

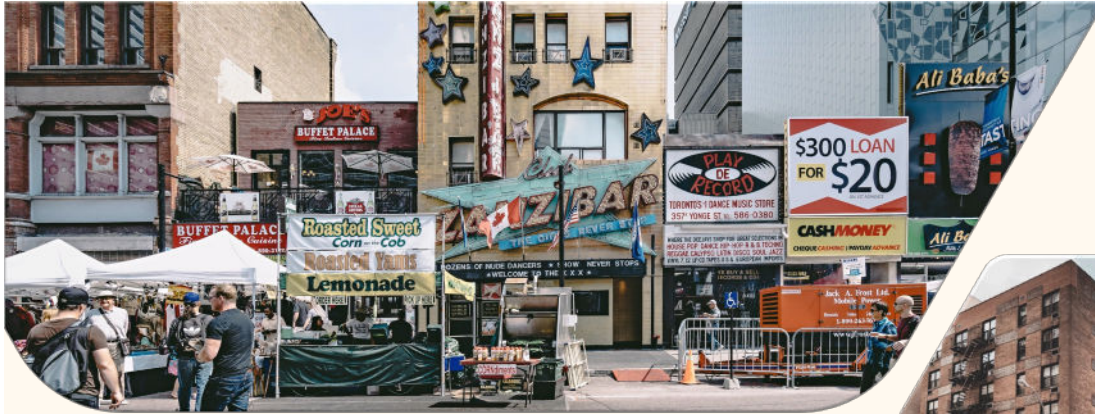


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*Supporting the  
Mental Health  
and Well-Being  
of Students  
Impacted by  
Undocumented  
Status*

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*Associate Professor of Child and  
Adolescent Development  
California State University Sacramento*



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*A bit about me & what motivates me to be here*

**Socio-cultural psychologist, immigration scholar, “immigration psychologist”**

**Conducted qualitative research with undocumented communities for 10+ years to understand the psychology of migrant “illegality”**

***Immigration is personal to me***

*1.5 gen Polish-Canadian immigrant & 1st gen US immigrant*

*Grew up within Polish community where friends and family were undocumented*

*Their stories inspired my doctoral studies and professional journey*



## Toronto (2012-2015)

Research with Polish 1st generation undocumented adult immigrants



## Chicago (2015-2017)

Research & advocacy work with ethnically diverse 1.5 generation undocumented children & youth



## Sacramento (2017- )

Research has focused on well-being of undocumented students

Collaborations with Dreamer Resource Center (e.g., facilitated weekly support group, seminar with undocumented students, conference planning)



K-12 UndocuAlly Training

College UndocuAlly Training

Undocumented Stress Cycle Webinar Series

Webinar 1: Understanding the Undocumented Stress Cycle

Webinar 2: Psychological First Aid and Immediate Support

Webinar 3: From Concern to Community

Webinar 4: Healthy Activism and Long-Term Well-Being: What does it take?

## College UndocuAlly Training

This research-informed College-Level UndocuAlly training video was created to help faculty, counselors, administrators, and staff learn about the experiences of undocumented and mixed-status family college students, as well as ways to support these students' practical and psychological needs. The video features real stories from undocumented and mixed-status college students and is organized into three modules: (1) Basic Immigration Terms and Policies; (2) Living with Undocumented Status; and (3) Supportive Practices and Resources. Each module ends with a quiz to test viewers' knowledge. The video overviews federal and state policies that focus on California but are not exclusive to California—and thus, audience members from various states may find the training useful for their campuses. The video can be used to train various groups of educators, counselors, and staff to become UndocuAllies in their respective settings.



<https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/dreamer-resource-center/resources.html>

Based on your experience and/or prior knowledge, how might you describe the lives of undocumented and/or mixed-status family students? What *common characteristics* might they share?

