

Families that stay together

I value my own home experience, says **Brianda Reyes of Garland**

After a long day at school, where I usually spent three hours in calculus tutorials, I was always glad to go home. It's not that I was running away from derivatives and integrals, I was running toward my family and our home-cooked dinners.

I never stopped to think of how blessed I was — and am — to be able to come home to a family who still sat together for a dinner that my mom cooked that day. I never stopped to

think of how blessed I was that my parents are still together, and happily in love, after almost two decades.

I never stopped to think about it until I was talking to my friend about our future plans.

He said that he wanted a stable family and a household where he could

come home to warm meals; growing up, he didn't have that.

After that conversation with him, I began to count how many of my friends had divorced or uncaring parents, or a single

mother. I was shocked when I completed the tally. I'm not a psychologist or a therapist or a family development researcher. I'm just a 17-year-old girl, but I can safely assume that living under a roof with a broken family is not the most apt environment for a child. I cannot even begin to imagine how different my childhood would have been if my parents had not been together or if one of them was entirely missing from my life.

That is not to say that all children that come from a non-traditional family will turn out to be delinquents or drug abusers. I know plenty of classmates — many of them are my closest friends — who, despite a lack of ideal parents, have turned out to be admirable teenagers. But I still see a sort of emptiness in their eyes when they talk about their parents' divorce or when I talk about how my family and I sat at the dinner table together and shared our day.

Perhaps, I thought, the difference was cultural. Hispanic families tend to be much more family-driven than American families. It is seen as perfectly normal for children to live with their parents until they have married. Among Americans, this is frowned upon.

But no matter what, even if it were a cultural difference, that does not make it as easy for my friends to be able to sit around the table with their family, it does not make it any more reasonable or, better yet, excusable.

I'm just a 17-year-old girl, but if I could ask one thing of this world, or at least this society or community, it is that they try a little harder to keep their families together. There is no shame in seeking counseling to keep a redeemable marriage alive, and there is definitely no shame in asking to leave work just a little earlier so you can join your kids for dinner or make it to their soccer games, even if you know they'll lose.

Years from now, I want my children to be able to have the family life I was so privileged to live. I do not want them to be the only ones among their friends to be able to enjoy that. So as a society, let's keep it together.



Voices

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Brianda Reyes is a senior at South Garland High School and a Student Voices volunteer columnist. To respond to this column, send an e-mail to voices@dallasnews.com.