

# Supporting Children

DURING IMMIGRATION  
ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS



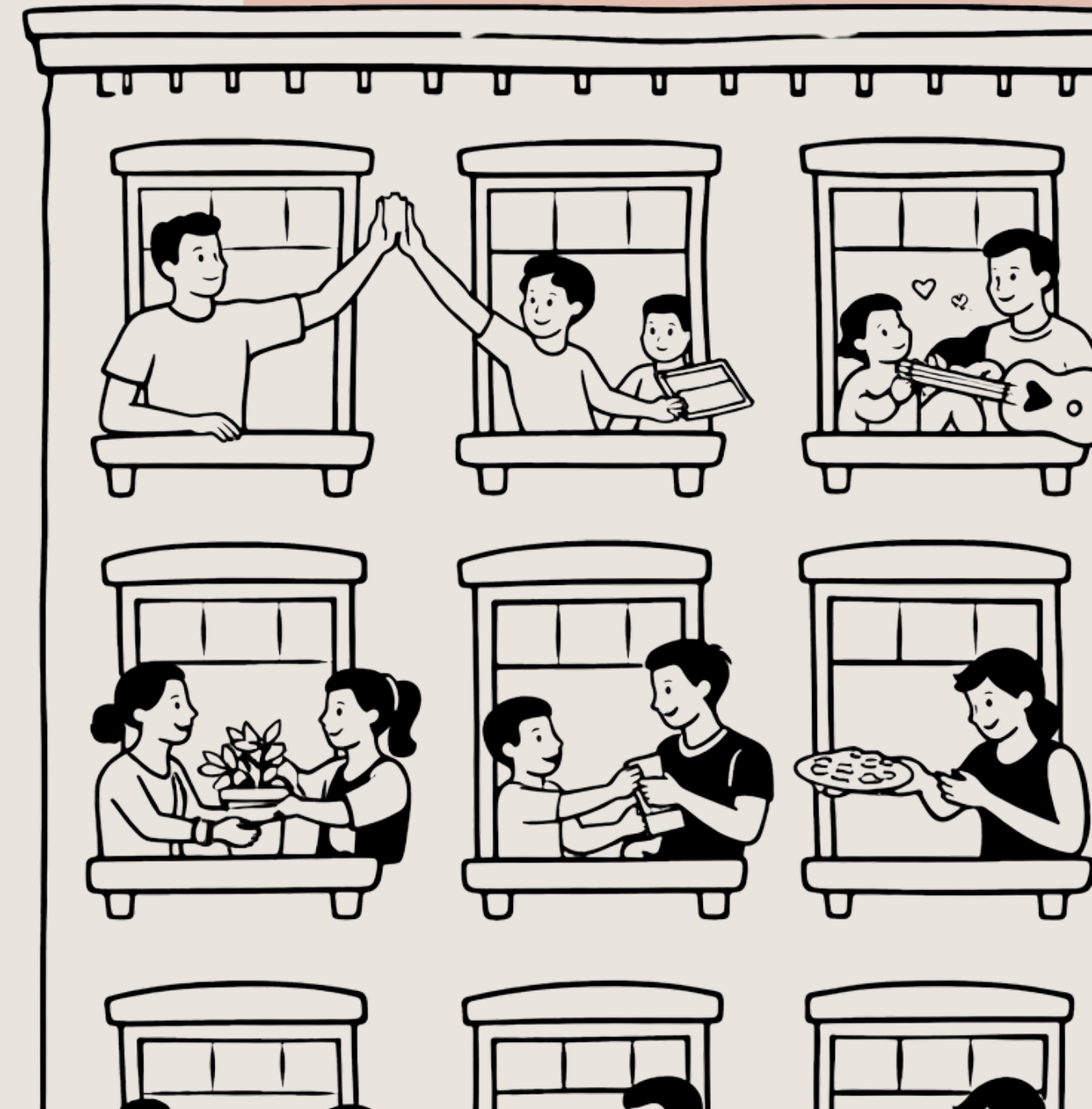
PRESENTED BY  
**HOPEWELL HODGES**

# Thanks to today's host



# Look around.

Not just at the world — at this *call*.





# Today's Goals

**Discuss children's developmental needs right now**

**Model skills for communicating with kids about immigration enforcement operations**

**Help you plan practical steps to meet children's developmental needs today**

**Share digital resources to help you bring these skills into your community, family, and practice**

**Ending on a hopeful note**

*Briefly:*

~~Who I Am~~

Who We Are

We're collaborative of child-serving professionals, including experts in:

- Developmental Psychology
- Pre- and Perinatal Mental Health
- Clinical Psychology
- Social Work
- Refugee and Immigrant Health
- Resilience Science

*L to R: Dr. Saida M. Abdi, Jasmine Banegas, Dr. Colleen Doyle, Dr. Katie Lingras, Dr. Danielle Vrieze, Hopewell Hodges*





**Collaborative for Immigrant  
and Refugee Children's  
Leadership and Excellence**

# The CIRCLE Project

- Interprofessional collective serving Minnesota's immigrant and refugee children
- Members represent over a dozen cultural backgrounds
- Trains schools and providers to serve changing community populations
- Provides Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees (TST-R)

**Want CIRCLE in your schools?  
Write to Dr. Saida Abdi: [sabdi@umn.edu](mailto:sabdi@umn.edu).**



# Quick Note on Terminology

“Arrest”

“Detention”

“Deportation”

