

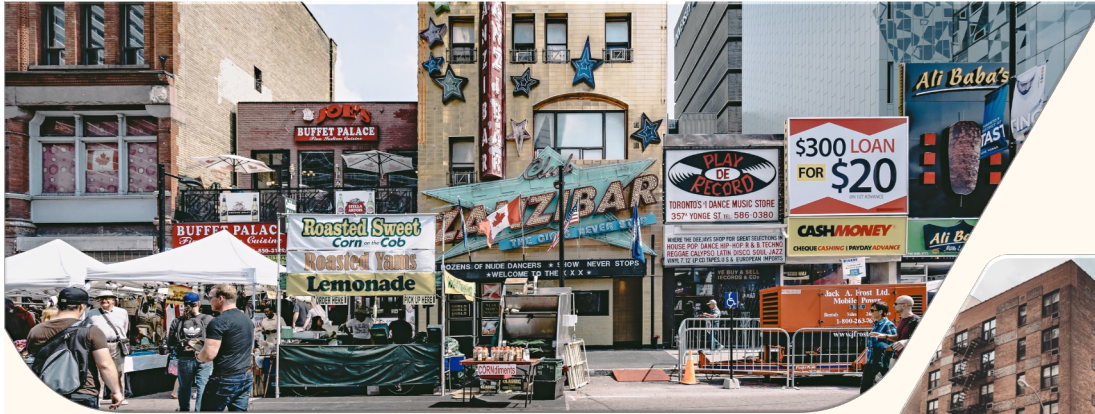


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Supporting the *Mental Health and Well-Being* of Students Impacted by Undocumented Status

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Adolescent Development
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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 (2) 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?

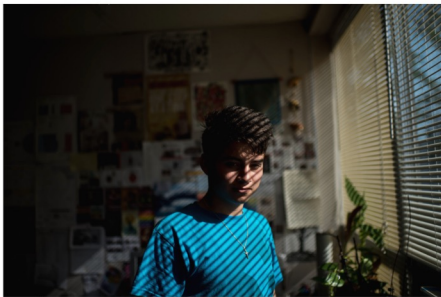


***For Immigrant Students, a New
Worry: A Call to ICE***



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. Loren 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 Rennaissen 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 Schukar for The New York Times