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***For Immigrant Students, a New Worry: A Call to ICE***



Dennis Rivera-Sarmiento, an undocumented Honduran immigrant, on his first day back at Stephen F. Austin High School after being detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. *Lenora Elliott for The New York Times*

***Immigration Crisis Shifts From Border to Courts***



Brayan, 16, at the Central American Refugee Center in Hempstead, N.Y. Brayan fled El Salvador and entered the United States last year. *Andrew Rossen for The New York Times*

***Immigrants Who Came to U.S. as Children Fear Deportation Under Trump***



Carlos Roa, who was a toddler when his parents brought him to the United States from Venezuela and is now training to be an architect, fears deportation under the Trump administration. *Alyssa Scholze for The New York Times*

***This Is the Face of an Undocumented Immigrant. Don't Look Away.***



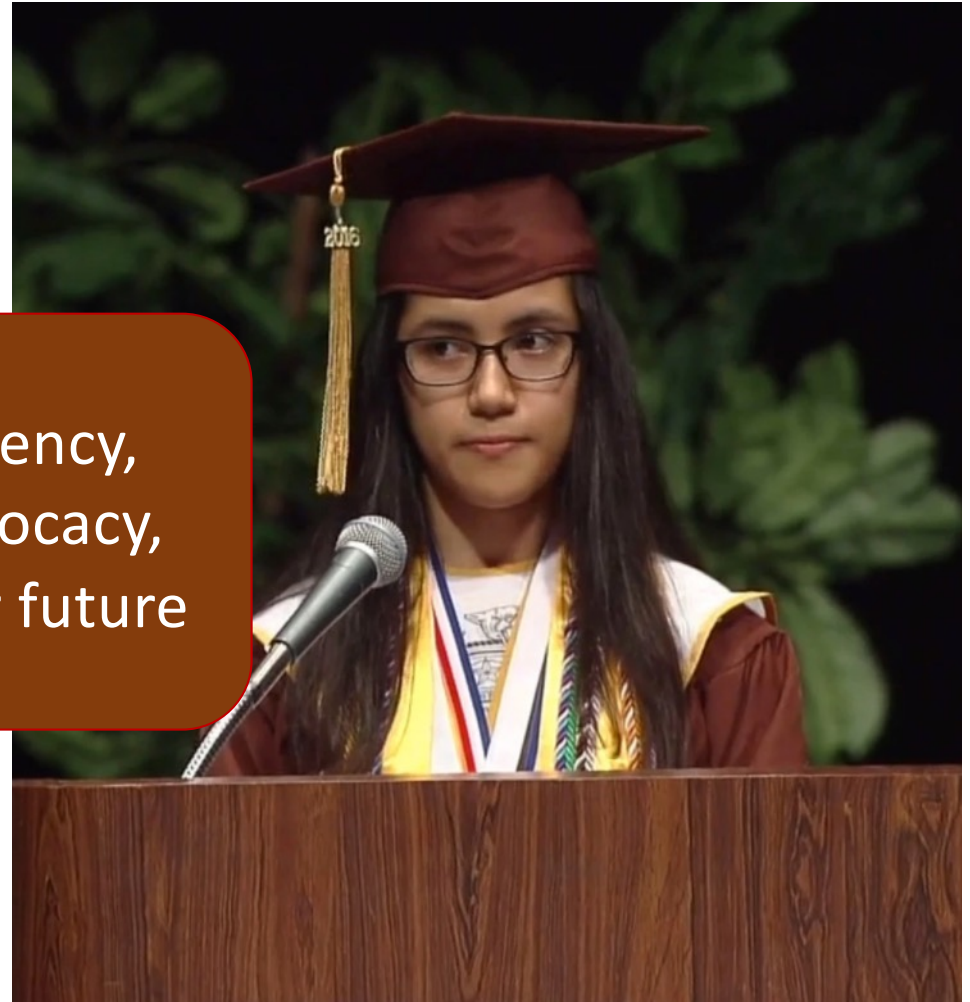
Karla Curbajo Villaverde writes: "I took notes by hand during interviews; after the legal review, I destroyed the notes. I chose not to use a recorder because I did not want to intimidate my subjects." *Talya Zeman-Berish*

Lives characterized by fear,  
shame, exclusion, limitations,  
uncertainty

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Lives characterized by agency,  
determination, pride, advocacy,  
and commitment to better future





