

# FAMILIES BELONG TOGETHER

## BRAVE CONVERSATIONS: IMMIGRATION EDITION

### INTRODUCTION

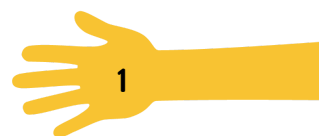
*Talking with family members who don't agree with you over the holidays is HARD and immigration can be one of the topics that gets most heated. We've all had those tense, uncomfortable conversations about complex topics, and this year, we want to be there to help when the border and immigration come up at the dinner table. Here are some FAQs on what's really happening and quick tips to help you talk about it when your Uncle Bob brings up "those immigrants."*

***We'll start with some topline, and give you more detail below:***

The truth is, the Biden administration has not yet repealed the inhumane, racist, and xenophobic Trump-era policies that have left tens of thousands of people stranded at the border, in detention centers, and still separated from their families, like we were promised. In fact, the Biden administration conducted more ICE flight deportations in 2021 than in 2020 and has expanded racist policies like Remain in Mexico and Title 42 that rolled over from the Trump administration.

A big reason why this is happening is misinformation -- those bits of fake news you might hear at the dinner table. With media spreading lies and fear-mongering narratives that create fear of people of color, migrants, and immigration, the Biden administration has acted accordingly and continues policies that actually contribute to the "chaos" at the border or the supposed "danger" that "open borders" might bring.

To be clear, the crisis at the southern border -- where there are tens of thousands of asylum seekers waiting for legal entry into the U.S. -- has been created because the government has all but halted asylum processing completely and forced people to wait in makeshift camps for sometimes years on end rather than opening up a safe, legal and dignified pathway into the U.S.



**TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE THIS CONVERSATION, THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:**

1. Tips for talking about hard topics
2. Common ideas about immigration and how to respond
3. Facts about what's really happening
4. Info about what we can do about it
5. Additional resources for further research



## SO, HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT THIS WITH YOUR FAMILY? HERE ARE SOME STEPS:

### Step 1

#### **Take a DEEP BREATH.**

Remind yourself that most people are coming from a good place and repeating what they've been told. We're all still learning. Try to listen deeply and encourage honesty. In order to learn and grow, we must dare to be brave, not safe. And conflict is good! It gives us an opportunity to identify miscommunications, learn, and grow.

When you start these conversations, your family members and friends might bring up what's happening around the country and have thoughts and feelings. Let them share. Make sure they feel heard. Encourage honesty and bravery.

### Step 2

#### **Elevate shared values.**

Reinforce empathy, acceptance, and respect.

You can start with our Families Belong Together values. We all agree that children should never be forcibly separated from their parents or caretakers. We can all agree that it's inhumane to lock up people who are fleeing danger in detention centers with little to no resources or send them back to the danger they're desperate to escape with their family members and children. We wouldn't ever want to face these conditions ourselves. It's important to get to a point where both parties agree on the importance of the values we hold dear to our hearts.

### Step 3

#### **Relate to the familiar.**

Talk about your family's origins. Ask about your family's history. Bring in examples from friends, neighbors, and community members who are immigrants.

## Step 4

### **Bring in the facts.**

Center the real narratives, numbers, and people who are affected by racist and cruel policies. Dive into the direct consequences immigration policies have on children and families. Use new sources that are credible -- make sure to discern the difference between a fact and opinion and emphasize why this is the crux of growing together in concert.

## Step 5

### **Deliberate.**

Frame the debate, help people understand the potential harms and what is at stake. Give the information needed to reinforce support.

## Step 6

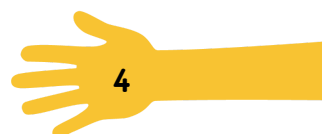
### **Create alternative visions.**

Paint a picture of the world that can be like if people took action to achieve justice together. Imagine what we could achieve when we all fought for the families that need us the most. And when people say it's too complicated, reframe the conversation so that next steps for creating a world where children and family separation and detention no longer exist is possible.

## Step 7

### **Provide opportunities for action.**

When alternative visions become intangible, people tend to lose hope. But there's so much we can do today to create change. Encourage involvement in our movement.



## READY TO CONVERSATE? HERE ARE 10 COMMON (& PROBLEMATIC!) IDEAS WITH HELPFUL RESPONSES TO USE:

### 1. *“Immigrants are invading the United States.”*

- a. People coming here are not invading the U.S.--they're fleeing extreme danger and seeking safety for their families, a decision any one of us would make in the same position. I think I would leave if there was nowhere safe to be in my country and my family was in danger too. People would rather be with their families, with the familiar, in their own culture. People flee because they have no choice. It's extremely hard to start over as an immigrant in the U.S. and those choosing to leave everything behind do so because there is no other option. I know the news makes it seem like there are record levels of migration, but migration levels have actually risen and fallen many times historically. And usually, that's because of conditions in the countries people are leaving, and not even related to U.S. immigration policy. In fact, I just learned that border apprehensions were higher in the 1960s than they are today. Read more about the history of border encounters [here](#).

