

Indian Children Living In America

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Being born in America but being Indian at heart has been quite challenging for me and I'm sure I'm not alone. You are constantly exposed to both cultures, yet finding the balance seems like a never ending battle. And it is a battle. It is essentially trying to bring two sets of very different values together seamlessly, which seems nearly impossible. So how do you maintain your Indian values and live in America? How is it possible to be a true Indian if we are living in a country that is so different from India?

The Key Cultural Differences between India and America

Both India and America have an enormous amount to offer. But they are so different from one another that blending the two cultures can be very challenging.

India is a very collective country by nature. People tend to be very close knit and seem to thrive on group activities. From childhood, kids and parents are constantly connected and have a very strong bond with one another. For example, parents will keep their children next to them at night when they sleep and they prepare meals for their kids from childhood through adolescence. Also, as the children grow older, and they meet friends of their own, it is not uncommon for kids to bring their friends home to spend time with the family. And children often know the name of their best friends' mom and dad. Even later in life, it is not unusual to find joint families living together. Togetherness and being amongst others is the norm in India. It just naturally happens.

America, on the other hand often seems to follow the opposite pattern as it is a highly individualistic country. Straight from childhood, parents try to convince their children to sleep in their own beds in their own rooms,

and learn how to eat without being fed. They also encourage children to get involved in activities that will make them unique individuals. Once kids reach the age that they can move out of the house, they are so used to striving for independence that they almost crave it. Youngsters want to test out all the knowledge they have acquired and see how well they can survive on their own.

Both sets of values are extremely important to our success in life. While the Indian values make us compassionate, caring and selfless, the American values make us confident, self sufficient and ambitious. Ideally, we would like to have all of these characteristics, but often this does not happen...why? Why do some kids lose the core Indian values after being raised in America even though they are exposed to both cultures?

Home is where the Heart Is

I believe the key to maintaining Indian values lies in one place...home. The way you are raised at home has a lot to do with what you seek to accomplish in life and what you deem as important. In the early stages of life, your parents and siblings are your main role models, but as you grow older and get exposure to other people outside of the family, you obtain an infinite number of role models, which will ultimately influence your tastes and preferences.

Since most of our parents have originally come from India, they still have the Indian values mentioned earlier. They enjoy close-knit activities with their children and like to be involved with their lives. They seek togetherness and sharing. But as kids, being raised in America, we are constantly exposed to the American goal of reaching independence and moving away from family dependence toward self sufficiency. These two perspectives

contradict one another. How can we be dependent yet independent?

The outcome of this inconsistency usually forces the American born Indian child to choose one path or the other. And since we do live in America, it is just easier to follow the “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” mentality and become completely independent. So we start to disconnect from the family and tend to spend more time away from home. But, the more we move away from our families, our parents and siblings, the more we move away from the values they taught us. Therefore it is the connection we have to our families that is the key to maintaining our Indian values. This is not to say that we should not strive to be successful individuals and should not learn to survive on our own. But we should learn how to keep our independence without totally disconnecting from our parents and families. It is essential to keeping our Indian roots. This is not an easy task, but if it can be done. I believe

I have done it. If staying close to your family and valuing the lessons they have taught you is something important to you, as it is for me, you will be that much closer to keeping your Indian values intact.

The Big Picture

Though maintaining Indian values in America can be difficult at times, it all comes down to believing in what is right in front of you. Your family. Our families want what’s best for us and that includes being successful, independent and determined...which is actually everything that American culture teaches us. But they also bond us to the traditions that we as Indians should have, because it is who we are. So being connected to Indian culture and succeeding in America is not impossible. Our families have always been there for us and they will always be there, and if we as youths embrace this rather than run away from it, we can be true Indians living in America.



**BUT MOM, YOU SAID YOU WILL BE HAPPY
IF I MARRY AN INDIAN BOY, DIDN'T YOU?**