for one-on-one time with the baby, and a great time for a gentle massage on the changing table
- discipline/treatment of the children being a little more strict/rough—some of the reasons for this are just that it's a little bit cultural; that they want the children to behave well; that there are so many children they're dealing with that they lose their patience (it's hard work that they're doing day in and day out); those who are experienced working with babies might seem to be treating them a little rough when handling them, but in general, they're not, it's just that they have a lot of experience handling babies—however, if you ever think any treatment you see is abusive, you need to talk to the Project Directors and let them know
- most of the orphanages use cloth diapers and have very few baby wipes (if any)—the main reason for this is that disposable diapers and wipes are expensive; cloth diapers and “plastics” (hour-glass-shaped pieces of plastic that are tucked in and then tied around the cloth diaper to prevent leakage) are reusable and are easily washed in bulk for 20-30+ babies and then air-dried; cloth diaper rags are often used in place of baby wipes or even just rinsing the baby under running water (soap is available to wash your hands after physically rinsing off the baby using your hand)—volunteers are often surprised by the lack of baby wipes factor...but if you use the cloth diaper rags when you encounter a dirty diaper to get as much off as you can, then it's really not that bad (and again, soap is

available and you SHOULD wash your hands after); sometimes diapers and/or diaper wipes are available more than normal because they've been donated

Another thing to be aware of is many volunteers think the babies have “bruises” on their bums/backside, but they're not bruises at all. What these really are are Mongolian Spots, and they're found on the majority of Ecuadorian babies' bums/backside and are blue/blue-gray/blue-black; they're a discoloration of the skin, like a birthmark, and usually disappear after a few years—they are NOT bruises and pose no health problems at all. Why this is so unfamiliar is because they pretty much only affect certain races and ethnicities—most white people don't have them.