

## ARTICLE AND VIDEO VIEWING GUIDE: Latino Teens and Suicide

### Suicide Prevention

CWK Network

*“Overall, as a Latino community, we need to continue to become educated about this very important issue. We need to break that taboo, break that barrier, and talk about it. We need to help our children communicate with us when they have challenges.” – Pierluigi Mancini, Ph.D., addiction specialist*

Hispanic teens face the same pressures as any kid.

“Growing up and changes and peer pressure,” explains 13-year-old Jolis Abreu. “All of that, we gotta handle it.”

But experts say Latino kids often face another stress: a conflict between the traditionally strict culture of their parents and an American culture that seems to be more permissive.

Explains addiction specialist Dr. Pierluigi Mancini, “We are seeing many Latino youth that are born here or recently arrive here that are now living in a world much different than their parents’ world. So their parents don’t have a true understanding of the challenges these kids are facing.”

These kids can feel overwhelmed with messages about drug use and sexuality. They want to talk.

But, Dr. Mancini says, in Latino culture, children are not supposed to bring up these topics to their parents.

“How does a 13-year-old Latina girl approach her parents about that issue?” says Dr. Mancini, “We don’t know. There are no skills, there’s no bridge.”

And, he says, when a child can’t talk to their parent about their anxieties or fears, that can lead to self-destructive behavior and even suicide.

Who’s at risk? American/Alaskan Native youth have the highest rates of suicide-related fatalities. A nationwide survey of high school students in the U.S. found Hispanic youth were more likely to report attempting suicide than their black and white, non-Hispanic peers. ([www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication](http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication))

“We know as human beings that when I’m angry or sad, if I don’t talk to someone, that feeling doesn’t go away,” says Dr. Mancini.

“It’s like they keep it to themselves,” says 13-year-old Jolis, “and that pressure builds up and then... they can’t handle it and explode, and go all crazy.”

Experts say parents of all ethnicities and backgrounds should realize the unique pressures their teens face, and make time for open communication.

“We need to help our children communicate with us when they have challenges,” says Dr. Mancini.

#### Expert Advice for Parents

- Along with depression, there are other risk factors for suicide in teens – including substance abuse, eating disorders and other emotional and mental disorders. Traumatic events such as separation from a parent, physical and sexual abuse, the end of a romantic relationship, or social isolation can also leave a teen vulnerable to depression. ([American Psychiatric Association](http://www.psychiatry.org))
- Try to stay open, honest and patient when your child brings up sensitive topics and issues. You can use these conversations as opportunities to convey your values, expectations, morals, and support. ([Children Now](http://www.childrennow.org) and the [Kaiser Family Foundation](http://www.kaiserfamilyfoundation.org))

- Keep the lines of communication open with your teen, even if they get into trouble. Rejecting or punishing them without hearing them out could mean that, next time, they will avoid coming to you for help. (Pierluigi Mancini, Ph.D., addiction specialist)

#### References

- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Child Welfare League of America
- National Mental Health Association
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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