AMERICANBARASSOCIATION
CILA Children's Immigration Law Academy

A New Path:

My Toolkit for Navigating Life in the United States

I. INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this right now, it may be because you find yourself navigating a new chapter of your life as an "unaccompanied immigrant" youth in the United States. We know that for many youth, this experience is one of the most difficult challenge they have faced in their lives. However, for many of them, this was a chance to secure protection, safety, and new and better opportunities.

Probably, what you want the most is to start this new chapter of your life. Likely by now, you have found out that the migration process can be stressful, lengthy, and complicated, especially if you have traveled without your parents or family. This will make adjusting to life in a new home, and environment challenging. Surrounding yourself with people who care and want the best for you and who are willing to support and guide you through the challenges that you might encounter, will make this change less scary.

Health: An overview of potential social, behavioral, and mental health challenges that might arise as you adjust to life in the United States.

Immigration process: Information about your rights and practical tips to navigate this complicated process.

Resources: Links and contact information for resources available to you online or in your community, such as medical care, mental health care, and legal assistance.

The goal of this toolkit is to offer general information, tips, and resources related to mental and behavioral health, certain legal rights, and the immigration process. Please be advised that the content of this toolkit is not meant to replace the advice and guidance of professionals, be it mental health providers or immigration attorneys. Please seek professional help if needed. In addition, this toolkit contains the website address (external hyperlinks) of other organizations. This does not constitute endorsement or responsibility for the content or privacy practices of these organizations or their websites.

CILA would like to thank the ABA's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Center for their guidance in developing this resource.

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III. UNDERSTANDING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

A. Processing and understanding your experiences

It is possible that just like many youth who have migrated by themselves, you also experienced situations that might have influenced or caused your need to migrate. Some of these experiences may have been so impactful or traumatic that they feel as if they have changed you forever. It may be hard to process them and may feel overwhelming and scary.

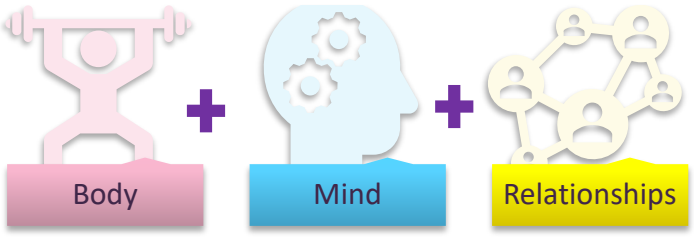
There are many reasons why some unaccompanied youth migrate to the U.S. Do some of these reasons resonate with you?

- Endured abuse, neglect or discrimination from their family or others close to them or from others in their communities.
- Sometimes there is not one single reason, but many different circumstances that factored into a decision to leave.
- Poor access to health services, including mental health.
- Lack of opportunities in quality of education and employment.
- Endured or exposed to violence at home or in the community.

Regardless of what prompted your migration, we understand that this new chapter in your life will present you with many challenges. Perhaps what you will want most is to forget about what happened to you and have a fresh start. Unfortunately, no matter how far someone travels, their feelings, emotions, and memories tend to travel with them, especially when the memories are painful. It is important not to ignore your feelings and emotions. If you need help with this, it is important to know that there are people that can support you with this, such as a mental health provider, like a social worker, or an adult you trust. They can help you explore and understand your emotions and feelings. This will hopefully prompt the beginning of a journey of healing and positive mental health. Throughout this toolkit we'll be providing tips, guidance, and resources for these various challenges.

B. What's mental health?

Mental health is how you feel in your mind, and it includes your feelings, emotions, and thoughts. However, it is important to note that healthy mental health is more than just what is in your mind. It is also about finding a balance between the needs of your **body** (physical needs), **mind** (thoughts, feelings, and emotions), and your **relationships** (family, friends, and community).



C. Understanding emotions and feelings

Recognizing and understanding our emotions and feelings is vital for a healthy quality of life, especially in terms of mental health. Emotions and feelings are two different things. Even though they are different, one does not exist without the other. Where there is an emotion, there is a feeling that follows it. Emotions are the instant reaction to an event, action, experience, or anything that activates our five senses (a stimuli). **Basic emotions can include anger, shame, guilt, joy, sadness, and fear.** Emotions have a physical and natural reaction and come before the feelings show up. On the other hand, your feelings are your thoughts and understanding of your emotions. **Here are a couple of examples to help you understand emotions and feelings:**

- You are asked to speak in front of a group of people. Once in front of the people your heart starts beating faster and your face gets hot and red. What you just felt, is your body reacting to fear of public speaking (**emotion**). Maybe this made you feel anxious or confused (**feelings**).
- You decide to go for a walk in the park. While in the park and dog comes running towards you. Your heart starts beating faster, you start sweating and start running away from the dog. The dog coming towards you gave you a sense of fear (**emotion**). It made you feel panicked and terrified (**feelings**), as this reminded you of when a dog attacked you when you were younger. In this scenario, your previous memory triggered the alarm signal to protect you.
- It is important to note that there are no good or bad emotions. Your physical reactions to emotions are a response to what you need in that moment. At times, these reactions are the body's way of protecting you from a perceived danger (like the example above). Emotions and feelings are part of all of us, and we can't avoid them. However, by

becoming aware of what we feel with each emotion and as a result knowing how to act in each situation, is the key to reducing unwanted negative sensations.

Use the following worksheet to explore and understand your emotions and feelings:

Sad, scary, or angry emotions are usually a normal response to an exceptionally tough or challenging situation or event. All are normal at one point or another, even anger.

1. How does angry or scared sound for you?
2. How does it look for you?
3. How does it feel in your body?
4. What do you do with it?

Feelings or emotions can sometimes build up/escalate and make you feel sad, angry or it can even make you react in an unpleasant way. Even though is normal to feel angry at times, is never ok to be mean, or hurt others or yourself.

Make a list of what makes you feel angry or scared:

1.
2.
3.
4.

Make a list of healthy coping skills (these are things that can help) when you feel angry or scared, such as taking a deep breath, listening to music, or talking to someone.

1.
2.
3.
4.

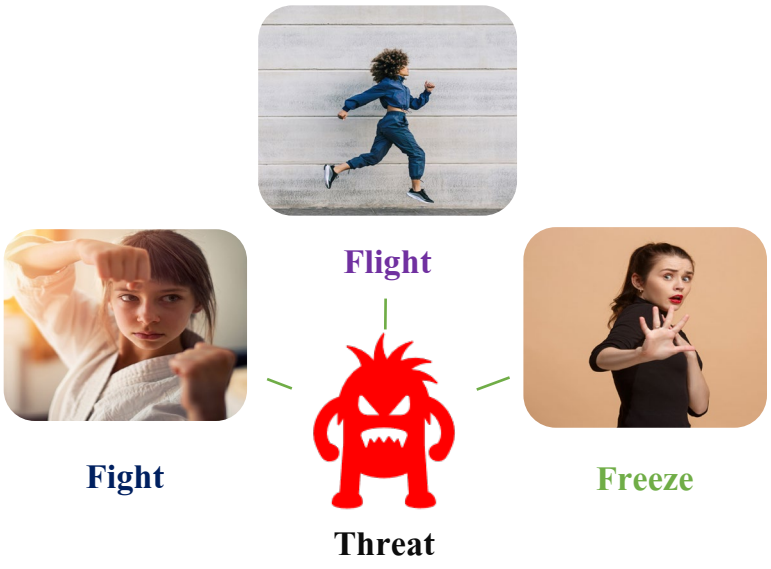
Practice these coping skills daily, even if you do not need it at the time. The practice can help prevent or reduce an escalation of unpleasant emotions and feelings and it can also make you be ready for when you do need the de-escalation of these emotions or feelings.

D. Mental health and trauma

For many youth, the journey to the United States can be difficult, scary, and/or overwhelming. Some youth are exposed to all sorts of dangers including robbery, kidnapping, human trafficking, physical and sexual assault, lack of food, and lack of shelter. These traumatic experiences and the stressors that usually show up before, during or after migration can feel overwhelming and too difficult to navigate alone. It is possible that you have faced or are facing these types of challenges. We wanted to provide you with some information that might help you understand and navigate these challenges. We also wanted to offer you resources so you know where to ask for help in facing these challenges.

What is trauma?

Let us start with exploring and understanding what trauma is. Trauma is the body's reaction to an event or situation that is viewed as dangerous, frightening, or a physical threat to one's own life. Trauma is based on a personal experience, meaning that what is traumatic for you is not necessarily traumatic for another. These traumatic events/situations can be anything from experiencing or witnessing abuse, or a crime (like a shooting/murder/robbery), to serious illnesses, and even immigration that was experienced in a traumatic way. A reaction to trauma usually includes the following protective actions/reactions: **fight, flight, or freeze**.



These are responses to stress that's occurring in our bodies when something is emotionally or physically scary or too overwhelming for us at that moment. The activation of these protective actions can also cause involuntary physiological changes in the body and mind. For example, during the fight or flight reaction the heart rate speeds up, which increases the flow of oxygen to major muscles, hearing can become keener (intense), and the perception of pain can decrease. This is to facilitate faster protective action. On the other hand, a freeze reaction involves similar physiological changes as the fight or flight response but instead of reacting

these are put on hold, causing physical immobility. The freeze response can be a way for the brain to analyze and decide how to react to a threat or it can also be a way to disassociate (emotionally remove yourself) from a situation. Keep in mind that the fight-flight-freeze response is an automatic **protective reaction/response**, so you cannot control it. Also, it is important to note that you can experience this protective response whether the danger is real or not, because to you this danger is real in that moment. Trauma can affect everyone differently but for some trauma can have profound consequences on their health, sense of security, and overall wellbeing. However, there are things you can do to manage it by using coping and grounding skills.

What would a fight, flight, or freeze response feel like? The following are some signs of a trauma response. You might experience one or multiple of the following protective reactions. Keep in mind that everyone is different.

- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Nausea (feel like butterflies in the stomach)
- Sweating
- Tense muscles
- Rapid thoughts
- Feeling cold or numb
- Difficulty breathing or holding breath
- Inability to move

It can take time and practice to develop good coping skills. Here are few things that could help:

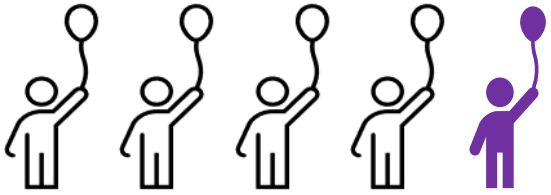
- Do not be afraid to ask for or accept the support of others.
- Be kind and patient with your own process.
- Talk and express your feelings out loud or write them down.
- Get plenty of rest and try to eat healthily.
- Set goals, start with short term goals but towards a long-term goal.
- Explore and learn to recognize emotional triggers.
- Participate in activities you regularly enjoy.

If you have experienced a traumatic situation, consider seeking help from a professional that can help you navigate this difficult or traumatic experience. Learn about coping and ground skills, in this toolkit. **(Resources on pages 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 36)**

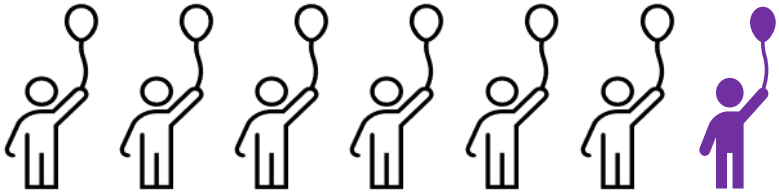
E. Mental health conditions and youth

Although being young can help you avoid many illnesses that typically affect adults, youth does not make you immune to mental health challenges. Everyone experiences a mental health challenge at one point or another in their lives. However, please note that a mental health challenge is different than a mental health condition. For example, even though sadness (**a mental health challenge**) is a facet of depression (**a mental health condition**), they are not the same thing. Sadness can be a **temporary** state of mind, while people who suffer from depression find themselves in a **chronic** state of sadness.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), it's estimated that **1 out of 5 children** experience a mental health condition each year in the **United States**.[1]



The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that **globally 1 in 7 of children** ages 10-19 years old experience mental health conditions and that these mental health conditions remain largely unrecognized and untreated.[2]



Though every individual is different, there are some mental health conditions that affect youth more often than others. There are also certain mental health conditions that often first show up in adolescence.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the following are the most common mental health conditions among adolescents (10-19 years old) and young adults

[1] Centers for Disease Control (CDC)-Improving Children's Mental Behavioral Health. Last visited March 27, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/child-mental-health.html.

[2] World Health Organization (WHO)-Adolescent mental health. Last visited October 10, 2022. Available at: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health.

(19+).[3] Informing yourself about these mental health conditions can help you recognize them and get help and support. If you want to learn more about these conditions, please **click on the boxes below.**

Depression can cause feelings of sadness/or a loss of interest.

Anxiety can present in many different ways, but it usually involves intense feelings of worry or fear that do not go away and can get worse over time.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Condition (ADHD) can cause difficulty paying attention, impulsivity, and in some cases, being overly active.

Eating Disorder can often cause preoccupation with food, weight, and body image.

Bipolar Disorder (usually shows up later in adolescence or early adulthood) can cause extreme mood swings, including highs (overwhelming joy, excitement, energy) and lows (feeling sad, guilty, pessimistic, and without energy).

Schizophrenia Disorder (usually shows up later adolescence or early adulthood) may cause hallucinations, delusions, and very disordered thinking.

To learn about other mental health Conditions or substance (drug) use: https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions.

[3] National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)-Mental Health Conditions. Last visited October 10, 2022. Available at: https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions.

These mental health conditions can interfere with your daily life, relationships, school experience, and job performance. This information is quite basic and does not address the complexity of each condition. Still, it may serve as a starting point for you to learn more and ask for help. **We have provided the following activity worksheet with questions that can help you explore your current mental health. (Resources on pages 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 36)**

Did any of these mental health conditions or symptoms resonate with you? If yes, Which?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How is it affecting your life and those around you?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How are you currently dealing with this challenge? What's helping if anything?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you feel you are possibly dealing with a mental health challenge/condition, we recommend you seek help from someone from your support system or a professional like mental health professional. Who's your support system (these are people that help/support you during good times or challenging times as well)? Remember, a support system can also include people who are not related, such as a teacher, counselor, or neighbor.

1.

2.

3.

If you do not have a good support system (read more on support system in this toolkit), there are places and organizations that support youth who are struggling with a mental health condition, including substance use conditions.

To **find treatment and support**: Visit https://www.findtreatment.gov/ or if you are in a mental health crisis you can call **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, Dial, or text 988 or visit their website at** https://988lifeline.org/?ref=w3use.