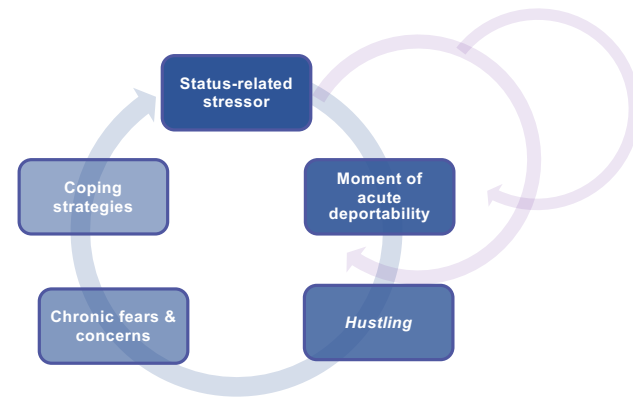
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# To support students impacted by undocumented status:

1. Develop sensitivity to their unique psychosocial experiences and needs
2. Supporting their agency & capacities to build meaningful lives despite their challenges

1.

## The Undocumented Stress Cycle



2.

## Providing Support & Building Well-Being



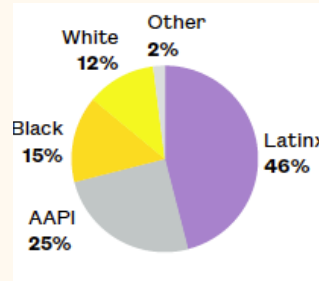
# 1. Developing Sensitivity



# Students Impacted by Undocumented Status

## UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

- Immigrant youth and adult learners who have entered, reside, and/or work without authorization
- Arrived as children (47%), adolescents (39%) or adults (14%)<sup>1</sup>
- Racially & ethnically diverse
- **454,000 or 2% of students in higher education**<sup>2</sup>
- **21,000 undocumented students in higher education live in IL**<sup>3</sup>
- Face deportation, financial, academic, and future concerns<sup>5</sup> as well as shame & stigma<sup>4</sup>
- Cannot access federal financial aid & most scholarships
- Most do not have authorization to work and protection from deportation via DACA<sup>4</sup>



## MIXED-STATUS FAMILY STUDENTS

- Citizens or green card holders who have undocumented parents and/or family members
- Can access financial aid and other resources/supports available to citizens
- Grow up with fears of parents' and/or family members' deportation
- 10.6 million U.S. citizens live with undocumented immigrants, where 5.8 million of these are children<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Fedlum (2020)

<sup>4</sup>Gonzales et al. (2013)

<sup>4</sup>FWD.US (2021)

<sup>5</sup>Enriquez et al. (2018)

## Contexts shared by immigrant children<sup>1</sup>

- Segregated neighborhoods, low-income areas
- Multiple family households
- Overworked parents, financial uncertainty
- Language barriers

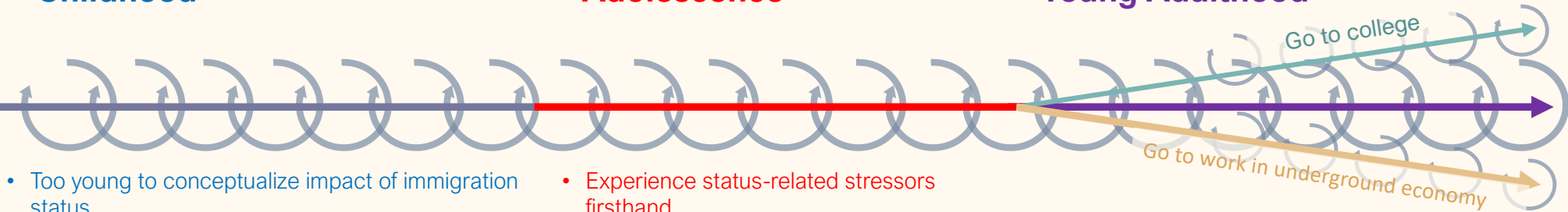
Sociopolitical and policy context shape developmental trajectories by affording various opportunities and challenges<sup>6</sup>

- Connect with persons who support them
- Encouraged to believe in themselves & their potential for academic success
- Develop hope and aspirations for the future

### Childhood

### Adolescence

### Young Adulthood



- Too young to conceptualize impact of immigration status
- Experience their parents undergo recurrent status-related stressors (e.g., fearing authorities) that produce fears of parents' disappearance & vigilance toward authorities<sup>2,3</sup>
- Learn that "something is wrong" with their presence in the U.S.
- Confuse immigration with "illegality"
- Experience shame & fear about being immigrants
- May experience deportation of family members (direct status threat)

