



Issues for Immigrant Parents and Their Children

Immigrant families to Canada and the United States can face many issues complicating their adjustment to the new host culture.

Often unconsidered is the implications for intra-familial culture clash when children take to the host culture sooner or more wholeheartedly than their parents. Risk of conflict between children and their parents is heightened on issues of socialization with opposite gender friends, developing friends of other cultures, issues of rights and freedoms and expectations for academic performance.

Further, it is important to appreciate that immigrant families come to Canada generally seeking to provide a better life for their children than what might have been available in their country of origin. Hence when these parents come up against conflict with their children owing to adaptation, the conflict can be felt by the parent as tremendous disrespect by the child who doesn't understand the parents' rationale and sacrifice in coming to the new country.

While there are common challenges faced between immigrant parents and children of both gender, risk of pregnancy is a potent issue that can intensify concerns for the well-being of girls. In addition, strong cultural imperatives with regard to dress, deportment and socializing with the opposite sex can at times place greater demands on girls than boys.

These differences can erupt into serious fights between daughters and parents. Even when a fight does not erupt, some teenaged girls may seek to lead a double-life; keeping secrets about relationships and even their dress when at school or in the community. Other teenaged girls may seek to subordinate their feelings to the will of their parents only to find themselves depressed and anxious over the difficulty with cultural and family adaptation.

Boys do face cultural imperatives and conflicts too, but the absence of risk of pregnancy can lessen the scrutiny placed upon them by parents. However, the boys may be more subject to high expectations for academic excellence, which may or may not be taken well. If not taken well, boys may come to reject their own family's culture, falling prey to the illusions of freedom from authority by gravitating to counter-

culture groups or gangs. This in turn can lead to a risk of conflict with the law and abject academic failure as well as extreme conflict with their family.

The challenge is on the parents to adapt and find reasonable strategies to support cultural expectations in view of the greater likelihood that their children will be affected and changed by the new host culture. It is less a question of whether the children will be changed by the host culture, but rather how and to what degree. Further, some immigrant parents may hail from cultures where the norm is to tell a child what to do and expect obedience. This quickly erodes for the children socialized particularly in western culture where individual freedom is valued and rewarded. Thus those parents who adjust and develop strategies that minimize the risk of conflict with their children stand the opportunity to remain more influential in their children's lives than those parents who rely solely upon control strategies.

While not nagging their children, sharing stories as to why parents chose to immigrate and their hopes for their family's future can inform their children as to their family aspirations. Further, when parents invite their children to engage in a dialogue about the differences between their respective lives non-judgmentally; parents and children may be apprised of their respective experiences and may be in a better position to discuss differences between themselves.

The challenge here is for the parents to develop skills that rely more upon influence than control. This can also be facilitated by participation and enjoyment of cultural activities and inviting their children's new friends to join in. Co-opting children's friends can serve as a better way of maintaining family integrity than isolating from friends.

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