F. Dealing with a mental health challenge or condition

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIH), the following are some signs and symptoms of mental health challenges and conditions by specific age range. This list names some, but not all the signs or symptoms. In looking at this list, it is important to know that facing a few or several of these signs/symptoms does not mean you are suffering from a mental health condition, but it does mean that you need to ask for help and explore further as that might be a possibility.[4]

Pre-Adolescents (9-12 years old):

- Substance use (consuming alcohol or drugs)
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments (for example, unexplained head and stomach aches)
- Changes in ability to manage responsibilities at home and/or at school.
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Frequent outburst of anger/prolonged negative mood
- Excessive fears, worries, and anxieties

Adolescents (13-19 years old): (also include the symptoms/signs mentioned in the pre-adolescents list)

- Suicidal thoughts (thoughts about wanting to end your life/dying)
- Strange thoughts/delusion (for example, having a false interpretation of reality)
- Social isolation (not spending time with family/friends)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows (for example, feeling incredibly happy to then feel incredibly sad)
- Feeling confused
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits (for example, either going from sleeping and eating "normally" to eating or sleeping too much or not eating or sleeping enough)

[4] National Institute of Mental Health (NIH)-Child and adolescent mental health. Last visited December 4, 2022. Available at: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health.

G. Understanding a mental health challenge or condition

According to the Mayo Clinic, there are variety of factors that can affect or cause a mental health challenge or condition. Most of these factors fall under three different areas, **genetics** (these are the traits you get from your parents, such as your looks and personality), **brain chemistry** (how your brain functions), or **environmental exposure** (things/situations we are exposed to).[5] Keep in mind that there are also **protective factors**, which can help prevent or lessen the risk for mental health challenges or conditions.

Our genes play a role

The genes you inherit from your parents can play a role in your mental health. For example, just like you can inherit physical traits like your hair and eye color from your parents, you can also inherit non-physical traits like a predisposition to certain mental health conditions, such as depression, bipolar, schizophrenia and others. A predisposition does not mean you will develop the condition. It just means you are at higher risk for developing it. It is like having the condition "inactive or asleep" inside of you. However, it is important to note that there are several other factors besides genetics that could prompt a mental health condition or challenge. This can include naturally occurring changes in the brain chemistry or changes due to environmental exposures.

Our brain chemistry plays a role

Changes in neurotransmitter levels can cause a mental health condition. Neurotransmitters are chemicals found naturally in your brain and their function is to correctly send the proper signals to other parts of the brain and body. When there is an imbalance of these chemicals, the brain is not able to perform adequately which can cause various mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety. Sometimes the reason for these changes happening in the brain is unknown, but there are some things that have been known to cause these changes such as exposure to pollutants or substance use. This exposure can be something that occurred before or after birth.

[5] Mayo Clinic-Mental illness overview. Last visited October 10, 2022. Available at: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968.

The environment plays a role

Environmental exposures can refer to anything from pollutants in the environment to the social-cultural environment that surrounds us. Some environmental exposures that can impact our mental health include:

- Major losses, such as the death of a loved one (especially if the loss was unexpected or traumatic in nature)
- Dysfunctional family relationships
- Separation (like those caused by divorce or migration)
- Socio-economic difficulties (such as extreme poverty)
- Substance use (drugs or alcohol) or exposure to drugs/alcohol before birth or after
- Exposure to pollution (such as bad/toxic chemicals in the air or water)
- Exposure to violence
- Enduring abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) or neglect in basic care
  (To learn about abuse, read Understanding Abuse in this toolkit.)

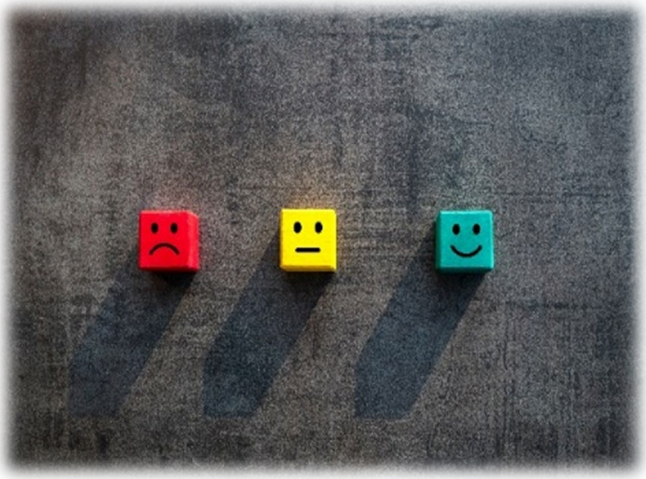
The presence of these factors can increase the chances of facing a mental health condition or challenge. For example, someone with a family history of depression who is also living in an abusive relationship might have a higher chance of developing depression or another mental health condition than a person who is living in a safe environment.

H. Are you struggling with your mental health?

Mental health can fluctuate (change) throughout life. There are going to be times when you feel like you can conquer the world, and then there will be times when you might struggle to even get out of bed. It is very normal to have these ups and downs, especially when you are young. You may be able to manage many of these difficulties alone or with minimal help from others. Then there may very well be other challenges that are too big to tackle alone, like witnessing or suffering a traumatic event such as an act of violence, a natural disaster, or even going through the immigration process. Everyone can react differently to these events, and there is no right or wrong way to feel. In other words, your emotional response can be a normal part of the healing process, but this of course does not mean that it will be easy.

It is okay and recommended that you seek the help of someone you can trust during challenging times. This can include someone from your support system or from a professional

like a mental health provider, social worker, school counselor or even a primary care doctor. Although everyone is affected differently at various times, the following can be some possible emotional or physical signs/symptoms of a mental health challenge or condition. (To learn more on how to find a medical doctor, read Navigating the health care system, in this toolkit.)



If you are feeling any of the following signs/symptoms, please consult with a medical or mental health provider to rule-out a medical or mental health challenge/condition as this can be a sign of both.

- Lightheadedness
- Inability to feel (emotionally)
- Feeling disconnected (emotionally)
- Altering emotions, such as amazement, denial, remorse, or self-blame
- Extreme sadness, crying
- Mood changes, such as irritability, anguish, nervousness, pessimism, or indifference
- Inability to concentrate
- Recurring memories or nightmares about the event
- Social rejection, isolation
- Physical symptoms, such as unexplained pain and aches, nausea, or fatigue
- Changes in eating habits or sleep pattern

Be aware of your own symptoms and be prepared to seek intervention if the symptoms listed above persist or worsen; particularly if they begin to interfere with your daily life or if you are consuming alcohol or drugs. **If your symptoms include thoughts of death or suicide, these are symptoms of a more serious condition and require immediate professional help.**

If you feel or are **thinking about hurting yourself or others**, please **call 911** or the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at https://988lifeline.org/ or by **dialing 988** on your phone. **(Find resources on pages 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 36. For medical care resources page 53).**

IV. NAVIGATING UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

A. Substance use (drugs or alcohol)

As an adolescent this can be a sensitive and stressful stage of life for you. This is the stage of life where you might find yourself exploring your identity and individuality. Keep in mind that this is also the stage where curiosity, risk-taking behavior, and social pressures to fit in tend to be high. These stressors can leave you more vulnerable, when the opportunity arises, to try drugs or alcohol. Substance use can occur out of curiosity, pressure to fit in, or in an attempt to alleviate emotional or physical pain.

Please note that occasional use of drugs or alcohol can turn into overuse or a dependency, and this can lead to bigger problems. If you feel that you have a problem with using drugs, please seek help. You can reach out to a trusted adult that can provide you with support and guidance with this difficult challenge. Together you can explore and seek out help from professionals that specialize in substance use concerns. **(Resources on page 18)**

According to the Mayo Clinic the following are some symptoms or behaviors of drug dependency:[6]

- Feeling that you must use the substance regularly
- Not meeting obligations and work responsibilities, or cutting back on social or recreational activities because of substance use
- Continuing to use the substance, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm
- Doing things to get the substance that you normally wouldn't do, such as stealing
- Driving or doing other risky activities when you're under the influence of the drugs or alcohol
- Failing in your attempts to stop using the drugs or alcohol

[6] Mayo Clinic-Drug addiction (substance use disorder). Last visited May 8, 2023. Available at: https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112.

To find mental health and substance use services in your area or online:

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) treatment Locator:** https://findtreatment.gov/. **1-800-662-4357**. To find local mental health services, including substance use services.
- **Informed Immigrant:** https://www.informedimmigrant.com/help/. To find mental health services in your area and to learn about other resources for immigrants.
- **Take Action for Mental Health:** https://takeaction4mh.com/.To learn about mental health and to find resources.
- **Latinx Therapy:** https://latinxtherapy.com/resources/. To find a Spanish speaking mental health provider and low cost.

For more information on how to navigate a mental health crisis:

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Navigating a Mental Health Crisis:** https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Individuals-with-Mental-Illness. To learn more about mental health crisis and how to navigate.
- **Treatment Advocacy Center-Respond in a crisis:** https://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/component/content/article/186-old-get-help/1613-get-help-crisis-response#Assault%20threat. If you know someone who's in a mental health crisis you can learn more on how to support them during a crisis.
- **Included in this toolkit:** Dealing with a mental health challenge or condition.

B. Migratory grief and loss

Even if you have not experienced a traumatic event, migration in and of itself can entail grief and loss, and that is challenging. When we think about grief and loss, most of us instantly associate it with death. However, grief and loss can also occur in other situations where something happens that we interpret as a loss, like the end of a relationship, loss of health, or loss of a job. You can also experience grief and loss when migrating. Grief can occur with migration regardless of whether the move was your choice or not. This is because leaving behind your family, friends, the place where you were born, and the places you formed memories can bring a sense of loss.

If you are grieving this loss, that is understandable. It is a normal reaction and a natural consequence of migration.[7] **(Resources on pages 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 36)**

What can help during this process?

- Normalizing and validating your feelings. It is normal and okay to feel fear, nostalgia, and/or sadness. The fact that migration might be common does not mean that it is not difficult.
- Surround yourself with trusted people. It is important to find support either from someone you know and trust or from a support group, (learn more about it in this toolkit).
- There are social support groups in the community that can help you navigate this challenging time. These support groups can be a good place to meet people going through a similar situation. They may understand how you are feeling and can offer you support and some insight into how they have coped with their grief and loss.

Resources for grief and loss, including how to find local support groups:

- **Kids Health-Teens Health-Grief:** https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/someone-died.html. To learn about grief and how to manage it.
- **Dougy Center**: https://www.dougy.org/program-finder. For resources on grief and loss and where to find local support, including local support groups.
- **La Inteligencia Migratoria-manual para inmigrantes en dificultades** (**only available in Spanish**): https://zoboko.com/read/la-inteligencia-migratoria-manual-para-inmigrantes-en-dificultades-lmrxqlp8?hash=303e7d68d636020db394188a31d39b81. To learn about migratory grief.

[7] National Institute of Health (NIH)-Migration, cultural bereavement, and cultural identity, February 4, 2015. Last visited October 11, 2022. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1414713/.

C. Sexual orientation and gender identity

You may find yourself exploring, trying to understand, and/or accepting your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+), or even just talking about it, can be overwhelming and sometimes scary, especially if you have experienced discrimination or have been bullied or treated unfairly simply due to your sexual orientation or gender identity. It is also possible that you are struggling to understand and accept yourself. Only you can decide when the right time is or with whom you would like to share this part of you**. Please note that you do not have to label yourself LGBTQIA+ or use any other label. It is your decision to make.** The important thing for you to know is that you are important and that you matter regardless of your sexual orientation or identity.

To learn more and find LGBTQIA+ resources or support:

- **National LGBT Health Education Center, a glossary in Spanish of LBTQ terms**: https://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/National-LGBT-Health-Education-Center-Glossary.SPANISH-2018.pdf. If you are not familiar with some terms/words, here's a list of terminology commonly used here in the U.S. just for your awareness.
- **The Trevor Project:** https://www.thetrevorproject.org/. To find support and resources.
- **Kids Health:** https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/sexual-orientation.html. To learn more about sexual attraction and orientation.
- **Human Rights Campaign:** https://www.hrc.org/resources/lgbtq-youth. For LGBTQ+ written resources and support.
- **Somos Familia:** https://www.somosfamiliabay.org/resources/. To find Latino/a LGBTQ+ resources and support groups.

D. Navigating your sexual health

Adolescence is a stage of self-discovery and sexuality is part of it. However, talking about sex or sexual health can be considered taboo or a difficult topic in some families. This leaves many, especially adolescents, to navigate their sexuality and sexual health on their own. Many rely on the information shared by friends or on information found on unreliable internet sources. This can cause an inaccurate interpretation or understanding of sexuality or ideas that do not correspond to facts.

Sexual health education is important because:

- It allows you to know that sex is normal and that you are not alone in how you feel or think.
- It can help you make informed choices regarding your sexual health. These choices can help prevent an unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.
- It can help you recognize areas of concern such as sexual assault, abuse, and rape. According to Planned Parenthood, sexual assault or abuse means any unwanted sexual contact. It is when someone uses force or pressure (either physical or emotional) to get you to do something sexual. Rape is when someone forces or pressures you into having sex.[8]
- It allows you to learn about your sexual and reproductive rights. According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the violations of sexual and reproductive health and rights are many, especially when it pertains to women around the world. OHCHR lists the following as some of these violations:
    - Denial of access to sexual health services and poor quality when available
    - Denial of women's right to consent services
    - Forced sterilization, forced virginity examinations, and forced abortion
    - Female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage.

It is important to recognize that sexual health is an integral part of your overall health. Sexual health does not only affect or influence your physical health but also our mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. If you feel that your sexual and reproductive health and rights were violated or if you need assistance navigating sexual health services or education, please check out the following resources listed on **page 22.**

[8] Planned Parenthood-What are sexual assault, abuse, and rape? Last visited April 10, 2023. Available at: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/bullying-safety-privacy/sexual-assault-abuse-rape.

Resources about sexual health and how to find in-person resources:

- **Planned Parenthood**: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us#SnippetTab. Planned Parenthood has been providing crucial and essential reproductive health care, sex education and information to many, especially to those who otherwise would not have anywhere else to go due to lack of health insurance or financial means or support from their family. Planned Parenthood offers the following services free or at low cost:
    - Women's and men's Health and Pregnancy testing and services
    - Testing, treatment, and vaccine service for STDs
    - Transgender hormone therapy
    - **Birth control, including emergency contraceptive (morning-after pill) and abortion services or referrals**, in states where this is allowed. Look at the following website to learn more about your state's stand on abortion: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/abortion/it-still-legal-me-get-abortion
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-Health Services**: https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/health-services.htm. LGBTQ+ people have a variety of health needs. Find networks, services, and health clinics by state available to address those needs.
- **WE>HIV**: https://www.greaterthan.org/. To learn more about sexually transmitted disease (STD) and to find testing services: https://www.greaterthan.org/find-services/
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC)**: https://www.nsvrc.org/. There is a national network of community-based **rape crisis centers** and local organizations who support the needs of sexual assault survivors. These centers exist across the United States to provide supportive services to victims of sexual assault. To find the rape crisis center closest to you: https://www.nsvrc.org/organizations
- **Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)**: https://www.rainn.org/. The RAINN offers the National Sexual Assault Telephone Hotline. The hotline can help you find and connect with a local rape crisis center. You can call 1-800-656-4673, or access RAINN's online chat service at https://www.rainn.org/get-help. (Available in English and Spanish)
- **If you are currently housed in an ORR shelter and want to learn more about your reproductive health and rights, ask to speak with a clinician, case manager, or with an attorney who can provide with more information and explain your rights.**

V. UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

A. Recognizing abuse

There are behaviors in any type of relationship that are not okay and that can impact our mental health. Sometimes these behaviors can constitute abuse. It can be hard to recognize abuse when experiencing it, but awareness is a key step to stopping or escaping it. A first step towards understanding abuse is naming the many forms it can take, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or in the form of neglect.

