

# Planning for your children's future

A guide on talking to your loved ones about how to keep your family together



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# Introduction

It's painful to think about being separated from your children. But there are things you can do now to be prepared in case it happens. Planning ahead can help you feel more control over your life and can give your family more stability in this difficult and overwhelming process.

This guide will help you plan for and talk about how your children will be cared for if you and your partner are detained or deported. You'll learn how to:

- 1** [Talk with your partner](#) to make a childcare plan together p.4

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- 2** [Talk with your children](#) to prepare and support them p.8

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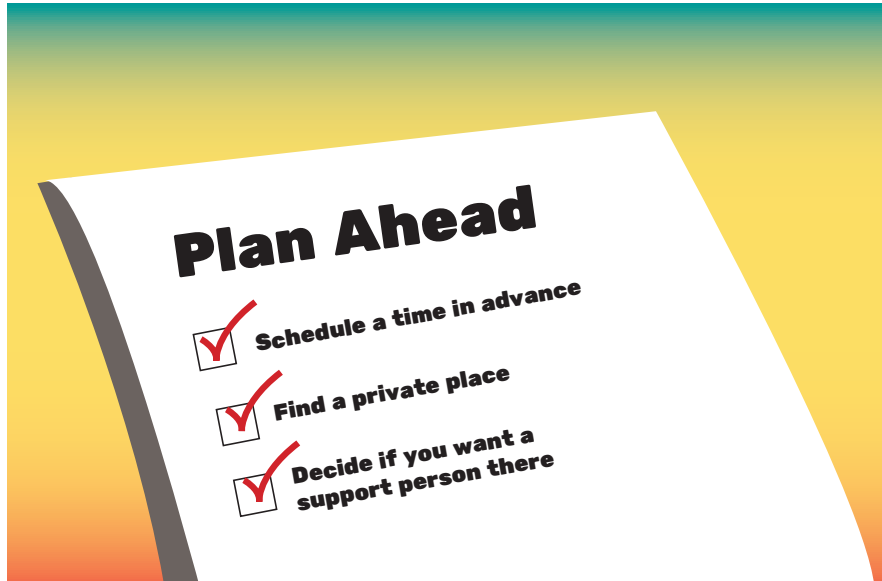
- 3** [Talk with a caregiver](#), the person you'd like to care for your children p.15

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- 4** [Next steps](#) p.20

# 1 Talking with your partner

It can be hard to have these conversations, but you and your partner are the best people to decide how your children should be cared for.



## Getting ready to talk

Plan ahead so you can think through what is important to you and your family, and to find the right time to talk.

- Plan to talk when there won't be interruptions.
- Find a private and quiet place where you can talk to each other honestly and freely.
- If you can, find someone to care for your children so that they won't overhear or interrupt.

These are difficult things to talk about and people often disagree about what they think should happen. It can be helpful to ask a support person like a family member or religious counselor to help out and make sure that you both have a chance to share your ideas.

### Finding a time:



**When is a good time for you and your partner to talk privately?**

### A support person could be a:

- Family member
- Friend
- Religious counselor
- It's okay to have trouble working together to come up with a plan for your children's care. It can take a long time and you might have to talk about it several times!
- You can revisit your plan over time—think of it as a “work in progress” that can change as your

