

How to Talk With Your Children About Immigration Enforcement

Welcome!



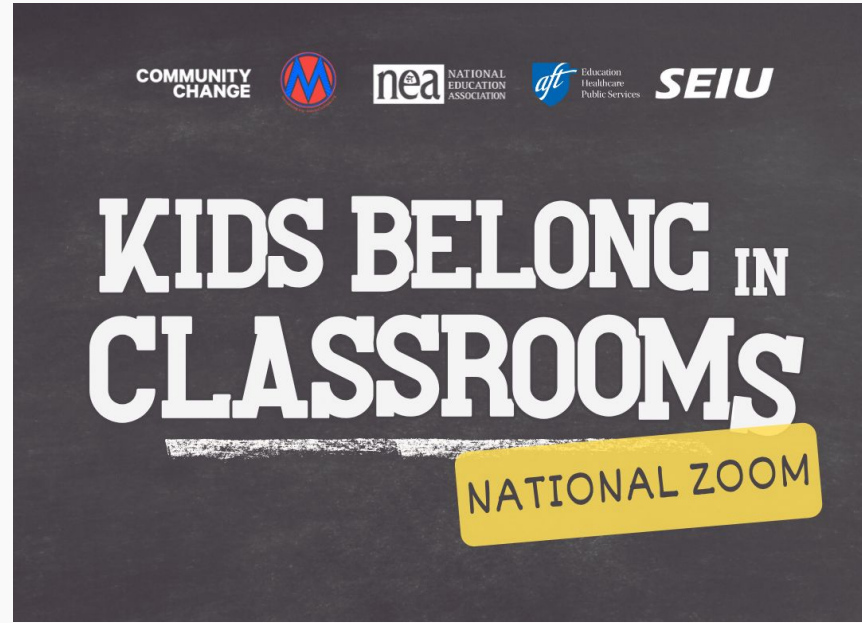
Community Change Action

National organization that **builds power from the ground up**. We believe that effective and enduring social movements must be **led by those most impacted by injustice** and **voting is one essential lever of change**. The work we are building together now is another.

*Community Change, was founded in 1968 by leaders of the civil rights, labor, and anti-poverty movements following the deaths of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, as a living legacy to the senator. Its founders' vision and their charge—to **build power through grassroots leadership, to challenge the government to be a force for good, to focus on poor people, especially poor people of color**—are just as relevant today as they were then.*



This Kids Belong in Classrooms Training is brought to you by:



Together We Can

- Create a welcoming environment for all families & school employees that keeps our kids, parents, educators, and school workers safe!
- Stand up against anybody trying to separate children from their families!
- Foster joy, pride, and mental wellness through community-building & support!

Today's Training

- Training for parents and caregivers on talking to kids about ICE
- We will share practical advice from psychologists and advocates on how to engage with kids on this topic
 - Why these conversations matter
 - Language and framing
 - Age appropriate conversations
 - Recognizing signs of stress in children
 - Managing your own fear

Agenda

- 1 Why these conversations matter
- 2 Before you begin: preparing yourself
- 3 Age-by-age guidance
- 4 Language & framing
- 5 Managing your own fear
- 6 Recognizing stress in your child
- 7 Practical preparedness tips

Why These Conversations Matter

Children absorb more than we think

Even very young children pick up on fear and tension in their environment — through media, peers, and what they overhear at home.

Preparation reduces fear

Research shows that children who are prepared for scary events are less afraid when (and if) they occur.

Silence leaves gaps

When kids don't get information from trusted adults, they fill in the blanks themselves — often with scarier stories than reality.

You don't need all the answers

What matters most is being present, listening with kindness, and offering steady support.

A Note of Context

Take in this training in a way that makes sense for you.

Before You Begin: Preparing Yourself

1 **Calm yourself first**

Take a breath and settle your own body before starting any conversation. If you don't feel ready, it's okay to try again later.

2 **Check what they already know**

Start by asking open-ended questions: "What have you heard about immigration or ICE at school or online?"

3 **Use simple, honest language**

Use words your child understands. Speak in a calm voice. Honesty builds trust.

4 **Plan to revisit the topic**

You may need to have this conversation again and again. That's okay — and expected.

Age-by-Age Guidance: Ages 3–6

Safety and security come first

- Validate fears while affirming safety. "You are loved and will be taken care of."
- Use simple, direct language: "Mom or Dad may need to leave for a while because of new rules in this country."
- Name a specific trusted adult who will care for them, and make sure they know that person.
- Reassure them that the parent will find their way back to them.
- Avoid showing media footage of arrests or detention centers.
- Books and play are powerful — they help young children process experiences they can't yet put into words.

