

# Living with the Threat of Deportation



Living in the US with the threat of deportation comes with a great deal of anxiety and fear. Part of that anxiety comes from uncertainty: You don't know when or if you will encounter ICE or police. You don't know what might happen to your children if you are arrested. You don't know what life will be like if you are forced to return to your home country.

**Knowing what to expect** can take away some of the anxiety and stress. This guide gives you an idea of what to expect in an ICE raid, during your time in ICE custody, at the border, and immediately after deportation. See the chapter, Know Your Rights: ICE Encounters and the Removal Process, to learn more about the removal process, from arrest to possible deportation.

**Making a plan** can also help reduce anxiety and stress. A plan can guide you through the crisis and help you remain calm. It can be hard to think and make decisions under stress but if you've laid out a plan, this will help. The Make a Plan chapter addresses how you can prepare.

This chapter covers ways you can cope mentally with the uncertainty, anxiety and stress. It also addresses some things you may worry about if you are undocumented, like whether you can get a driver's license or medical care.

It covers the following topics:

- Practice patience and mindfulness
- Prepare mentally for challenges
- Getting medical care
- Getting help if you are a victim of a crime
- Driving while undocumented
- Housing protections



*Best thing that can reduce anxiety is to have a plan. You don't have to be rigid with that plan, because you're going to ... get out and realize that the world isn't what you expected it to be.*

—Joe Joe M.

## Practice Patience and Mindfulness

You are under a lot of stress. Give yourself permission to accept that things may not be ideal or easy. It will be useful to practice patience. Go slow. Breathe. It is natural to feel stressed sometimes, but there are ways of managing your stress and preventing it from getting out of hand.

Think about what you can do to set your mind at ease. What are the hobbies you enjoy? You might play soccer, take long walks, or garden, for example. How can you build such activities into your life to relieve some of the stress?

If you have a daily meditation, mindfulness or exercise routine, maintain it. If not, think about starting one. This will help calm you and allow you to reduce your stress and maintain focus. The chapter on Mindfulness provides detailed guidance on getting started and even has a few guided meditations



# Prepare for Mentally for Challenges

**As you consider your potential deportation, work on practicing patience, both with others and with yourself.**

What skills do you use to manage stress?

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When things go wrong, or when you're disappointed, what can you do to keep yourself on track and focused?

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What have you done in the past to successfully adjust to major life changes?

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What skills, habits, or traits helped you to stay motivated, build positive relationships, and maintain self-respect?

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Who can you turn to when you are stressed or anxious? Who is in your support network?

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What organizations can be part of your support network? Do you have a church community? Is there an organization that supports people like you?

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*Take a breath. You're going to be in for a ride, and you better pack your patience.*

—Pablo M.



## Getting Medical Care

If you or a family member are undocumented, you may be afraid to get medical care. Maybe you are afraid they will ask about your immigration status. You may worry about paying for medical bills, especially if you don't have insurance. You have the right to get medical care without worrying about being deported. Health care workers should not ask you questions about your immigration status, nor should they report you to ICE.

You will likely be asked to pay for services out of pocket. Always ask about the expected costs before receiving a service. Look for community health centers that provide low-cost health care and services on a sliding scale.

You can safely get medical care at these places:

- Community health centers that provide low-cost health care: <https://www.healthcare.gov/community-health-centers/>
- Federally-qualified health centers: <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>
- Urgent care clinics
- Public hospitals
- Emergency rooms
- Safety-net hospitals

If you are undocumented, you cannot enroll in Medicaid, Medicare, or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and you also can't get insurance through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace.

There are some insurance options, though.

- **Insurance through your employer.** You may be eligible to receive insurance through an employer.
- **State programs.** Some states have insurance options for people who are undocumented. Illinois' All Kids program provides affordable healthcare for children of low-income families, regardless of immigration status.

- **Emergency Medicaid.** If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, you can apply for Emergency Medicaid to cover the costs. Different states have different ways to apply. Ask a healthcare professional to help you.