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

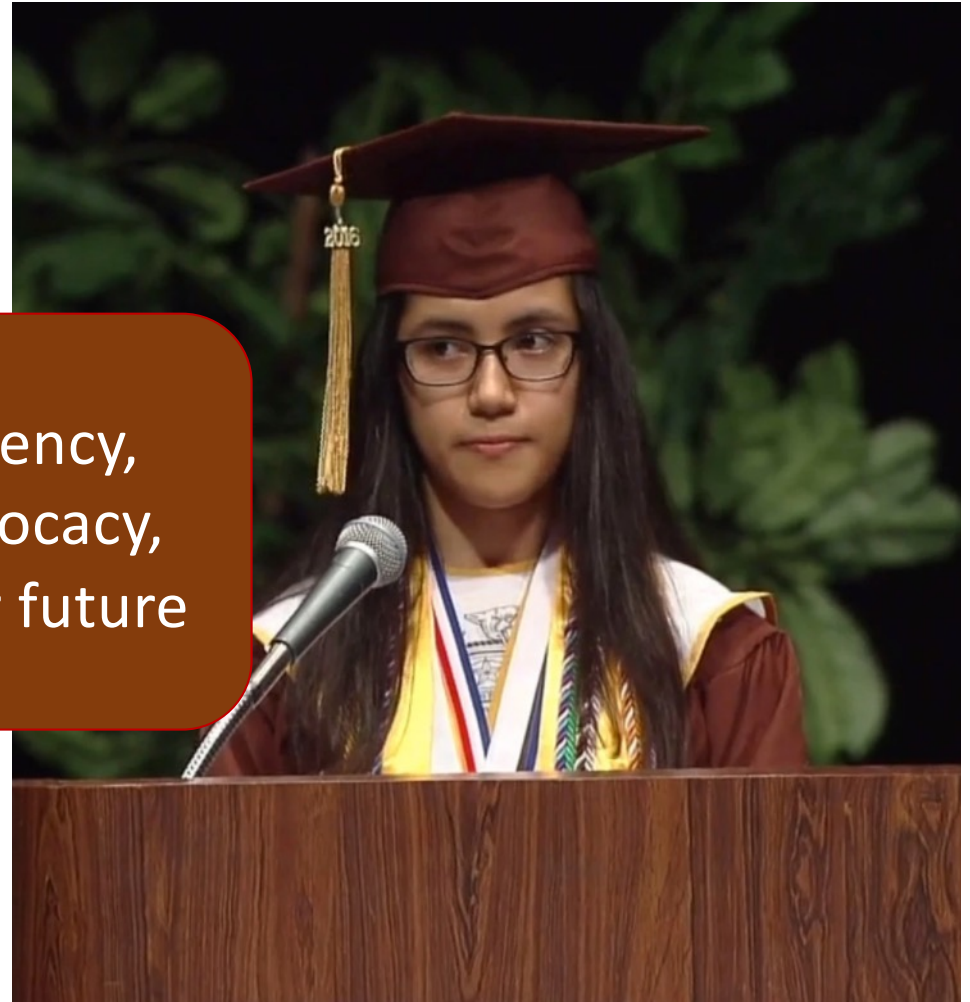


Karla Cornejo Villavicencio writes: "I took notes by hand during interviews; after the legal review, I destroyed the notes. I chose not to use a recorder because I did not want to intimidate my subjects." Talya Zemanich-Berlin

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



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





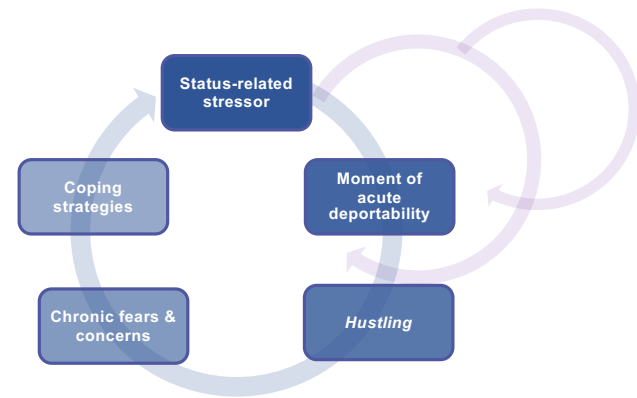
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To support students impacted by undocumented status:

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



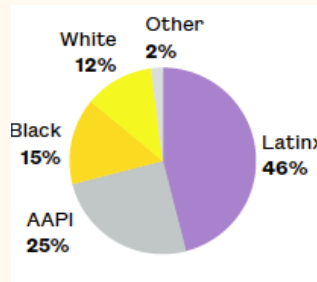
1. Developing Sensitivity



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%)¹
- Racially & ethnically diverse
- **454,000 or 2% of students in higher education²**
- **21,000 undocumented students in higher education live in IL³**
- Face deportation, financial, academic, and future concerns⁵ as well as shame & stigma⁴
- Cannot access federal financial aid & most scholarships
- Most do not have authorization to work and protection from deportation via DACA⁴



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 children⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Fedlun (2020)

⁴Gonzales et al. (2013)

⁴FWD.US (2021)

⁵Enriquez et al. (2018)

Contexts shared by immigrant children¹

- 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 challenges⁶

- 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^{2,3}
- 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"⁴
- Confusion, fear, despair about the future, shame, stigma, isolation
- "Learning to be illegal" - learning to address status-related circumstances & cope with newfound concerns⁵