### 2. *“Aren't there more people coming than ever before?”*

- a. Migration levels go up and down over time, but what's really important is to look at the reasons people are coming. They are coming here for safety--literally fleeing for their lives--and to be with their family members here and the people they love.

### 3. *“But why don't people come 'the right way'? They shouldn't break the law.”*

- a. Surprisingly, there actually aren't many legal pathways to come to the U.S., and those that exist greatly favor wealthy immigrants from European countries. Current policies have almost entirely shut down the asylum system for people seeking safety. Seeking asylum has been a legal right since 1948, and has recently been shut down unlike ever before. There are virtually no legal ways for people to seek safety in the U.S. right now. And for people who have been here for a long time, it is nearly impossible for many to gain legal immigration status. For those hoping to come, backlogs are egregious. For example, as of December 2021, if a U.S. citizen files an application for their adult married child in Mexico to immigrate to the U.S., the current wait time for an application is [more than 22 years!!](#) [This infographic](#) was helpful to me to explain how few pathways to citizenship exist for undocumented people in this country.

### 4. *“But how do we protect U.S. jobs and interests? They're stealing our jobs.”*

- a. I understand why you think this. This is a long-standing myth that has been repeated over and over in the media. But it doesn't hold up. [Studies show](#) that overall, immigration helps the economy and raises wages for all workers. Furthermore, undocumented people are often forced into exploitative and physically demanding jobs that U.S. citizens do not want to do. While some people have stories of losing a job to an immigrant, many people lose jobs to automation and other U.S. citizens all the time, and immigration is not a driving factor in job loss.

5. *"It's always been this way. It didn't use to be a problem."*

- a. It can feel like this is just the way things are, but it hasn't always been like this. In fact, many of the most harmful policies and agencies were created more recently. For example, the Department of Homeland Security, the parent agent of border patrol and ICE, was created in 2003. That's younger than me! [Looking back further](#), it didn't even used to be considered a crime to cross the border in the early 1900s century! I had no idea that historically, this is a relatively new notion.

6. *"People are illegal. They broke the law."*

- a. A human being cannot be illegal. The term "illegal" is dehumanizing. Instead use "undocumented immigrant" or "non-citizen." If there were more pathways to citizenship and legal immigration status, as immigrants have been fighting for for decades, they would use them. But they don't exist. There is no Ellis Island anymore, where people can arrive and be processed. Especially under current policies, when people have to wait years in Mexico under worse conditions than where they came from, they are often left with no choice but to find another (more dangerous) way into the country just to get to safety.

7. *"A border wall wouldn't be so bad."*

- a. Maybe it feels like it wouldn't affect your life, but building a border wall would have a lot of negative consequences for a lot of people. It's environmentally disastrous, separates communities that have long been intertwined across the border (including trade), cuts through indigenous nations, endangers people seeking safety, and further shuts down access to seeking asylum once. [It will also be really expensive! It would cost nearly \\$20 million per mile and in total, the project would cost more than 11 billion U.S. tax-paying dollars.](#) We could instead use the funds to help migrant families seeking safety to process legal asylum applications that cost a minimum \$1,000 and help resettle them into our communities. We can be a nation that welcomes people instead of punishing them for wanting a better life.

8. *"Immigrants are criminals."*

- a. Statistically, immigrants are far less likely to commit crimes than U.S.-born people, but we often see this trope play out in the media. [Over 22% of immigrant characters on TV were associated with crime.](#) Changing the way immigrants are represented is important to undo this harm.

9. *"Immigrants don't pay taxes."*

- a. I hear this a lot too, but factually, this doesn't hold up. Undocumented immigrants pay billions into the Social Security Trust Fund (funds they'll never have access to when they retire), federal income taxes (though they're denied federal aid, benefits, and services), and state and local taxes. [Refugees who become U.S. citizens pay, on average, more in taxes than they receive in government benefits.](#)

10. *"Why don't they speak English?"*

- a. Immigrants express themselves in the ways they're most comfortable, just like we do. Many immigrants speak more than one language, which is so impressive! [And I just found out that the United States actually doesn't have an official language :\)](#)