- **Physical abuse** can be any act of violence that causes an injury (accidental or intentional). This may include punching, kicking, shaking, stabbing, throwing, biting, choking, burning, or hitting (with a hand or an object, like a belt or switch).
- **Emotional abuse** can include harsh criticism, name-calling or derogatory comments, shaming, threatening, withholding love and affection.
- **Sexual abuse** may include inappropriate touching, being forced to have sex, or engage in sexual acts, being forced to watch pornography, being prostituted, or having someone expose themselves to a child.

- **Neglect** can include intentionally not providing certain basic life necessities, including food/water, adequate shelter, appropriate supervision or providing timely needed medical care.

Abuse can arise in any relationship and in any place, including the relationship between a parent/caregiver and a child, the relationship between other family members (uncle and niece/nephew and siblings, for example). In addition, abuse can arise in the form of intimate partner violence (couples) and can affect anyone of any gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Abuse can occur in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Abuse can also occur in relationships outside the home or family, such as relationships at work or relationships at school.

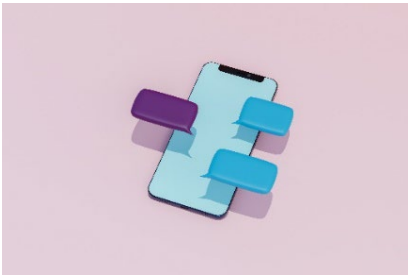
If you are experiencing abuse by anyone, remember that no one deserves abuse. It is not your fault, and you can get help. A first step may be telling a trusted adult in your life about the abuse or calling or texting one of the many hotlines available to support you. (**Resources on page 26)**

B. Teen dating violence

Beginning a romantic relationship is a natural process of growing up, and with it come experiences that may be unfamiliar. It is important to understand and recognize the dynamics that can lead to intimate partner violence. Many adolescents confuse jealousy and control for love and affection. Teen dating violence encompasses various abusive behaviors, including physical and sexual violence, verbal, and emotional aggression (like threats, insults, intimidation, or manipulation), and stalking by current or past romantic partners. Just as it can happen in person it can occur via the internet or via an application (app). Though we have all heard of domestic violence, we don't always think about teen dating violence, yet it affects many youth in the United States every year. For example in 2019, about 1 in 11 female teens and 1 in 14 male teens reported being victims of physical dating violence, according to teen dating violence statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[9] Again, if you are if you are experiencing dating violence/abuse, remember it is not your fault, and you can get help. There are organizations ready and willing to support you. (**Resources on page 26**)

C. "Sexting"

"Sexting" (sending pictures of a sexual nature via text) has become prevalent. According to the Pew Research Center, 17% of middle and high school students have received explicit pictures from other people they did not ask for and 7% have had explicit images of themselves shared without their consent. It is important to be careful when sharing or receiving explicit pictures. Be mindful, that situations and relationships change all the time, even someone who you thought was trustworthy can turn around and use these images to extort or intimidate you. All states in the U.S. have child pornography or child exploitation laws that prohibit sending, receiving, or possessing images of a sexual nature of a minor. These laws were created to protect children from being exploited by others, but most of the laws are vague and that means that anyone found to be in possession of these types of images could potentially be prosecuted for distribution of child pornography.[10] If you or someone you know has questions or is being extorted, bullied, or harassed, please check out the following resources to get help. (**Resources on page 26)**



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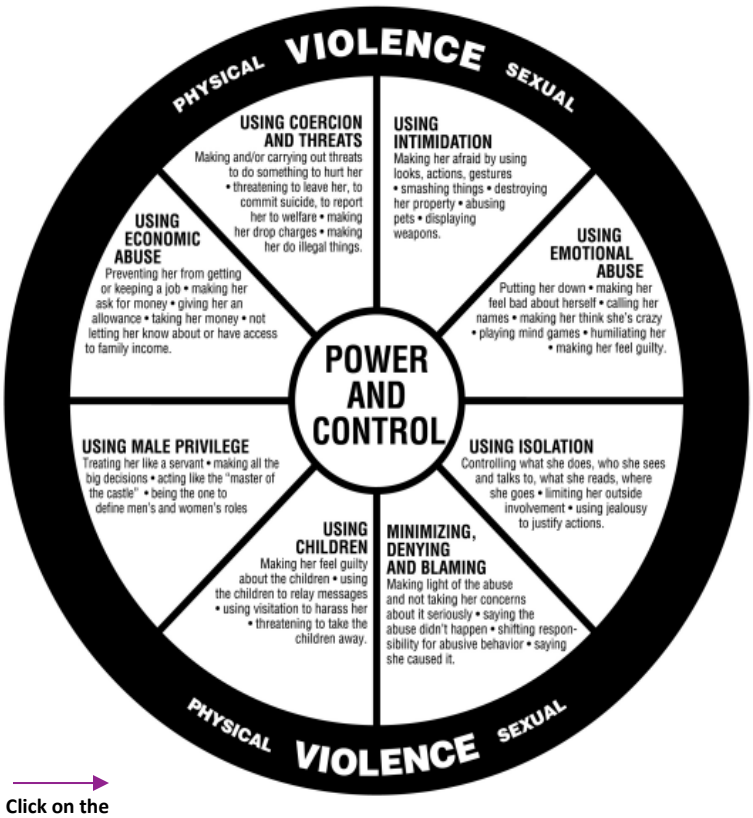
[9] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)- Fast Facts: Preventing Teen Dating Violence. Last visited April 24, 2023. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html.

[10] Cyberbullying Research Center-The Status of Sexting Laws Across the United States. Last visited May 5, 2023. Available at: https://cyberbullying.org/the-status-of-sexting-laws-across-the-united-states.

D. Leaving an abusive relationship

Please know that no matter what, no one deserves to be mistreated or abused and no one is worth compromising their mental and physical health for. To follow is some advice given by the Office on Women's Health on leaving an abusive relationship: [11]

- **Awareness**. The first step is recognizing that you find yourself in an abusive relationship/situation. At times, some are in complete denial that this is occurring. Recognizing the signs are key, such as extreme jealousy, attempts to control all aspects of your life, including isolating you from your family and friends.
- **Support system**. Talk or seek help from trusted family and friends. Tell them what's going on. Chances are, they have already noticed and have had concerns for your safety but have been waiting for you to reach out. Your support system will help you throughout the process. If you do not have a support system, keep in mind there are organizations that can support and help you throughout the process.



Click on the wheel to visit the Duluth website and see image enlarge.

[11] Office on Women's Health-Leaving an abusive relationship. Last visited May 12, 2023. Available at: https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/domestic-violence/leaving-abusive-relationship.

- **Discretion**. If you intend to leave do not publicize it. The word can get back to the abuser and make the situation worse for you. Instead prepare and get all your affairs in order. Keep your support system informed of your plans and keep them on standby. During this stage, stay calm, avoid any triggering situation and if needed avoid them in general if possible.
- **Securing a place**. If possible, try to secure a place where you can go when you leave. This can be a shelter or a place of someone in your support system.
- **Documents**. Try to gather all the important documents before leaving. This can be birth certificates, tax papers, passports, bank account information, immigration papers or any paper that is important to you.
- **Have company**. Try to have someone with you as you leave. It's best not to do it alone.
- **Law enforcement (police)**. Involve the police if necessary. If you do not feel safe and are terrified of even trying to leave, the police can escort you.
- **Remember why you are leaving**. You've been mistreated for so long that it might be easy to be persuaded back to their charm and forget to leave. Constantly remind yourself why you are leaving and what could happen if you stay.
- **Healing**. If you are in this step, you have left, and the healing process can start or resume now. This process will require a lot of work on your part but with the support of your support system and professional support, like from a mental health therapist, you can get there and heal.

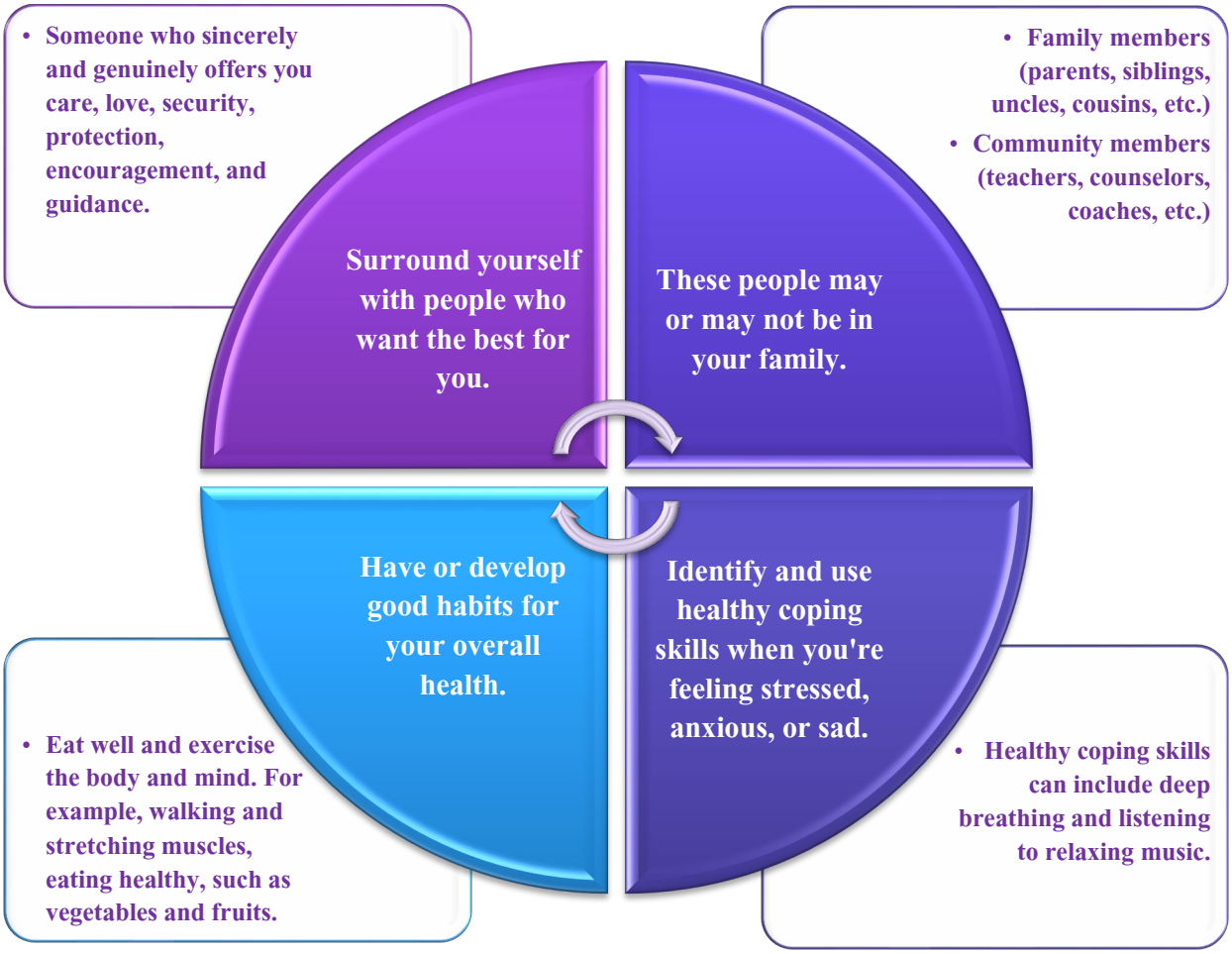
Resources that can help if you find yourself in an abusive relationship:

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** http://www.ndvh.org/**.** 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)
- **National Center for Victims of Crime:** www.victimsofcrime.org. 1-202-467-8700
- **Love is Respect:** www.loveisrespect.org. 1-866-331-9474
- **Esperanza United**: https://esperanzaunited.org/es/base-de-conocimientos/.
- **Women's Law:** https://www.womenslaw.org/.
- **National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights:** www.nnirr.org. 1-510-465-1984
- **National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project:** http://www.niwap.org/. (202) 274-4457
- **Child Help Hotline**: https://childhelphotline.org/resources-for-teens/. 1-800-

VI. TIPS TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

A. Building resilience (protective factors)

Protective factors are your internal and external personal resources, you have to cope with challenges and protect your mental health**.** These protective factors can include people (**external**), things (**external and internal**), or actions (**external and internal**). See below for examples of these protective factors and how you can acquire these protective factors:



Learn more about coping skills and how to build a support system in this toolkit.

