

# How can I help my kids retain our culture, now we live in NZ?

It can be both exciting and worrying for us as new immigrant parents whose children are integrating into full New Zealand culture through school or preschool. Schools sometimes provide our child's first experiences of speaking full English and mixing with Kiwi children where we hope they can form friendships. But we also know that these children and the teachers may not hold the same beliefs we do and our language is not spoken at all in this environment, so it is normal to worry too that our children might lose our original culture, which is hugely important to us.

Worrying too is that we may also have high expectations for our children's academic futures (in order that they follow professional careers) but as our children align more with Kiwi culture, it can appear that our goals for them are placed at risk.

We asked young people who are attending New Zealand schools and higher school education, what's helping them reach the goals their parents set for them. We think you may find their answers very reassuring. We also noticed that their responses align with the research on the most positive experiences of integration to a new country.

## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The young people we spoke to were always thinking about their next steps to 'get ahead'. We were surprised to see they were researching the types of jobs New Zealand had a shortage of and impressed by how actively they were looking for training and 'up-skilling' in order that they may work in these roles.

They spoke about their need to focus on studying in order to get good jobs, achieve their goals and have bright futures.

## RETAINING LANGUAGE

Young people enjoyed their parents speaking to them in their cultural language. As one said: "My first language is fundamental to who I am, it's extremely important to me."

They suggested parents offer as many opportunities as possible for kids to speak, read and write in their first language and thought this was a great way to keep connected as a family.

Many said attending church or the mosque were also important places to practice their language and culture.

Young people were also aware that their parents were keen for their English to be excellent, and they took this very seriously. Most wanted to be bi or multi-lingual, with one saying: "Speaking our language and English is the most respectful thing to do for our parents."

## CELEBRATIONS, EVENTS & RELIGION

For many of the young people we spoke to religion was extremely important. Other ways young people enjoyed retaining their culture included:

- attending cultural festivals
- celebrating New Year anniversaries
- wearing traditional clothing
- cooking and eating traditional food
- attending church or mosque
- continuing faith-based beliefs and celebrations.

**"If you forget your culture, you forget your life."**

## AVOIDING BAD STUFF!

Young people were aware New Zealand offered more liberal choices for them than their parents had ever had available. Here are some of the things they wanted to share with their parents:

- I'd like to talk to you about this. I know the rules and right from wrong, but I'd still like to be able to talk about it. I'd like you to be friendly with me around these topics.
- Try and understand what it's like for me growing up here. Ask me questions if you want to.
- If you see my behaviour change, please come and talk to me.
- I'd love you to come to my school and meet my friends, so you can see I'm okay and not taking risks.
- Guide me and let me know what you want me to be doing but try not to lecture me or assume I'm doing things you don't approve of.
- I know I can't do whatever I want. Nobody can. I don't want to break your trust.
- You're there with every decision I make.
- I know you came here to give me a better life. I sometimes think it would be easier for you back home. But you're here for me. I owe you."

## HOW ELSE CAN PARENTS SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE?

And finally here's some of the requests from young people to help them better enjoy New Zealand, along with you, their parents.

- Think about how you want to keep involved in my life. Pay attention to my report cards, come and meet my teachers
- Keep checking in on me and asking how things are for me.
- I do need some privacy. I'm happy for you to follow me on social media, but please don't create dummy accounts or 'take over'.
- Be honest with me and I'll be honest with you.
- Have some fun with me. Spend time with me. Take a break and let's go explore and have a picnic, go explore, come shopping with me.
- Treat me like the person you want me to be. I really am that responsible, caring and respectful person now.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS AND RESEARCH SAYS

We also contacted Christchurch Resettlement Services (CRS) and referred to research to see what helps new New Zealanders retain their culture – and whether this is beneficial.

It's important to know that young people are adapting to New Zealand life, but this doesn't mean they've given up on their culture. They really learn two ways – the way of their original culture and the way of New Zealand culture.

It's clear that sometimes young people worry about what their parents may think about their New Zealand ways, and if they sense disapproval, they may hide some aspects. This creates a bit of a negative cycle – they worry about disapproval, they hide things, parents become more suspicious, they hide things more...

So, the advice young people have offered here is actually very helpful in encouraging parents being able to manage this with their teenage/older children.

It's clear that a new immigrant who adapts to New Zealand culture as well as maintaining their original culture will enjoy life here more. New immigrants who can relate to and engage in New Zealand society generally have:

- greater life satisfaction
- better social and cultural adaptation
- less identity concerns and worries
- less perceived discrimination.

The young people we talked to were very clear they were committed to maintaining their original culture and adopting a New Zealand culture too. It's clear, this has very positive outcomes for them. As their parents, this may be challenging, however it's very important to support them in this and also look to adopt a similar approach.

## REFERENCE:

[Ward, C. Acculturation and Adaptation in First-Generation Immigrants to New Zealand. 2008. <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/cacr/research/migration/acculturation-and-adaptation-in-first-generation-immigrants-to-new-zealand>](https://www.victoria.ac.nz/cacr/research/migration/acculturation-and-adaptation-in-first-generation-immigrants-to-new-zealand)

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