**THESE TERMS ARE NOT ALWAYS ACCURATE.**

# Our Ultimate Goal

A world safe enough for grown-up helpers to do their jobs well

*See community safety resources linked later in slideshow.*



# What does it take to protect child development during crises?



# What does it take to protect child development during crises?

I HAVE ONE SUBJECT I  
LIKE IN SCHOOL

MY DAD DOES AN  
AVERAGE JOB AT  
PARENTING

I CAN MANAGE MY  
EMOTIONS 90% OF  
THE TIME

MY NEIGHBORHOOD  
HAS A SPORTS TEAM

MY SISTER IS  
USUALLY NICE TO ME



I GET HEALTHY  
LUNCH FOR FREE  
AT SCHOOL

MY NEIGHBOR KEEPS  
AN EYE ON ME

# What makes the difference for kids?

## Very ordinary resources.

Most of what will help children do well right now is:

- Free or low-cost
- Common
- Already in their environment



**The times feel extraordinary.  
Children are largely the same.**



# Core Developmental Needs

**I am safe.**

**Even when changes happen, many important things will stay the same.**

**I am capable and competent.**

**I can be proud of who I am and who my family is.**

**I can talk about my feelings with safe grown-ups.**

**There is a future, and in it, I am loved.**

# Communicating with Children About Immigration Enforcement Operations



# Communicating with Children About Immigration Enforcement Operations

## Talk early.

**Will talking about detention and deportation traumatize a child?**

**Children who go through scary things feel less scared if they know what to expect.**

# Communicating with Children About Immigration Enforcement Operations

## Talk often.

How do I prepare for “the big talk”?

Having multiple short conversations with children is often more helpful than having one big one.



If this isn't a classic 3.5 year old approach to eating an apple, I don't know what is. And yes, he ate a ring around it and declared that he was finished. 🙄🙄🙄

# Communicating with Children About Immigration Enforcement Operations

## Talk calmly.

When is the right time to talk with a child?

The right time to talk is when you are regulated.



Children borrow their grown-ups' nervous systems.

# Communicating with Children About Immigration Enforcement Operations

## Talk first.

Should I wait for the child to bring these things up?

Children need *permission* from grown-ups to talk about difficult things.

# How to talk first: W.I.N.N.

## WONDER

**“I wish your mom was here to see your recital today. I wonder if you were thinking about her.”**

## INVITE

**“If your friends were talking about the news today, I’d love to hear what you heard and how people are responding.”**

## NAME & NORMALIZE

**“When people see a parent get arrested, they may feel scared and mad. You can share these feelings with me, even if they are hard to talk about. I always want to hear what is on your mind.”**

