




GUIDING CAREGIVERS

How to talk to a Child about
Deportation or Separation

News reports and adult discussions about deportation can cause children many worries because they do not understand concepts about the law and policy. Some children may become fearful of separation from a parent and others may be coping with having been separated.

SHOULD CARETAKERS SPEAK TO CHILDREN ABOUT DEPORTATION AND SEPARATION?



Caretakers often wonder if it is better to keep silent and worry that conversations could cause fear or further traumatize a child. Although it can be an uncomfortable topic, it is important for affected families to speak with their children – whether that be a parent affected by deportation or a caretaker caring for a child separated from a parent.

Having an open conversation, at the child's developmental level, can help to address worry and to explain terms like deportation and immigrant. Children are hearing these terms from others, so it's typically better that they obtain accurate information directly from a caretaker.

HOW CAN CARETAKERS EXPLAIN DEPORTATION?

The use of analogies is often a helpful method for explaining difficult to understand concepts to children. The following are examples that caretakers may find helpful to use when they talk with a child about deportation.



PRESCHOOL

Children at this age understand separation only in the short term. Concepts like “for a long time” are difficult to understand. For this age group, it is helpful to explain things in very concrete terms.

Classroom rules analogy:

Premise is that sometimes we have to “ask for permission” before doing things – even necessary things (i.e., need bathroom/hall pass before leaving the classroom) and not doing so has potential consequences (i.e., may need to return to classroom & ask for pass).

Concretely explain who will meet the child’s needs:

“Tia Maria will dress you, take you to school, play with you, give you dinner, put you to bed, etc.”



SCHOOL AGE

Children may try to hide emotions as to not worry adults or may attempt to ignore the situation although they may still be feeling strong emotions.

Field-trip analogy:

Premise is that before you go on a field trip you need a “paper” (permission slip) to go. If one goes on the field trip without the “paper” then he/she may need to “go back” to properly ask for permission.



ADOLESCENT

This is the ideal age to clarify doubts about things they may have heard, to clearly define terms and to talk about their family history.

Natural disaster analogy:

Premise is that if someone is affected by deportation, it is wise to prepare for such as you would for a known natural disaster.

The plan may include things like: preparing legal documents, reviewing them with the adolescent & letting him/her know where they are kept.