B. Asking for help

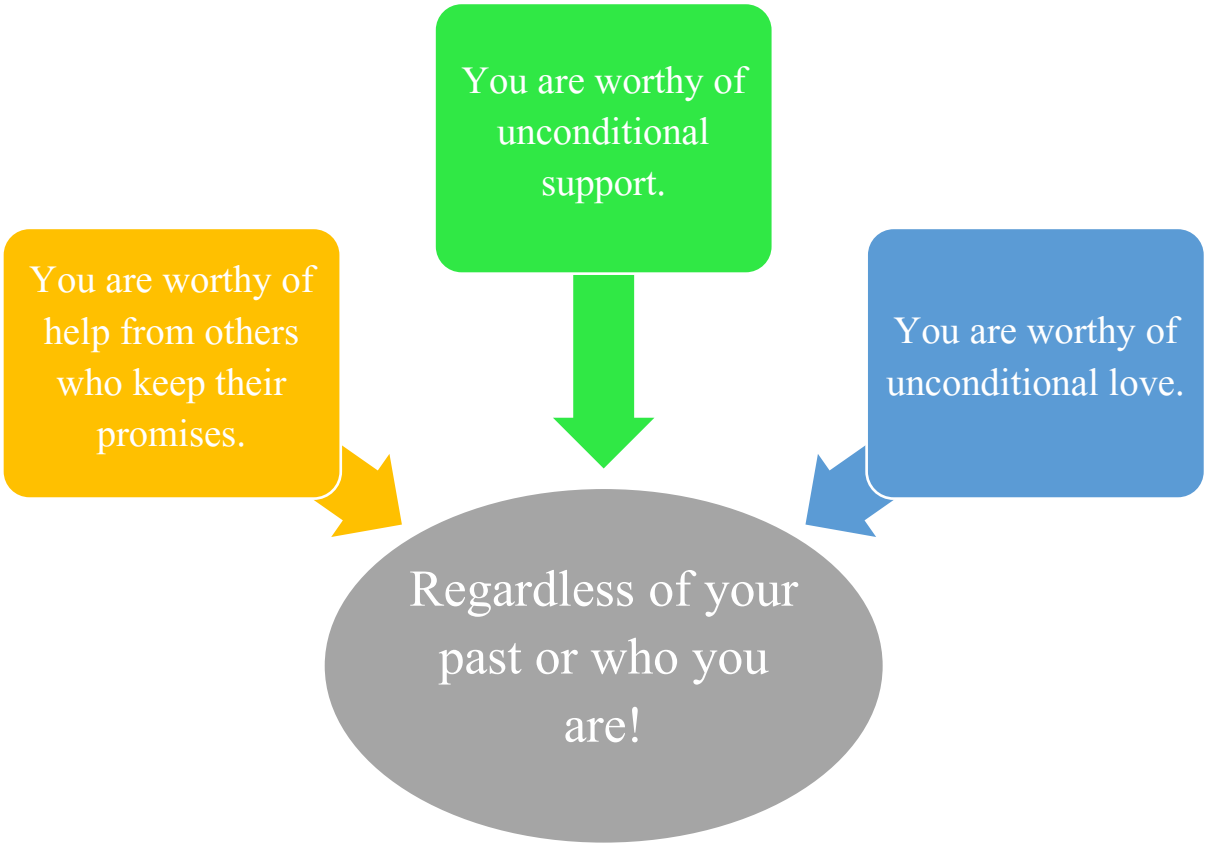
At times it can be difficult to ask for help. This is especially difficult for those who have been let down too many times, especially by those close to them. For some the hesitation to ask for help comes from a protective strategy passed down by ancestors who had a negative experience.

Does this resonate with you? Do you tell yourself, *"I don't need anyone. I will do it all myself."*

It's possible this can be your way of protecting yourself from disappointment or from getting hurt either physically or emotionally. Unfortunately, negative and hurtful experiences can make you reluctant to trust other people.

Someone scared to trust others may think, *"If I don't put myself in a situation where I trust someone, then I will not have to be disappointed when they either don't show up for me or fail to follow through on a promise."*

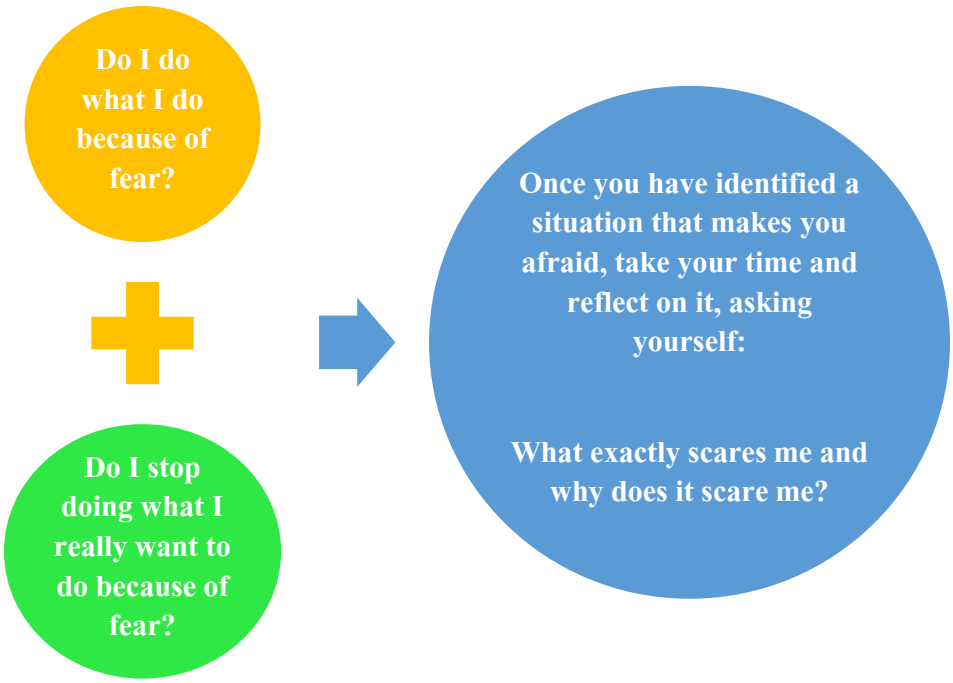
It is important for you to know the following:



Breaking down the emotional barrier:

People who have been hurt tend to build an emotional barrier/wall which serves as protection from abuse, hurt or disappointments. This protective barrier/wall is built so strong and thick that unfortunately sometimes it can also block love. Trusting others means allowing yourself to be vulnerable (to put the barrier down), and that can be very scary for anyone, especially for someone who has been hurt before! Keep in mind that the goal is not to be fearless, but instead to learn to manage your fear. You do not want fear to deny you the opportunity to welcome good experiences and block those people who have your best interests in mind. The important thing is to recognize and confront your fears.

Ask yourself these questions:

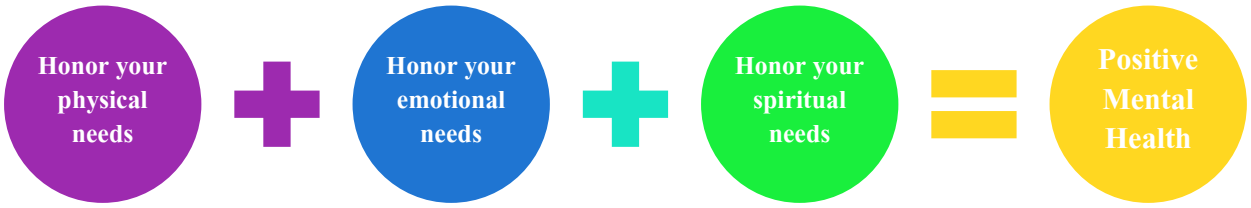


Listening and learning from what your body and mind are telling you is critical to understanding your trauma/hurt/fear/disappointment and your reaction to it. Your body and mind can show you what makes you afraid, what makes you anxious, and what makes you stressed. In short, your body and mind can show you what triggers (provokes) a negative or defensive response in you. Being aware of all these things will allow you to identify and reflect on the things or patterns that can cause you emotional pain. One of the goals is to create certain attitudes that help you deal with them more effectively when they reappear. In other cases, the fears are too hidden, and our attitudes are too internalized (deep inside) that you might need the help of someone, like a mental health professional, to assist you with this process. The good news is that being aware of your trauma or emotional pain means that it can be healed. **(Resources on pages 12, 16, 18, 20, 22, and 36)**

C. Self-care

Many youth today face different challenges than the previous generations faced growing up. Many feel more stressed, anxious, depressed, and lonelier than ever before. This can be attributed to several factors, including worries about their future with climate change and concerns about economic and job security. Maybe you have these same worries and additional ones unique to Immigration. These can include navigating the difficulties of growing up in a place that is new to you, and often, with people that you do not or do not know well. Positive mental health can help you navigate and deal with the challenges life sometimes gives you. Just like your body requires good nutrition, water, and movement to stay in good physical condition to face the daily physical demands, your mental health requires all that and more. It is important to listen to your body and mind and to practice what is commonly referred to as self-care.

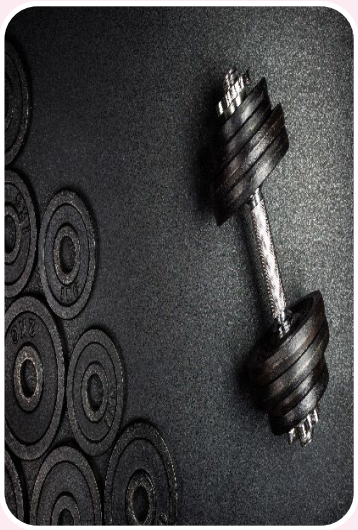
Self-care is a set of actions that prioritizes both our well-being and includes our physical, mental, and spiritual health.

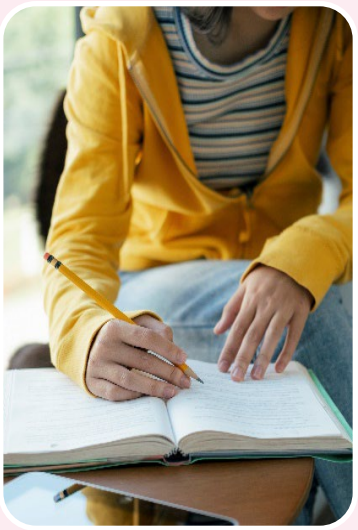


To start taking care of yourself, the first step is to identify your needs and how you can address these needs. Taking care of yourself means asking yourself, ***"What do I need?"*** and answering as honestly as possible. Self-care does not have to be perfect; it just has to be perfect for you. The most important thing is to consider what works best for you and to consistently practice that. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), most self-care habits fall under the **following six umbrella categories**:[12]

[12] National Institutes of Health (NIH)-Your Healthiest Self: Wellness Toolkits. Last visited Feb. 25, 2022. Available at: https://www.nih.gov/health-information/your-healthiest-self-wellness-toolkits.

Here are some examples of how self-care can look like:





1. Physical Self-Care

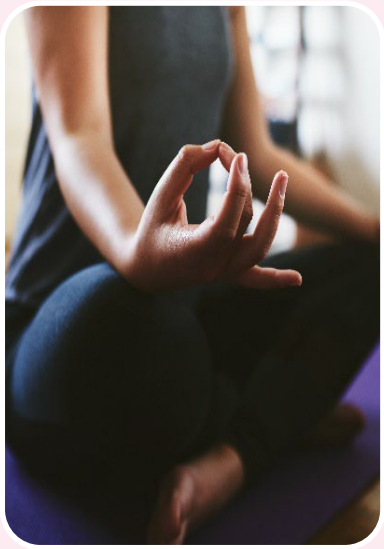
- Can involve things such as your diet and exercise. When possible, incorporate fruits and vegetables into your diet and stay hydrated. Additionally, find a way to move your body that is enjoyable to you.
- Some examples may include going for a walk or kicking a soccer ball around with your family/friends.

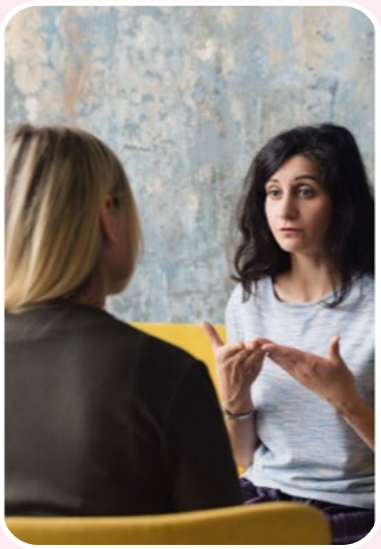
2. Mental Self-Care

- Can involve decluttering your mind, which can help reduce stress. Mental self-care will look different for everyone and may even look different for you from day to day.
- Some examples may include, taking a nap, reading a book you enjoy, or doing a hobby that helps you to relax.

3. Emotional Self-Care

- It can involve getting in touch with your emotions. This is important for your emotional well-being.
- Some examples may include writing in a journal, writing down words of affirmation, or practicing meditation.
  - ***"I matter and I'm worthy."***





4. Social Self-Care

- Can involve both socializing with others, as well as spending time alone.
- Some examples may include phone calls with a loved one, cuddling with a pet, or spending time with friends.

5. Spiritual Self-Care

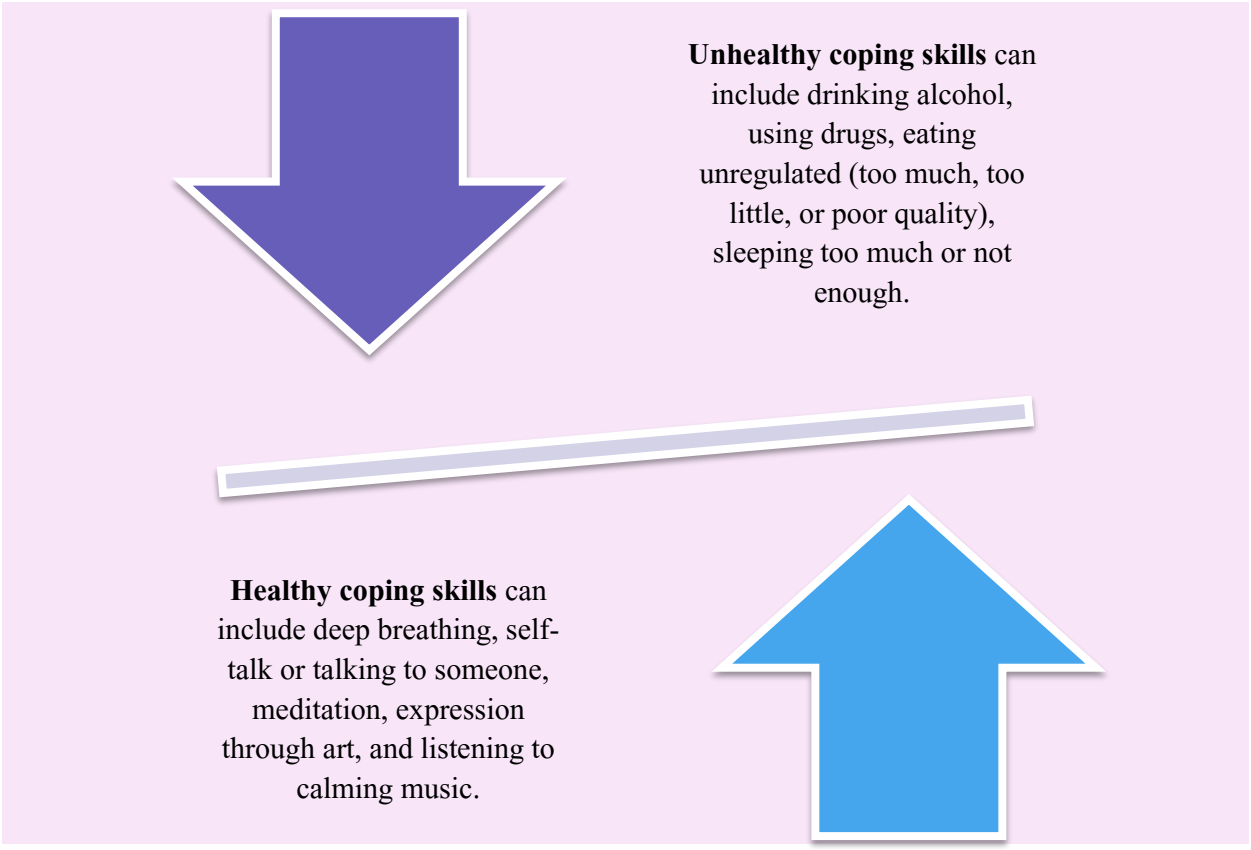
- Can involve the act of nurturing and connecting with your soul.
- Some examples, for some this may include involvement in religious practices (attending church or bible studies) or for others, it may include volunteering for a cause you are enthusiastic about, doing yoga, or spending time in nature.

