



COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT MENTAL HEALTH

# Support for Immigrant Youth and Families in Illinois



For immigrant, refugee, migrant, asylum-seeking, and other new arrival families, this is an extremely distressing time. People may be concerned about their ability to remain safely in the United States (U.S.) and may worry that their family will be separated. For children, the fear of being forcibly separated from family due to deportation is clearly traumatic and threatening, especially due to many immigrant populations' emphasis on the centrality of family. Many escaped traumatic and life-threatening events in their home countries and risked their lives to come to the U.S. to seek refuge and reunite with family members. Deportation to them means being put in harm's way, being socially isolated and unable to meet their basic needs. Threats of separating family members or the return to life-threatening circumstances generate feelings of desperation, hopelessness, and helplessness. The uncertainty for the immediate future and shift in life plans can not only be hard to tolerate, it can lead to mental health crises. Many immigrants respond by isolating themselves and withdrawing from community services and events. However, we want you to know that:

**Illinois is a Welcoming State.  
Chicago is a Welcoming City.  
Schools and hospitals are safe spaces.  
Many community organizations are here to support you.**

Adults can support youth by understanding that, just like adults, many young people are feeling nervous about being deported or seeing loved ones deported. The heightened level of distress may put young people at risk for severe mental health concerns. Among those especially vulnerable are:

- Recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)
- Those who are of undocumented status or have undocumented family members
- Those who are not proficient in English
- Visible minorities – due to skin color, style of dress (e.g., hijab)
- Gender non-conforming youth
- And those with previous risk factors for emotional distress, such as:
  - Previous history of depression and anxiety disorders
  - Prior suicide attempts or non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors
  - Substance use
  - Impulsive aggressive behavior
  - Socially withdrawn/isolated



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## Chicago is a Welcoming City

Chicago recognizes the dignity and contributions of immigrant communities and offers a wide range of supports for immigrants to help with adjusting to life in a new community.

Here are some benefits available to our newest residents.

### Benefits for immigrants of all statuses:

- **CityKey Identification:** This identification can be used to access city resources, obtain discounts to businesses around the city, open a bank account, and register for benefits.
- **Grants and Emergency Cash Assistance:** the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago provide grants to support healthcare, food, and emergency cash assistance to individuals who qualify.
- **Chicago Police Department** does not arrest individuals on the basis of immigration status and does not cooperate with ICE.
- **Legal Consultation:** The State of Illinois and the City of Chicago, in partnership with The Resurrection Project and local community organizations, provide assistance to help eligible immigrants apply to stay or work in the US legally. There are Know Your Rights and Labor Rights Workshops available to immigrants.
- **Nutritional Assistance:** Families with young children may be eligible to receive assistance from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) to purchase food, milk, formula and connect with healthcare providers.
- **K-12 Education:** Children ages 5-20 can enroll in school.
- **Healthcare:** Medicaid will cover healthcare for low-income adults and children in Illinois, regardless of status.



## Important Strategies for Professionals Supporting Immigrant Youth

1

**Model positive coping and stay calm.** Communicate with your words and your behavior that you will keep them safe.

2

**Ensure and promote safety.**

- Many of the racist and hateful things people say or do are not only wrong, but also against the law. Reach out to authorities and leaders who can help hold individuals accountable for promoting hatred.
- Help youth identify safe spaces and safe adults who can speak up on their behalf.
- Inform families of Know Your Rights workshops in your community.
- Support families in making a family preparedness plan.

3

**Connect with social support and decrease sense of isolation.**

- Universities and schools can offer circles of support, and other safe spaces for students to express concerns and seek support.
- Connect with faith communities, a source of support for many refugee/immigrant communities.

4

**Raise awareness of organized support for refugee/immigrant rights.**

- Just knowing that there are organizations who will safeguard their rights can be reassuring to youth. Increasing their sense of control and influence over their environment and their future promotes hope. By donating to or volunteering with these organizations, adults and youth both increase social support and a sense of control over their situation.
- It's important not to challenge or dismiss a young person's fears that prejudice will harm them. However, reassure them that there are people and organizations who will help support immigrant rights.



