



Tip Sheet: Supporting Migrant Populations

Background: Understanding the Situation

Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and people with undocumented status often experience trauma from displacement, family separation, and uncertainty about immigration status. These stressors often increase the risk of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation. Migrant populations are much less likely than others to use mental health services. Studies have shown that the rates of mental health service usage among Latino, Asian, and African migrant populations are consistently lower than the national average of 13 percent for the general public, with some migrant groups utilizing services at a much lower rate than non-migrants (Derr, 2016). Additionally, fear of deportation and distrust of systems often prevent migrants from seeking help, further exacerbating their mental health struggles.

Research and Best Practices for Crisis Counselors Working with Migrants

1. Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy

- **Make no assumptions.** Migrants have diverse cultural backgrounds that shape their emotional responses and crisis behaviors. Counselors should practice **cultural humility** and recognize that stress and coping mechanisms can differ across cultures.
- Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers often endure significant trauma, such as war, violence, or family separation. Counselors should be sensitive to these experiences and avoid actions or language that could reawaken trauma.
- Many migrants may not speak English fluently, so it is important to provide services in their native language. Counselors should use trained interpreters when needed and **avoid using family or friends**, as this can compromise confidentiality and increase stress.
 - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline counselors may access interpretation assistance in more than 200 languages during 988 Lifeline interactions. These services are paid for by the national administrator of the 988 Lifeline network and are provided at no cost to 988 Lifeline network centers. To access these services, 988 Lifeline counselors dial 1-866-874-3972. The counselor then inputs their center's client identification number, which can be found on the 988 Lifeline's Network Resource Center.

2. Trauma-Informed Care

- Migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, are often survivors of severe trauma. Counselors should use trauma-informed care principles, focusing on **safety, trustworthiness, empowerment, and collaboration**.
 - Focus on the strengths of the individual and encourage them to take an active role in their recovery. Help identify their unique abilities, resilience, and past successes.
 - Involve the individual in decision-making and respect their autonomy in determining the direction of care. Discuss the available choices so they can make informed decisions.



3. Legal Concerns and Fear of Deportation

- Do not ask directly about legal status. **Explore the situation.** One of the biggest barriers for migrants seeking crisis support is the fear of being reported to immigration authorities. Counselors should reassure individuals that **crisis services are confidential**, except in cases of imminent risk of harm to self or others, and not shared with immigration authorities. This transparency helps alleviate fears and encourages migrants to seek the support they need.

4. Mental Health Resources and Referrals

- Migrants may not be aware of mental health resources or may not have access to affordable care. When identifying and providing resources, counselors should provide migrant-specific resources whenever possible:
 - **Culturally competent mental health services:** Help migrants connect to providers who understand their cultural context.
 - **Community-based organizations:** Many grassroots organizations specialize in providing services to refugees, asylum seekers, and people with undocumented status.
 - **Legal assistance:** Many migrants need legal guidance regarding their immigration status. Counselors should be able to refer individuals to free or low-cost legal services, including those that offer support to migrants facing deportation or detention.

Resources for Migrants in Crisis

- **National Immigrant Justice Center:** Provides legal and support services for immigrants, including refugees and asylum seekers.
 - Website: <https://immigrantjustice.org/>
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** Offers culturally competent mental health support and resources specific to migrant populations.
 - Website: <https://www.nami.org/>

Sample Language Crisis Line Counselors May Use When Supporting Migrant Populations

<i>"I want you to know that this space is safe, and you can share as much or as little as you're comfortable with."</i>	<i>"Quiero que sepa que este espacio es seguro, y puede compartir tanto o tan poco como le resulte cómodo."</i>
<i>"I know sometimes people feel unsure about reaching out for help because they're worried about what might happen next. Is there anything that has made it hard for you to get the support you need?"</i>	<i>"Sé que a veces las personas se sienten inseguras al buscar ayuda porque temen lo que pueda suceder después. ¿Hay algo en particular que le haya dificultado obtener el apoyo que necesita?"</i>
<i>"Anything you share with me stays confidential, and I will not report this to anyone, including immigration authorities, unless there's an immediate danger to you or someone else."</i>	<i>"Cualquier cosa que comparta conmigo se mantendrá confidencial, y no se reportará a nadie, incluyendo a las autoridades de inmigración, a menos que haya un peligro inminente para Usted o para otra persona."</i>



<i>"If you're worried about getting in trouble because of your immigration status, please know that crisis services are here to support you, not to report you. We're focused on your safety and well-being."</i>	<i>"Si le preocupa su estatus migratorio, por favor sepa que los servicios de crisis están aquí para apoyarlo/a, no para reportarlo/a. Nuestro enfoque está en su seguridad y bienestar."</i>
<i>"There are many resources available to help you navigate this. Whether you need help with your emotional health or finding legal support, I can connect you to services that will respect your needs and concerns."</i>	<i>"Hay muchos recursos disponibles para ayudarle a navegar con esto. Ya sea que necesite ayuda con su salud emocional o encontrar apoyo legal, puedo conectarlo/a con servicios que respeten sus necesidades y preocupaciones."</i>
<i>"Whatever you decide to do next, I'll be here to support you. You have the right to access help, and we can explore what feels safest for you."</i>	<i>"Cualquiera que sea su decisión sobre qué hacer a continuación, estaré aquí para apoyarlo/a. Tiene derecho a acceder la ayuda, y podemos explorar lo que se sienta más seguro para Usted."</i>

References

- 988 Lifeline. (n.d.). [FAQ: Is the 988 Lifeline available in other languages for non-English speakers?](https://988lifeline.org/faq/calling-the-988-lifeline/faq-is-the-988-lifeline-available-in-other-languages-for-non-english-speakers/) Vibrant Emotional Health. <https://988lifeline.org/faq/calling-the-988-lifeline/faq-is-the-988-lifeline-available-in-other-languages-for-non-english-speakers/>
- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). [Immigration and refugees](https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration-refugees). <https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration-refugees>
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- National Alliance on Mental Illness. (n.d.). [Hispanic/Latinx immigrants and first-generation Americans](https://www.nami.org/your-journey/identity-and-cultural-dimensions/hispanic-latinx/hispanic-latinx-immigrants-and-first-generation-americans/). <https://www.nami.org/your-journey/identity-and-cultural-dimensions/hispanic-latinx/hispanic-latinx-immigrants-and-first-generation-americans/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). [Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services](https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/tip-57-trauma-informed-care-behavioral-health-services) (Treatment Improvement Protocol Series 57). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/tip-57-trauma-informed-care-behavioral-health-services>