



American Counseling Association

School Counselor Connection

School Counselors Supporting Immigrant Students and Their Families

When students and their families migrate, leaving behind relatives, communities, and cultures, it can be very challenging to acculturate and assimilate into a new environment. Providing adequate support to immigrant students requires learning about their different cultures and understanding the migration process.

Cultural Awareness

Not all immigrants are undocumented or come from Latinx countries. It is important that you do not make any assumptions or create a false narrative or impose your own narrative. Learn about the culture before meeting with students and their families. Allow immigrant families to share their stories of migration. Allow them to share their needs and wants. Provide them with a safe space to share their concerns.

The Migration Process

Many immigrant families leave their homes for various reasons, as follows:

- Unemployment in their home country
- War
- Famine
- Community violence
- Gangs
- Other personal reasons

The best thing you can do is listen, validate, and show compassion. The migration process is difficult, as once the decision has been made, families may be separated for an unknown length of time. If they are crossing the border, it can be traumatic. Once in this country, they may fear what might happen if they reveal their undocumented status, making it harder for them to receive needed services. The school counselor will have to establish clear boundaries to ensure the safety of their undocumented counselees.

Support

It is important to provide immigrant students and their families with resources that are culturally appropriate. This can include connecting families to community organizations that work with families from similar backgrounds, non-profits, spiritual and religious organizations, and organizations that provide legal support. Build a rapport with the families and most importantly, provide a safe environment that allows and encourages families to share their experiences.

Some of the stressors and mental health concerns immigrant students might disclose include trauma, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. First address safety needs. Once they are addressed, it is important to address other mental health concerns, being mindful that many immigrant students may not have resolved other trauma or hurts that occurred in the past. Teaching, explaining, and being genuine will assist with the process.

Eunice Humphrey,
Ed.D., LCPC
Mental Health
Consultant

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