- Experience status-related stressors firsthand
- Discovery = "Awakening to a nightmare"<sup>4</sup>
- Confusion, fear, despair about the future, shame, stigma, isolation
- "Learning to be illegal" - learning to address status-related circumstances & cope with newfound concerns<sup>5</sup>

- Cannot afford college tuition
- Do not believe college is an option and/or worthwhile
- Need to prioritize family needs

<sup>1,6</sup> Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018

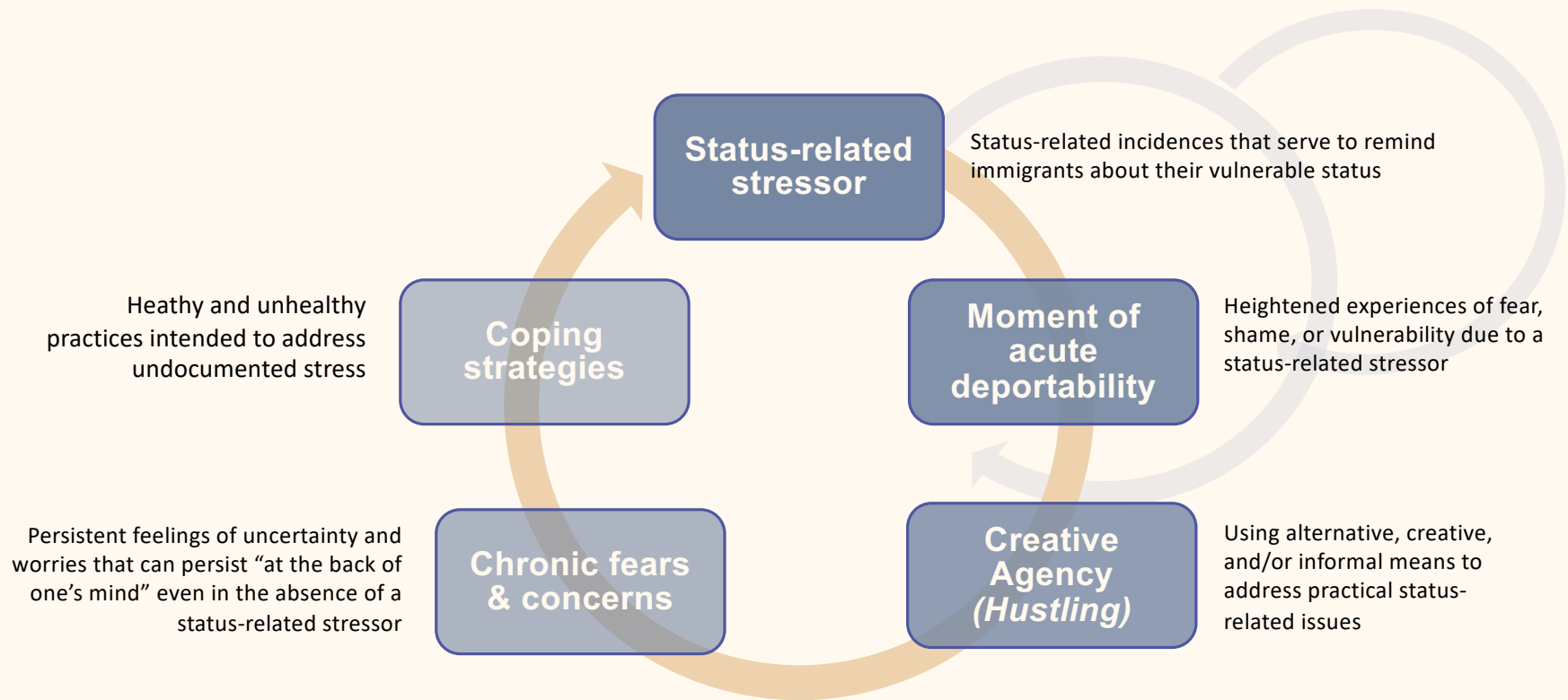
<sup>2</sup> Dreby, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, 2021