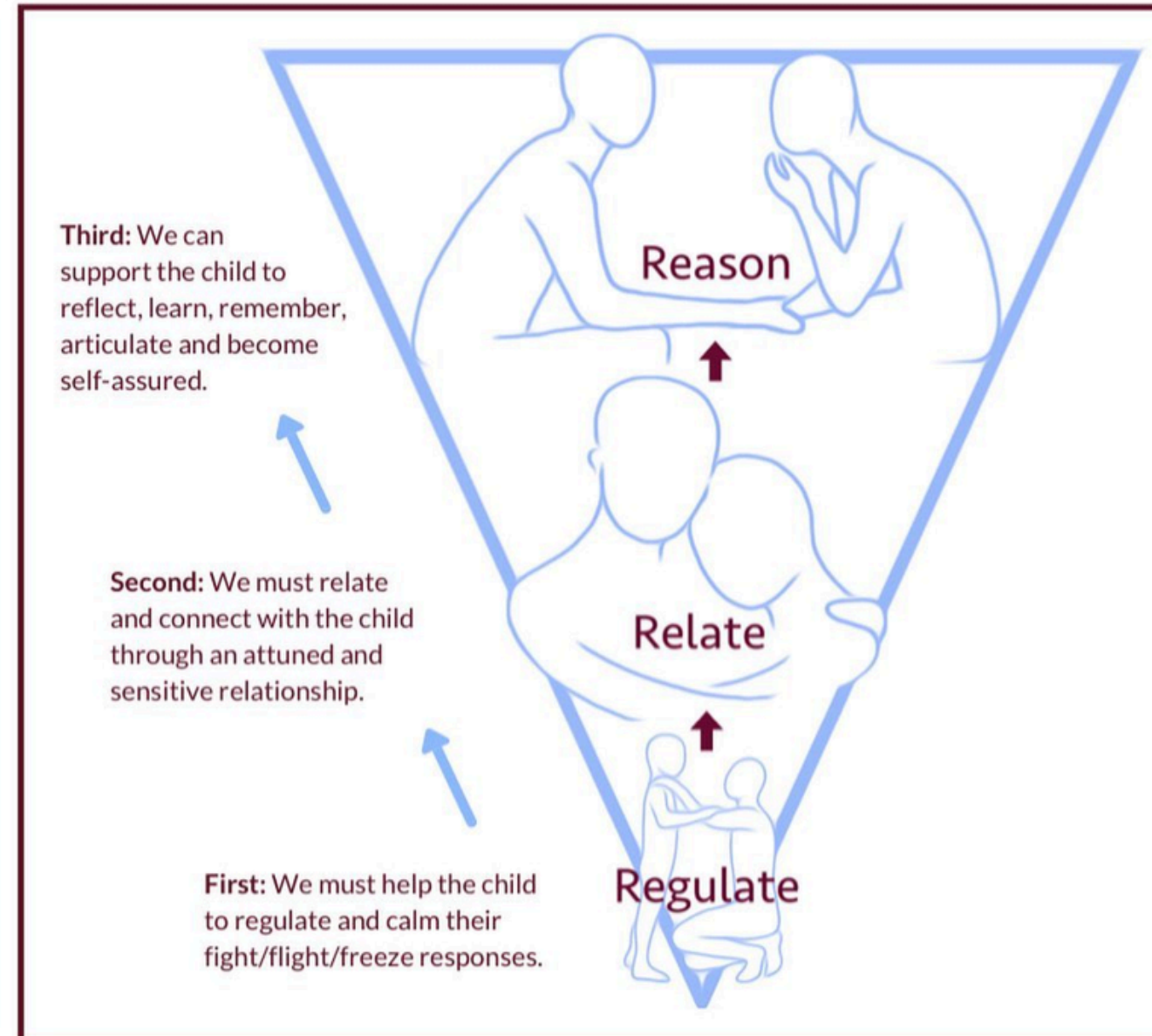
# Regulate-Relate-Reason

## Beacon House

Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team

### The Three R's: Reaching The Learning Brain

Dr Bruce Perry, a pioneering neuroscientist in the field of trauma, has shown us that to help a vulnerable child to learn, think and reflect, we need to intervene in a simple sequence.



Heading straight for the 'reasoning' part of the brain with an expectation of learning, will not work so well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.

# Listen more than you talk.

## **Tip #1:**

**Start by asking children what they understand already.**

*This lets you use their language, correct misunderstandings, and avoid introducing new fears.*



# Listen more than you talk.

## Tip #2:

### **Let the child lead you in play.**

Resist the urge to ask questions, “correct,” or teach them while they play. This shows a child you accept their thoughts and feelings.



# Listen more than you talk.

## Tip #3:

**Show the child that you are listening to their behavior.**

*“I see that you are hitting your cousin. I wonder if you’re feeling mad or sad or scared right now. Would you like to tell me what’s on your mind while I braid your hair, or do you want to go run around at the soccer field?”*

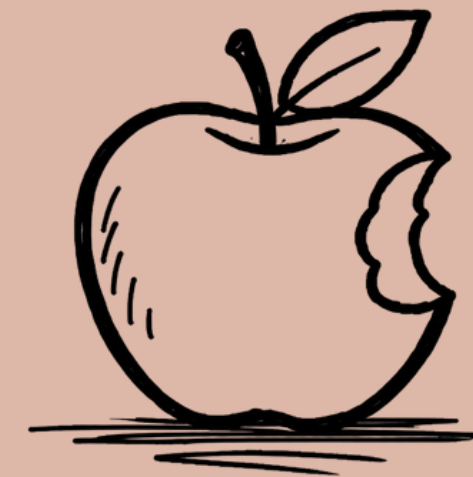


# Talking about risks and safety in the community

## #1: Model talking about the facts calmly.

“Officers are here to arrest certain people, but they aren’t always being careful. Some people are scared that they might get hurt by the officers.”

“A woman was killed, and people are sad and mad about it. I am sad and mad too.”

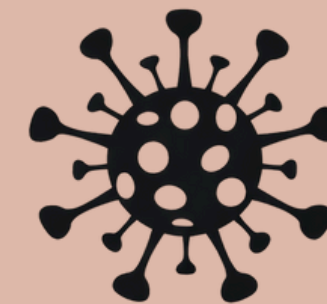


# Talking about risks and safety in the community

## #2: Share how current events are manageable.

Give examples of other community/family stories where things got better.

- We know what to do to stay safe
- We might change what we are doing for a little while
- Grown-ups help us with our feelings
- We listen to helpers who tell us how to stay safe
- We listen to the helpers who tell us when it's safe



# Talking about the risk of deportation

**Emphasize that documentation is an *administrative* problem, not a moral one.**

“To move to the U.S., people need permission papers.

It takes a very long time to get those papers, and a lot of people are still waiting for them for years after they move to the U.S.

Waiting for these papers doesn't make someone a bad person. It just shows how many other people are waiting for their permission papers, like a long line in a store.

Sometimes, a person has to move to another country while they wait for their papers.

I might have to move to another country while I wait.”



# After a parent's detention or deportation

## **Promise only what you can guarantee.**

“You will always have adults around you who do their best to take care of you. You will always be so loved and so important.”

## **Let children know what was out of a grown-up's control.**

“Your mommy loves you very much, and she was so sad when she had to go away. She did everything she could to stay here, and she'd be here if she could.”

## **Admit when you don't know the answers.**

“I promise I'll tell you more as soon as I find out more.”



# Read together.

- Helps explain events.
- Normalizes children's emotions.
- Shows that these topics can be talked about.
- The active ingredient is you.

## Remember to:

- Preview the book.
- Let the child set the pace.
- Choose times to read when you can support children's reactions.



# Meeting Children's Core Developmental Needs



# Core Developmental Needs

**I am safe.**

**Even when changes happen, many important things will stay the same.**

**I am capable and competent.**

**I can be proud of who I am and who my family is.**

**I can talk about my feelings with safe grown-ups.**

**There is a future, and in it, I am loved.**

# For all children:



Reduce children's risk of seeing violence.

Avoid frightening language and media exposure.