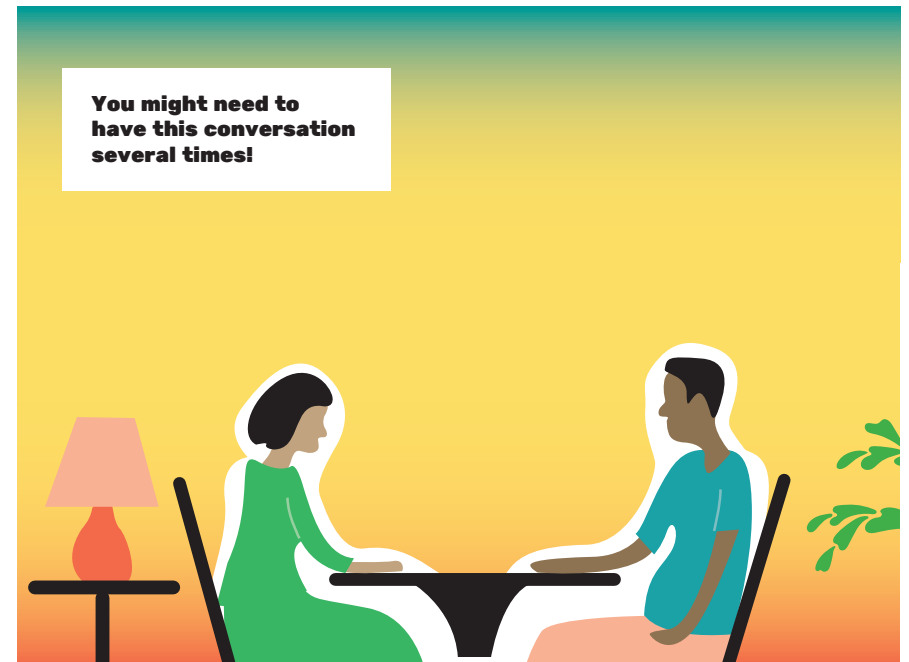
- children get older and what's important to you changes.
- If you're having a hard time talking to your partner or feel like your voice isn't being heard, see page 21.

### Ask Yourself:



**How am I feeling about talking to my partner about this?**

**You might need to have this conversation several times!**



# Talking with your partner

**Even if you are separated from your partner, it can still be important to include them.**



## If you are the only parent

In many families, one parent takes care of their children. Even if your partner is already separated from the family—because of detention, deportation, or for another reason—it can still be important to include them in the planning process because it can help children feel fully supported by both of their parents. In some cases, legal decisions for your children can only be made with both parents involved.

- **If one parent is in detention**, you might not be able to talk privately. But you can try to talk either when they are released or when they return to their country of birth.

### Ask Yourself:



**How am I feeling about talking to my partner about this?**

## Guidelines for talking with your partner

- Each parent should have time to talk without being interrupted.
- Make time to talk about your feelings and things you're worried about.
- Try to be patient with your partner and give them time to explain themselves, even if you disagree with what they're saying.
- Write down the things you agree on and the things you disagree on.
  - It's good to figure out these things early on, but don't feel like you need to make decisions right away.

### For things you don't agree on with your partner:

- Don't feel pressure to change your partner's mind.
- Whenever you disagree, think of a way both of you could compromise and write it down.
  - Use the space on pages 22-23 to write down your points.
- Compromises can look like: *"Our children can live with my aunt and her family, but they will visit your uncle and his family every weekend."*

- If you start to feel overwhelmed, upset, or you can't concentrate, let your partner know and take a break. Figuring out which things are hardest for you to talk about will help you to keep going.
- If you're so anxious or upset about making a plan that you can't eat, sleep, or work well, you might want to get more support. See page 21 for help.

### Ask Yourself:



**Is this a good time for a break?**

## 2 Talking with your children

Talking to your children about how they will be cared for in case you're separated can help them feel more involved, and like they have a say in the plan.



### Getting ready to talk

- Talk to your children in a space where everyone can hear each other and there are no distractions.
- Give yourself an unlimited amount of time to talk. It might take more than one try to cover everything you want to say to each other.
- Give your children time to ask questions or express concerns they may have about your plan.

You know your children best. Try to anticipate their needs before talking to them. If your children start to get

upset, take a break from the conversation. Don't force them to speak or listen.

Reassuring your children that your relationship is forever and that no physical separation can change that is the most important thing you can say.

#### Ask Yourself:



**What do my children need to feel supported?**



### For children 10 and under:

Young children don't have a clear sense of time, so it will be hard for them to understand how something that might happen in the future will affect them.