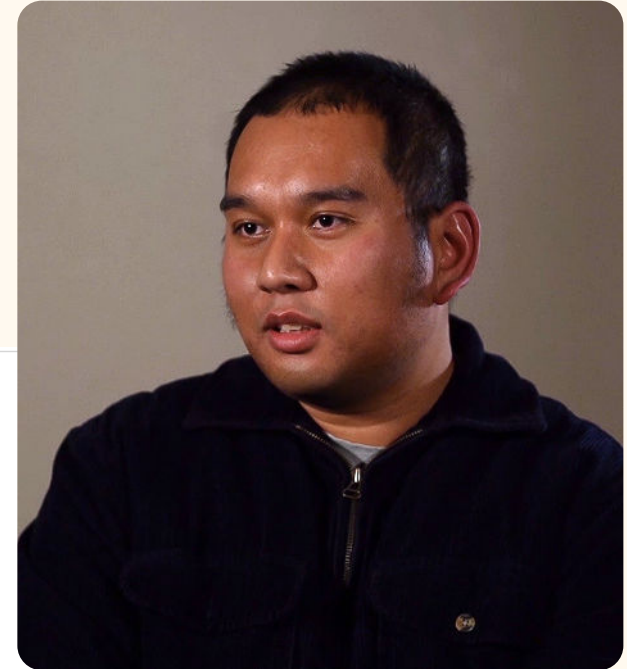
<sup>4</sup> Gonzales & Chavez, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Gonzales, 2011

# The Undocumented Stress Cycle



# Let's hear from Seng



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## College UndocuAlly Training

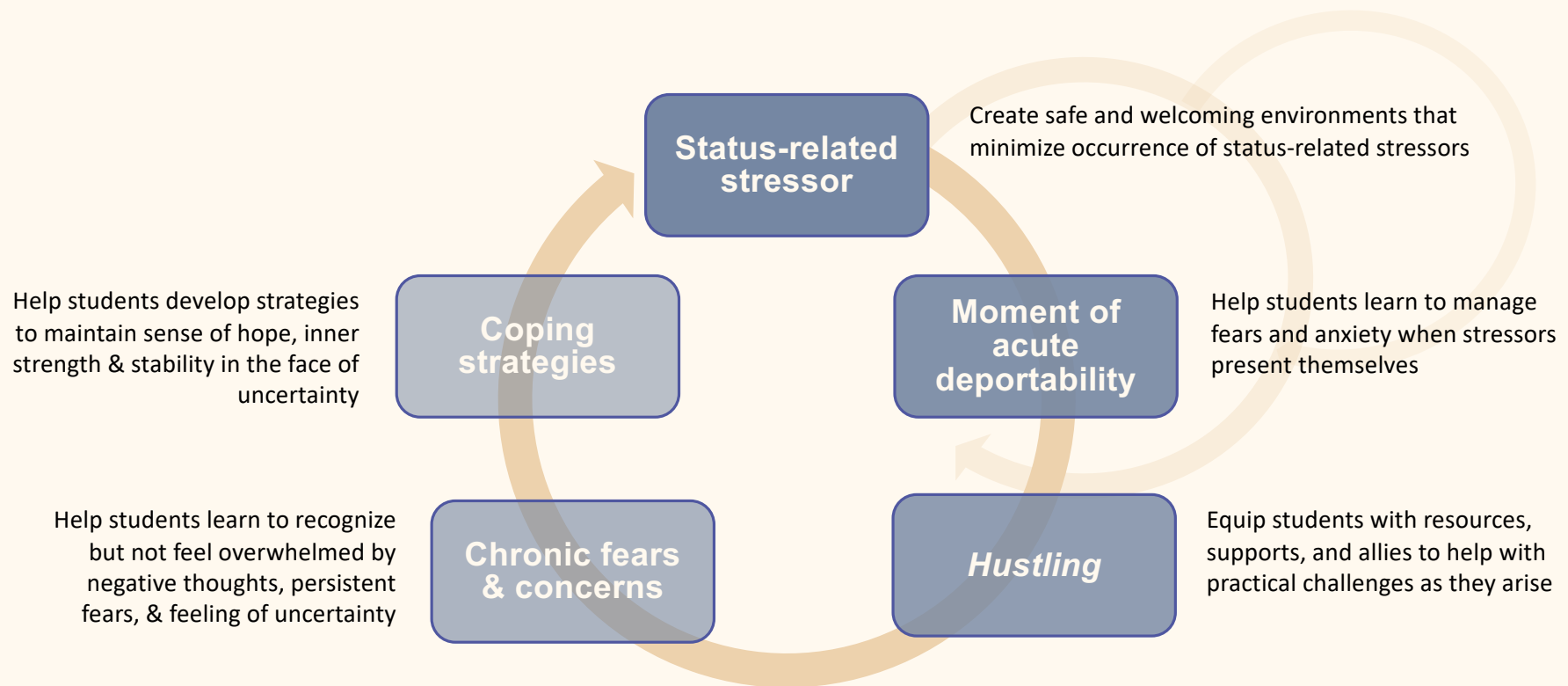
This research-informed College-Level UndocuAlly training video was created to help faculty, counselors, administrators, and staff learn about the experiences of undocumented and mixed-status family college students, as well as ways to support these students' practical and psychological needs. The video features real stories from undocumented and mixed-status college students and is organized into three modules: (1) Basic Immigration Terms and Policies; (2) Living with Undocumented Status; and (3) Supportive Practices and Resources. Each module ends with a quiz to test viewers' knowledge. The video overviews federal and state policies that focus on California but are not exclusive to California—and thus, audience members from various states may find the training useful for their campuses. The video can be used to train various groups of educators, counselors, and staff to become UndocuAllies in their respective settings.