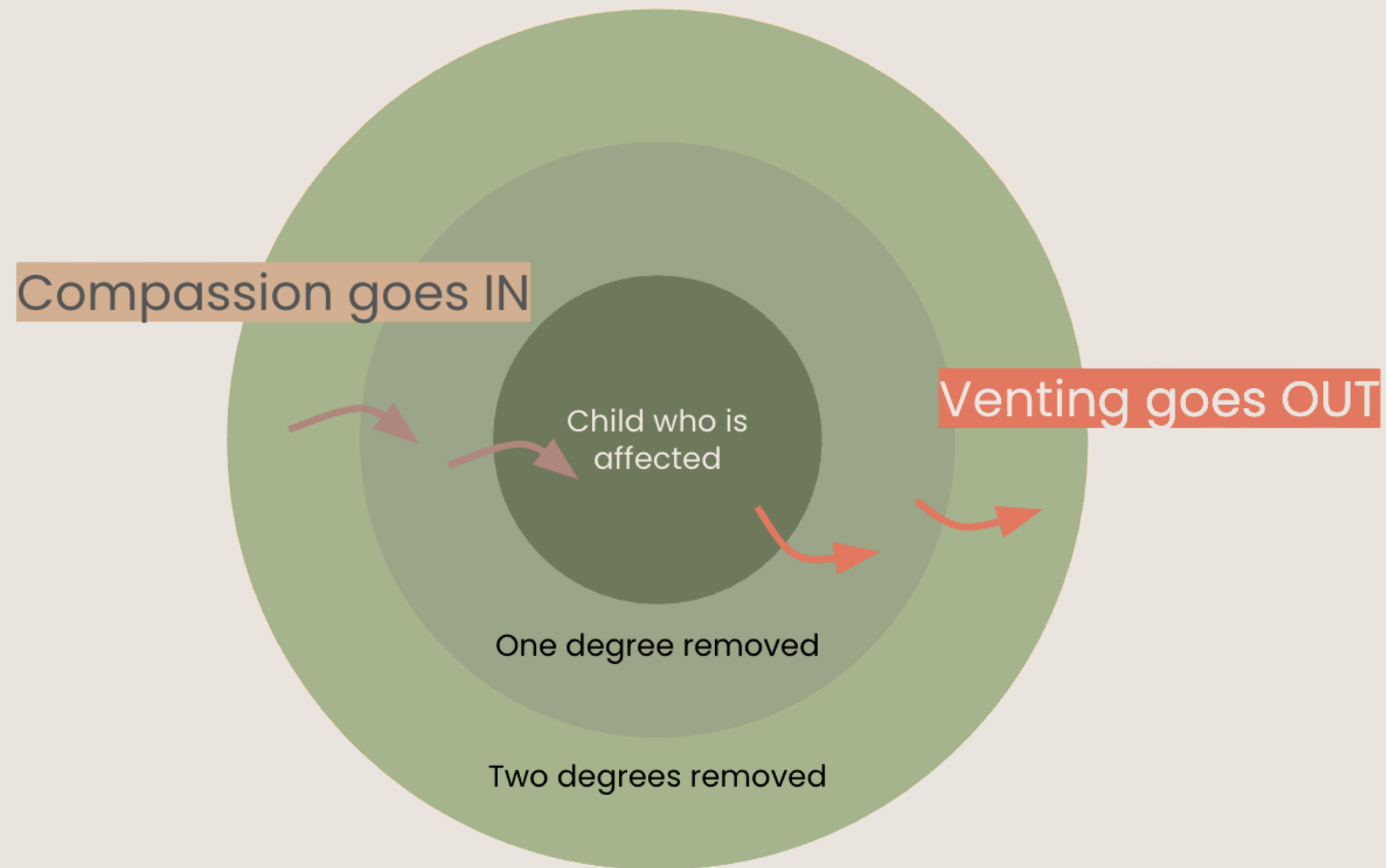
**I am safe.**

Point out what your family does to stay safe and healthy.

Notice, count, and name the helpers.

# Check your circles.

Your own mental health closely affects that of the children around you.



# When parents are at risk of detention & deportation:



Create a Family Preparedness Plan (see slides at end)

Repeatedly name and describe the people who will keep taking care of the child no matter what (teachers, aunties and uncles, pastors, etc.).

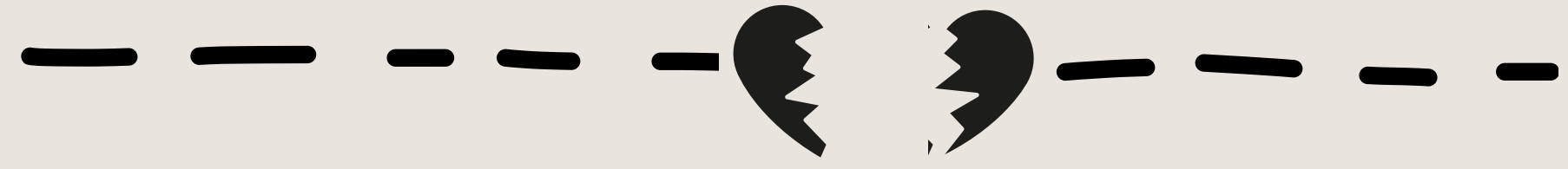
**I am safe.**

Talk with the child about what to do when we feel unsafe.

Complete Declaration of Parental Authority (DOPA) forms and have them notarized.

Teach children their rights.

# When a parent has been detained or deported:



Help the child trust that their biological needs will be met.

**I am safe.**

Point out evidence that the child is safe *now*, in this moment.

Help the child keep connecting with trusted adults.

# Core Developmental Needs

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# For all children:



Support biological rhythms

Keep up affection and attention

**Even when changes happen, many important things will stay the same.**

Maintain daily and weekly routines

Keep behavior expectations the same\*

\*but have patience and flexibility if children show some regression

# When parents are at risk of detention & deportation:



Make voice and music recordings

Tell children how much their family members would miss them if they had to go away

**Even when changes happen, many important things will stay the same.**

Make sure alternative caregivers know how to maintain children's routines

Tell children how they will be cared for if a parent has to leave

# Connection can span a distance.

## For families at risk of separation:

Use short separations to teach a child that people can feel connected when they're apart.

