

HANDOUT 2



Reflective Writing Prompts for Providers Working With Immigrant Families

Exploring emotional responses, assumptions, and relational dynamics in work with parents who have experienced migration-related family separation and reunification.

These prompts are informed by the study's findings and grounded in a psychodynamic perspective and principles of self-reflection, countertransference awareness, empathic attunement, ambivalence, and the therapeutic relationship. They invite mental health providers, social workers, and other family support professionals to reflect on their own emotional responses, assumptions, and interactions with immigrant parents. They can be used for individual reflection, journaling, or clinical supervision.

1 Understanding Parents' Experiences

- What assumptions might I hold about why a parent migrated or lived apart from their child?
- How do I distinguish between a parent's choices and the circumstances that constrained those choices?
- Am I allowing parents to define their experiences in their own words?

2 Exploring My Emotional Responses

- What feelings arise in me when I hear parents describe their experiences of separation or reunification?
- Do I feel an urge to reassure, rescue, advise, or find solutions? What might these reactions tell me?
- How might my personal experiences or beliefs influence how I respond to parents?

3 Recognizing Parents' Emotional Connections

- How do I understand a parent's continued emotional presence in their child's life despite physical distance?
- Am I unintentionally equating physical absence with emotional absence?
- How can I recognize and affirm the ways parents have remained "siempre ahí" ("always there") for their children?

4 Attending to Loss, Guilt, and Identity

- How might migration-related experiences affect a parent's sense of self and identity as a mother or father?
- How comfortable am I sitting with a parent's grief, guilt, anger, or ambivalence without trying to resolve these feelings?
- What might remain unspoken in a parent's narrative, and how can I create space for these feelings to emerge?

5 Reflecting on Reunification

- Do I assume reunification should be a joyful experience?
- How might I respond when a parent expresses love and relief alongside resentment, guilt, or disappointment?
- How can I support parents in making sense of changes in their relationships with their children?

6 Reflecting on the Helping Relationship and the Shared Emotional Experience

- How might parents experience me as a provider, particularly when discussing painful or vulnerable experiences?
- Am I listening to understand, or am I interpreting their experiences too quickly?
- How can I create a relationship in which parents feel emotionally heard, respected, and understood?
- How might my emotional responses influence what parents feel comfortable sharing or withholding?
- How might our different cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, or positions of power shape our relationship?
- What happens between us when I misunderstand a parent's experience? How might I recognize and repair that moment?
- Am I making space for parents' perspectives, even when they differ from my own understanding?
- How might parents' responses to me influence my own feelings, assumptions, or ways of engaging with them?

Informed by the study *What About the Parents?* by Dra. Cheryl Aguilar, LICSW, PhD. Read the dissertation: [ProQuest](#). More resources at [siempreahi.org](#).