Center for Childhood Resilience
Resilient Kids. Stronger Communities. Brighter Futures.

illinois childhood trauma coalition
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Preliminary Messaging to Raise Awareness about the Significant Impact of the Presidential Election on Youth Health and Well-Being

Since the presidential election on Tuesday, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago has become aware of several reports that children and youth are experiencing significant distress. Youth who have been affected include frequently marginalized youth, such as LGBTQ youth and refugee/immigrant and undocumented children and youth, but may not be limited to these groups.

For refugee/immigrant children, fear of being forcibly separated from family through deportation is clearly traumatic and threatening, especially due to many immigrant populations' emphasis on the centrality of family. Many youth risked their lives to come to the United States to reunite with family members and have themselves often escaped traumatic and life-threatening events in their home countries that propelled them to seek refuge among family and relatives in the U.S. The threat of separation from family, or of the return to life-threatening circumstances, generates a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. For LGBTQ youth, they are frightened that civil rights and broader social acceptance that has been advancing in recent years are at risk. Children of same-gender couples may also fear the dissolution of their parents' marriage and subsequent loss of guardianship. These fears increase a sense of isolation and hopelessness for this group. As a result, college and community counseling centers are being overwhelmed with the volume of calls for support, and schools are reporting instances of hate speech, racist vandalism, and having to cancel classes due to safety concerns.

There is evidence that some students have interpreted the political rhetoric as giving them permission to bully other students of color and minority status. Youth who are victimized by bullies are at risk for severe mental health concerns. Among these youth especially vulnerable are:

- Visible minorities – due to skin color, style of dress (e.g., hijab)
- Gender non-conforming youth
- Refugee/immigrant children and adolescents as this population may not receive the help they need as many of these families do not seek traditional mental health services and lack access to other sources of support
- Recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) or "dreamers". For many of these youth, the U.S. is the only country they have ever known and they are scared of both educational/employment disruption and deportation to their countries of origin, many of which are plagued by violence, and where they would be completely alone, without family, education, or employment.
- Those whose family members also may be undocumented and experiencing the same distress
- And those with pre-existing risk factors for suicidal behavior, such as:
    - Depression and anxiety disorders
    - Prior suicide attempts or non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors
    - Substance use
    - Impulsive aggressive behavior
    - Socially withdrawn/isolated

IMPORTANT STEPS ADULTS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT YOUTH

1. **Model positive coping and stay calm.** Communicate with your words and your behavior that you will keep them safe.

2. **Ensure and promote safety.**
    - Many of the racist and hateful things people say or do are not only wrong, but also against the law. Reach out to authorities and leaders who can help hold individuals accountable for promoting hatred.
    - Help youth identify safe spaces and safe adults who can speak up on their behalf.

3. **Connect with social support and decrease sense of isolation**
    - Universities and schools can offer circles of support, and other safe spaces for students to express concerns and seek support.
    - Connect with faith communities, a source of support for many refugee/immigrant communities.

4. **Raise awareness of organized support for refugee/immigrant/LGBTQ rights**. Just knowing that there are organizations who will safeguard their rights can be reassuring to youth. Increasing their sense of control and influence over their environment and their future promotes hope. By donating to or volunteering with these organizations, adults and youth both increase social support and sense of control over their situation.
    - It's important not to challenge or dismiss a young person's fears that prejudice will harm them. However, reassure them that there are people and organizations who will help.
    - Affirm LGBTQ identities by actively showing support for LGBTQ youths' orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Support can include helping the young person attend LGBTQ youth groups, advising or attending the LGBTQ student groups at your school if you are an educator, or including a young person's LGBTQ friends in family events if you are parent or family member.

5. **Promote healthy coping.** Good ways for youth to cope include:
    - Keeping family and school routines
    - Relaxation practice
    - Talking and spending time with family, friends, or faith communities
    - Distraction
    - Using humor
    - Scheduling pleasant activities
    - Exercising
    - Writing in a journal
    - Being creative or artistic
    - Avoiding substance use and isolation
    - Limiting media use to avoid repetitive images and messages that remind them of bad events.

6. **Familiarize yourself with signs of distress and signs of potential suicidality**:
    - Withdrawing from family and friends
    - Dramatic mood change

- Threatening to kill him/herself
- Talking, thinking, or writing about death or suicide
- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Unusually reckless behaviors
- Giving away prized possessions
- Exposure to others' suicidal behavior

7. **Link with available services** (See below)

KEY WAYS ADULTS SHOULD COMFORT CHILDREN

1. Remind children that 'Adults around you will protect you.'

- Kids are scared by adult reactions, like strong emotions, violence, or talking about moving to other countries. This makes kids think that adults in their life are not in control and cannot keep them safe.
- It is important for parents to model taking care of themselves and good coping skills.