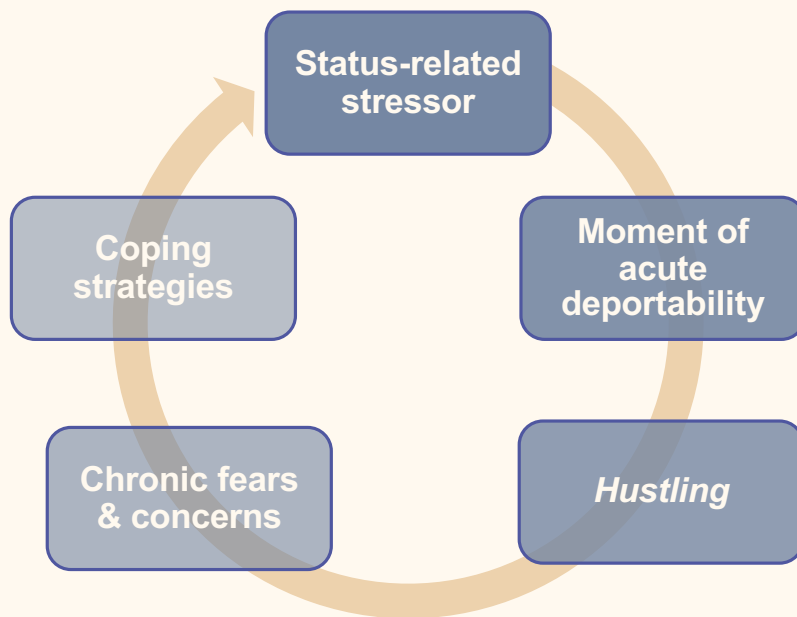
## **2. Building Agency & Well-Being**



# Building Well-Being = Addressing USCs



## Four major strategies for supporting students impacted by undocumented status



- 1. Create welcoming environments**
- 2. Address immediate concerns**
- 3. Address long-term concerns**
- 4. Take action to expand support**



