

Study shows family support, awareness benefit Latino college students

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A successful transition to college life is the first step to graduating. Among Latino college students, graduation rates are on [therise](#) but still [lag](#) behind other ethnic groups.

New research from the Arizona State University Department of Psychology has demonstrated the importance of family relationships for Latino students as they adapt to college. Family dynamics—especially communication and parent awareness of their child's daily lives—had both immediate and long-term protective effects on student well-being. The study was published in *Developmental Psychology*.

"Family really matters. We examined how family dynamics during the last year of high school and across the first year of college impacted Latino students' transition to college. What we found is that family communication has lasting and positive benefits on the adjustment to university life," said Jeri Sasser, an ASU psychology graduate student and first author on the paper.

The research team followed 207 Latino students during their last year in high school and first year of college. The study participants completed questionnaires about family communication, parent support and knowledge of their daily lives, and their own well-being when they were in high school and during their first and second semesters of college. The questions about family communication assessed the quality of communication between the students and family members such as parents, grandparents, siblings, or aunts and uncles. The student well-being measures included alcohol use and levels of [depressive symptoms](#).

Positive family communication during senior year of high school predicted fewer depressive symptoms during the first semester of college. The benefits of family communication persisted beyond the first semester by way of parent awareness of their child's daily lives.

The students' perception of how aware their parents were of what was happening in their lives was related to less alcohol use during the first and second semesters of college.

"Depressive symptoms and alcohol use tend to increase when people go to college, and that can be hard to change. This study shows that establishing family communication before the college transition may promote lower levels of depressive symptoms and alcohol use," said Jack Waddell, an ASU psychology graduate student and second author on the paper.

The study also found that student experiences in college affected family dynamics. For example, students who reported increases in depressive symptoms during the first semester of college also reported decreasing parent support during their second semester.

"Latino youth continue to be one of the largest ethnic minority groups represented in higher education settings, but they have the lowest graduation rates," said Leah Doane, professor of psychology and senior author on the paper. "We are doing a good job of increasingly promoting college-going pathways for Latino youth, and we need to do a better job of understanding what happens when they are in [college](#) from an individual, family, and institutional perspective to enhance their abilities to succeed and graduate."

More information: Jeri Sasser et al, Family dynamics and adjustment across Latino/a students' transition to college: Disentangling within- and between-person reciprocal associations., *Developmental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1037/dev0001474](https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001474)

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