



Mental Health in the Post-DACA Era: Building Strength in Undocumented Latinxs, DACA Recipients, and Those Who Love Them¹

“The sun shines not on us but in us” -John Muir

1. Validate your feelings. Each person lives their experiences in different ways. In distressing times, some may feel sad, others may become constantly irritable, yet other experience both intense sadness and irritability. For example, some of us may feel intense fears; others may be angry and experience a deep sense of injustice from the shifts in existing policies. These, and other emotions are understandable. There is no “right” way to feel. Don’t be afraid of tears. Your tears are a natural response to this very stressful time in your life. Your tears are a healthy way to release your emotions. Anger is also a normal response to distress, and some may find that pacing or venting frustrations help. Give yourself permission to observe your emotions and experience them without judgment.

Resource:

- ✓ Consider journaling, talking to friends or family, or talking to a counselor.
- ✓ There may be validation in hearing the stories of others that are experiencing similar feelings and/or events. Here are some [podcasts](#) that Latina.com recommends: Creating Espacios, Super Mamás, No Sé Dime Tú, De Colores Collective, Café con Pam, Tamarindo Podcast, Nos Vemos en el Swap Meet, y LatinoUSA. We also recommend NPR’s Code Switch. Code Switch is all about race, ethnicity, and culture.
- ✓ Talking to others or listening to podcasts may also cause stress; if so, embrace the need for silence and give yourself permission to make space for yourself.

2. Recognize symptoms of distress. Symptoms of distress vary across people. It is important that you pay attention and learn to recognize what are *your* symptoms of distress so that you know when might be a good time to step away, take a break, or find a safe place to rest for a moment. Here is a list of some common symptoms of distress:

- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious/nervous, and/or irritable (continually feeling “on edge”)
- Dramatic changes in your mood
- Display of intense emotions, or emotional outbursts
- Feeling numb
- Feeling emptiness, hopeless, helpless, and worthless
- Isolating from your peers, friends, and/or family

¹ Prepared for NLPA by Luz Garcini, Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez, Gabriela Hurtado, Josefa Selena Leon, Laura P. Minero



National Latina/o Psychological Association

Asociación Nacional de Psicología Latina

- Trouble sleeping, concentrating, remembering things, or making everyday decisions.
- Difficulty managing your everyday responsibilities or relationships
- Obsessive thinking or rumination (e.g., can't get certain thoughts out of your head)
- Changes in your energy or motivation level (e.g., lack of energy, inability to stay still)
- Talking, thinking or writing about death and dying
- Unexplained physical symptoms (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, dizziness, palpitations)

Resources:

- ✓ Consider engaging in some form of physical activity. Physical activity is known for its ability to relieve symptoms distress. Consider any form of exercise from a stroll to strenuous activity and fun activities like gardening or surfing. For some house cleaning is both productive and physically activating.
- ✓ Mindfulness relaxation meditation [video](#) on letting go for bed.

3. Identify your triggers. Pay attention to things, people, and/or situations that may trigger *your symptoms of distress*. For instance, a common trigger is watching the news. Although it is important to stay informed, following the news too closely may increase your distress. Pay attention to how following the news makes you feel. If you notice that this makes you feel anxious, can't fall sleep, or makes you feel sick, consider taking a break or reading the news at a different time (e.g., in the morning instead of at night).

Resources:

- ✓ Remember that it is ok to remove yourself from social media sites, even if it is just temporary.
- ✓ Read a good book instead of the news. Here's a list for [Women who Persist](#), and [2017 releases from Latinx authors](#).

4. Build on your strengths. You are strong, and you can rely on your past experiences and knowledge to remain strong. Focusing on your past experiences and your sources of personal strength can help you learn about what works and what doesn't work so that you can stay strong. Remember to: (1) maintain a positive view of yourself and trust your instincts; (2) take care of yourself by keeping up with and/or creating a normal routine and continuing to do the things that you enjoy and that help you relax; (3) look for opportunities to learn more about yourself as you face this difficult time; and (4) spend time with your loved ones for support and encouragement.

Resource:

- ✓ Consider building your [Tree of Life](#).



National Latina/o Psychological Association

Asociación Nacional de Psicología Latina

5. Connect or reconnect with your joys. Take a moment to remember the things that bring you joy. It can be drinking a fresh cup of coffee, reading HuffPost, talking to a friend, or looking at pictures of your baby niece. It could be painting, riding your bike or a skateboard, taking a walk, enjoying nature or riding the subway. Perhaps it is wearing jewelry an ancestor gave to you as a present or listening to your favorite song. What are the activities that help you feel renewed? Worthy? Loved? Take a moment to remember them and make space for these in your daily life. Also, think about the last time you laughed out loud? Felt serene? Felt at ease? Remember that time and recall: Who were you with? What were you doing?