6. Professional Self-Care

- You do not always need to seek out a mental health provider such as a therapist, but it is important to consider doing so when a crisis arises. Please note, a crisis can qualify as any painful emotion you may feel or anytime you need immidiate support.
- **Do you find yourself in a mental health crisis?** You can call 911 or call/text 988. https://988lifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now/.

D. Coping and grounding skills

In addition to facing major life changes that migration entails, you are also going through your adolescent years. Adolescence is a time of many deep emotions, intensity, social pressures, physical ackwardness, and physical discomforts as your body changes. There will be situations that will be stressful, emotionally painful, and situations that you cannot control. However, with the proper tools, it is possible to manage your reactions to stressful and difficult moments. Coping skills and grounding techniques are tools that can help you do just that and more. **Coping skills** are thoughts and actions use to deal with events that may cause emotional discomfort. These skills are your internal resources that you use to manage/regulate emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, or sadness. Maybe you have learned these skills through experiences or from others (like your parents or friends). It is important to note that there are healthy and unhealthy coping skills.[13]

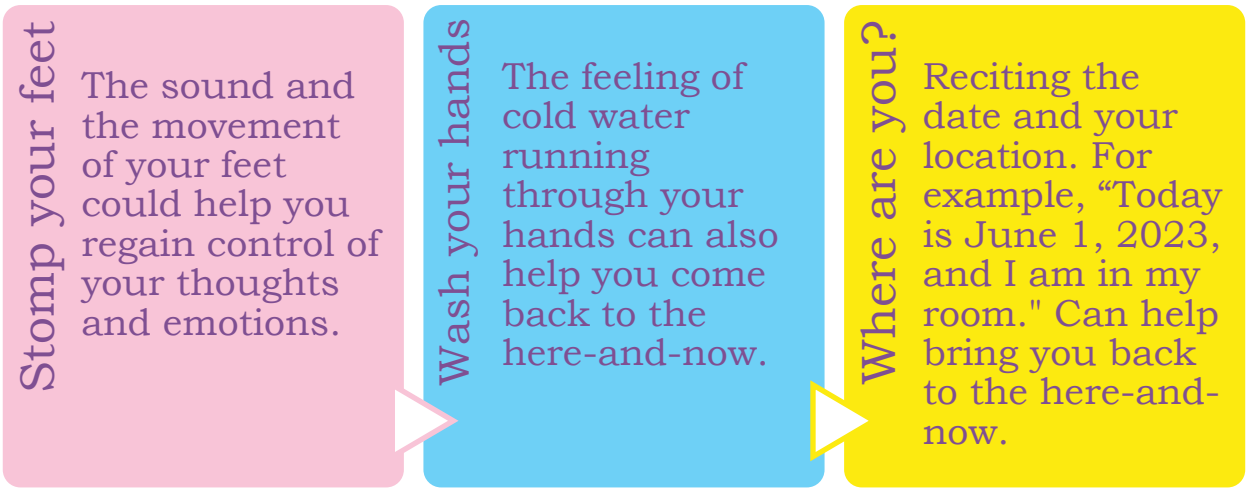


[13] Healthy place: Coping Skills for Mental Health and Wellbeing. Last visited, June 2022. Available at: https://www.healthyplace.com/other-info/mental-health-newsletter/coping-skills-for-mental-health-and-wellbeing.

The key is to improve your tools for coping with stress or emotional pain. This can assist you in taking a pause before reacting to a situation. This pause will allow you to take a better look at the situation and find a better approach to it. Healthy coping skills cannot make the problem go away, but they can help you manage or control the stress, anxiety, or de-escalate intense emotions (positive and negative ones).

There may be situations that make you feel emotionally overwhelmed or scared. During these times, you may have irrational and persistent thoughts that trigger fear, anxiety, insecurities about yourself or your surroundings. Perhaps, you may feel that the only way to escape or feel safe is to go somewhere else in your mind. This is your way of protecting yourself at that moment from a situation that you perceive as scary or stressful. For people who have experienced trauma, those thoughts can also lead to feelings of reliving a traumatic event from the past. **Grounding** is a technique that can help you in that moment to recover and refocus on the present (here-and-now). (**Learn about feelings and emotions on pages 6, 7, and 8 on this toolkit.**)

The following are some grounding tips and techniques that might help you come back to the here-and-now, this is especially helpful for someone who has endured trauma.



The goal of grounding techniques is to focus you on the here-and-now, not the painful past, by helping you become aware of where you are standing and what surrounds you, hence the name “grounding.” Grounding techniques can be useful for anyone. If you find yourself in a time of emotional distress, we have provided some grounding, mindfulness, relaxation activities, and resources in this toolkit in **pages 34, 35, 36, 37, 38 and 39**.

E. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the awareness of "something" that is happening in the moment. In other words, it means **being present in the here-and-now.** Most importantly, it means to be in the present moment in a balanced way, with an attitude of acceptance and openness.

Have you ever walked or driven somewhere and upon arriving at your destination, you find yourself confused?

"How did I get here?"

Perhaps you remember the beginning of the walk/drive and then arriving, but do not remember how you got there.

Or have you ever been talking to someone, and they ask you a question and that's when you realize you were not paying attention to the conversation.

"What were we talking about?"

Has this or anything similar happened to you? Situations like these ones occur when our physical body is present in whatever we are doing but our mind is not. It is as if we were briefly asleep (in a dream). Sometimes this happens because we are elsewhere in our mind, maybe thinking of a difficulty or challenge happening in our life, or maybe we are so overwhelmed with our personal responsibilities or duties that it feels easier to emotionally disconnect.

Mindfulness can also help you better manage emotions, activate relaxation, and bring an understanding for how your mind works.

Tips to achieve mindfulness:

1. Sit with your back straight. Some people sit in the **lotus yoga position**, but this is not mandatory. What is important is to sit in a way where the back is straight, since in this way you will not be bothered by unnecessary muscle tensions.
2. Perform controlled breathing.
3. Focus on what is going on in your body. Close your eyes and focus attention on small events that you can notice occur in your body, one after another and dedicate to each of them approximately half a minute (as mentioned in body scan meditation).

You can also practice mindfulness actively as you live your day-to-day life. Some examples suggested by the Mayo Clinic include:[14]

- **Pay attention**. It is hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all your senses—touch, sound, sight, smell, and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment**. Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting, and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing**. When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath, and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

Resources for navigating mental health challenges:

- **The Jed Foundation:** https://jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/. To learn about how to navigate mental health challenges.
- **Mindfulness for Teens:** https://www.mindfulnessforteens.com/videos. To learn more about mindfulness and resources.
- **Teens Health:** https://www.kidshealth.org/en/teens/. To learn how to deal with stress and other mental health challenges.

[14] Mayo Clinic, Mindfulness exercises. Last visited Nov. 11, 2022. Available at: https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/consumer-health/in-depth/mindfulness-exercises/art-20046356.

F. Helpful breathing techniques

Being aware of your breathing and learning to control it is a useful self-regulation (this means controlling your mind-thoughts, feelings, and actions) and grounding tool. There are going to be times when upsetting thoughts or memories could trigger your body's alert system. To reduce these levels of alertness it is especially useful to learn and integrate forms of controlled breathing when triggered or even into a day-to-day routine. Controlled breathing can help you be aware of your actions and allows you to calm the body during times when your alert system is activated (this can feel and look like rapid heartbeat and breathing, improper posture, muscle tension, persistent or irrational thoughts.)

Practice the following breathing techniques. The more you practice now, the better prepared you'll be for when you need to really use them.

Balloon breathing: Take a deep breath in. When you breath out, pretend you are blowing up a balloon. To help control your breathing, color a balloon, as you breath.

Snake Breathing: Sit in a comfortable position. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, making a long 'sssssss' sound, like a snake. Try to make the exhalation last as long as you can before you can inhale again.

Bumblebee Breathing: Sit in a comfortable position, with your hands resting in your lap. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, keeping your lips closed. Make a humming 'mmmmm' sound as you exhale (like a bumblebee). Make sure your face and lips are soft and relaxed so that you can feel the vibration!

G. Meditation: body scanning

Body scanning involves developing awareness by scanning the different parts of the body slowly, gently, and thoroughly. Body scan meditation can be an effective way to release tension that you may not even realize you are experiencing. It involves paying attention to body parts and bodily sensations in a gradual sequence from the feet to the head.

You can use the following points to practice body scanning:

1. Get comfortable. It is preferable to lie down, especially if you are doing a body scan meditation before falling asleep. If that is not possible or comfortable, sitting comfortably is also an option.

2. Take a few deep breaths. Let your breathing slow down and start breathing from your belly instead of from your chest, letting your abdomen expand and contract with each breath.

3. Bring awareness to your feet. Now, slowly, direct your attention to your feet. Begin to observe sensations in your feet. If you notice pain, acknowledge it and any accompanying thoughts or emotions, and breathe gently through it.

4. Breathe in the tension. If you notice any uncomfortable feelings, focus your attention on it. Breathe inside them and see what happens. Visualize the tension that leaves your body through breathing and imagine it evaporates into the air.

5. Continue when you feel ready.

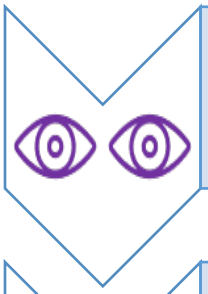
6. Scan your entire body. Continue this practice with each area of your body, gradually climbing up through your feet until you reach the top of your head. Notice how you feel and where you are holding your stress.

7. If you feel tightness, pain, or pressure, continue to breathe in any tightness, pain, or pressure you feel. This can help you release the tension in your body now and be more aware of it in the future so that you can release it then as well. (If you feel like you cannot breathe at any time, stop what you're doing and if it doesn't get better seek help or call 911 for a medical emergency.)

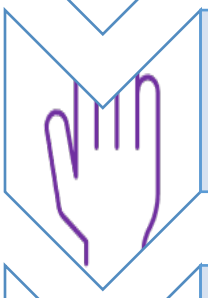
H. The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique

Do you remember what your five senses are? **These are sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing**. These five senses are engaged with your mindfulness (this means being present in the here-and-now). Mindfulness and grounding help our brain disconnect from negative thoughts and activate our five senses so that we consciously return to the present.

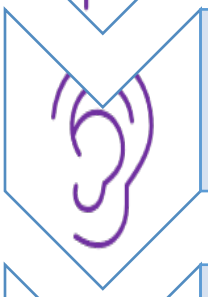
Below is the language you can use to activate your senses to help with grounding:



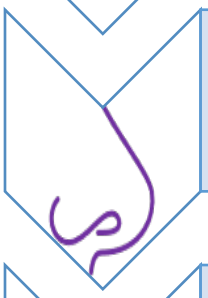
- Identify **5 things you see** around you. Look around you. What do you see?



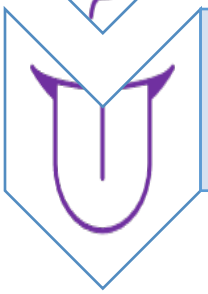
- Identify **4 things you can touch.** Using your sense of touch, whether with your feet, legs, hands or your entire body.



- Identify **3 things you can hear**. Using your sense of hearing, what can you hear around you?



- Identify **2 things you can smell**. What are two smells that are hidden in the corners of what you can see, feel, and hear right now?

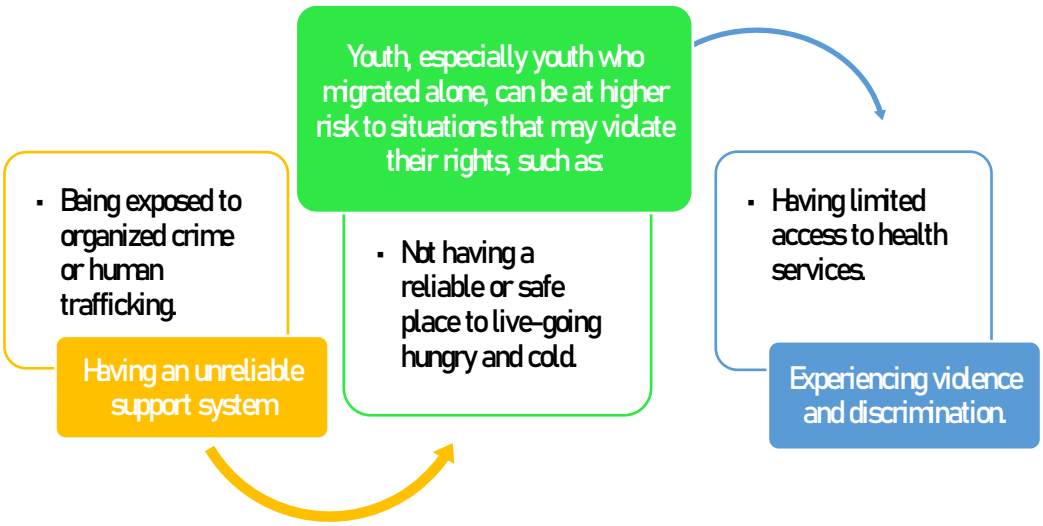


- Identify **1 thing you can taste**. What is one thing you can savor right now?

VII. PROCESSING IMMIGRATION BASICS

A. Your immigration status

Our immigration system is a complicated one. As a result, there may be various challenges that arise during or after your migration process. Some of these challenges can involve worrying about your immigration status and the risk of deportation, as well as struggling to understand the immigration process itself. You may also be unsure of how to access education and health care, or fear that you will be turned away if you try to.



These challenges can be overwhelming if you are facing them alone or do not know where to get support or resources for these challenges. If you are experiencing these worries, it may be helpful to start with an understanding of your immigration status. **The following are some possible immigration statuses for immigrant youth here in the United States. Keep in mind that there are others. Do you know which applies to you?**

- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)
- Refugee/Asylee
- U or T visas recipients
- Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR)
- Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holder
- Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) recipient
- Without lawful immigration status

It is recommended that you consult with and get guidance from an attorney or legal service provider that specializes in U.S. immigration law. There are organizations that can assist you. To find an attorney or an organization that can support you through your immigration process please see the resources provided **on pages 41 and 44.**

B. Understanding your rights

International human rights exist for all human beings, regardless of their migration status. **Every person, citizen, or migrant (documented or undocumented), has and deserves basic human rights.**

Some of your rights here in the U.S. include:

To live a life free of discrimination and mistreatment	To have access to adequate housing	To have access to education
The right to receive medical care (physical and mental), especially urgent medical care	The right to be yourself by practicing your own culture, your own language and religion	The right to have fair working conditions and wage

As we have indicated throughout this toolkit, the immigration process is complicated and unpredictable. This means that there is always the possibility that you might find yourself facing various challenges, including uncertainty as to if and when you can obtain lawful status and the possibility of deportation.