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

^{1,6} Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018

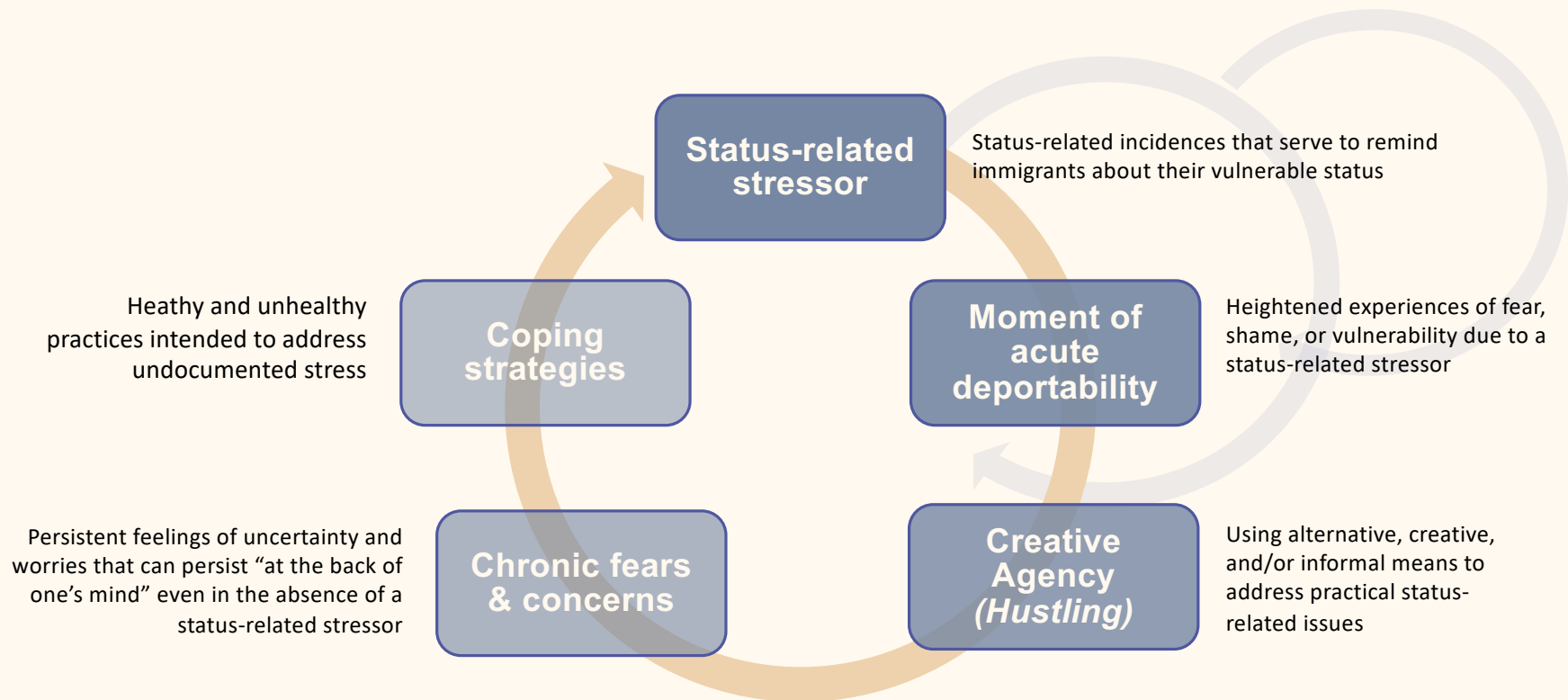
² Dreby, 2012

³ Ellis, 2021

⁴ Gonzales & Chavez, 2012

⁵ Gonzales, 2011

The Undocumented Stress Cycle



Let's hear from Seng



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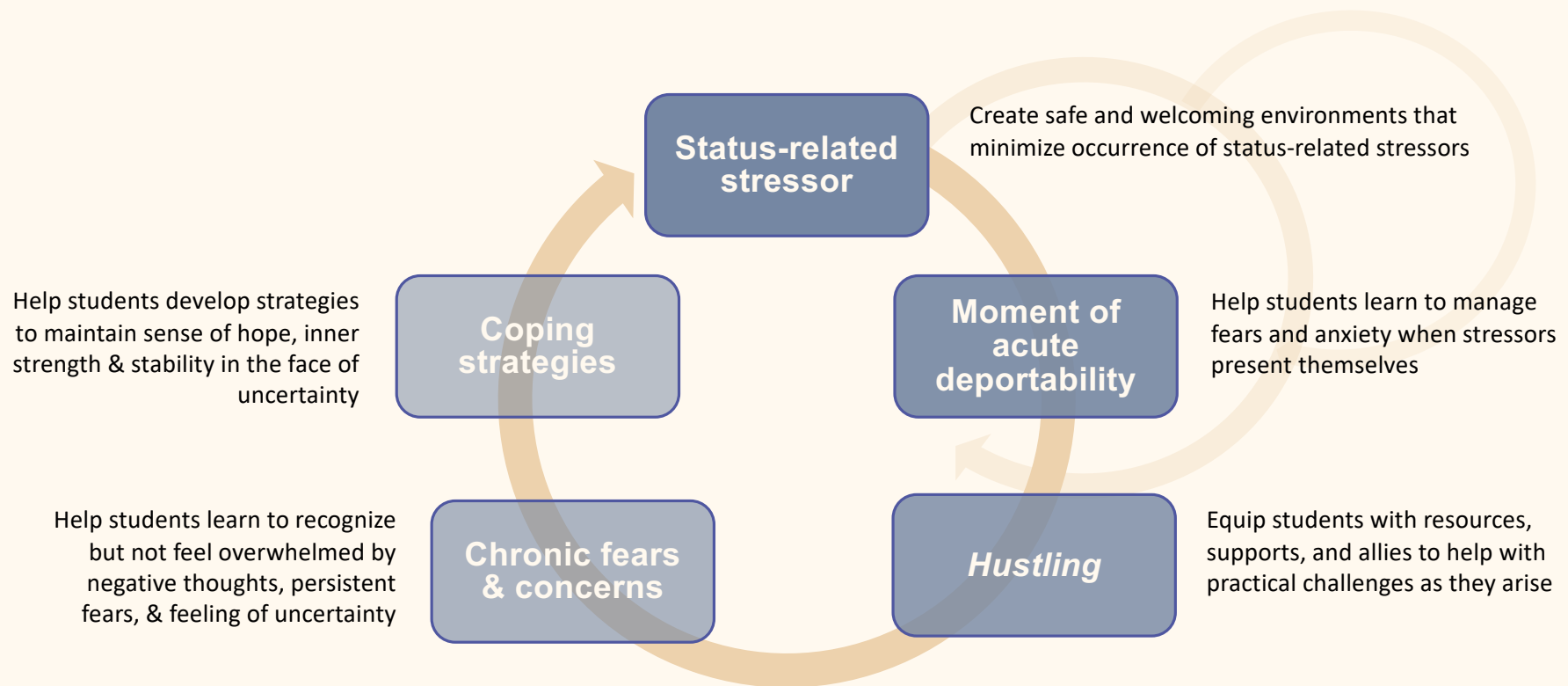
This research-informed College-Level UndocuAlly training video was created to help faculty, counselors, administrators, and staff learn about the experiences of undocumented and mixed-status family college students, as well as ways to support these students' practical and psychological needs. The video 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.



