



*En Boca Cerrada No Entran Moscas
Pero ... En La Unión Está La Fuerza¹:
Family Communication*



It is a common struggle for families to know when to discuss sensitive issues and when not to. Families of all different backgrounds often struggle to talk about difficult things such as when a family member has a mental illness, is incarcerated, or dies. However, families at-risk of separation, detention, or deportation face unique challenges that make it particularly difficult to talk about this sensitive issue.

Some common fears and worries faced by undocumented families when discussing their undocumented status are:

- I am not sure when to talk about it. I do not want to ruin the good moments we have.
- I don't know where to start, there is so much to talk about that it feels overwhelming.
- My family is often stressed with work. I do not want to cause more stress.
- When talking to a child/youth: Children will not keep our secret and we may get deported.
- When talking to a child/youth: Children will be scared and I don't want to worry them.

Should we discuss our family's fears related to our documentation status?

Each family needs to decide whether or not to discuss their feelings about their documentation status and plans in case of possible family separation, detention, and/or deportation. Each family's situation is different.

Pros of Talking <i>En La Unión Está La Fuerza</i>	Pros of Not Talking <i>En Boca Cerrada No Entran Moscas</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members can support each other. • Can help build stronger family unity. • Family members can feel and be heard. • Family members can have clarity about the risks that they are facing. • Family members can be prepared and have a plan of action in case of separation or emergency. • Family members can agree about and decide what information to believe or rely on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent a family member from disclosing their documentation status to someone that could put the family at-risk. • Avoid conflict if family members disagree about what to do or how to react. • Protect everyone from experiencing negative emotions that could come up • Avoid power struggles that could come up among family members. • If nothing happens, no time was wasted on stressful conversations.

If Our Family Decides to Talk: How Do We Do It?

Here are some things to think of as you prepare to talk as a family.

If you choose to talk:

1. **Who?** Remember that anyone in the family can call a family meeting. Caregivers may be the leaders in the home, but DACA recipients may have a wealth of knowledge and experiences that will be critical in any discussion.

Pointers:

- Try to include all family members in the discussion.
- Rely on the people that are knowledgeable to provide information regardless of age.
- Consider consulting with knowledgeable people and having them join the conversation.

¹ Prepared for NLPA by Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez, Luz Garcini, and José Manuel González Vera

2. **When?** Pay attention to when your family may be ready to talk. Consider if it's a special day (e.g., birthday, holidays) and if the conversation will affect that special day. Will the conversation take place at a time when family members may be distracted or busy? Is it likely that there will be interruptions from other people or events taking place? How long do you have?

Pointers:

- Ask family members when would it be a good time for a family conversation.
- Find a time to have a family conversation when your schedule may not interfere.
- Make sure there is space/privacy to have the conversation without interruptions.
- Make sure there is sufficient time for everyone involved to voice their concerns.

3. **What?** Think about the main issue that your family wants to address and find ways to communicate it appropriately. For instance, if you want to learn how your family is feeling about possible family separation or deportation, that conversation will look different than if you want to create a plan about what to do in various scenarios. Consider also what you say in the context of who you are talking to. Having a conversation with a child will be different than if you were talking to an adolescent or adult. Also, talking to family members with intellectual disabilities or cognitive impairments may require special attention.

Pointers:

- Start with a statement of the family problem or concern.
- Identify and state the goal of the family conversation, but keep it simple (e.g., expressing feelings about the situation, making a safety plan).
- Ask other family members how they feel about the issue. **Listen!**
- Answer questions honestly and accurately, but give details only as they are requested. Sometimes providing too much information at once can feel overwhelming.
- Invite family members to keep thinking about questions to discuss later. Set up a follow-up time.
- Be prepared to address issues that arise from misinformation.

4. **How?** Think about how you are going to communicate the issue to your family. Be sure that you pick a time when you can speak in a calm and reassuring way. Your family are likely to pick up on how you are feeling. Starting a conversation in a calm manner can increase a sense of safety.

Pointers:

- To remain calm during the conversation, here are some things that you can do:
 - Set the time and location so that the space is comfortable.
 - Sometimes having a conversation during a snack/meal time can add comfort.
 - Set things up to invite calmness (e.g., comfortable clothing, a cup of tea, quiet place)
 - Start the conversation with strengths (e.g., we are here because we love each other)
 - Write down what you would like to say.
 - Have a plan ready for pausing or stopping if you or a family member becomes anxious or upset.
- Acknowledge that talking about immigration is difficult, but reassure that you can do this together.
- Brainstorm solutions together. You can ask family member for ideas and make a list of pros and cons.
- Agree as a family on a safety plan and identify steps to be taken to make it happen.
- Provide family members with resources to keep informed.
- When developing a plan, rehearse the steps of the plan often to be sure that everyone understands.
- Encourage family members to ask questions or to ask for help when needed.

Having family conversations about difficult topics is hard! The first thing you can do is get started! Maybe you can't take all the steps we recommend in one week, but you can choose to do one thing at a time (e.g., decide what to talk about, write it down), and then plan for when and how to take the next step. These recommendations might be difficult to do at first. **The best way to get better at it, is to practice!** Remember "*En La Unión Está La Fuerza.*"