Resources to learn more about your rights and find legal help (also see page 44 on this toolkit):

- **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**: https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/.
- **I America**: http://iamerica.org/know-your-rights#you%20have%20rights.
- **Immigration Legal Resource Center (ILRC):** https://www.ilrc.org/immpreptoolkit.
- **Immi:** https://www.immi.org/en/Info/get-legal-help.
- **ImportaMi**: https://www.importami.org/hc/en-us.
- **Immigrations Advocates Network:** https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/.

C. Avoiding fraud/scams against immigrants

There are many scams targeting immigrants. For this reason, it is particularly important to familiarize yourself with who is who in the immigration law world. This will help you understand the process and familiarize yourself with who everyone is and their role in your immigration process. **To learn more about these organizations and people go to page 43 of this toolkit.**

The Federal Trade Commission offers tips on **how to avoid becoming a victim of a scam**. The following are some of these tips. Keep them in mind as you seek out help with the immigration process:[15]

Do not go to a notary regarding your legal case. A notary public is not authorized to give legal advice. A notary in the United States is not a lawyer and cannot represent people before government agencies.

Do not hand over your original documents. Birth certificates, passports, or any original document should not be given to anyone. Watch out for people who may seek to retain them until some amount is paid.

Exercise caution in signing documents. It is best not to sign documents until they are complete. You want to understand what you are signing and avoid changes or additions made after you sign that you are unaware of.

It is best to keep a copy of all government forms and letters related to a petition or application. To avoid any scams, consult reputable attorneys and representatives and use the forms on the official sites of the United States government.

You can also learn more about **how to avoid immigration scams** by watching the following video created by the American Bar Association's (ABA) Commission on Immigration: **Click on the box to watch the video** or visit the following webpage: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vfFGM6msc8.

You can also, visit the Children's Immigration Law Academy Youth webpage at https://cilacademy.org/information/, to learn more about other resources that might be helpful to you during your immigration process.

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[15] Federal Trade Commission Consumer Advice-Avoid Immigration scams and get real help. Last visited December 29, 2022. Available at: https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/avoid-immigration-scams-get-real-help.

Who's Who in the Unaccompanied Youth's World

Federal Agencies

Department of Homeland Security

CBP (Customs and Border Patrol)

- Officers carry out apprehensions at/near the border.
- Interview (Form 1-213) individuals at/near border.
- Transfer unaccompanied youth/child to HHS-ORR custody.

ICE (Immigration & Customs Enforcement)

- Officers carry out internal apprehensions.
- NTA-Notice to Appear is filed by ICE Attorneys.
- Consider requests for release rather than adult detention for youth/child turning 18 in ORR custody.

USCIS (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services)

- Agency that carries out benefits adjudication.
- Initial jurisdiction over unaccompanied youth/child's asylum applications.
- Asylum Officers
- Adjudicating Officers (consider SIJ, U, and T visa applications, among others, at national centralized offices-Service Centers).

Health & Human Services

ACF (Administration for Children and Families)

- ORR (Office of Refugee Resettlement)
- Responsible for care and custody of unaccompanied youth/child through local care providers.
- Responsible for efforts to reunify unaccompanied youth/child with approved sponsor.
- While in ORR shelter youth/child will come into contact with: Case managers, clinicians, Federal Field Specialist (FFS), case coordinators, teachers and medical care staff.

Department of Justice

EOIR (Executive Office for Immigration Review)

- Immigration court system (There are immigration courts around the country).
- Proceedings/cases are styled "In the Matter of RESPONDENT'S NAME."
- DHS is opposing party, represented by ICE trial attorney.
- Notice to Appear filed by ICE attorney initiates removal proceedings.
- You have the right to an attorney who can represent you in your removal proceedings, but at no expense to the government.
- There are free legal service providers. For directories, see page 44 in this toolkit.

State Courts:
State courts of general jurisdiction or specialized courts (family, juvenile) may make findings related to special immigrant juvenile status.
Note: State courts are not involved in every child's case. They are typically involved when child is seeking special immigrant juvenile status. A child may also be subject to state court proceedings – for example, for traffic violations or juvenile delinquency issues.

Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights:
-Appointed child advocates in specific cases.
-Independent non-profit organization with various offices nationwide.
-Provide best interest recommendations about detained unaccompanied youth for various stakeholders.

D. Some basics about removal proceedings

If you receive a document to attend a hearing in immigration court, then it may be that removal proceedings have been started. This means you will have to attend hearings at an immigration court. During this process, you may fight to stay lawfully in the United States. In other words, you may pursue in court the right to remain in the United States because you qualify to do so under immigration law. Removal proceedings are initiated by an ICE attorney and based on the alleged fact that you have violated U.S. immigration law in some way. The ICE attorney represents U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, a federal agency that is part of the Department of Homeland Security. Note that violating immigration law is not a criminal, but a civil violation.

The following information can help you familiarize yourself with the process:

Primarily, it's important you know that you have the right to have an attorney represent you in your immigration proceedings. Keep in mind that you will not be assigned a lawyer automatically, you will have to ask for or find a lawyer yourself. There are growing number of non-profit organizations that **offer legal services at free or a low cost** to those who qualify for their services. There are also private attorneys, but keep in mind they usually charge more for their services. You can request a consultation with a private or non-profit attorney. There may be a fee so inquire beforehand what it is.

Resources to search for immigration legal service providers in your area:

- **EOIR list of Pro-Bono legal service providers** (list maintained by the immigration court system): https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers.
- **IAN legal services directory** (list maintained by the Immigration Advocates Network): https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/.

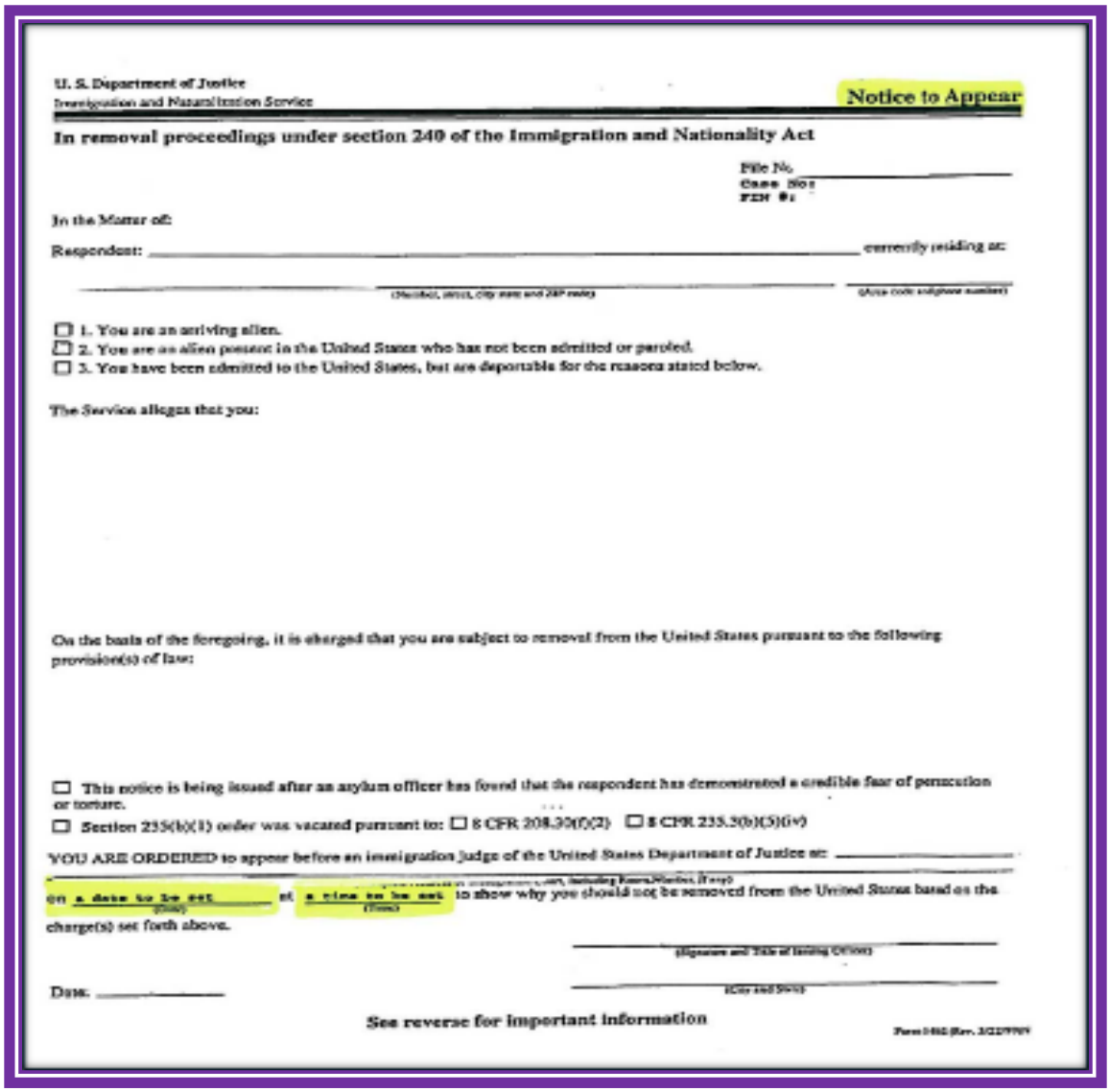
If you are concerned about an immigration raid, learn more about your rights and what you can do in this situation:

- **Immi:** https://www.immi.org/en/Info/learning-center/know-your-rights/how-to-be-prepared-for-a-raid-or-arrest/.
- **Informed Immigrant:** https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resources/know-your-rights/how-to-prepare-yourself-for-an-immigration-raid/.
- **ImportaMi:** https://www.importami.org/hc/en-us/articles/4411262341655-Top-5-Questions-You-May-Have-about-Immigration-Cases-and-Your-Rights-in-the-US.

Notice to Appear (NTA):

You may have received a document called a **Notice to Appear (NTA)**. The NTA is a notice from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security indicating that you are to appear in immigration court because the government has created a removal case against you. The NTA is addressed to you and should show the date, time, and location of the hearing in immigration court.

You can **click the box** to learn more about an NTA or you can visit the following website: https://help.asylumadvocacy.org/nta/.



U. S. Department of Justice
Immigration and Naturalization Service

Notice to Appear

In removal proceedings under section 240 of the Immigration and Nationality Act

File No.
Case No:
FIN #:

In the Matter of:

Respondent: _____ currently residing at:

_____ _____
(Number, street, city state and ZIP code) (Area code and phone number)

☐ 1. You are an arriving alien.
☐ 2. You are an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or paroled.
☐ 3. You have been admitted to the United States, but are deportable for the reasons stated below.

The Service alleges that you:

On the basis of the foregoing, it is charged that you are subject to removal from the United States pursuant to the following provision(s) of law:

☐ This notice is being issued after an asylum officer has found that the respondent has demonstrated a credible fear of persecution or torture.
☐ Section 235(b)(1) order was vacated pursuant to: ☐ 8 CFR 208.30(f)(2) ☐ 8 CFR 235.3(b)(5)(iv)

YOU ARE ORDERED to appear before an immigration judge of the United States Department of Justice at: _____

_____
(Complete Address of Immigration Court, Including Room Number, if any)

on a date to be set (Date) at a time to be set (Time) to show why you should not be removed from the United States based on the charge(s) set forth above.

_____
(Signature and Title of Issuing Officer)

Date: _____

_____
(City and State)

See reverse for important information

Form I-862 (Rev. 3/22/97)

Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)-Immigration court system:

The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is an agency within the Department of Justice that is responsible for adjudicating (deciding) immigration cases. The judge hearing your case is employed by EOIR. EOIR offers tools you can use to obtain information about your removal proceedings. You can call the hotline (1-800-898-7180), or you can use their online system. Information is available in English and Spanish. For both, you will need your A-Number. This number can be found on your NTA as well as other documents you may have received. You can also visit the EOIR website to learn more the immigration process, https://icor.eoir.justice.gov/en/#.

Please check-out the following graph to help you navigate the EOIR automated hotline:

Step 1: To reach the automated hotline, call 1-800-898-7180.

Press 1 for English | Press 2 for Spanish.

↓

Step 2: Enter your A number and confirm your number

Then press 1 to get the information, such as the date, time, and location of your hearing.

↓

If you have an NTA without a listed hearing date, it is recommended to dial the above number and follow these instructions at least once a week in order to check for updates and make sure that you do not miss a hearing.

↓

Online Option: If you have access to the internet, you can use the automated case information resource there.

English link: https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/en/ | **Spanish** Link:https://acis.eoir.justice.gov/es/

↓

Please note that failure to attend a hearing may result in an order of deportation.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-in:

Oftentimes, when adults are in removal proceedings, they will receive notices to attend Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-in appointments**. There is a difference between going to an EOIR hearing and an ICE check-in.** An ICE check-in is an appointment with an ICE officer. This gives the ICE officer an opportunity to review the details of your case and receive updates. Keep in mind that this information could affect your case, but ICE does not decide whether you will win or lose in immigration court. ICE check-ins occur routinely and often affect adults. Unaccompanied minors who turn 18 while in an immigration facility may be subject to ICE check-ins as well. Unlike EOIR hearings, ICE check-ins do not take place at the court before a judge; rather, they typically happen at the ICE local field office.

- If you need to verify the details of your appointment, you can call 1-888-351-4024. It is always best to visit the ICE website for current information, as numbers may change. **You can find information here**: https://www.ice.gov/ICEcasereview.
- Remember that ICE is the same agency that represents the Department of Homeland Security during your removal proceedings. This is the agency that started proceedings against you in the first place. Please note, the information you share during a check-in with ICE may become part of the files that the agency has on you.

You have rights, even when an immigration agent or police officer come knocking at your door. Keep the following in mind:

You do not have to open the door!

You can say, "B*ased on my 4th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution, unless you have a signed warrant by a judge with my name, you are not allowed to come into my home*."

You do not have to answer any questions or sign any documents!

You can say, "*Based on my 5th Amendment rights under the United States Constitution, I do not have to speak to you or answer any questions you might have. I do not have to sign anything or provide you with any documents*."

Remain calm!

