

How to Raise a Kid Who Hustles



Chances are, you inherited your parents' work ethic and want to pass on the same motivation to the next generation. Thankfully, you can teach *ganas*, experts say, if you lay the groundwork early.

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MARIBEL BENITEZ RASCO can hardly remember a time growing up when her immigrant parents weren't hard at work. Her dad, a cook, was out the door by 4 A.M. and would return home just as her mom, a waitress, left for her evening shift. "As a kid, I didn't realize adults had normal careers with weekends and nights off," says the Mexican-American mom. "My parents never turned down an opportunity so that my sisters and I wouldn't want for anything."

Rasco has certainly inherited their hustle. A trauma therapist, she recently received her master's degree in clinical and school counseling while juggling a full-time job and raising a 2-year-old son, Noah, with her husband in San Antonio.

She worries, though, that the boy, who is growing up with more privilege and opportunities than she ever had, won't have the same level of *ganas*—aka the hunger to push for more, even when the odds are stacked against you. "A lot of my ambition comes from watching my parents persist no matter what and the barriers I've faced as a first-generation Latina trying to find my place at the table," Rasco says. "I don't know that my son will experience life in the same way."

That need to strive is an inherent part of the Latino storyline in the United States. In fact, according to the Pew Research Center, 77 percent of Latinos—compared with 62 percent of the general public in the U.S.—believe that people can

succeed through perseverance. But as generations of Latinos assimilate, there's often a shift in values, says Karen Caraballo, Psy.D., a Puerto Rican psychologist in Brooklyn, New York. "Latino immigrants come to this country with hopes and dreams to improve their family's life," she says. "They have a very different work ethic than their kids and grandkids, who are more acculturated. If younger generations don't see the immigrant struggle or hear it being talked about, they can take it for granted."

So how can parents raise determined kids, all while allowing them to enjoy a more comfortable life? It's a tricky balance, but one that's possible with a little—yes!—hard work on your part.



¡Vamos!

1

Find What Motivates Them

Just as previous generations of Latinos were driven by the prospect of a better life, kids need something to compel them to go the extra mile. “It’s easier to keep pushing to excel if you’re doing something you really care about or can do well,” Dr. Caraballo says.

To pinpoint exactly what drives your kid, expose him to diverse activities and see what sticks. “Just try not to restrict children,” Dr. Caraballo says. “They should feel free to explore and develop interests.” Your job is to pay attention to what they naturally gravitate toward or could spend hours doing happily. And be wary of overscheduling. Boredom is a powerful tool, too, one that teaches kids to rely on their ingenuity and, perhaps, discover new talents in the process.

You can encourage kids to start thinking long-term by tapping into their hopes and dreams with a simple question all children love to answer: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Their response may change month to month, but it’s an opportunity to discuss setting goals. You can reply by saying, “What can we do to make that happen?” That way, he gets into the habit of looking at dreams, even those that seem impossible, in terms of achievable steps. “Help them focus on what they can do in the moment,” Dr. Caraballo says. For example, when Lucas, Dr. Caraballo’s 6-year-old, declared he wanted to be a dentist, mom and son discussed the values inherent in that profession (responsibility, commitment, compassion) and found activities that would propel the boy closer to his objective in the short term, such as completing chores and volunteering.



2

Emphasize Effort

If you want your kids to go after what they want, prepare to cheer them on. Experts agree it’s a great way to build confidence at an early age. Veronica Arevalo, a Venezuelan entrepreneur in Tampa, did just that when her son, Juan, now 10, got into go-kart racing. Instead of handing over the cash for a new go-kart, she and her husband asked him to contribute to the expensive hobby. Juan soon came back with a pitch to bake and sell *pan de jamón*, a traditional Venezuelan holiday bread, at Christmastime. Arevalo supported him by creating ads targeted

at local Venezuelan groups on Facebook, and the boy eventually raised \$1,200, more than enough for his share of the vehicle. “When we told him about his profits, he had this huge smile and felt so empowered,” Arevalo remembers.

Recognition for a job well done can start with simple household chores, which introduce concepts such as problem solving and teamwork and can be easily tailored by age, says Laura Olivos, Psy.D., a Peruvian-American child psychologist in Miami. She suggests getting young kids (even toddlers) to pitch in, even if their sweeping technique leaves something to be desired. “The trick is to let little ones participate in their own loving, imperfect way,” she says. “When we praise kids for their effort instead of the outcome, they feel appreciated and are more likely to improve their skills over time.”

