

**Bicultural Families:
Meeting the Challenges of Raising Children with Two
Cultures**

— What kind of education do we want them to have? How will we teach them the things they won't learn in school?

At a more fundamental level, how should we teach them to behave and what methods should we use?

At my house, we found that we have different expectations of behavior and different ways to discipline based on the cultures in which we were raised. Aziz grew up in a culture in which children clean the house, buy the groceries, prepare dinner, take care of younger siblings and contribute to the family income. They kiss their father's hand when he returns from work. They don't openly question parental authority. When they disobey, they are shamed by their parents, siblings and neighborhood children.

In contrast, my mother like many American moms cooked dinner and served us, cleaned the house, did our laundry, drove us to appointments and asked for our input about family plans. To punish us, she sent us to our rooms or removed privileges.

Should our family adopt one approach or the other or a mixture of both? How will our choices affect our children?

— There are no definitive answers, Crohn says. — Approaches that work well for some families spell disaster for others. — But, he says, — There is one consistently bad solution: avoiding the difficult issues and living with chronic resentment. What is really important is doing the work to discover which path will work for you.

Handling Differences

Some bicultural families embrace one culture or the other. Others try to give their children the best of both. In deciding how to raise bicultural children, experts agree that *how* you decide is more important than *what* you decide.

Raising children in a bicultural family is much like raising children in any other family in that the family dynamic begins with the marriage. Raising children is a test of how well a couple has learned to handle their many differences, says Dugan Romano, author of *Intercultural Marriage: Promises & Pitfalls*. With children, all the issues surface and must be confronted. — Differences don't matter, — she says. — How they are managed does.

Parents must make decisions about what traditions the family will follow, what foods will be served, how children will dress, where they will live, what language they will speak — the list is endless. But Romano identifies 10 characteristics of successful bicultural marriages. To keep these families on solid footing, she says that parents have to foster:

- a commitment to the relationship
- an ability to communicate
- a sensitivity to each other's needs
- a respect for each other's culture
- flexibility
- a solid, positive self-image
- love as the main marital motive
- common goals
- a spirit of adventure, and
- a sense of humor.

Parents' attitudes greatly affect the children's, Romano says. When

See the complete contents of *Bicultural Families*:

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Part 2: [Helping Kids Embrace Both Cultures](#)

Part 3: [Stages of Cultural Identity](#)

Part 4: [How Bicultural Families Make It Work](#)

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