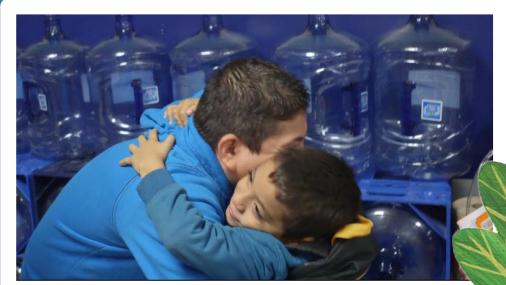


How to Support Young Children in Immigrant Families

Part I: Social and Emotional Health



How can early childhood centers and preschools best support young children in immigrant families during uncertain times? Here are some tips for educators and program directors.

Signs of Distress in Young Children

Children under age 6 may show signs of stress without being able to communicate accurately about what is causing their discomfort. It is important to listen while also looking for clues in order to help.

Signs of distress may include:

- Behavior issues, including aggression
- Separation anxiety
- Withdrawal
- More bathroom accidents
- Regressions in age-appropriate behavior
- Inability to sleep or focus
- Challenges in social interactions
- Fear of people in uniform

Reasons for distress may include:

- Worry and fear about "something bad" happening to them or their family
- Fear of how "getting in trouble" could impact the family, as seen in [this video clip](#)
- The impacts of a loved one's arrest, detention, or deportation
- Instability at home, including moving or new caregiving arrangements
- Prior traumas related to the family's situation

How to Provide Ongoing Support to Young Children

Programs can address these issues by:

- Maintaining daily routines and noting topics that come up in play and conversation
- Offering targeted mental health support
- Providing a designated adult who can stay with the child in times of difficulty
- Using age-appropriate activities (e.g., check-ins and drawing)
- Creating or using social stories to help children understand current concerns
- Additional training related to trauma and anxiety for staff and families
- Partnerships with local community, health, and mental health organizations

For more tips, see the [online version of this article](#).

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Part II: Family Partnerships



When families are facing uncertainty, strong family and community partnerships can provide support. Keep in mind that families may be navigating a range of immigration issues and decisions with varied implications for their children, including within mixed-status families in which some members of the family are U.S. citizens or residents but others are not.

Communicating with Families

Keep lines of communication open by:

- Providing updated information in families' home languages
- Building relationships with families by getting to know their interests, skills, and strengths
- Letting families know where they can ask questions
- Making personal contact with each family to let them know you are there to help
- Offering ideas for how families can support their children's well-being and learning at home
- Sharing family resources, such as [Sesame Street's bilingual Tough Topics collection](#)
- Engaging with family liaisons and parent leaders to discuss ideas and pressing issues
- Connecting families with community partners as needed
- Providing virtual options for family meetings or events
- Discussing the impact of children hearing or seeing upsetting news reports
- Avoiding direct questions that put families on the spot or may make them uncomfortable

Emergency Contacts

Keeping [emergency contacts updated](#) is essential for all families, especially if there is the possibility of a caregiver being detained. Help families keep these contacts updated by:

- Sending frequent reminders to all families to update contact information when it changes
- Making this process more accessible by translating forms and making a "how-to" video
- Asking families to list multiple emergency contacts, including at least one U.S. citizen
- Checking in with each family to verify back-up care and emergency procedures
- Getting accurate information about where the young child's siblings are enrolled in school to coordinate responses if needed

For more tips, see the [online version of this article](#).

How to Support Young Children in Immigrant Families

Part III: Tips for Program Directors



There are many steps that program directors can take to prepare for a range of situations.

Changes to 'Sensitive Locations' Guidance

Early childhood programs were previously considered "sensitive locations" where immigration enforcement would not take place unless under pressing circumstances. **That guidance has been rescinded.** While this does not mean enforcement will take place in these settings, program leaders need to be prepared that it might.

It's also important to understand how the possibility of immigration enforcement activity may impact your families. For example, families may keep children home and may not be willing to share sensitive information or attend events.

Key Considerations for Program Directors

Here are some steps that program directors can take:

- **Develop a policy that addresses interaction with immigration officials.** Many K-12 schools are developing these kinds of policies. Local school districts, community partners, and national organizations may be able to offer some guidance and resources for early childhood settings. Share these policies with families proactively and invite them to ask questions, privately if needed. While it is important not to give false hope, you can share the ways that your center is being responsive and preparing for a variety of scenarios.
- **Prepare a plan for caring for children whose caregiver has been detained.** When caregivers are detained during the work day, early childhood centers are responsible for the children in their care until an appropriate caregiver is found. Just as they would prepare for any crisis, centers can create a plan that addresses children's most immediate basic and emotional needs, identifies a safe place to stay, and enlists a network of partners who can help. In addition, centers can connect families with experts who can help them plan for possible separation.

Note: Guidelines and laws that apply to early childhood programs may vary depending on the program's location, affiliation, and funding. They also may be different from local K-12 public school policies. If clarification is needed, look for assistance from program administrators, local early childhood agencies, or national early childhood organizations.

For more tips, see the [online version of this article](#).