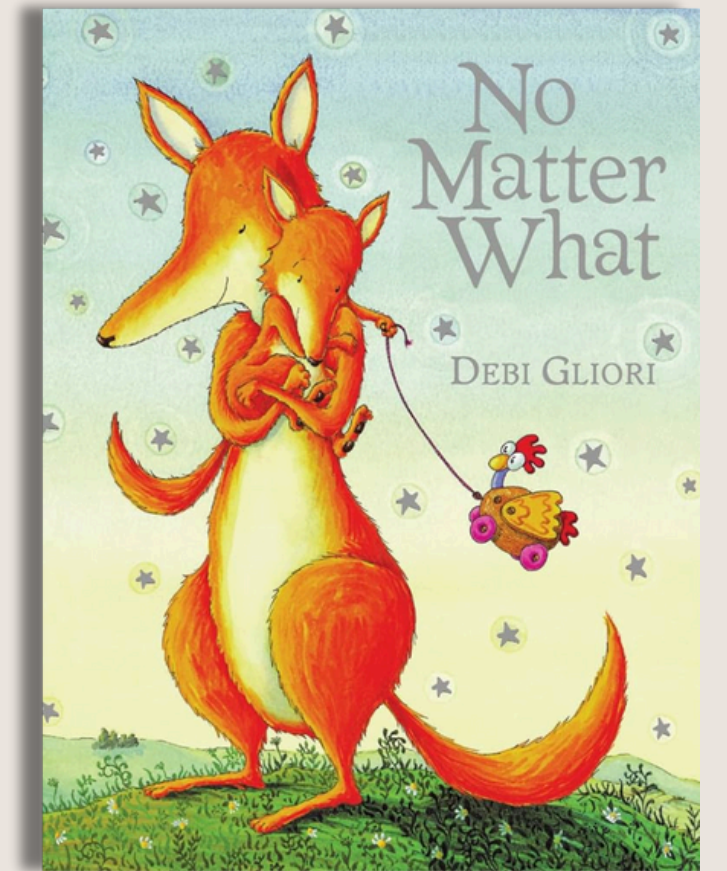
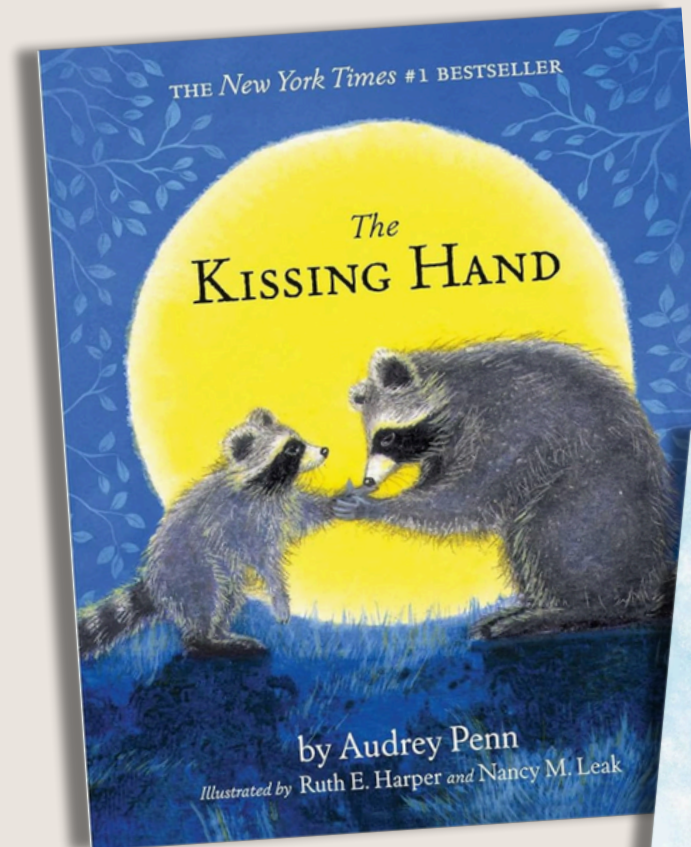
Practice sending "friendly wishes" to people who live far away.

Find ways to use cultural or religious practice (like prayer or discussing dreams) to practice feeling connected to loved ones from afar.

## After separation:

Remind the child of their parent's favorite things about them.

Facilitate phone calls, video calls, and letters.



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# For all children:



Praise children's emerging skills

Praise children's *efforts* at managing their feelings and behaviors

**I am capable and competent.**

Help children build confidence in family safety plans

Talk about kids' jobs vs. adults' jobs.

# When parents are at risk of detention & deportation:



Give children developmentally appropriate “jobs” to do in the event of family separation

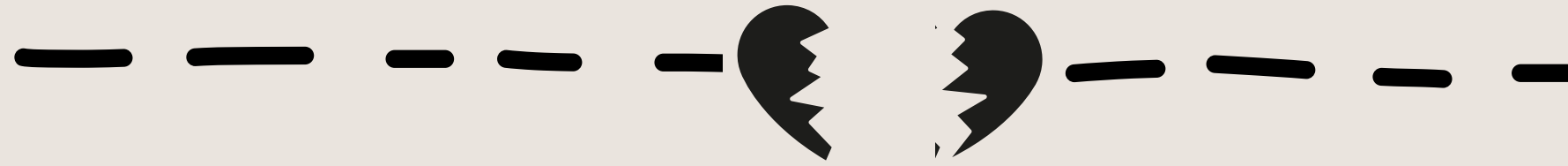
**I am capable and competent.**

Make time to play regularly to support the child in processing the world.