2. Remind children we have a government system of checks and balances.

- There are democratic processes in local, state, and federal governments.
- Lawmakers can use democratic processes to prevent individuals from making decisions alone.

3. Remind them there is still hope, and people will fight for them.

- The United States is a country of immigrants.
- Our country is founded on the principles of freedom of religion.
- Human and civil rights organizations will fight for individuals' rights and to prevent unlawful decisions.
- We accept different opinions in a democracy, and individuals should stand up for what they believe is right.

Resources

Support for Youth

- Crisis Text Line
  http://www.crisistextline.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- The Trevor Project
  http://www.thetrevorproject.org
- To Write With Love On Their Arms
  https://twloha.com
- Center on Halsted
  http://centeronhalsted.org

Support for Family/Parents/Caregivers

- Look Through Their Eyes
  www.lookthroughtheireyes.org
- Child Mind Institute
  http://childmind.org/article/youre-worried-suicide
- Parents.com
  http://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/everything-kids/tips-for-talking-about-the-outcome-of-the-election-with-kids
- Today Show Segment:
  http://www.today.com/parents/how-talk-your-kids-about-election-results-t104827
- Huffington Post: What do we tell the children?
  http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-should-we-tell-the-children_us_5822aa90e4b0334571e0a30b

Support for Professionals working with Youth

- Teaching Tolerance (resources for teachers)
  http://www.tolerance.org/election2016
- Human Rights Campaign (help for LGBTQ youth)
  http://www.hrc.org/blog/after-election-lgbtq-youth-are-panicked-heres-what-we-can-do-to-help-them
- Youth Suicide Prevention Program (information on youth suicide)
  http://yspp.org/about_suicide/statistics.htm
- Illinois Safe Schools (resources for creating gender inclusive schools)
  http://illinoissafeschools.org

Human and Civil Rights Organizations

NATIONAL

- Immigrant Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights
  http://www.icirr.org/
- American Civil Liberties Union: works to defend individual rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution
  https://www.aclu.org/action
- Anti-defamation League: fights against anti-Semitism and bigotry as one of the largest civil rights organizations in the country
  http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/

- Border Angels: all-volunteer non-profit that advocates for immigration reform and social justice focusing on the U.S.-Mexico border. It offers educational and awareness programs and migrant outreach programs to San Diego County's immigrant population.
  http://www.borderangels.org/
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: works to promote the civil rights of people of color and to eliminate race-based discrimination
  http://www.naacp.org/about-us/
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund: fights for racial justice through litigation, advocacy and education
  http://www.naacpldf.org/ways-get-involved
- **National Immigration Law Center** is dedicated to fighting for the rights of low-income immigrants through litigation, policy analysis and advocacy, and various other methods
  https://www.nilc.org/get-involved/
- National Immigration Forum: is another leading immigrant advocacy group that offers various programs to integrate immigrants into the workforce and obtain citizenship
  http://immigrationforum.org/about/
- Lambda Legal: mission is to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and those with HIV through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.
  http://www.lambdalegal.org/issues/transgender-rights

LOCAL

- Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights: works to protect the best interests of children who come to the U.S. on their own
  http://theyoungcenter.org/
- Illinois Refugee Mental Health Task Force: *a volunteer task force committed to ensuring access and promoting awareness around mental health needs and services for refugees and immigrants in Illinois*
  http://www.ilrmh.org/
- Illinois Business Immigration Coalition: provides a voice for Illinois businesses in support of common sense immigration reform that supports Illinois' economic recovery, provides Illinois companies with both the high-skilled and low-skilled talent they need, and promotes the integration of immigrants into our economy as consumers, workers, entrepreneurs and citizens
  http://www.illinoisbic.biz/
- Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition, Ad-hoc Committee for Refugee/Immigrant Children & Trauma: The ICTC is a voluntary collaboration of organizations that tracks emerging trends, promotes education among professionals and the public, and offers support to a broad network of agencies that work with and for children and families who experience trauma.
  www.lookthroughtheireyes.org
- National Immigrant Justice Center: dedicated to ensuring human rights protections and access to justice for all immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers
  http://www.immigrantjustice.org/