Age-by-Age Guidance: Ages 7–12

Children this age often won't volunteer their worries

- Children this age don't want to worry their parents — you may need to open the door for them.
- Keep having conversations even if they seem quiet or uninterested. They are listening.
- Establish a family plan and identify a list of 5 or more trusted adults they can turn to.
- Roleplay specific situations — like what to do if they see something frightening in the community.
- Check what messages their school is sending about ICE and try to align your messaging at home.
- Validate any negative feelings about hurtful things they hear and gently correct misinformation.

Age-by-Age Guidance: Ages 13–18

Teens need more specifics — and more support than they may show

- Teens are more independent and more online — help them take breaks from upsetting media.
- Guide them on what to do if they encounter an ICE officer: stay calm, know their rights, memorize key phone numbers.
- Teens may take on more caregiving responsibility if a parent is deported — make sure they feel capable and supported.
- Remind them they are still your child, even if roles shift. Name the adults who will advocate for them.
- Help them connect to a consistent mentor: a coach, teacher, relative, or community leader.
- Use this as an opportunity to learn together about immigration law and civic systems.

What to Say: Language & Framing

✓ Language that HELPS

- "People need papers to be in the U.S., and many people — like me — are still waiting for theirs. This doesn't make me a bad person."
- "It's not your job to keep me safe from this. Grown-ups are doing everything they can."
- "If I have to go away for a while, I would be so sad. And you would be safe every day with [trusted adult]."
- "I don't know yet — but I promise to tell you if I find out more."

✗ Phrases to AVOID

- "Don't worry about it" — dismisses their very real fear.
- "This won't happen to us" — creates a false sense of security that can conflict with what they see.
- Describing a parent as a "criminal" — children need to understand their parent is a good person in a difficult situation.
- Making promises you can't keep about the future.

Managing Your Own Fear

"Kids want to take care of their parents as much as parents want to take care of their kids." — Dr. Gabriela Livas, UT Austin

1 **Think ahead**

Before the conversation, ask yourself: how do I want my child to feel when this is over? Use that goal to guide your tone.

2 **Name it, don't amplify it**

It's okay to share your own feelings authentically, but don't overwhelm your child with your distress.

3 **Find another adult to confide in**

Have someone you can talk to — a friend, family member, or mental health professional — for your own worries and fears.

4 **Your calm is contagious**

Children look to adults to gauge how scared they should be. Practicing deep breathing together can help you both.



Recognizing Stress in Your Child

Physical signs

Headaches, stomachaches, changes in appetite or sleep, bedwetting or other regressions in younger children

Behavioral signs

Mood swings, irritability, aggression, difficulty following rules, clinginess or fear of separation

Emotional signs

Withdrawal, seeming "too good" or quiet, or acting younger than their age

School-related signs

Trouble concentrating, reluctance to go to school or leave the house

If symptoms persist more than 2 weeks or worsen, reach out to a teacher, pediatrician, or mental health professional.

Practical Preparedness Steps

1 **Create a family preparedness plan**

Document what will happen for each child — who will care for them, what their day will look like, and how you'll stay in touch.

2 **Designate a trusted caregiver in writing**

Complete a formal document designating a trusted adult to care for your child if you are deported. Have it notarized.

3 **Maintain routines**

Routines provide security and identity. Talk to your back-up caregiver now to ensure they can keep the same routines in place.

4 **Build your child's pride in who they are**

Immigrant children thrive when they can navigate U.S. culture while staying connected to their heritage — food, music, spiritual practices.

5 **Keep the connection strong**

Set up photos, recordings, video calls, and letters in advance. Plan how your child will stay emotionally connected if you are apart.



A Note of Hope

The most common response to trauma is recovery.

Most children who go through very difficult events are doing quite well a few years later. The safety, stability, and love you offer now — whether for a short time or a long time — will support their thriving for the rest of their lives.

Your presence matters. Your calm matters. Your honesty matters.

Questions? Resources? You are not alone.

Sources

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The Kids Belong in Classrooms Toolkit Includes Tips for:

- Pass out know your rights materials to your school community.
- Create a school emergency preparedness plan.
- Building Morning Arrival and Dismissal Support Teams.
- Fostering joy & culture pride in your school community.
- Advocating for local policy change.
- Deepening the connection with your local community around your school.



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Thank you for joining us!

