

Del corazón de los jóvenes

What Latino teens are saying about love and relationships



Rarely are teens themselves asked to share their thoughts and beliefs about issues that affect them. *Del corazón de los jóvenes*—which in English roughly translates to “youth speak from the heart”—gives both teens and parents a snapshot of what Latino teens* *themselves* say about relationships.

Although *familismo* is traditionally an important part of Hispanic culture, it can be difficult for parents to discuss relationships, love, sex, and teen pregnancy with their children. Parents should know, however, that teens themselves say they want to hear from their parents on these topics. *Del corazón de los jóvenes* also provides some tips for Latino parents and teens to begin or continue conversations about healthy relationships—the building blocks of strong families and strong communities.

At present, Latino teens have both the highest teen pregnancy rate and the highest teen birth rate of any major ethnic group in the United States. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has long believed that efforts to reduce teen pregnancy should focus, in part, on the role that relationships play in teens’ lives. We hope the information presented here will be of interest not only to Latino teens and parents, but also to those who work with Latino teens.

This document is based on findings from a nationally-representative survey of Latino teens and adults, focus groups with Latino teens, and research previously published by the National Campaign. In particular:

- Public opinion results are drawn from a nationally-representative survey of Latinos, conducted in September and October of 2006 by International Communications Research (ICR) on behalf of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. ICR conducted telephone interviews with 221 young people ages 12-19 and with 202 adults ages 20 and older, all of whom identified themselves as Latino/Hispanic. The exact wording of survey questions and answers can be found in *Voices Heard: Latino Adults and Teens Speak Up About Teen Pregnancy*, which is available online at www.TheNationalCampaign.org.
- Also presented are some key themes and quotes that emerged from focus groups with Latino boys and girls ages 13-19 conducted by the National Campaign in Los Angeles, Miami, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C.
- Other data are from *Parent-Adolescent Communication about Sex in Latino Families: A Guide for Practitioners*, as well as the National Campaign’s *A Look at Latinos* fact sheet series. For more information about these and other publications designed for the Latino community, visit www.TheNationalCampaign.org.



“Sex makes things difficult—it’s harder to let go of the other person. You can’t move on.”

– Latina teen girl, Los Angeles



Relationships

Latino teens often say that honesty, communication, respect, and *confianza*** are important qualities of a healthy relationship. Dishonesty and infidelity are generally cited by Latino teens as characteristics of unhealthy relationships. Jealousy, however, is most often cited by Latino teens as a sign of a serious problem in a relationship. For example, many Latina teens say that jealousy is often regarded as a sign of caring and affection at the beginning of a relationship, but that jealousy often escalates to the point where it can be very difficult to get out of the relationship.

DATING DANGER: More than one-third of Latina teens report that their first sexual partner was four or more years older. Teen girls who date older guys are at a higher risk of teen pregnancy—as the age difference between teen girls and their partners increases, the likelihood of having sex increases and the likelihood of using contraceptives decreases.

PARENT TIP: Teens often say that a primary reason why young people stay in unhealthy relationships is because their boyfriend or girlfriend is the one person they have who is always there for them. Make sure your children know that *you* are there for them too.

Fast Fact: Three-quarters of Latino teen boys (75%) and more than half of Latina teen girls (55%) believe that getting married is better than remaining single.

Latino teens often say that it's best to wait to have sex. Some report that sex does not necessarily bring a couple closer and can lead to difficulties or even end a relationship. Latina teen girls in particular say that sex can have negative effects, such as getting emotionally attached to a partner before they are ready or causing damage to their reputation.

Fast Fact: Almost seven in ten (69%) sexually-experienced Latino teens wish they had waited longer to have sex.

TEEN TIP: We hear a lot of teens say that even though they knew they weren't ready, they had sex in the "heat of the moment." Make sure you talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend about what's right for you before you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation.

Parent-Teen Conversations

Latino teens say that parents most influence their decisions about dating and relationships. Even so, there seems to be a conversation disconnect between parents and teens. Although 80% of Latino parents say that they've had a helpful conversation about relationships, love, and sex with their teens, only 66% of Latino teens agree.



"What my parents tell me is more important than what the media says."

- Latina teen girl,
Los Angeles



TEEN TIP: It's okay to initiate a conversation with your parents about relationships and/or sex. Keep in mind that there's a chance your parents never had "*la charla*" with their parents, so talking to you might be awkward for them.

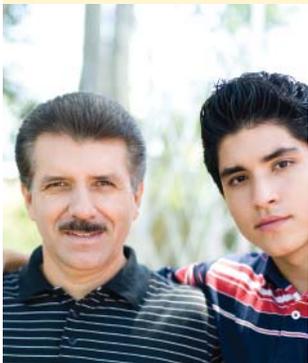
Latino teens, like all teens, often express frustration that their parents do not take their romantic relationships or their feelings seriously. Teens want parents to know that just because they are young, it doesn't mean *que no se pueden enamorar*.

PARENT TIP: Teens appreciate your effort in trying to see things from their perspective. Put yourself in their place and think about things from your son or daughter's point of view. You might find it helpful to share some of your own experiences with them or to ask them to tell you more about their experiences. Remember to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture.