# GET PREPARED WITH THE FACTS:

- Right now, the border is essentially shut down. That means **people seeking safety--fleeing because of persecution, environmental disasters, war, extreme poverty, and other forms of violence--do not have any real way to do so at a point of entry**. Previously, people and families fleeing danger who arrived at a port of entry along the U.S. Southern Border (or an airport or other land or water port of entry) and expressed a fear of returning to the country they came from would have the chance to go through a court process in the United States to prove their eligibility to stay here. That process was extremely limited to begin with and riddled with discrimination and bureaucratic backlogs. But now, that process doesn't even exist in the first place! The chaos we're seeing at the border is actually created by the U.S. government's policies and back-ups, not the other way around.
- There are two major policies in place right now--both holdovers from the Trump era--that are stopping people from being able to exercise their legal right to seek asylum in the U.S. The policies are called **Title 42 and the misnamed "Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP),"** more commonly known as Remain in Mexico. What does each of these policies do?

♥ Title 42 is a perversion of a public health policy that the Trump administration put in place and the Biden administration has been continuing to use to expel arriving migrants under false covid safety pretenses. Under Title 42, migrants are immediately expelled without due process or any chance to present their case for asylum. Public health officials have decried the use of the policy and affirmed that it does not stop the spread of COVID-19, but the Biden administration has chosen to keep it in place. Black migrants are particularly targeted by Title 42 expulsions and [more than 130,000 migrants and families have been expelled](#) since the restrictions were put in place. You can read more about Title 42 Expulsions [here](#).

♥ Remain in Mexico, officially called "Migrant Protection Protocols" or "MPP," is a policy that illegally requires people seeking safety in the United States to wait in Mexico for months or years before their court date. Remain in Mexico was designed by the Trump administration and is cruel, dangerous, inhumane, and a violation of the international human right to seek asylum. You can read more about Remain in Mexico [here](#).

♥ These policies force people into dangerous conditions and many people fleeing for their lives fall victim to violence, kidnapping, and torture after being denied their right to seek asylum in the United States. In the first nine months of President Biden's term, there were [more than 7,000 cases of kidnapping and other violent attacks on people who were expelled from seeking safety in the U.S.](#) Additionally, some parents are forced to make the impossible decision to send their children into the U.S. alone to save their lives or enter the country via increasingly dangerous parts of the Southern border, often leading to extreme injury and even [death](#).

- Under the Biden administration, things have stayed as bad as they were under Trump or gotten worse, despite Biden's campaign promises to build a more humane immigration system. Here are a few examples:

♥ From January 1, 2021, through the end of October 2021, there were [4,808 ICE Air Flights](#) compared with [4,101 during the same time period in 2020](#).

♥ The number of people in immigration detention increased from [15,444 on January 7, 2021](#) to [22,129 on October 1, 2021](#), under the Biden administration.

♥ As of October 18, 2021 the Biden administration carried out [1,283,415 deportations and expulsions](#).

## WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT: A VISION FOR A JUST FUTURE FOR IMMIGRANTS.



We absolutely have the resources and vision to build a humane, just, and functional system to welcome people seeking safety. We are just missing the political will. The United States could welcome all those seeking safety through humanitarian structures that allow people to enter *without detention*, to travel to the communities where they will live, and to have the resources and support they need to be safe and to thrive in this country. We could offer housing, case management, support navigating new social systems, and more. We actually

already do a lot of this for people designated refugees by the U.N. who are resettled in the U.S. (a tiny, tiny fraction of the overall population of displaced people in the world). But we could do more and we could do it for a lot more people. In fact, we could use the money currently spent on border enforcement, detention, and deportation to fund it, and we would all be safer and live in a more rich, vibrant country.

And there are actually a lot of people already working on making this vision a reality and you can join that work too! One crucial step is having these hard conversations in our own communities and with our own friends and families. Hopefully, this guide is a helpful tool to do that.



## HERE ARE SOME OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DOING INCREDIBLE WORK TO SUPPORT IMMIGRANT JUSTICE:

### Join us at Families Belong Together

*Also, sign up to be a part of our national Welcome With Dignity campaign that we have joined together with 80 other organizations to call for a restart of legal processing at the border.*

United We Dream

Mijente

Undocublack

Haitian Bridge Alliance

RAICES



There are also thousands of local organizations tirelessly supporting immigrants and fighting unjust immigration policy all over the country. Look into local organizations in your area and see how you can support them!

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- [Detention Watch Network Reports](#)
- [Debunking Immigration Myths](#)
- [Timeline of Historical Immigration Policy](#)
- [Define American: Change the Narrative, Change the World Report](#)
- [#WriteInclusion Factsheets - Migrants](#)



## FEEDBACK

We're always looking for feedback on what works and what doesn't. Let us know if you use this guide and any changes you recommend for other users by contacting us at [info@familiesbelongtogether.org](mailto:info@familiesbelongtogether.org).