- Tell your children if being separated is just a possibility, or if the situation is more urgent.
- Show confidence in your plan—seeing that you're confident and in control will help them feel more secure.

#### How to help your children feel supported:

- Keep personal, comforting items nearby, like their favorite teddy bear or blanket.
- Tell them you love them.

- Tell them it's normal to feel whatever they're feeling, and that it's okay if their emotions change.
- Reassure them that you're going to be okay and that your family has a good support system.

Children may show that they're worried by not being able to sleep, eat, or concentrate. They might also do things that they've grown out of, like throwing temper tantrums or needing a bottle. Try to be patient – these kinds of reactions are completely normal. If their behavior continues or gets worse, consider getting help from a counselor (see page 21 for resources).

# Talking with your children

Try to be patient as your children process these changes.



## For children over 10 and teens:

Older children and teens look forward to being adults and having more control over their lives. This means they'll want lots of opportunities to express their opinions about what will happen in their future.

- They'll want to participate in making the plan and not have it forced on them. The more that teens feel they can express themselves and be heard, the easier it will be for them to accept the plan.
- Be prepared for the possibility that your teen might not want the same things as you do.

- They might express feelings that are hard for you to hear, like not wanting to join you if you have to leave the U.S. It's important for your children to be able to share their feelings without you becoming angry or hurt.
- Older children may also react by acting out or changing their behavior. This is also completely normal. Try to be patient as they process these changes, but if their behavior continues or gets worse, consider getting help from a counselor (see page 21 for resources).

## Guidelines for talking with your children

### 1. Start by talking about what's going on and your family's immigration story.

Here's an example of how you can start:

- *"Mommy and Daddy need to talk to you about something important. We are planning for the future of our family and want to talk to you about it. We want you to feel comfortable talking to us about whatever feelings and worries you have. You can ask us as many questions as you want."*
- Then, talk about where your family comes from and about your family's history and culture.
- Explain that your family comes from a good place where their grandparents or great-grandparents were able to grow up.
- Talk about why your family came to the U.S. What were they hoping for? What did they think it would be like? How was it different from their home?

### Ask Yourself:



### What are some of the values from my home country that I want my children to grow up with?

You can mention some of the beliefs or values you hold—like being kind to others, or being respectful of older people—and activities or food you enjoy as a family.

## Guidelines for talking with your children

### 2. Talk about your family's current immigration status.

- Explain that people who are born in the U.S. have rights that people who were born in another country don't always have. The U.S. government decides what these rights are, so the rules can change depending on who leads the government. Right now, the rules are changing, and it's harder for some people who weren't born in the U.S. to stay here.
- You can ask your children if they know what it means to be "detained" or "deported." If they don't know, explain that it means to be told by the government to leave the U.S. and go to the country where you were born.
- You can also talk to your children about their status in the country if it's different than yours, and if they have questions about what could happen to them.

### Ask Yourself:



### How are my children feeling?

### 3. Explain that you're making a plan for the whole family in case you have to leave.

The plan might be for them to go with you to the country where you were born, or for them to stay in the U.S. with someone who cares for them, while you move away.

- If you need to leave, explain that they may have to stay in the U.S. with someone that you've chosen to care for them.

Reassure them that:

- They'll be able to talk with you regularly and see you whenever possible.
- They'll still go to school and have bedtimes and activities, like they always have.
- They'll always be able to keep their connection with you, and they'll have support to keep that connection strong.

### You might want to repeat the message:

We'll always be a family. A child's relationship to their parents is forever and no physical separation between us can change that.

## Guidelines for talking with your children

### 4. Talk about how you're working to choose the person who will care for them.

- This person can be referred to as a caregiver.
- Ask your children what they think a caregiver should know about them, and what the caregiver can do to help them feel safe and comfortable.
- Explain that you're gathering all of their favorite things to share with the caregiver.
- Explain why you're choosing this specific caregiver. Your children may want to offer ideas about caregivers or arrangements.
- Say that you're working with the caregiver to make a plan for how you will stay connected to them if you have to leave, like writing letters and talking on the phone.

