

## Latino teens happier, healthier if families embrace biculturalism



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Parents of adolescents know that it can be challenging to make sure their teens are making healthy choices. Latino parents who have immigrated to the United States face an additional and unique challenge: raising adolescents in a new country and culture.

Latino teens face challenges too. Adolescents who are trying to adjust to life in the U.S. themselves, or who are first-generation U.S. citizens with parents of a different culture, can be at greater risk for health problems and risky behavior associated with acculturation. Acculturation is defined as how much and how quickly a person adjusts to a new culture.

A study funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, shows that Latino adolescents in the U.S. who maintain ties to their culture of origin are more likely to develop healthy behaviors than their peers who do not. Latino adolescents with strong awareness of their family's culture reported higher self esteem, fewer social problems and less hopelessness, aggression and substance abuse.

“Teens adjusting to a new culture can encounter stressful situations like racial discrimination,” said CDC scientist Corinne Ferdon. “These situations are associated with adolescents engaging in risky behavior such as youth violence and substance abuse.”

The good news is that there are steps you can take as a parent with your teen to overcome these health risks. As a Latino parent who has immigrated to the U.S., you can honor your culture of origin and also weave in parts of the U.S. culture to help your teen adjust and live a healthy, balanced life. Your teen will not have to choose between their heritage and the American culture; you can help them be proud of both.

Here are some steps Latino parents can take to help keep teens stay safe and healthy:

- 1. Find the balance.** Work to help your child understand which parts of the U.S. culture are helpful, and which parts conflict with your personal family values to help adolescents make healthy decisions.

- 2. Make time for family.** Work schedules and a lack of extended family support often make family time difficult. It's very important that you spend time together as a family during times of cultural adjustment. Take a walk, eat meals together, or engage in other activities your whole family enjoys.

- 3. Talk to your children.** Talk with your adolescent children as you are getting used to life in the United States, and communicate about making good choices about their health and safety.

- 4. Listen to your children.** When differences of opinion arise, try to listen and be flexible enough to hear what your teen is saying about how things are done in this new culture and about how they may be struggling or thriving.

For more information:

Call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyYouth/az/>