Help older children to practice the roles they may have if the family is separated

Monitor for signs that children are becoming protective of adults

# When a parent has been detained or deported:



Help older children balance changing roles while maintaining school performance, social lives, and sleep

**I am capable and competent.**

Help children understand that a parent's departure was not their fault and has nothing to do with kids

Help older children to keep filling the roles that are meaningful to them.

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# For all children:



Check in with children to see what they are hearing about people who moved from other countries.

Help children connect regularly to role models

**I can be proud of who I am and who my family is.**

Share proud stories from the family

Name the values of the child's family again and again (fairness, being good neighbors, etc.)

Help children tell stories about how their family is practicing their values together

# When parents are at risk of detention & deportation:



Repeatedly remind the child that deportation is an administrative issue, not a moral one.

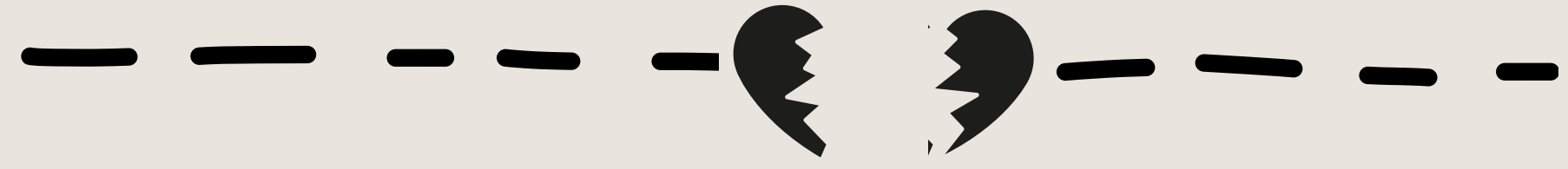
**I can be proud of who I am and who my family is.**

Validate feelings of hurt and anger if children are exposed to unkind or discriminatory treatment

Practice cooking, singing, dancing, prayer — things that help a child connect joyfully to their culture

Help children name why discrimination is wrong

# When a parent has been detained or deported:



Facilitate connections with peers from the same cultural groups

**I can be proud of who I am and who my family is.**

Help the child share positive memories with their parent

Repeat the parent's favorite things about the child

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# For all children:



Follow children's leads in play.

Help children label their emotions

**I can talk about my feelings with safe grown-ups.**

Offer children creative outlets

Remember that insides may not match the outsides!

Validate difficult feelings while maintaining your own regulation

Initiate conversations about emotions

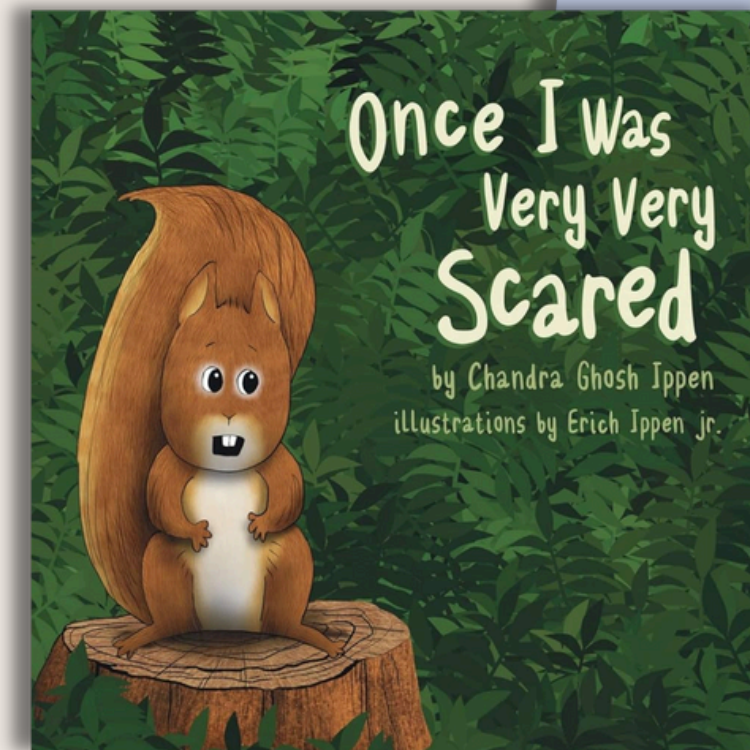
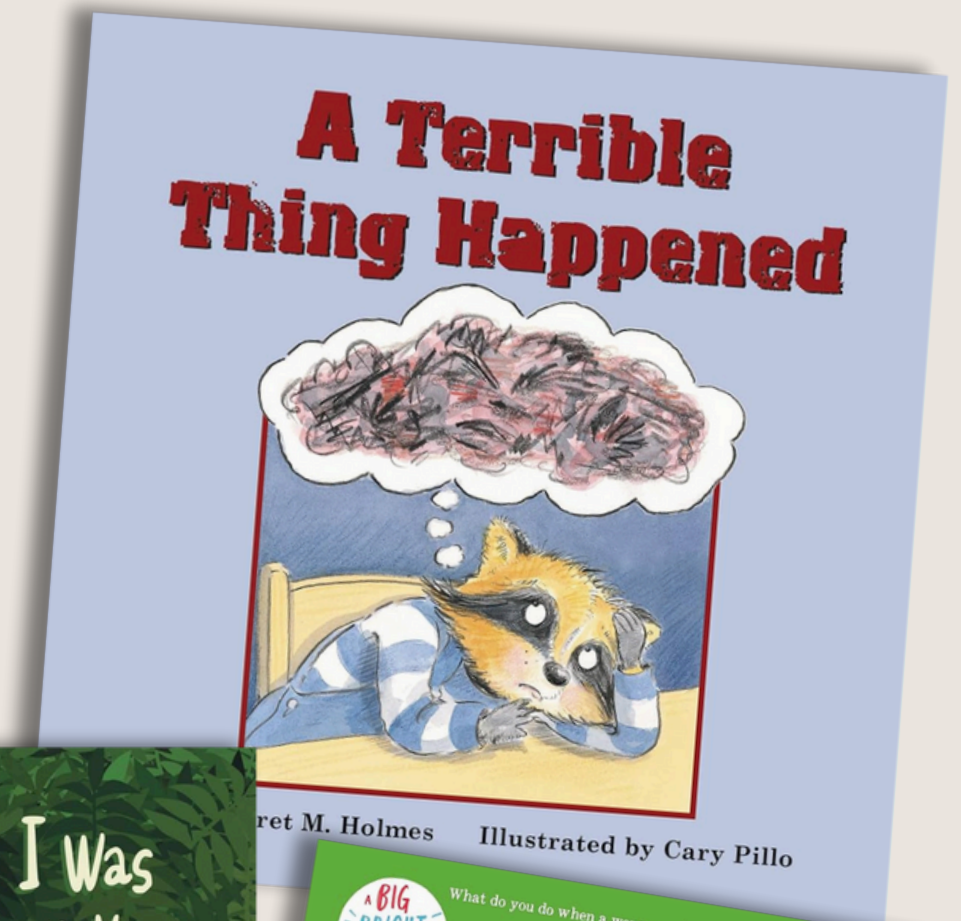
# Rely on trusted tools.

