From Immigration Status Disclosure to Response: De-escalating Fear & Addressing Student Needs

More Resources: Project Dignity & Belonging Webpage

Behavioral Health, Crisis Management, and Family Support Plan

PURPOSE

To provide a **compassionate, trauma-informed, and legally sound** response when a student discloses their or their family's undocumented status and expresses high anxiety, fear of deportation, or related distress.

This plan supports the emotional regulation of the student, preserves trust, and connects the student and family to appropriate supports—**without escalating fear or compromising confidentiality.**

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: The First 10 Minutes

If a student discloses:

- “I’m undocumented.”
- “My family is afraid of getting deported.”
- “We heard ICE might come.”
- “I don’t feel safe.”

✅ Do:

- **Stay calm and grounded** in your body and tone.
- **Affirm safety**:
  “Thank you for trusting me. You are not alone. I’m here to support you.”
- **Listen non-judgmentally**. Let the student speak. Use active listening (eye contact, nodding, quiet presence).
- **Pause and assess** for immediate emotional needs (panic, freezing, tears, hyperventilation).
- **Offer grounding**:
  “Let’s take some slow breaths together. You’re safe right now.”
- **Emphasize privacy**:
  “You don’t have to share anything you’re not comfortable sharing. This conversation is private.”

🚫 Do NOT:

- Ask for immigration details or legal documentation.
- Make promises about what will or won't happen legally.
- Refer the situation to law enforcement or child welfare unless there's imminent danger unrelated to immigration status.

NEXT STEPS: Support and Advocacy

1. **Loop in a safe or trusted individual in your school building:**
    - Use a warm **handoff** if a student is in distress.
    - Ask: "Would you like to talk with someone trained to support students in stressful moments like this?"
2. **If the student declines support**, reassure:
   "That's okay. I'll check in with you later today. I'm still here if you need anything."

3. **Follow up within 24 hours** to check on the student's emotional well-being.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT (within 1–3 days)

- **Coordinate (only with student/family permission)** with:
    - District family liaison
    - Latinx or immigrant community partner (e.g., LCA)
    - Trusted bilingual staff

- **Offer referral** to:
    - Legal aid organizations
    - Counseling services
    - Community organizations offering immigrant support

- **Share translated resources**:
    - Know Your Rights cards
    - Preparedness Packets - Spanish

CHECKLIST FOR SUPPORTING UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

ACTION	NOTES
Affirm the student's safety and worth	Avoid legal speculation
Avoid collecting immigration info	Do not ask or document
Offer emotional support or referral	Safe/trusted individuals in school building
Protect student privacy	FERPA and Oregon law (ORS 659.850)
Provide grounding strategies	Breathing, sensory tools, quiet space
Loop in trauma-informed supports	Prioritize connection, not compliance
Offer translated materials to families	Spanish, Purepecha, etc.
Refer to trusted legal/community partners	LCA, Oregon Law Center, etc.
Document concern in student support log	Don't mention immigration status
Follow up within 1–2 days	Ongoing connection builds trust

SAMPLE LANGUAGE TO USE

- "You are not alone. There are people and organizations that exist to protect you and your family."
- "What you're feeling makes total sense. You've done nothing wrong. We're going to support you with care."
- "Our school is committed to creating a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment for all students—regardless of immigration status"

High Desert
Education Service District