You can use your phone to call someone, take notes or to take pictures or video of the documents or the situation.

Ask to speak with an attorney!

Do not sign anything before speaking with an attorney.

E. Alternatives to detention

ICE's Alternatives to Detention (ATD) program has announced a new subprogram called the Young Adult Case Management Program (YACMP) for 16 cities. According to ICE, this case management program was designed to help 18- to 19-year-olds navigate the immigration process and does not include electronic monitoring. As the program is new there is little information or details on the requirements of this program. According to ICE's website, the program aims to connect participants to community services and resources, as well as educate them about their legal rights and obligations.[16] **(Resources on pages 41 and 44)**

These are the 16 cities this program is in: Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, El Paso, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Orlando, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego and Washington, DC.

Here are a few tips in navigating this new program:

If you are chosen to be in the YACMP program, you'll be contacted to set up a meeting with them. If you are contacted about this program and are currently working with an attorney, it is recommended you inform them immediately. They'll be able to help you navigate this process. Some youth have been contacted regarding this program via mail, email, and text. If you do not have an attorney and feel unsure about this program, we recommend you reach out to organizations that would be able to help you with this process.

During the meeting with YACMP, you'll be assigned a case manager. This case manager will be asking many questions about your reasons to coming to the U.S. and other personal information. Please note that you have the right not to answer their questions.

It is not clear if this program is required or if someone can opt out without any legal consequences. Again, if you are unsure of about this program, we recommend you reach out to organizations that would be able to help you with this process.

[16] U.S. Department of Homeland Security-Alternative to Detention. Last visited May 31, 2023. Available at: https://www.ice.gov/features/atd.

VIII. INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS

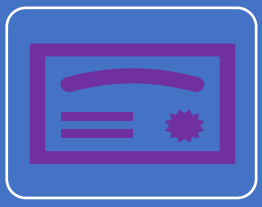
A. Navigating your rights to an education

The first thing to know is that all youth in the United States, including you, are entitled to an education. This is regardless of your race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration, or citizenship status including that of your parents. Each school district has their own policies on what documents they will or will not accept to enroll a child into their schools. However, school districts must use the guidelines below for every student:[17] To learn more about the age elibility and your options for an education visit the following website by **USA-Hello**, https://usahello.org/education/children/education-law-and-rights/. **(Resources on pages 50 and 52)**

Residency

- Schools may ask for proof of residency within the school district.
- Schools are not allowed to ask about a child's citizenship or immigration status or that of their parent/guardian.
- Schools may ask that a parent/guardian use their identification card or driver's license to prove residency; however, the school may not require this form of documentation to prove residency.

Proof of age



- Schools may not require a birth certificate to verify a student's age.
- Schools may use the following documents to verify age: religious records, hospital records, a physician's certificate showing date of birth, or previously verified school records.
- Note: This list is not exclusive. You can confirm with your school district as to what they accept.

Social Security Number

- Schools may request your child's social security number to serve as their identification number. However, schools must also inform you that this is voluntary.
- By federal law, schools may not deny a child's enrollment to school if any parent does not choose to disclose this information.
- Schools may not require a parent/guardian to share their social security number.

[17] U.S. Department of Justice and Education-Fact sheet: information on the rights of all children to enroll in school. Last visited January 17, 2023. Available at: https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf.

B. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and university/community colleges

ESL classes

As you might know, there are many obstacles for immigrants coming to the United States, and a language barrier is often one of them. English can be a difficult language for newcomers to learn. For immigrants in the United States, however, knowing English can be critical to their integration and economic advancement. Fortunately, there are many opportunities and free or low-cost resources to learn and practice the language. This includes English as a Second Language (ESL) classes or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. In these ESL and ESOL courses, immigrants can learn to write, speak, read, and improve pronunciation in the English language.

How to find English classes:

You can find free or low-cost classes at public libraries, community organizations, churches, and community colleges. You can also learn English through online library resources, teaching apps, and language exchange pages.

Visit the following websites that can help you in your education process:

- **Libray finder**: https://libraryfinder.org/. To find your local library.
- **U.S.A Learners**: https://www.usalearns.org/. Online Classes.
- **USA Hello**: https://usahello.org/education/. Information about English classes or GED.

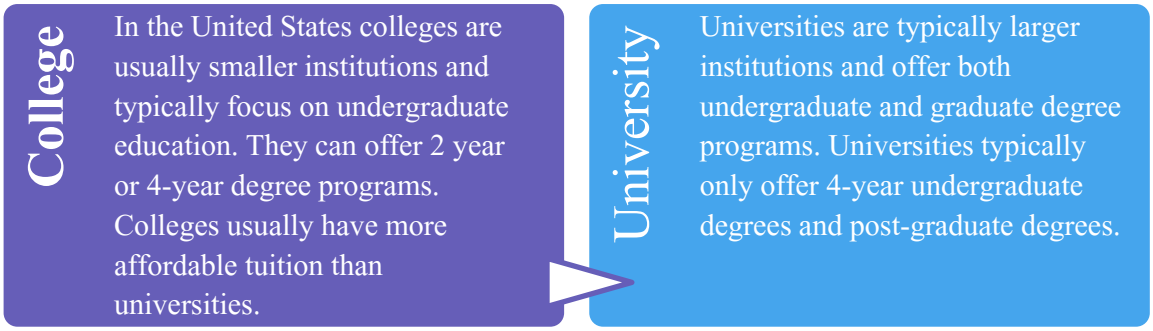
Community college and university:

Students who have completed and received a high school diploma or passed the General Educational Development (GED) tests can attend a college or university here in the United States. There are no rules or laws at the federal level that prohibit universities or colleges from accepting students that do not have legal immigration status.

However, at the state level, some states have restrictions on undocumented students attending universities or colleges that are part of the state public education system. If you are interested in going to college or university, do not be afraid to ask about your options. You can ask a high

school counselor, teacher, employer, someone at your church, or a friend who might be able to point you in the right direction.

The difference between a college and university here in the United States:



Tuition financial assistance:

Another obstacle many immigrant students, especially undocumented students, face is how to pay for college or university tuition. Here in the United States, undocumented students cannot receive federal financial aid (the financial assistance the federal government provides some students). Do not let this discourage you, as there are other ways you can get financial aid or scholarships to pay tuition. According to the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), a growing number of states offer state financial aid to students who meet certain criteria, regardless of their immigration status, including California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and the District of Columbia.[18] Public colleges and universities offer different tuition rates depending on whether a student is considered to be resident of the state (in-state) or not (out-of-state). Out-of-state tuition rates are often significantly higher. According to NILC, at least 23 states and the District of Columbia offer in-state tuition, regardless of immigration status, to students who have attended and graduated from secondary schools in their state.[19] In addition, some colleges offer private aid, and there are numerous private scholarships available to youth, regardless of immigration status.

Higher ED Immigration Portal created an interactive map that lets you navigate each state's stance on tuition and financial aid for students without immigration legal status. To use and see the map, visit the following website: https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/states/.
(More resources on page 52)

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[18] National Immigration Law Center-Basic facts about in-state tuition for Undocumented immigrant students. Last visited December 29, 2022. Available at: https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/basic-facts-instate/.

[19] National Immigration Law Center-Basic facts about in-state tuition for Undocumented immigrant students. Last visited December 29, 2022. Available at: https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/basic-facts-instate/.

For more information, guidance, and resources on how to enroll in public school, higher education, and financial resources:

- **ImportaMI-**5 Important Questions You Should Know About Enrolling in Public School: https://www.importami.org/hc/en-us/articles/4633213303191--5-Important-Questions-You-Should-Know-About-Enrolling-in-Public-School. ImportaMi can provide support for finding legal and other local resources.
- **Higher Ed. Immigration Portal**: https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/states/. To learn more about what your state offers in terms of financial resources.
- **Informed Immigrant**: https://www.informedimmigrant.com/resources/. To find resources for undocumented students.

The following websites provide guidance on scholarships available to anyone, including students who are without lawful immigration status:

- **Immigrant Rising**: https://immigrantsrising.org/resource/applying-for-scholarships.
- **The Best Schools**: Financial Aid for undocumented students: https://thebestschools.org/resources/college-finances/financial-aid-undocumented-students/.
- **Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)**: https://www.maldef.org/resources/scholarship-resource-guide-2022-2023/.
- **Hispanic Scholarship Fund**: https://www.hsf.net/scholarship.
- **The Esperanza Education Fund**: https://www.esperanzafund.org/about-us. For scholarships available to immigrant students, regardless of status, in Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia.

C. Navigating the health care system

If you need medical care for you or your family, below are some tips that may help you navigate some of the potential challenges when seeking medical care:

- Anyone, regardless of their immigration status, can receive health services without being asked about their immigration status.

- Anyone can receive medical care at a variety of healthcare facilities, including federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), urgent care clinics, public hospitals, and emergency rooms, regardless of immigration status.[20] Hospital emergency rooms and all health centers that receive federal funds have a duty to provide medical care to patients suffering from an emergency, regardless of their immigration status.

- Health information is protected by HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996), which means that all data (including immigration status, nationality, or date of birth) is confidential and cannot be shared by anyone.[21]

- Sometimes, the unexpected, including medical emergencies occur. Please do not hesitate to go to the hospital if you are experiencing a medical emergency, even if you do not have healthcare insurance. If you end up needing hospitalization, you can apply for health insurance coverage such as emergency Medicaid. You can ask to speak with a **hospital social worker**, as they could help and guide you on this matter. Also, depending on your immigration status, you may be eligible for other programs such as Medicaid

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[20] Protecting Immigrant Families-Immigrant rights to health care. Last visited April 28, 2022. Available at: https://pifcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Immigrant-Rights-to-Health-Care-March-2021-English.pdf.

[21] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-Summary of HIPAA privacy rule. Last visited April 28, 2022. Available at: https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/privacy/laws-regulations/index.html.

(regular), CHIP, or health insurance through the marketplace exchange (not free). To learn more about these programs, visit the following website: https://www.healthcare.gov/.

Resources on how access medical care:

- **National Immigration Law Center (NILC)-**Know Your Rights: https://www.nilc.org/issues/health-care/derechos-seguro-y-cuidado-de-salud/.
- **Need Help Paying Bills**: https://www.needhelppayingbills.com/html/dental_school_clinics.html. List of places that offer free dental care.
- **The National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics**: https://nafcclinics.org/find. To find free and charitable clinics.
- **Find a Health Center**: https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/. To search for health centers.
- **Centro Sol**: https://www.jhcentrosol.org/. Community resources.
- **Health Quetzals**: https://quetzaleshealth.org/resources. Resource Center.
- **New Eyes**: https://new-eyes.org/. Glasses for those in need.
- **211**: https://www.211.org/. To find local resources.
- **Migrant Clinicians Network-Health Network:** https://www.migrantclinician.org/our-work/health-network.html. Health Network is Migrant Clinicians Network's is a virtual case management program that helps migrants with ongoing health needs to find care at their next destination.
- **Also, check with your school district in your community, as sometimes elementary schools offer hearing and vision clinics.**

D. Identification card (ID) or driver's license (DL)

Both a state identification (ID) and driver's license (DL) are important forms of identification in the United States. In addition to evidencing that you are authorized to drive a vehicle, a U.S. driver's license can be used as a form of identification for many other purposes, such as cashing checks, opening bank accounts, or signing documents before a notary. Like a driver's license, a **state ID** can be used as a form of identification, **but it does not authorize you to drive a vehicle**. The U.S. federal government does not issue driver's licenses or state IDs. Each of the 50 U.S. states issues its own driver's licenses and identification cards.

Example of DL

Example of ID

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), as of October 1, 2022, there are 18 states, including the District of Colombia, who offer authorization to undocumented immigrants to obtain a DL, state ID, or both. Keep in mind that these states require that an applicant supplies certain documentation, such as a foreign birth certificate, foreign passport or consular card and evidence of current residency in the state.[22]

1. California (DL & ID)
2. Colorado (DL & ID)
3. Connecticut (DL)
4. Delaware (DL)
5. Hawaii (DL)
6. Illinois (DL)
7. Maryland (DL)
8. Massachusetts (DL)
9. Nevada (DL)
10. New Jersey (DL & ID)
11. New Mexico (DL)
12. New York (DL)
13. Oregon (DL & ID)
14. Rhode Island (DL & ID)
15. Utah (DL)
16. Vermont (DL)
17. Virginia (DL)
18. Washington (DL & ID)

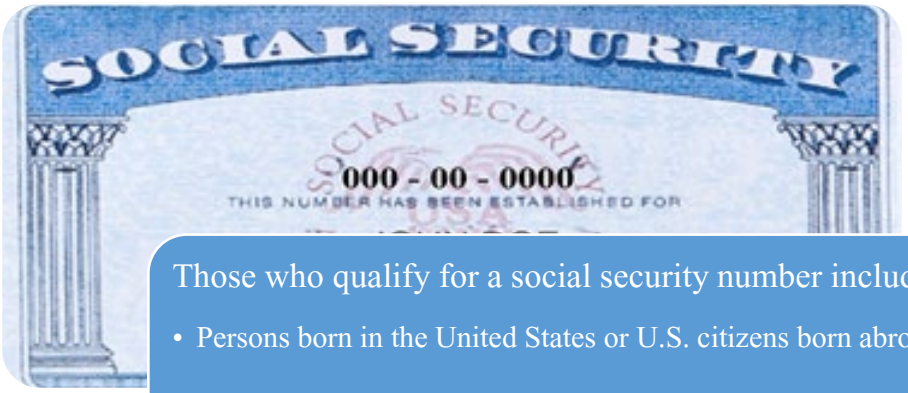
[22] National Conference of State Legislatures-States offering driver's license. Last visited January 25, 2023. Available at: https://www.ncsl.org/immigration/states-offering-drivers-licenses-to-immigrants.

To find your local Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV): https://www.dmv.com/dmv-office.

Keep in mind that every state varies on whether someone without an immigration legal status can obtain a state ID and/or driver's license. It may be a good idea to consult with an immigration attorney before applying for an ID/DL in your state, so that you know whether you are eligible and what documents to take with you or present.

E. Social Security Number

In the United States, Social Security is one of the most important social benefits available to workers. Social Security is part of the retirement plan for almost all. It provides replacement income for qualified retirees and their families. In most cases, it is mandatory that Social Security funds be deducted from the worker's salary. To get Social Security benefits, the Social Security Administration assigns a Social Security Number (SSN) to those who qualify. This number assists the worker in being able to work legally in the United States and pay taxes into their Social Security retirement benefits. Social Security also offers disability assistance and survivors' benefits to those who qualify.



Those who qualify for a social security number include:

- Persons born in the United States or U.S. citizens born abroad.
- Foreign nationals with permission to work in the United States.
- Immigrant youth who qualify for certain types of legal relief may be able to obtain an SSN upon obtaining work authorization and while awaiting an outcome in their immigration case.