### Ask Yourself:



### Have I made enough space for my children to express themselves and ask questions?

You can ask:

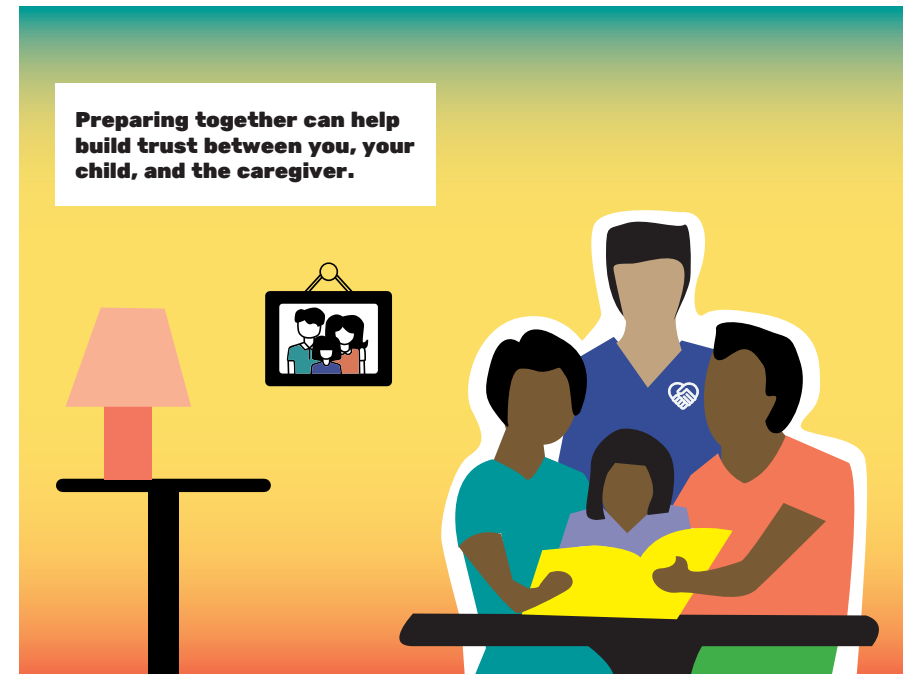
- How are you doing?
- What are you feeling right now?
- What thoughts are coming to you right now?
- Do you have any questions?

**There are things that will go unsaid because it may be too painful, or there may not be time to say everything you want to tell your children. Consider writing a letter for your children to open in case you're separated.**

- You can also have them write letters or draw pictures for you, and come up with a plan for your caregiver to send them to you in case you're separated.

## 3 Talking with a caregiver

Finding a caregiver for your children can help you prepare in case you're separated from them.



### Finding a caregiver:

The first time you talk with your potential caregiver might just be a time to explore what this can look like.

Talks with a potential caregiver for your children will be ongoing and should also involve your child. Preparing together can help build trust between you, your children, and the caregiver.

- A caregiver could be a close friend or relative.
- If you don't have someone in mind, you can get help from a community organization to find a caregiver. See the back page for resources.
- Ask them lots of questions. You should be comfortable with your choice and have a sense of their values and parenting.



# Talking With A Caregiver



## Getting ready to talk

If you haven't already, read page four to find the right time to talk.

Write down your talking points ahead of time so that you have a clear plan for what to talk about.

What do you hope the caregiver will provide everyday?

- Wake-up and bedtime routines
- Meals
- School drop-offs and pick-ups
- Help with homework

Try to be as specific as possible, so the caregiver can get a clear understanding of what your family will need.

- Are there any "special needs" that your children have? These are the "extra" things beyond daily caretaking that they will need, like:

- Tutoring
- Medical treatment
- Sports teams or participation in other activities

- Be as specific as possible with the caregiver about your family's needs. The more you share, the better prepared they will be.

