



Talking to Kids About ICE, Immigration Raids, and Community Safety

A Short Guide for Parents

Why these conversations matter

Children often hear about immigration enforcement from friends, social media, or news, even when adults think they are not paying attention. Honest, calm conversations help children understand what's happening while helping them feel safe and supported. The goal is not to explain everything at once, but to answer questions truthfully and reassure children that the adults in their lives are there to protect them.

What ICE is and how to explain it to children

ICE stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It is a federal law enforcement agency that is part of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE enforces immigration laws inside the United States and also investigates certain cross-border crimes and trafficking.

You might explain this to children in simple language:

“ICE is a group of officers who work for the federal government and enforce immigration laws. Sometimes that means questioning people about where they live or their immigration status, and detaining/stopping them.”

Understanding what is changing right now

Recently, the federal government has greatly increased funding for immigration enforcement. In the past, ICE's annual budget was under about \$10 billion. New laws and funding plans are allowing tens of billions of dollars more to be spent over several years, potentially more than \$80 billion in total funding related to detention and enforcement.

In practical terms, this funding is being used to:

- Hire more officers
- Expand enforcement operations
- Increase detention space
- Build or expand detention facilities

A kid-friendly way to explain this:

“A budget is a plan for how the government spends money. When the budget for something gets much bigger, it means that activity happens more often. That's one reason people are talking about immigration enforcement more right now.”

Another way to help children picture this:

“Imagine a school that used to have one hall monitor and suddenly hired ten more. You would probably see hall monitors more often, and feel like you were being watched or controlled. Something similar can happen when a government program gets much more funding.”

Why children may be hearing more about this

Because of these changes:

- News coverage has increased
- Families may be discussing safety plans
- Schools and community groups are sharing information

You can explain:

“When something in the government changes a lot, people talk about it more. That doesn’t mean you are in immediate danger, but it means adults are paying attention and working to keep families safe.”

Focus on systems, not stereotypes

Children often look for one person to blame. It helps to separate people from systems, and explain that large events happen because of laws and policies.

You can say:

“Officers are people, but ICE is also a government agency with rules and power. Many adults are working to make sure those rules are fair and that people are treated with dignity.”

“These situations happen because of government rules and decisions.”

“Some people believe those rules should change, and they are working to make them fairer.” This helps children understand that problems can be addressed and changed.

Acknowledge feelings and normalize them

Children may feel scared, confused, sad, or upset, even if they are not directly affected.

You can say:

“It’s normal to feel worried when you hear about things like this.”

“You can always talk to me about how you’re feeling.”

“I’m here to help keep you safe.”

You can also teach simple ways children can calm themselves:

Take slow, deep breaths

Talk to someone they trust

Draw or write about their feelings
Remind themselves: "I am safe right now."

Reassure children about safety

Children need to hear clearly:

"You are not responsible for solving these problems."
"Adults at school, at home, and in the community are working to keep children safe."

What children should know if approached by immigration officers

Keep this simple and focused on safety, especially for younger children:

Children are not in trouble.

They do not have to answer questions alone.
They should find a trusted adult immediately.

Practice simple phrases:

"I need to talk to my parent or teacher."
"I can't answer questions without a grownup."
"I need to call my family."

For older children, you can also explain:

They do not have to open the door to strangers.
They have the right to remain silent.
They can ask for a trusted adult or lawyer.

Practicing calmly can help children feel prepared rather than frightened.

Create a family safety plan
Children feel safer when they know there is a plan.

Make sure children know:

Their full name and their parent or guardian's name
A phone number they can call
Who will take care of them if needed
Where important documents are kept (for older children)

Practice the plan together so children feel confident and prepared.

Teach children who they can talk to

Remind children they never have to face scary situations alone.

Trusted adults may include:

- Parents or caregivers
- Teachers or school staff
- School counselors
- Family friends or neighbors

Let children know there are always people who want to help them feel safe.

- Help children see helpers and community care
- Children cope better when they know people are working to help.

You might talk about:

- Community groups supporting families
- Teachers creating safe spaces
- Neighbors helping one another

You can ask:

“What is one way we can help people in our community feel welcome or supported?”

Encourage empathy and kindness. Children may also worry about friends or classmates.

You can teach them:

- Listen if a friend is upset
- Say “I’m here for you”
- Tell a trusted adult if something feels wrong

These small actions help build a caring community.

Keep the conversation ongoing

You don’t need to explain everything at once. Short, honest conversations over time are more effective than one long discussion. Let your child’s questions guide you.

Closing reassurance

The most important message children need to hear is simple:

“You are safe. You are loved. And there are many people working every day to take care of our community.”