<https://children.wi.gov/Pages/Resources/FeelingsThermometer.aspx>

## FEELINGS THERMOMETER

How do you feel?	What can you do about it?
 <b>ANGRY, FURIOUS, EXPLOSIVE</b> ▶ Yelling, Stomping, Meltdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vigorous physical exercise</li><li>• Breathe deep breaths</li><li>• Take a warm shower or bath</li></ul>
 <b>FRUSTRATED, ANNOYED, IRRITABLE</b> ▶ Arguing, Refusing, Shutting down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meditate/pray</li><li>• Listen to favorite music</li><li>• Take a fast-paced walk</li></ul>
 <b>ANXIOUS, WORRIED, UNSETTLED</b> ▶ Pacing, Avoiding, Clingy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk to a family member/friend</li><li>• Pay attention to each of your 5 senses</li><li>• Focus on what you <i>can</i> control</li></ul>
 <b>SAD, NEGATIVE, LONELY</b> ▶ Crying, Withdrawn, Slowed/Disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set a positive goal for the day</li><li>• Call a friend or relative</li><li>• Journal about your feelings</li></ul>
 <b>HAPPY, CALM, CONTENT</b> ▶ Smiling, Laughing, Engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help someone else</li><li>• Notice and enjoy your positive mood</li><li>• Engage in an enjoyable activity</li></ul>

 Wisconsin Office of **Children's Mental Health** [children.wi.gov](http://children.wi.gov)



# Core Developmental Needs

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**There is a future, and in it, I am loved.**

# For all children:



Have patience when children prioritize short-term needs

**There is a future, and in it, I am loved.**

Engage the child in frequent storytelling

# **When a child is in pain: Contain and sustain.**

# Digital Resources #1

## When children are afraid of a parent's deportation

As enforcement orders intensify, many children are afraid of being separated from their parents and other loved ones. This document, prepared by child mental health professionals, describes steps that immigrant and refugee families can take to support their children and maintain healthy relationships during this frightening time.



ns:  
that conversations about

Already in use in school districts, community centers, emergency rooms, and clinics across the country

[https://macmh.org/  
resource/immigrant-family-  
resources/](https://macmh.org/resource/immigrant-family-resources/)



Available in:

- English
- Spanish
- Mandarin
- Korean
- Somali

Coming soon:

- Karen
- Hmong
- Dari
- Pashto
- Haitian Creole
- Ukrainian

# Digital Resources #2

## Supporting Children After a Parent's Deportation or Detention

The deportation of a parent can be a very stressful and frightening event for a child of any age. Children may show mental health and behavioral challenges as they process the separation and adjust to the change in their lives. This document was prepared by child mental health professionals, and it describes ways to support healthy development and resilience for children in this difficult situation. It is intended for children's primary caregivers, along with other supportive adults, like teachers and neighbors. You may also reference [this document](#).

### Help the child feel safe

- Children feel the safest when the adults around them can regulate their own emotions well. Make sure that you take good care of yourself during this transition by relying on your support network, processing your feelings with other adults, and using your coping skills. That way, you are more likely to be calm when you talk to the child.



Already in use in school districts, community centers, emergency rooms, and clinics across the country