### Ask Yourself:



**How am I feeling about having this conversation with the person who will care for my children?**

## Guidelines for talking with the caregiver

### 1. You can start by talking about your family's current situation.

If you already know when you have to leave, talk about your timeline. If you don't know, explain that you're trying to prepare in case something happens.

Explain how your children are doing. You can talk about:

- What you've already told your children
- What their temperaments and life experiences are like
- How they might react to being separated from you
- What emotional support you think your children will need

### Ask Yourself:



### How can I make sure I feel emotionally supported after the talk?

You may have more intense feelings talking face-to-face with a caregiver than you did thinking about or planning for the conversation.

## Guidelines for talking with the caregiver

### 2. Ask the caregiver about their interest in and commitment to caring for your children.

Ask them:

- What feelings and worries do they have about caring for your children?
- How will they keep you informed about important decisions?
- How will they help you keep open communication with your children?
- How will they handle disciplining your children?
- How will they support your children's participation in important cultural and religious traditions?
- How will they support your children in their personal interests and special activities?
- What kind of financial arrangement would they feel comfortable with?

#### Ask Yourself:



**How am I feeling about what my caregiver has to say?**

### 3. Talk about how you will work through disagreements together in the future.

You might not always have the same priorities as the caregiver. But your children relationships with you and the caregiver will remain strong if you work through differences together.

### 4. Leave space for the caregiver to talk about their feelings and any questions they have.

You might want to write something to the caregiver or do something else to express your gratitude for their willingness to care for your children.

#### Ask Yourself:



**Have I given them space to share their feelings and express concerns?**

# 4 Next steps



You might need to plan for a few things after talking with your family:

- What will happen if you're detained, including who will take your children to visit you and how often.
- Any legal steps you need to take, like setting up a legal agreement with your caregiver.
- Regular communication and check-ins with your family and the caregiver. This will help you update your family on what's going on in your life and if there are any changes to your timeline.

- Regular communication will also give you the opportunity to spend time together and to work through feelings and questions you have about your plan.
- Have conversations between you, your children, and the caregiver together. This will help your children know that the caregiver is someone you trust and that there is a plan in place to ensure that you will be a part of their lives, no matter what happens.

## There are many places you can find support and resources.

### For counseling referrals:

#### *Thrive NYC*

- Text "well" to 65173 or call 888-NYC-WELL
  - for Spanish, call and press 3
- [www.nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/](http://www.nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/)

### For general resources:

#### *Mixteca Organization*

245 23rd Street 2nd Fl.  
Brooklyn, NY 11215  
718-965-4795  
[www.mixteca.org](http://www.mixteca.org)

#### *Mayor's Office of Immigration Affairs*

212-788-7654  
[www.nyc.gov/immigrants](http://www.nyc.gov/immigrants)

### For caregiving resources:

#### *Center for Family Life Sanctuary Families Program*

443 39th Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11232  
718-438-9500

*If you need help finding a caregiver, we suggest reaching out to your local faith-based organizations.*

### For legal help:

*Good Call for 24/7 support if your loved one has been arrested or detained*

- Call 833-346-6322
- Text "hello" or "hola" to 347-679-6908

#### *Legal Aid Society Immigration Law Unit*

199 Water Street  
New York, NY 10038  
844-955-3425  
[www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)

#### *The Bronx Defenders*

360 E 161st Street  
Bronx, NY  
Hotline: 347-778-1266  
[www.bronxdefenders.org/clients-community/help](http://www.bronxdefenders.org/clients-community/help)

#### *Brooklyn Defenders Services*

177 Livingston Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
718-254-0700  
[www.bds.org](http://www.bds.org)



# Your family will always be a family

A child's relationship to their parents is forever and no physical separation between you can change that.

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## **The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)**

is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement.  
[www.welcometocup.org](http://www.welcometocup.org)

**The Center for Family Life**, a program of SCO Family of Services, is a neighborhood-based family and social services organization with deep roots in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.  
[www.sco.org/programs/center-for-family-life](http://www.sco.org/programs/center-for-family-life)

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Family Life  
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