5

**Promote healthy coping. Good ways for youth to cope include:**

- Keeping family and school routines
- Relaxation practice
- Talking and spending time with family, friends, or faith communities
- Distraction
- Using humor
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Exercising
- Writing in a journal
- Being creative or artistic
- Avoiding substance use and isolation
- Limiting media use to avoid repetitive negative images and messages
- Participate in activism or in issues that are important to them

6

**Familiarize yourself with signs of serious distress and potential suicidality and be prepared to link to services**

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Dramatic mood change
- Threatening to kill him/herself
- Talking, thinking, or writing about death or suicide
- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Unusually reckless behaviors
- Giving away prized possessions





## Key Ways Parents & Caregivers Can Support Immigrant Children

1

**Remind children that “You are safe now. I am a safe person, and I will do everything I can to protect you.”**

- Kids are scared by adult reactions, like strong emotions, violence, or talking about moving to another country. This makes kids think that adults in their life are not in control and cannot keep them safe.
- It is important for parents to model taking care of themselves and practicing good coping skills.

2

**Remind children that “We have been through hard things before. We will get through this together.”**

- Give specific examples of how your family was brave before, during, and after their journey to the US.

3

**Remind them there is still hope, and people will fight for them.**

- The United States is a country of immigrants.
- The U.S. has a history of civil rights activism and resilient individuals coming together to fight injustices.
- Already human and civil rights organizations are actively fighting for immigrant rights and preventing unlawful decisions. You also can get involved!





4

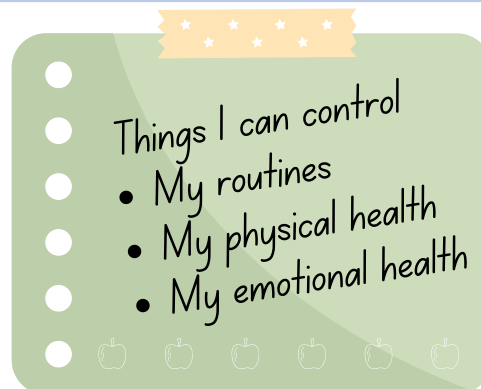
**Remind children that Illinois is a welcoming state and there are still safe spaces.**

- There are sanctuary/welcoming cities and states (Illinois for example, other states may be different).
- Schools and faith-based organizations are safe spaces (in Illinois, other states may be different).
- Students can reach out to trusted adults at school if they need support.
- Hospitals and clinics are safe spaces (in Illinois, other states may be different).

5

**It can be helpful to focus on what is under our control.**

- Important to keep routines (going to school, bedtime, mealtimes, story times)
- Keep up family/cultural traditions (celebrate holidays, birthdays)
- Take breaks from media / social media and engage in other pleasant family activities
- Take care of your physical health (exercise, eat healthy, drink water)
- Take care of your emotional health (express your emotions by talking to a trusted person or through creative outlets, practice relaxation/meditation, seek professional help)





## Crisis Resources



### How to find services when someone is willing to ask for help

For immediate requests to talk to a counselor

- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 or go to [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)
- **Lifeline - Help in Spanish:** Call 9-8-8 to speak with a counselor

To make a referral to an individual for ongoing support

- **National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Helpline:** 800-950-NAMI (6264) or reach out to [Info@nami.org](mailto:Info@nami.org)
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) Helpline:** 800-622-HELP (4357)
- You can also contact Crisis/Emergency Mental Health Partners (listed by city in IL) <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30893>

### Protocol for Suicidal Ideation

- When someone expresses *suicidal thoughts* (or the desire to take their own life) or engages in *suicidal behavior*
- **Step 1**
  - TAKE ALL THREATS SERIOUSLY.
- **Step 2**
  - DO NOT LEAVE THE PERSON ALONE. They must remain under CONSTANT adult supervision
- **Step 3**
  - **CALL 911.** Ask for an officer trained in crisis intervention (CIT Trained) and advise them that you are calling about a mental health emergency. At no time should you or any untrained person try to assess the severity of risk. Assure the person that you are taking actions to keep them safe.
- **Step 4**
  - PROVIDE REASSURANCE. Assure the person that you are taking actions to keep them safe.