<https://macmh.org/resource/parent-deportation-stressful-frightening/>

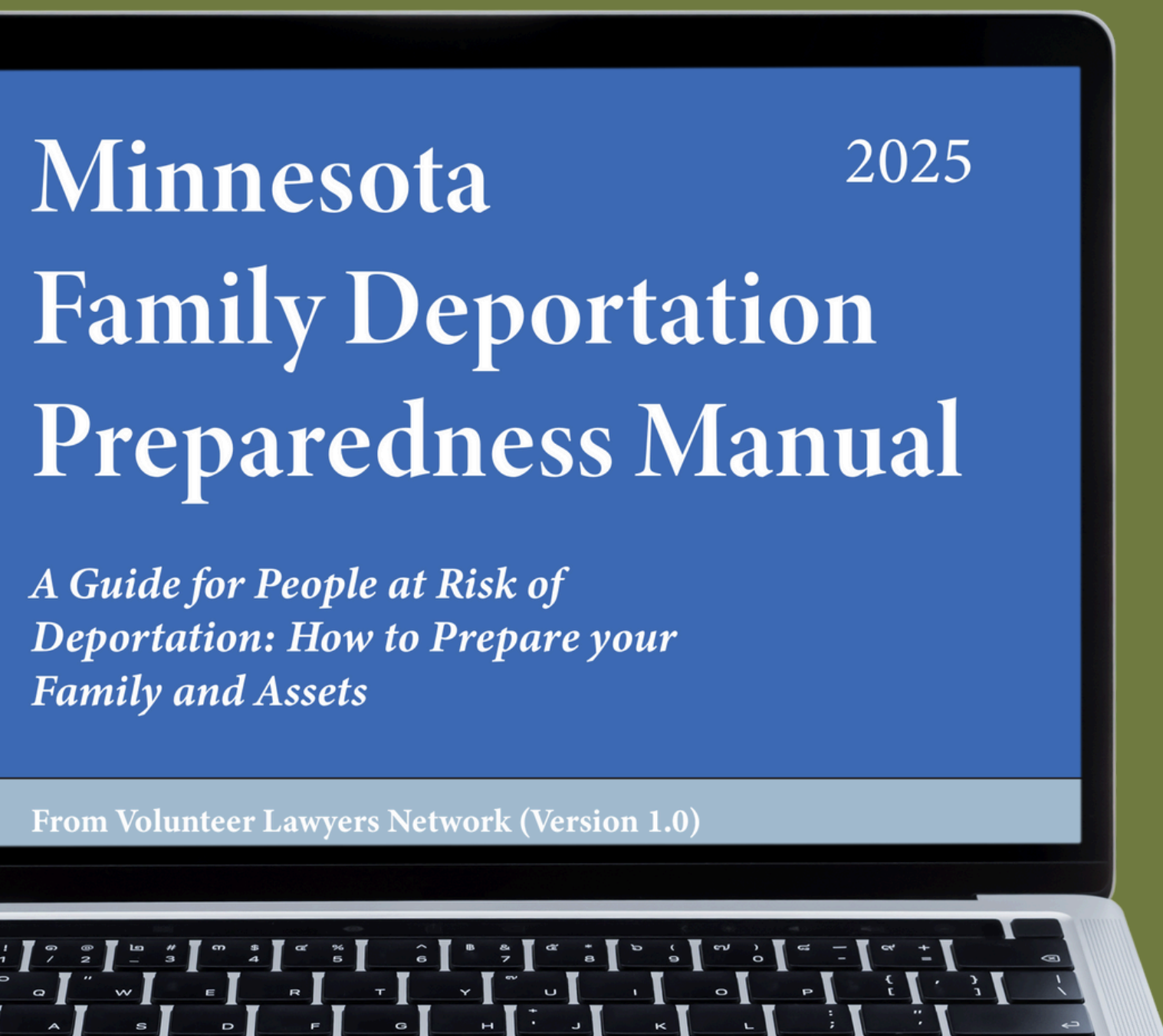
Available in:

- English
- Spanish

Coming soon:

- Somali
- Dari
- Pashto
- Haitian Creole
- Ukrainian
- Karen
- Hmong

# Digital Resources #3



Family preparedness plan (with link to DOPA documents)

[https://www.vlnmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Minnesota\\_Family\\_Deportation\\_Preparedness\\_Manual.pdf](https://www.vlnmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Minnesota_Family_Deportation_Preparedness_Manual.pdf)

<https://tinyurl.com/family-preparedness-2026>



# Digital Resources #4

*The following resources have been collated by Dr. Katie Lingras, Child Psychologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Minnesota Medical School.*

*Resources created by others are attributed where available.*

*Please reach out to Dr. Lingras at [klingras@umn.edu](mailto:klingras@umn.edu) for additional questions, concerns, or any corrections.*

Quick Tips for Parents/Caregivers:

What to Avoid:

- Don't minimize fears: Don't tell them "don't be afraid," as fear is a natural response.
- Don't give false promises: Be honest about the uncertainty while offering hope.
- Don't Repress Emotions: Let them know it's okay to be scared, sad, or angry.

Instead...

- Look for signs kids might be stressed or picking up on tensions (explicit knowledge vs.

Resources for talking to kids about deportation, immigration, and ICE

[z.umn.edu/talkingtochildrenaboutice2026](https://z.umn.edu/talkingtochildrenaboutice2026)

<https://tinyurl.com/conversations-with-kids>



# Digital Resources #5

## Community Resources in response to ICE Crisis 2026

*When adding resources, please check appropriate area to make sure it is not already listed.*

<https://defend612.com/local-resources/> (some require a log in)

<https://drive.proton.me/urls/3BQTG29B88#46R7ocgiFwew>

**Mutual Aid linktree Hub for immigrant neighbors:** <https://linktr.ee/ICEOUTmutualaid>

- The link above appears to have been taken down as of 1/11/26, but another similar link is below. Check back in case it comes back up though <https://linktr.ee/mplsmutualaid>

### Uncategorized

The Family Resource Center provides school-based resources and social services for families and students at Minneapolis Public Schools.

<https://www.mpschools.org/community/family-resource-center>

Minnesota resources for community safety and immediate needs

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UN6nqzcAlukH-k3WjINUjo18kLSMjc1b4jY4xdft3rk/edit?usp=sharing>

<https://tinyurl.com/safety-resources-2026>





# A Note on Hope

# Gratitude

- MACMH staff (especially Amanda Amos and Lauren Moberg)
- Community organizers who got the word out
- Artists who volunteered their time
- Community helpers who serve children every day



Dr. Ann Masten



Marilyn Murray



Hannah Jensen

# References

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