If mental health challenges or substance abuse are preventing you from functioning well or feeling good, get help from a mental health professional. If you are feeling especially bad or feel like you might be a danger to yourself or someone else, get help right away. Call the suicide and crisis lifeline at 988 or anonymously contact the Crisis Text Line. The Crisis Text Line provides free, 24/7, confidential support (in English and Spanish) via text message to people in crisis when they text the word HOME to 741741.

You can also call 911 or visit an emergency room if you are in crisis.

Even if you are not in crisis, don't delay getting help if you are feeling depressed, anxious, or angry. If you aren't feeling well mentally and emotionally, it makes it so much harder to move forward in positive and productive ways. When you are feeling mentally healthy, you will find that things will seem more manageable and you'll feel more hopeful.

It may help to find a therapist who works with the undocumented community. See <https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resource-type/therapist-directories/> for a directory. There are many low-cost community health clinics where you can get help.

A mental health professional can help you:

- Work through changing harmful behaviors.
- Avoid alcohol or drugs to ease depression and anxiety.
- Feel stronger as you face challenges.
- Come up with goals and plans to solve your problems.
- Identify how your ways of thinking are influencing how you feel.

Mental health professionals can help you decide if it would be a good idea to take medicine to treat your mental disorder, and they can offer treatment for drug and alcohol addictions.



## Getting Help if You Are a Victim of a Crime

Many immigrants worry that if they report a crime, they may be deported. But there are laws that can protect you depending on what type of crime you've been a victim of.

- **The Violence Against Women Act** protects victims of domestic violence who are the child, parent or current/former spouse of a US citizen or permanent resident (green card holder) and are abused by the US citizen or permanent resident. If this applies to you, you may be eligible to apply for a green card yourself, without needing help from the person who has abused you.
- **U Nonimmigrant Visa Status** is a protection for people who have been victims of serious crimes and have information about the crime that they want to share with police. This applies only to certain criminal activity and you must be willing to participate in the investigation. Check with your local legal services clinic if you think this may apply to you.
- **T Nonimmigrant Visa Status** is for victims of human trafficking. If someone has forced you to work and you are afraid to return to your home country you may be eligible for this protection. You would need to help law enforcement investigate the trafficking.



## Driving While Undocumented

As you are likely aware, driving while undocumented is risky. If you are pulled over, you may be arrested. Some states allow police to turn people over to ICE after traffic stops. Others, like Illinois, do not. If you must drive, do so cautiously and be prepared for an encounter with police or ICE (see the Know Your Rights chapter).

If you can, get a driver's license. You will be driving legally and will be less likely to be arrested if you are pulled over.

States that allow undocumented immigrants to get a driver's license include California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.



## Housing Protections

If you are undocumented, you may be worried about getting housing.

**Federal laws.** Regardless of your immigration status, the Federal Housing Act offers you some protections. Landlords or real estate agents cannot:

- Discriminate based on race, national origin, sex, religion, color, disability, or family status.
- Decide not to rent to you because you or your family members don't speak English.
- Refuse to rent to you because you are an immigrant from a particular country.
- Ask about your immigration status because of how you look, talk, or dress.

Landlords CAN ask about people's immigration status or citizenship, but if they do, they must ask all potential or existing tenants to provide information about their immigration status. That is, they can't single you out because of how you look or talk.

If you have been discriminated against, you can file a complaint with the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. They do not ask about immigration status when people file a complaint. Call (800) 669-9777 (English and Spanish) to file a complaint.

Learn more here: [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/online-complaint](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/online-complaint)

**State laws.** In some states like Illinois, Colorado, and California, landlords are not allowed to evict tenants on the basis of their citizenship or immigration status. They are also not allowed to disclose information about your status, contact ICE, or increase rent. The only time they may do so is when there is a court order or law is involved. If your landlord harasses you, threatens you, or retaliates against you, you can sue them in court.