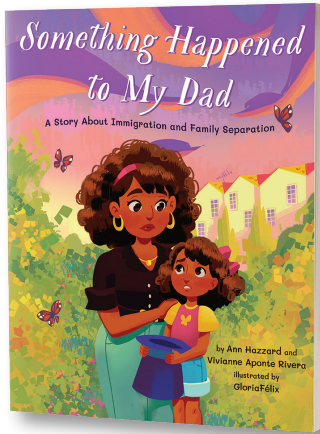




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

## Immigration: Helping Kids Understand Mixed-Status Families and Family Separation



*Something Happened to My Dad: A Story About Immigration and Family Separation* is an important book about the immigration and family separation experience. Available in English and [Spanish](#), this critical resource has an extensive Reader's Note with a glossary for Spanish language words and vocabulary list with kid-friendly definitions of immigration-related terms, adult-child dialog scripts, strategies for fostering cultural sensitivity, special considerations for mixed-status families, information about the illustrations, and [additional resources](#). In the story, Carmen is sad and scared when she learns her father has been detained because he is an undocumented immigrant. In this realistic and empowering tale, Carmen learns that through community and love, she can find strength in herself and maintain her connection with her Papi, who has been detained because of his immigration status.

Here's a short excerpt from the adult-child dialog section with conversations that might be initiated by children. It includes sample answers for parents and caregivers to questions from children.

### **Q: Why did Carmen's mom tell her to keep it secret that her dad was in a detention center?**

A: Carmen's mother might not have wanted people to treat them differently or feel sorry for them. Sometimes people keep secrets because it is upsetting to talk about something. Have you ever kept something secret so you would not have to talk about it?

### **Q: Why do people need papers to stay in the country?**

A: Countries have laws about who can move in and governments give people documents ("papers") to show that they have been approved to stay. Some people in the U.S. want our immigration laws to be strict, while other people believe that we should have laws that welcome many immigrants.

Check out *Something Happened to My Dad* here:  
[www.apa.org/pubs/magination/something-happened-dad](http://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/something-happened-dad)

### Q: What happens after someone without papers is detained (arrested)?

A: Once a person without papers is detained, they are taken to a detention center to wait until they can meet with an immigration judge. Sometimes the person is released on bail (money paid) and can instead wait in their home in the U.S. until their court date. Not everyone qualifies for or can afford to pay bail. The immigration judge decides if the person can stay or must go back to their home country (be deported). In recent years, some children have been separated from their parents or family while they wait for their court date with the immigration judge.

### Q: Are immigrants without papers criminals?

A: Most crimes, like stealing, drunk driving, or assault with a weapon, are actions that can hurt other people. That is why those behaviors are against the law or illegal. Immigrants without papers can be arrested for crossing the border illegally. But this is not a crime that directly hurts other people. Most immigrants, with or without papers, obey U.S. laws designed to protect us.

### Q: A boy in my class hardly speaks any English. Why?

A: Some families speak a different language at home and the children do not learn English until they start school. Other children have recently arrived in the U.S. and only speak the language spoken in their home country. What did you think about your classmate when you realized he did not speak English? Some people have negative thoughts about people who speak a different language. This is called prejudice.

#### This Article's Authors

**Ann Hazzard, PhD, ABPP**, is a co-author of *Something Happened in Our Town* and *Something Happened in Our Park*. As a psychologist, she has utilized therapeutic stories in treatment with children and teens. As a community advocate, she has focused on children's behavioral health and social justice.

**Vivianne Aponte Rivera, MD**, is a child and adolescent psychiatrist who is originally from Puerto Rico. She is on the faculty at Tulane University School of Medicine and has worked with immigrant families throughout her career. Dr. Rivera and Dr. Hazzard were faculty members at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta at the same time, each working at clinics serving mostly minority and immigrant families.

### Something Happened to My Dad

*Something Happened to My Dad* is a realistic and empowering tale where Carmen learns that through community and love, she can find strength in herself and maintain her connection with her Papi, who has been detained because of his immigration status.

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