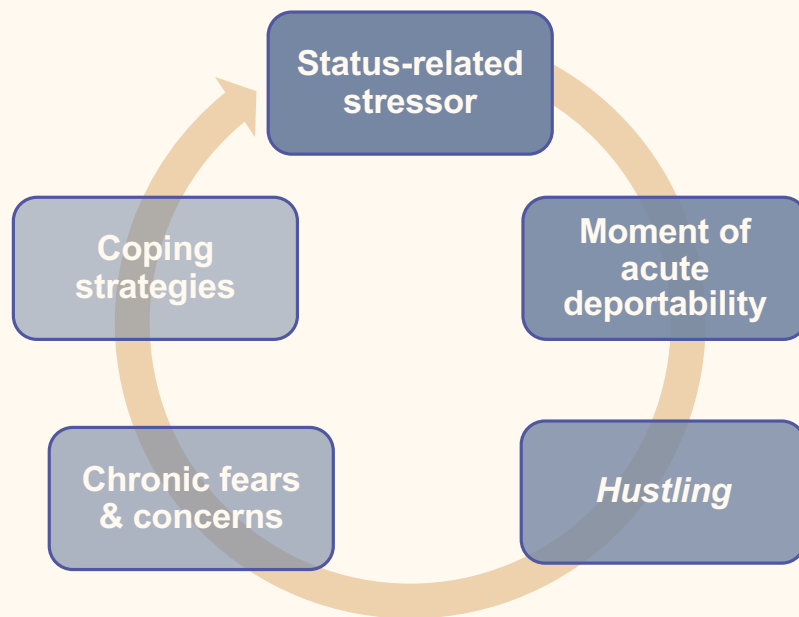
2. Building Agency & Well-Being



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**

A soft-focus photograph of a person's arm and hand gently holding a baby's hand. The person is wearing a light-colored, speckled shirt. The background is a warm, light beige color.

1. Create Welcoming Environments

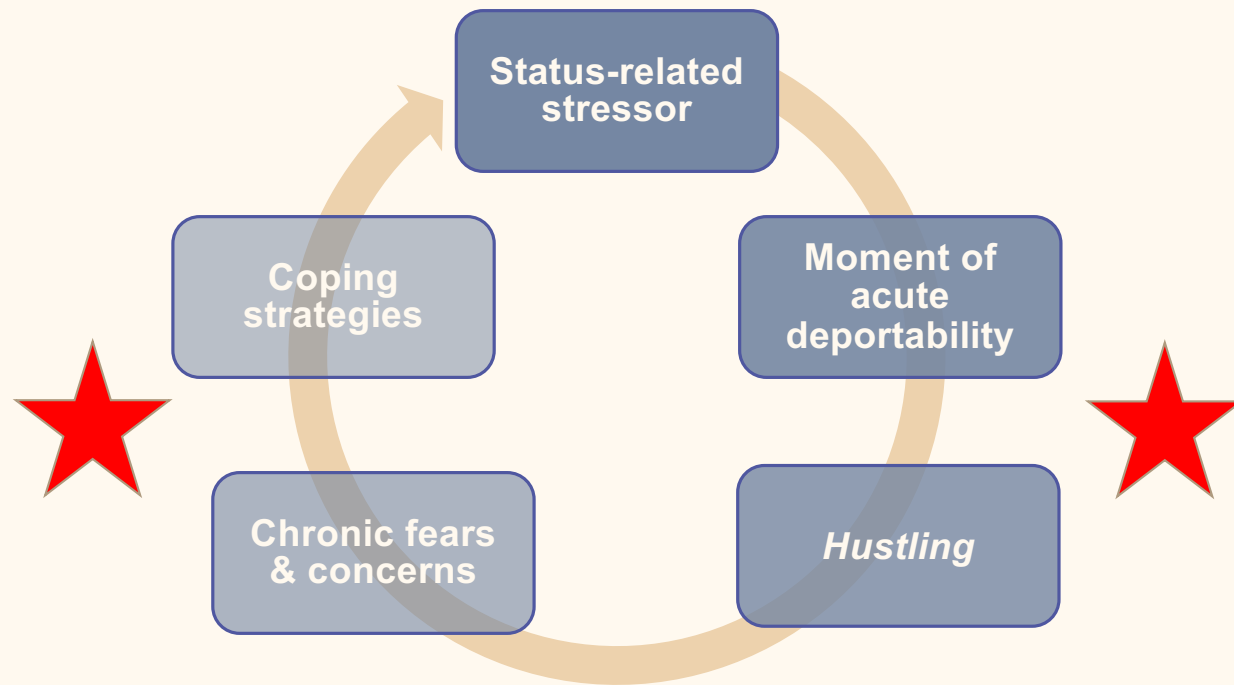


1. Create a visibly safe and welcoming space by putting up posters, stickers, and other signs marking your allyship with undocumented communities
Make resources visible (e.g., "Educational Binder" from Immigrantsrising.org)
2. Verbally communicate your allyship to students
3. Demonstrate flexibility 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



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 future¹**

Other manifestations:
sadness/depression,
feelings of hopelessness,
low self-regard, shame, &
social isolation²

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)

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

Immigrants Rising (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)

- 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)

- 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)

- 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



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!

Questions?

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