# 1. Create Welcoming Environments

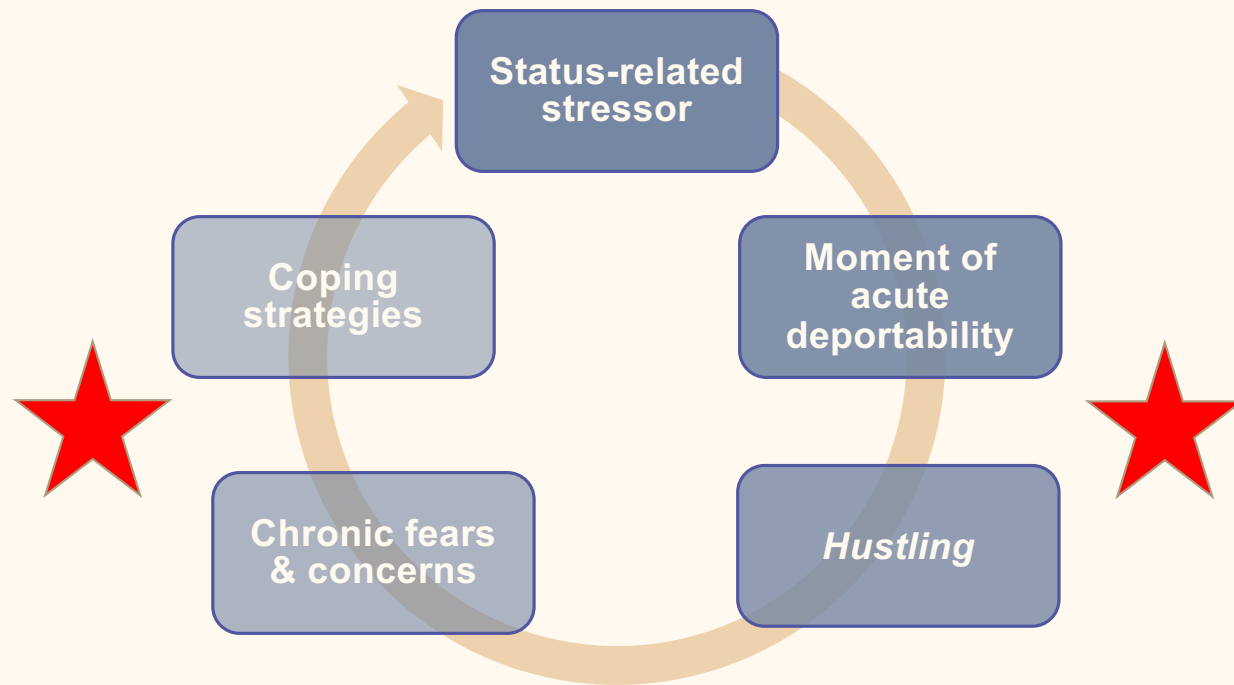


1. Create a visibly safe and welcoming space by putting up posters, stickers, and other signs marking your allyship with undocumented communities
  - Make resources visible (e.g., "Educational Binder" from [Immigrantsrising.org](http://Immigrantsrising.org))
2. Verbally communicate your allyship to students
3. Demonstrate flexibility for students impacted by undocumented status
4. Use appropriate language: undocumented, not "illegal" or "illegal alien"
5. Learn to pronounce names correctly and speak in ways that affirm students' experiences & communicate acceptance
6. Do not ask students to self-identify as undocumented



## *2. Address Immediate Concerns*

# Points when students are most likely to seek support



## Recognize status-related stressors



- Enrollment & academic barriers
- Acquiring financial aid
- Finding work
- Deportation threats
- Seeking to travel / study abroad

*Fear comes up unexpectedly. Sometimes you forget that you are here without papers. But there are moments when you are reminded. For example, when I go to the gym and scan my gym card, I think, 'somebody out there knows where I am.'*

# Recognize status-related stressors



- Enrollment & academic barriers
- Acquiring financial aid
- Finding work
- Deportation threats
- Seeking to travel / study abroad

- Watching news / social media
- Driving / Getting stopped
- Getting sick
- Family member getting sick
- Family members share status-related concerns
- Stranger asks, “where are you from?”
- Peer asks, “have you applied for financial aid yet?”
- Health official asks, “do you have health insurance?”
- Holidays & wanting to see family



## Provide psychological safety and comfort

**Show appreciation by acknowledging trust & courage it takes to disclose**

**Convey interest, safety, & care**

Maintain calm demeanor to model/offer stability

Ask questions & gather information about student's concerns to assess support needed

Validate the impact of the status-related stressor

Convey realistic support (e.g., "I'm here to support you")

**If appropriate, employ practices to help calm heightened state of arousal (e.g., breathing exercise, going for a walk)**

In case of emergency, seek professional support



## Co-Hustle

### **Research and discuss practical resources and solutions available to address status-related stressor**

Assist student in considering different strategies & give them choice

If you don't know, research and/or reach out to those who can help you support the student

Engage students in the research process

### **When you can't find a meaningful solution**

Avoid discouragement & misinformation

"There is always a way"

Warmly refer students to others who can help

### **Discuss long-term support**

A woman's profile is shown in silhouette on the left side of the image, looking towards the right. The background is a soft, warm gradient of light yellow and white. On the right side, the text '3. Address Long-Term Concerns' is written in a dark blue, cursive font.