To learn more about Social Security benefits and if you qualify, visit the following websites: https://www.aarp.org/retirement/social-security/questions-answers/non-citizens-ss-benefits.html and https://www.ssa.gov/.

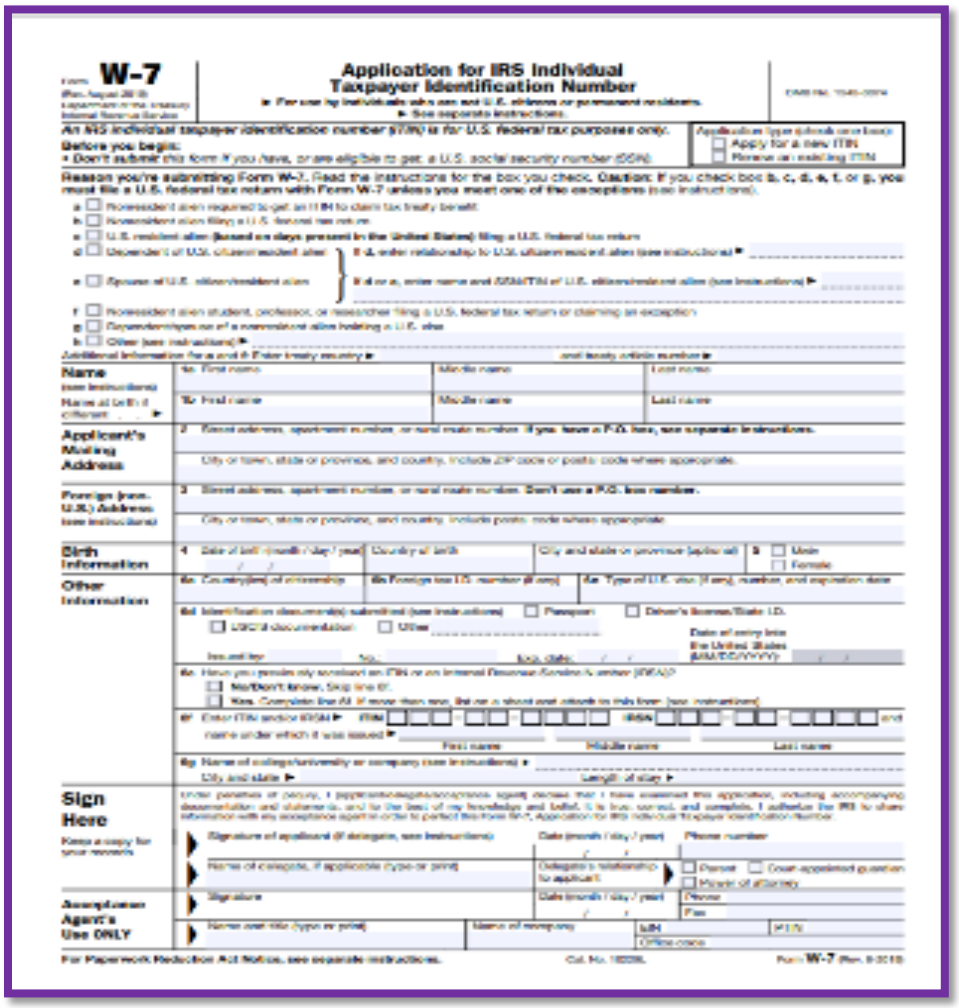
F. What is an ITIN and how to obtain your ITIN number

If you do not qualify for a SSN, you may still be ablet to obtain an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) for tax filing and paying taxes. According to the National Immigration Law Center, the following are some things to take in consideration regarding ITIN:

- For detailed information on **how to obtain the ITIN**, and things for consideration you can visit the following website at **National Immigration Law Center (NILC):** https://www.nilc.org/issues/taxes/itinfaq/.

- To learn about how to get an ITIN visit the following website by the **Internal Revenue Service (IRS)**: https://www.irs.gov/individuals/how-do-i-apply-for-an-itin or you can call the IRS toll-free number at **800-829-1040**. The IRS service allows you to check the status of your application seven weeks after sending your Form W-7 and your tax return.

- **Please note**, as you consider your immigration options, it is important to consult with an immigration attorney to learn more about your ability to obtain an SSN, ITIN, work authorization, or how working may affect your immigration case. Here's an example of a **W-7 form**.



Form **W-7**

Application for IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number

An IRS individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN) is for U.S. federal tax purposes only.

Before you begin:

Reason you're submitting Form W-7. Read the instructions for the box you check. Caution: If you check box a, c, d, e, f, or g, you must file a U.S. federal tax return with Form W-7 unless you meet one of the exceptions (see instructions).

Name

Applicant's Mailing Address

Foreign (non-U.S.) Address

Birth Information

Other Information

Sign Here

Acceptance Agent's Use ONLY

For Paperwork Reduction Act Notice, see separate instructions.

G. Selective service and the U.S. military

In the United States, the Selective Service System is a national program that maintains the names of eligible men who may have to serve in the military during a national emergency or war. However, registering for selective service does not mean you are joining the military as a job or career. Selective service does not apply to women or anyone entering the country after the age of 26.

Who should register for selective service?

Almost all men ages 18 to 25 who are U.S. citizens or immigrants living in the United States must register with the Selective Service System. This includes the following people:

- Refugees and asylees
- U.S. citizens living outside the country
- All male immigrants (lawful permanent residents and undocumented immigrants)
- All men who have DACA status

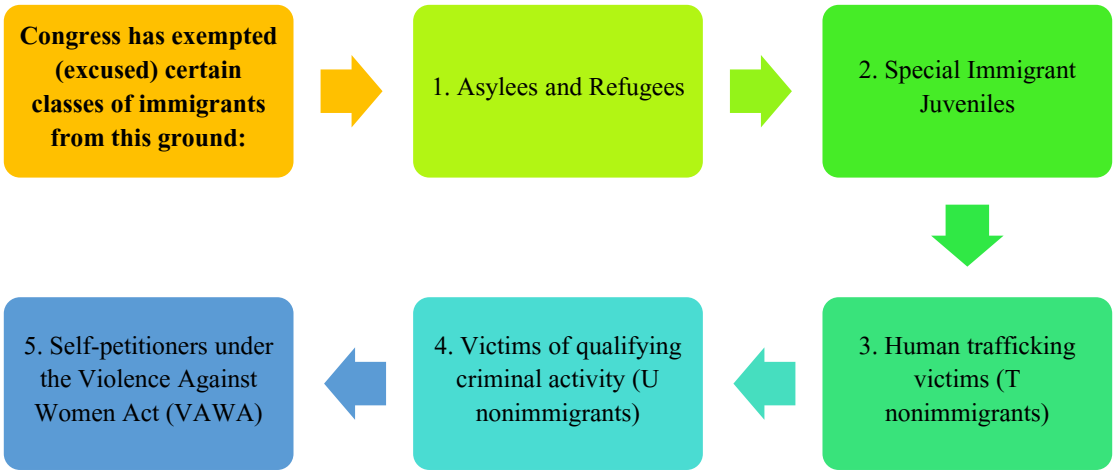
Please note the following:

- If you are an undocumented immigrant in the United States, you may have the opportunity to join the United States military if that is something you decide to do. Check with an attorney for more information.

H. Public benefits

Some immigrants have been afraid to apply for public benefits, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or Medicaid, and housing benefits, because of potential consequences to their immigration status or that of their relatives. This fear stems from what it's referred to "public charge" grounds of inadmissibility. The law provides that someone who is likely, at any time, to become dependent on the government by requesting assistance (certain public benefits) will meet grounds for inadmissibility (denial to then become a lawful permanent resident).

However, currently, and based on a final rule published on December 23, 2022, by the Biden Administration, the public charge ground of inadmissibility does not actually apply to the following individuals. **This is not a complete list. For more information, visit**: https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-processes-and-procedures/public-charge/public-charge-resources.



To learn more about public charge, and what benefits you can obtain without concerns to public charge visit the following resources:

- **National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (NIWAP)**: https://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/benefits-map#info. NIWAP created a chart explaining benefits/resources immigrants might qualify for based on their legal relief.
- **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)**-Public Charge: https://www.icirr.org/cargapublica.

I. If you find yourself without a place to live

Your adjustment to a new a new home and environment is not going to be an easy thing to do. It's going to be essential to have the support of your sponsor, family, friends, and/or community during this process. Some youth who have been through a similar process have found it difficult to find the support they needed from a sponsor or family. Unfortunately, some have even found themselves without a place to live due to various circumstances, such as a lack of safety in their home, understanding, or support from their sponsor/family. This has left these youth at higher risk to certain dangers, like human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a crime that involves the exploitation (taking advantage) of women, men, and minors for various purposes, including forced labor and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking is not something that only occurs to immigrants; however, immigrants, especially immigrant women and youth, are at a higher risk. They are particularly more vulnerable to traffickers because of their low level of understanding of laws or regulations, inability to speak English, immigration status, and lack of familiarity with U.S. employment protections.[23] Sometimes human trafficking is not obvious, because frequently the perpetrator is a family member or someone you know. Human trafficking can sometimes be someone saying to you that you have to work until you pay your debt in full, otherwise you'll have to face a negative consequence. Our discussion about this subject is not intended to scare you but to empower you with awareness and knowledge of these dangers and how to get help if it were to occur to you. We have provided several resources here for you to learn more about human trafficking and how to ask for help.

For more information on how to find shelter and other pertinent resources:

- **Child Help**: https://childhelphotline.org/. To learn about child abuse and find resources.
- **National Runaway Safeline**: https://www.1800runaway.org/about-us or call1-800 RUNAWAY (1-800-786-2929). If you have left your home and need to speak with someone for guidance and support.
- **Blue Campaign**-What is human trafficking: https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign. To learn more about Human trafficking and how to protect yourself. To report human trafficking 1-866-347-2423. Also, Exploitation and How to Protect Yourself.
- **National Human Trafficking Hotline**: https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en. To report, ask for help and find local service for human trafficking victims.

[23] American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)-Human trafficking: Modern Enslavement of immigrant women in the United States. Last visited December 30, 2022. Available at: https://www.aclu.org/other/human-trafficking-modern-enslavement-immigrant-women-united-states.

IX. BUILDING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

A. Tips to build a strong support system

This world is too difficult to navigate alone, especially as a young person. It is essential to build a support system that can help you not only with the practical things in life but also provide you with support during difficult and emotional moments. A support system can be a group of people, family members, friends, and others who can bring real and lasting help and support to you. These people (your support system) will be there in tough times or significant moments in your life (good and bad), to support and provide you comfort.

Below are some tips on how to build your support system:

- Identifying those who make up your support system is step number one. It does not have to be your family and friends. If you do not have family support or if your friends are few or far away, consider your neighbors, classmates, teachers, school counselor, church members, or others in the community that you live in. **Write down the names of those who make up your support system. Using the names, you have listed, write down what supportive role they play in the boxes below.** These people have shown you that you can count on them. Do not be afraid to reach out to them!

List the family members you can count on for varied reasons:	**List friends you can count on for varied reasons:**	**List community members you can count on for varied reasons:**
Emotional support:	Emotional support:	Emotional support:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
Encouragement:	Encouragement:	Encouragement:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
Advice on your social and personal life:	Advice on your social and personal life:	Advice on your social and personal life:
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.

- If you do not have a support system in your new community, you can try meeting or connecting with people in your community in various ways:
    - You can volunteer, join groups of causes that interest you.
    - You can join a gym or join a community sport team (like soccer).
    - You can sign up for free classes (like cooking classes, sewing, English classes) offered in the community (check your city's community center events/classes).

- If possible, you can also connect with your support system from your home country by using video chat or other social media networks to speak with them.
- Also, you might want to connect with others who are going or have been through the immigration process like you. You can get support from them, or you can provide support to each other.
- Remember, do not be afraid to ask for help, as all of us need help from time to time.

B. How to engage in conversation with a supportive adult

As an adolescent you may talk more to your friends than you do to your parents or anyone else, even if you have a great relationship with your parent/caregiver. Maybe this is because you feel that someone your age can relate and understand you better or feel they will not criticize or reprimand you for your mistakes. Even if this is the case, it is important to note that a supportive parent/caregiver can provide you with their support with the benefit of their experience and wisdom on how to navigate certain challenges.

Also, keep in mind that you can often count on the support of other adults besides your parents/caregivers who are important in your life, like a teacher, counselor, or coach you like to talk to. At first, it may seem awkward to talk to an adult, especially about sensitive topics, such as sex, relationship advice, feelings/emotions, or drugs/alcohol. But the more you try, the more normal it will feel.

Communication is key when navigating difficult or sensitive conversations or conversations to resolve a conflict.

The following are some tips to help you navigate conversations or resolve conflict whether with your parent or another trusted adult:

- You can schedule a meeting and let them know in advance. Try to pick a time where not much is going on to avoid interruptions, or a time where everyone is well-rested and fed to avoid irritability. It is best to have this conversation in person in a tranquil place, but if the other person is far away, a video chat can work. Please note that it is best to avoid resolving a conflict when emotions are high. Instead, wait until everyone has had time to "cool off or calm down."

- Prepare and practice what you want to talk about. This will help you feel more confident and clearer during the chat (you can also write your points down). This will help you not forget any of the points you want to be sure to make.

- You can ask for 5-10 minutes of uninterrupted talking. This will help with getting your point across without losing the nerve to speak, especially if it is a difficult topic.

- Prepare yourself emotionally for a possible positive and negative outcome or reaction from them. This would be a great opportunity to have your **coping and grounding skills** ready. This is especially important if you feel that you will not have the support or understanding of the other person. In addition, if you feel that this could be the case, then it would be a good idea to have a friend or supportive person on standby in case you need external support.

- Be clear on the message you want to get across. It is ok to be firm words when talking to an adult but avoid criticizing or using offensive words that can damage or worsen an already tough relationship. Be open and listen to their reasoning, as adults they might be able provide some wisdom based on their experience. Above all, try not to lose your cool.

- Remember, sometimes it can be more difficult to tackle conflicts with those we love, especially with adult figures. This is because the feelings and emotions run deep with them and because we care about what they think of us, and we want their support and understanding above everyone else.

X. CONCLUSION

Remember that you are not alone! As you find yourself taking your first steps in this new chapter of your life, try to embrace every moment, even the difficult ones. Even experiences that are hard might have important lessons in them. Keep in mind that your thoughts will definitively influence how you face each step you take. If you face the day to day with a positive vision of things, that will help you move towards your goals. Keep in mind that there are good people in the world who are willing to help, sometimes it just takes a little work to find them. Remember to share your dreams and goals so that those willing to do so can help you achieve them.

Best of luck on this chapter of your life and remember there are a lot of people out there who believe in you and willing to support you!