Resources:

- ✓ Read: [Live your life well.](#)
- ✓ Read: [31 tips to boost your mental health.](#)

6. Learn and practice new skills for healthy coping. Staying strong requires you to maintain flexibility as you deal with stressful and uncertain circumstances. Learning new coping skills could help you manage stress better. Some skills that you may consider exploring include: (1) finding ways to express your thoughts and emotions such as through art or writing; (2) learn and practice mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation; (3) develop your problem-solving skills; (4) create safe spaces for you and your loved ones; (5) create a deportation safety plan; and (6) expand your sources of social and emotional support including connecting with your faith-based communities, advocacy organizations, community centers, and peer groups.

Resources:

- ✓ Free [guided meditations](#) in English and Spanish for downloads
- ✓ Learn the basics of meditation Vipassana with [UndocuHealth United We Dream](#)
- ✓ Learn easy techniques to reduce tension and physical pain with [UndocuHealth United We Dream](#)
- ✓ Practice [grounding skills](#) to manage anxiety:
- ✓ Visit a [virtual safe space](#).
- ✓ Develop a Deportation [Family Preparedness Plan](#).
- ✓ What to do if an ICE agent is [at your door](#).

7. Take your mental health seriously and seek help. Whether mild, moderate, or severe, seek help to alleviate your distress. It is important that you share your feelings and concerns with someone that you trust. Consider talking to a therapist, medical provider, or a member of your faith-based community. Medical and mental health providers and clergy are required to maintain your confidentiality so that you can seek support without reservation and when needed.



National Latina/o Psychological Association

Asociación Nacional de Psicología Latina

Resources:

- ✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- ✓ Crisis Textline: 741741
- ✓ How to choose a therapist by the National Center for PTSD. Available in Spanish and English. This [sheet](#) includes information about what to ask a therapist before starting treatment, paying for therapy, and “fit” in therapy.
- ✓ Mental Health America Resources: Available in [English](#), and [Spanish](#). This page includes several resources including, a local MHA affiliate locator, psychoeducation for mental health, support groups/resources, and national resources for mental health.

8. Know your rights and identify available resources. Knowledge is empowering, and knowing your rights and where to seek support is helpful to reduce distress. Locate resources, services, and agencies near you so that you can seek help if you need it.

Resources:

- ✓ United We Dream information on [DACA](#).
- ✓ United We Dream: [If ICE agents show up at work or home](#).
- ✓ United We Dream Migrawatch Hotline: 1-844-363-1423 – to get help if someone that you know is in deportation proceedings or to report ICE activity in your community.
- ✓ For other information please visit United We Dream’s [Here to Stay](#) website.

9. Protect yourself from immigration scams. Dishonest practitioners or attorneys may promise to provide you with help or faster services if you pay them a fee. These people are trying to scam you and take your money. For example, seek information about DACA from official sources such as government agencies or the Department of Homeland Security. If you are seeking legal advice, choose a licensed attorney or accredited representative, assess their references and evaluate their reviews. Check that your attorney is a member of the state bar association. If they are not, do not engage their services. If they are, then look at their disciplinary history before you engage their services.

Resources:

- ✓ The NALEO Educational Fund toll-free, bilingual hotline, 844-411-DACA, provides “real-time” information and referrals to legal resources in our communities. Hotline’s hours are 11:00 am – 8:00 pm EDT.
- ✓ US Citizenship and Immigration Services: [Avoiding Scams](#)



National Latina/o Psychological Association

Asociación Nacional de Psicología Latina

10. Share your knowledge to help others like you. Drs. Adamés and Chavez-Dueñas recommend social action as a way to find support and to heal. Research has found that finding community with other individuals whom you share similar identities and experiences with can serve to feel less alone.

Resources:

- ✓ Read Adames and Chavez-Dueñas' [Toolkit for People of Color](#)
- ✓ United We Dream's Mental Heal Toolkit [Mental Health Toolkit](#)

11. Know that YOU ARE NOT ALONE! You are part of this country, and we will continue to fight alongside you. Undocumented Latinxs and DACA recipients make contributions to our communities every day. For example, undocumented workers are an important source of unmet labor need in the US and also contribute significantly to Social Security revenue that they are unlikely to ever benefit from. There are over 800,000 DACA recipients also contributing significant labor and financial resources to the US economy. There is hope, and the fight is not over.

Resources:

- ✓ Contact your representatives by fax (free) and let them know what you want them to do. You can use [FaxZero](#) or [ResistBot](#)
- ✓ See what [United We Dream](#) is up to: You can take [action](#) or share your [story](#)



For any questions or comments about the information provided, please contact
Dr. Luz Garcini at Luz.M.Garcini@rice.edu