

# Beginning to Heal



Deportation hurts in a lot of ways. Being arrested, detained, and deported can cause trauma. This chapter explores ways you can heal from this trauma, move forward, and become more resilient.

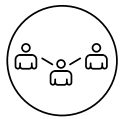
Resilience means that when something bad happens (like deportation), you can bounce back from it. It means that you can cope with stress instead of getting stuck with your bad feelings.

Resilience is something you can learn! It is not something that only some people have. It is something that everyone can strengthen, like when you build muscle. It takes time and work, but it can be done.

Having resilience doesn't mean stress is easy. It means that you have taught yourself to deal with tough things. Resilience means you have behaviors, thoughts, and actions that help you deal with stress. It means that your difficulties can help you grow.

If you feel stuck, get help from a mental health professional. Getting help is an important part of building resilience.

There are four main areas of resilience. To heal from the trauma of deportation, work to improve your resilience in these four areas.



## Build Your Connections

Connect with people you trust and who understand you. Remind yourself that you are not alone. Deportation is a time when you will strengthen old relationships and build new ones. The Relationships chapter can help you with this.

Support groups can help you meet people going through the same things as you. Support groups are available for:

- Drug or alcohol addiction. See Alcoholics Anonymous ([aa.org.mx](http://aa.org.mx)) or Narcotics Anonymous ([na.org](http://na.org)).
- Deportation
- Grief
- Mental health
- Disabilities
- Parenting
- Divorce
- Sexuality
- Weight loss

Go to your first meeting with an open mind. Listen and learn. Go to a couple of meetings to see if you like the group. If you don't like it, try to find another.

Finding support groups can be tricky, especially if you live in a rural area. The easiest way to find one is through an internet search. You can search terms like:

- "Deported or returned people"
- "Substance abuse support groups"
- "Community support group + name of your community"

Health care providers, community centers, and churches are also good sources of information.

No support groups near you? Join an online support group.



*Reach out to somebody. One of our coping mechanisms is to retract ourselves, isolate ourselves to try to deal with what we're going through.*

— Pablo M.

If you feel lonely and isolated, get involved in your community to make new friends. Here are a few ideas:

- **Community Organizing, Advocacy, Mentoring, and Volunteering.** Your skills are useful. You can make a real difference by using your skills to help people.
- **Join or Create a Shared Interest Group.** Join a sports team, book club, hobby group, parents support group, or become involved with local politics. You can even organize your own group! Your local public library is a good place to find or post notices.
- **Join a Community Association.** They organize events, like block parties, potluck meals, and musical events. Search online for “community organization + name of your community” or “advocacy group + name of your community.” Facebook and other social media apps can help you find groups.
- **Join a Religious Organization.** Join a church, synagogue, or other faith community. They can help you find meaning, purpose, and fellowship. It may take a while for you to find the place that feels right for you. Don’t be discouraged. It’s okay to go slow.

## Foster Wellness

**Take care of your body.** Your body needs good food, sleep, water, and exercise. All of these things can help it fight stress. Consider finding a gym, jogging, walking, biking, practicing yoga, or looking up free at-home exercise videos online. Practice safe sex by using condoms.

**Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness means being present in the moment. You can practice mindfulness in many ways. See the Mindfulness chapter to learn more.

**Avoid negative outlets.** Stress can make you want to feel better right away. It may make you want to use drugs and alcohol, or other negative things. This is like putting a Band-Aid on a large wound. It won’t help you heal. Try to do healthy things to help you cope.

**Spend time in nature.** Nature can be healing. Grow vegetables in a garden or visit a local park or forest.



*Working out and staying into sports was a way for me to stay healthy and motivated. It gave me physical health but also mental stability. It helped me cope with the anxiety of starting all over again. I say all the time, going to the gym and working out is much more than just doing exercise. Being fit gives you confidence and builds self-esteem. Being able to endure difficult things like lifting your max or running to the limit of your capacity builds courage and helps prepare you mentally for those difficult experiences you’ll have in life, to keep pushing forward. And eating healthy and staying within your weight limits is also important for living a long productive life.*

—Israel P.

## Find Purpose

**Help others.** Helping others can help you feel useful. Get involved with a community organization or help a friend who is struggling.

**Invest in what you do.** Your job may not be perfect, but how you do it is entirely up to you. What are your strengths? Bring those to your work. Find ways to do a little extra and try new things. Realize the value of the work you do, and honor that.

**Be proactive.** Ask yourself, “What can I do about this problem?” Set goals for yourself. Break them down into smaller steps. Work towards them, a little each day. The small steps you take will help you keep going.

**Learn about yourself.** How did deportation help you grow? How have you become a better person? This can help you feel better about yourself.

**Learn new things.** Be open to new ideas. Pick up a few books or take a class to learn something new. Challenge yourself. Expand your knowledge and thinking.

”

*Take care of yourself and everything else will fall into place... You can't stress out over everything that you have no control over. Don't give up hope. There's always hope. And love overcomes a lot of stuff.*

—Heather B.



## Embrace Healthy Thoughts

**Keep things in perspective.** You can't always control what happens to you. But you do have control of how you respond to the things that happen. Put away negative thoughts. Focus on having more balanced and realistic thoughts.

**Accept change.** Change is a part of life. Some change might get in the way of your goals. It is ok to accept some things. Focus on the things that you can change and control.

**Stay hopeful.** No one feels positive all the time. Let yourself feel upset or disappointed for a little bit. Then focus on what gives you hope. What helps you feel positive? What do you want and how can you make that happen?

**Learn from your past.** Look back at what has helped you in the past during hard times. Remind yourself of how you found strength before. What have you learned about yourself from your past?

**Find healthy ways to deal with difficult emotions.** You may feel grief, anger, or depression because of what you have gone through. These feelings are natural. Be aware of your good or bad feelings and accept them. Find ways to express them in healthy ways. It is okay to get professional help. Counseling can help you learn to be emotionally well.

”

*We tend to have difficulty finding our footing. We have a purpose, but now it is no longer as clear cut as it once was. Moreover, rather than dealing with the trauma, we tend to ignore it or downplay it as if it is completely normal what we just went through. Before anything, we must deal with our trauma. It is not going away magically. We can do it by asking for help, venting, or riding a bicycle for hours, as I love to do. But we have to address it.*

—Roberto L.