As children get older, you can also implement an earnings system—say, screen time after chores—to prove that hard work does pay off. “Society is set up so that we receive rewards, whether it’s money or pride, from the effort we put

GANAS 101

“My parents taught me that you have to put in effort to make your dreams happen. No matter what job my dad took, he was never late. My mom always dressed for success, even if she was cleaning houses.”

—Jessica Rangel
mom of two;
Tampa, FL



Hover your phone’s camera to tell us how you’re teaching your kid to hustle.

in,” Dr. Olivos says. “So doing the same with chores at a young age creates the foundation for future success.”

3

Keep Family Lore Alive

Not only are Latinos natural storytellers, but they also have a captive audience right at home. Yes, your children enjoy hearing about the life you lived before they came along. So why not use that as an opportunity to talk about the many generations of grit and dedication it took to get them where they are today?

Christina Muñoz, a mom of three, ages 7, 6, and 1, in Anaheim, California, frequently tells her kids how she learned the basics of addition and multiplication by assisting her dad, who owned a produce stand, sell fruits and vegetables at weekend swap meets. In fact, her father, now 88, is a constant source of inspiration. A Mexican immigrant with a first-grade education, he has dozens of tales that highlight his pluck—like the time, at age 6, he walked a mile and a half in the middle of a rainstorm just to deliver lunch to his father and brothers on a ranch.

“My dad’s stories are teachable moments, planting seeds of gratitude for what we have now and for the sacrifices of those who came before,” Muñoz says. “Whenever my older kids hear what he went through, they say, ‘Mami, we have nothing to complain about!’”

By explaining how the past affected your family’s present, kids also pick up a valuable lesson: that they have it in their DNA to overcome any obstacles that get in the way. Dr. Caraballo recommends weaving stories of perseverance into conversations with children in an organic

way—whenever a book, movie, or song with a tie to your ancestry pops up, or when cooking meals together from recipes passed down from Abuela. “You don’t have to sit down and have a big talk,” Dr. Caraballo says. “Do it as part of your daily routine. Look at everything as a chance to connect to your history.”

4

Leave Room for Mistakes

Failure is a big part of raising kids with resilience. “Inevitably, it creates a backbone,” says Dr. Olivos. Giving children the space to mess up conveys that success isn’t always easily won. For example, during playtime, if your 3-year-old is puzzling over a game, let her keep trying instead of coming to the rescue.

“Don’t micromanage play,” Dr. Olivos says. “It should be a testing ground where kids can figure things out on their own.” If you find yourself itching to correct your child, take a deep breath, reexamine your expectations, and then respond with reassurance. “Tell her you’re there to help once she’s tried her best,” Dr. Olivos says.

Same thing with older children and homework. Instead of taking over her solar-system mobile or rewriting her book report, ask open-ended questions that push her to be resourceful, such as, “What are some things you and I can do together to come up with a solution?”



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“After my parents’ divorce, my mom had to work two or three jobs. Within a year, though, she moved us to a fully furnished home, bought a car, and found a great career. I saw her defy the odds, so I knew I could too.”

—Christine Feliciano
mom of two
Tampa Bay, FL

GANAS 101

“My mom and dad were teens when they had me. Although we lived in the projects for a few months, both found a way to graduate college before 30. They’re proof I can do anything I put my mind to.”

—Kelly Rivera, mom of one
East Hartford, CT

This demonstrates you have faith in her talents and also that it’s more than okay to turn to others for support.

“By working collaboratively, you’re modeling how to deal with obstacles in a constructive way,” Dr. Olivos says. “Knowing that you are not alone encourages you to forge ahead despite difficulties—even if you fail, you know people have your back.”

5

Don’t Hide Your Hustle

Nowadays, with so many parents working a typical 9-to-5 schedule—which is progress!—kids don’t always see the toil that comes with getting ahead. Yet research from MIT has found that witnessing an adult persist with a task can actually increase effort and resolve in children as young as 15 months. “You’re his biggest role model,” says Dr. Caraballo, “so it’s important for him to hear about your work stresses and how you ultimately prevailed.”

It’s a tip Dr. Caraballo follows in her own household. She finds ways to share the behind-the-scenes of her job with her son. For example, she was recently preparing for a big work conference when the boy asked her what she was doing. Dr. Caraballo was truthful about the challenges—leading an eight-hour-long presentation, something she’d never done before. While she was nervous about it, she wasn’t going to let that stop her, and she told her son as much. After all, success takes commitment, and when kids see that in action, even in the face of fear, they get the courage to let go of their own doubts and keep going. And just think how exciting it will be when they finally accomplish what they set out to do. That alone is worth the effort. ✪