



MOORPARK COLLEGE

Inclusive Language Guide: Supporting Students who are Undocumented



What is inclusive language?

- Inclusive language is an effort to create space for all identities (gender, socio-economic status, race, sexual orientation, etc.) to feel safe and welcomed. People who utilize inclusive language refrain from using terms, expressions, jokes, etc. that would exclude particular groups of people.

Why is inclusive language important?

- Language is powerful. We can easily harm others with the phrases we use without even knowing it. Our intent may not be malicious, but our impact can be negative on the person we are interacting with. To avoid causing harm to those with already marginalized identities, utilizing inclusive language can help everyone feel safe, welcome, and represented.

Things to avoid saying...	Why?	What to do or say instead...
Illegal, wet back, criminal	These terms imply that the student or their family is at fault. It can also feel dehumanizing and offensive.	Undocumented or DREAMer
Why don't you just apply to be a citizen?	The citizenship process is not that simple or often is impossible. For many people who are undocumented, if they could apply to be a citizen, they would.	Don't say anything. Instead, educate yourself. Do research to better understand the challenges undocumented students face.
The rest of us had to get here the right way, why can't you?	This statement is oversimplifying the citizenship process and is offensive. It also assumes that everyone who is a citizen went through the same process.	Don't say anything.
What's wrong with going back to Mexico?	Not all undocumented people are originally from Mexico. Even so, many undocumented people have grown up in the U.S. This is their home and often all they have ever known. Some also don't speak the language of their native country.	Don't say anything
No matter what, you still broke the law.	It is not your place to share your opinion on immigration. As a university employee, your job is to support students regardless of their identity.	Don't say anything
How could your parents bring you here knowing you would have to struggle so much?	This statement places blame on the parents and can feel shameful. Remember, people leave their country of origin for many reasons. It is not your place to suggest their decision was wrong.	Only if a student has shared their status with you and seems open to talking about it may you say, "Tell me more about your family history."

Things to avoid saying...	Why?	What to do or say instead...
I noticed you have missed several classes. Are you overwhelmed because you are undocumented?	Although perhaps well intended, this statement assumes a student holds an identity they may not. You must question where that assumption is coming from. Is it their skin color? Not all undocumented students look the same. Never directly ask a student about their status. Allow them to share for themselves.	I noticed you haven't been in class. Is everything okay? What kind of support do you need?
You are not the <i>real</i> criminal.	Who is the <i>real</i> criminal then? You might be trying to show support for undocumented people, but at the same time you are also implying that other people in their community may be at fault.	It is a shame that people don't understand the complexity of immigration policy and that undocumented people are being blamed for so many problems in our society.
We are a nation of laws. Obey them!	This implies that the student knowingly broke the law. Again, remember you are here to support students regardless of their identity.	Don't say anything.
Oh wow, you are undocumented? I never would have guessed.	You should question yourself, what am I basing this assumption off of? Skin color, perceived socio-economic status? Not all undocumented people look the same and not all are from low-income families. Over-generalization reinforces stereotypes.	Thank you for sharing your identity with me. What kind of support do you need? Are you finding community on-campus? Have you heard of Moorpark College's Free Legal Immigrant Services?
Why don't you just get married?	Again, although you may have meant well, this is not an appropriate comment to make. Students should not be forced into marriage in order to get citizenship. This statement oversimplifies the student experiences as undocumented and takes away from the overarching need for immigration reform.	Don't say anything.
You are so brave!	Although this phrase sounds supportive, it is actually tokenizing the student's experience. It assumes that they are the person that made the decision to come to the U.S. when often it was their parents who made the decision to come to the U.S. when often it was their parents who made the decision. Yes, the student has overcome challenges to be here, but we do not want to sound patronizing.	It sounds like you have overcome a lot in your life.

Things to avoid saying...	Why?	What to do or say instead...
<p>Chain migration is ruining everything. Way too many people are allowed to enter our country with little to no requirements. We just let whoever in.</p>	<p>Chain migration is a term that has been used frequently in the media and by politicians. The term is referring to the “Family Reunification,” which is one of the avenues to gain legal immigration status. Using this term may not appear to be offensive in nature, but it creates the illusion that legal immigration is an easy process and that large amounts of people are able to abuse the system. This is a false understanding of our immigration policy. Those who utilize the family reunification go through a strict screening process just like they would if they used other avenues for legal immigration. The process can take upwards of 10 years.</p>	<p>Don’t say anything. Instead, do your research to better understand immigration policy and the difference paths to citizenship.</p>