### 3. Address Long-Term Concerns



## Recognize chronic fears & concerns

### **Everyday manifestations:**

- **academic concerns**
- **financial concerns,**
- **deportation concerns**
- **all of which lead to concerns about the future<sup>1</sup>**

**Other manifestations:**  
**sadness/depression,**  
**feelings of hopelessness,**  
**low self-regard, shame, &**  
**social isolation<sup>2</sup>**

*Fearful thoughts are there all the time. They are not overwhelming ... but everyone knows the ground they walk on ... They can deport you at any moment. ... there's this lingering chill of uncertainty*



## Support long-term coping

**Explore and emphasize social support to promote hope, positive self-regard, and healthy identity development**

Advocacy groups & undocumented student resource centers can be especially transformative

**Identify long-term healthy coping strategies to prepare for future status-related stressors (e.g., meditation, exercise, healthy eating, journaling)**

**Discuss the USC & possibilities for well-being in this context**

# Provide resources for the long-term

**Connect students to  
supportive social networks  
and groups**

**Orient student to state and  
national-level organizations  
that offer diversity of supports**

## **My Undocumented Life** ([myundocumentedlife.org](http://myundocumentedlife.org))

- Most comprehensive multi-resource site that combines information and resources from multiple organizations across the U.S.

## **Immigrants Rising** ([immigrantsrising.org](http://immigrantsrising.org))

- Multi-resource site focused on educational supports (e.g., scholarships, fellowships) as well as financial and legal supports
- \*Recently added\* mental health toolkit & support groups

## **United We Dream** ([unitedwedream.org](http://unitedwedream.org))

- Largest Immigrant Youth-Led Network in the U.S. Includes guides and toolkits focused on advocacy, legal advice, mental health for undocumented youth and allies

## **Informed Immigrant** ([informedimmigrant.com](http://informedimmigrant.com))

- Multi-resource site focused on legal updates and advice (e.g., immigrant rights, updates on changes in immigration policy)

## **National Immigration Law Center** ([nilc.org](http://nilc.org))

- Legally-focused resources include info about DACA, healthcare, immigration enforcement, workers' rights, education, drivers' licenses, economic support, taxes

## **Sac State Dreamer Resource Center > Resource Library**

- Video recorded trainings and webinars about the lives of undocumented and mixed status-family students

## **Undocuwisdom.com**

- Life lessons and advice on how to live well despite the challenges of undocumented status drawn from research with undocumented youth; includes survival guide, immigration books and media, & the USC



## *4. Take Action to Expand Support*

The background of the entire slide is a light gray color. In the center, there is a faint, semi-transparent image of several hands of different skin tones holding a white paper cutout of a human figure. The hands are positioned around the figure, suggesting support and care. The figure is a simple, stylized representation of a person.

**Communicate your allyship and connect with others on campus to build a robust network of support on your campus**

**Use your sphere of influence to advocate for supportive policies, resources and an Undocumented Student Resource Center on your campus**

**Create events and/or communications that educate students about mental health symptoms & de-stigmatize mental health help-seeking on campus**

**Continue to develop and/or share your knowledge (e.g., attend professional development workshops, conferences)**



# TAKEAWAYS

## **1. USC is a cyclical, developmental, and long-term process**

Thus, building well-being = long-term process

## **2. Supporting students impacted by undocumented status involves:**

- a. Developing sensitivity to their unique psychosocial experiences and needs
- b. Supporting their agency & capacities to build meaningful lives despite their challenges

## Do you identify as an undocumented person?

*I think if you were to have asked me that question a couple of years ago, I would have said to you maybe in private, “yes,” but to other people in public, “no”. I wouldn’t have considered it my salient identity. Something that really helped me “come out of the shadows” so to speak was the university where I attended. The university that I attended ... had a lot of programs that were geared toward [helping] undocumented students feel comfortable and feel safe ... and there was a lot of really great mentors that helped me go through the process of coming out about my identity. **Now I fully embrace it and consider it one of my most salient identities.***

**- Frida**

*Thank you!*

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*Questions?*

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