It's important that parents talk with their sons, not just their daughters, and that they deliver the same message about behaving responsibly in their relationships *and* being responsible about sex.

Fast Fact: Three-quarters of Latino teens—and 73% of Latino adults—think that parents send one message about relationships and sex to their sons and a different message to their daughters.

PARENT TIP: Some Latino teens say their parents can be overprotective, and that this can actually make a teen more likely to rebel against his or her parents. Give your children opportunities to earn your trust, and acknowledge them when they make good decisions.



“My mom doesn't say anything about my brother's three girlfriends, but what would she say if she were the mother of one of the girls?”

– *Latina teen girl, Los Angeles*

When Should the Conversations Start?



“If you don't learn this stuff when you're really young, you're not going to just know it when you're older.”

– *Latino teen boy, San Antonio*

Fast Fact: More than half (53%) of Latina teens get pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Waiting until high school to start talking about relationships and sex may be too late.

Some Latino parents say they plan to talk to their children about relationships, love, and sex only after certain stages of life are reached, such as when their children are in their first romantic relationship or when their children turn 18. Others acknowledge that they have spoken to their children in only rather vague ways about relationships, love, and sex.

PARENT TIP: Many parents freely admit that they want to talk to their children about relationships, love, and sex but don't know what to say or when to start the conversation. TV shows, *telenovelas*, and the news of the day often provide parents with opportunities to start or continue discussions with their children about relationships, love, sex, and teen pregnancy.

Latino teens say that they want their parents to start talking to them about relationships and sex before they hear about it at school or from their friends, which is perhaps sooner than some parents might think. It's important to start talking early. *Nunca es muy temprano.*

PARENT TIP: Think of “the talk” as an 18-year conversation rather than a one-time discussion. Many children are curious about relationships and sex. Don't jump to conclusions about your child's activities just because he or she asks you a question.

Role Models

Teens don't just automatically know what a healthy relationship is or how to have one. Seeing healthy, positive relationships around them can help them know how to create and maintain a healthy relationship when the time comes.

Even if teens don't have positive role models, they say they can learn a lot about what to avoid from seeing unhealthy relationships.

TEEN TIP: Role models don't need to be from your immediate family. If you know someone in a healthy relationship—*como un tío o una tía*—don't be afraid to ask questions or try to learn from them.

PARENT TIP: The more you talk about relationships and sex with your teen, the more likely it is that their knowledge, beliefs, and behavior will reflect your values.

DATING DANGER: Many Latino teens believe *machismo* and "traditional" gender roles are a potential source of problems in a relationship. Some say that teens often model their own behavior on the double standards they observe growing up, which can lead to poor communication, jealousy, and even abuse.

"For an example of a healthy relationship, I look at my parents, who are still together—they've taught me that you always have to be able to work it out."

– Latino teen boy, Miami

"My mom and my father are not together and it wasn't a healthy relationship. I look at what my mother went through and it makes me want to do better in my relationships."

– Latina teen girl,
Los Angeles



"My parents always just say, 'School, school, school! You can have a relationship later.'"

– Latino teen boy, Miami



Education, Goals, and Relationships

Fast Fact: More than nine in ten Latino parents say that it is very important for their child to get a college education.

Latino teens say that their parents discuss the importance of avoiding romantic relationships and early parenting with them because they want their children to go to college and *aprovechar de las oportunidades de este país*. However, teens also say their parents sometimes put too much pressure on them to be successful academically.

Fast Fact: More than two-thirds (69%) of Latina teen moms drop out of high school.

TEEN TIP: One of the surest ways to derail your plans is to become a teen parent. Early childbearing and parenting increases the likelihood that mothers will be poor and that their children will live in poverty and start school at a disadvantage. Children are a blessing, but they need parents who are prepared to give them the opportunities they deserve and who are ready to take on the life-long job of being a parent.

PARENT TIP: Talking about education is important, but make sure to acknowledge that school might not be the only thing that matters to your teen. Teens also need guidance and *apoyo* from their parents when it comes to relationships and their social lives.

Some teens say their parents encourage them to follow a certain sequence—to finish school, have a career, and *then* get married and start a family. Most teens agree that they want to finish their education before starting a family, but often say they also want to have meaningful relationships along the way. Teens can achieve a healthy balance between education and their social lives, but it's important for them to understand that the decisions they make now about relationships and sex will affect their future.



“My mom always says, ‘*La educación que reciben en los Estado Unidos no es la misma que recibimos en nuestro país.*’ She expects me to graduate and pursue higher education because no one else in my family really had the opportunity before.”

- Latina teen girl, Washington, D.C.



* UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, “LATINO TEENS” REFERS TO BOTH LATINO BOYS AND LATINA GIRLS.

** GLOSSARY

confianza = trust

“la charla” = “the talk”

que no se pueden enamorar = that they can’t fall in love

como un tío o una tía = like an uncle or an aunt

Nunca es muy temprano = It’s never too early

aprovechar de las oportunidades de este país = take advantage of this country’s opportunities

apoyo = support

La educación que reciben en los Estado Unidos no es la misma que recibimos en nuestro país = The education received in the U.S. isn’t the same as the education we received in our country

ABOUT THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT TEEN AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCY: The National Campaign's goal is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women, and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

If we are successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.

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