

Understanding the Unique Needs of Refugee Families and Youth



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Definition of Refugee

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugee as person who *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."*



Phases of Refugee Experience



PRE-MIGRATION

Exposed to war, experienced or witnessed violence
(kidnapping, killing, rape and torture)

Disruption of basic needs (education, health care,
food sources)

Separation from family members, caregivers

Experienced chaos, instability, unpredictability

Witnessed death, dead bodies, injury to others

Phases of Refugee Experience



MIGRATION

Similar dangers continue during the escape from war or violent area

May reside in refugee camps for years; conditions are often crowded, dangerous

Continued limited resources such as food, education and health care

Interviews to establish refugee status

Worries about the future

Phases of Refugee Experience



RESETTLEMENT

Refugee assistance includes ESL classes, job training, employment placement, cash assistance, legal services, and health care – strong emphasis on self-sufficiency

Language, Employment Barriers & Acculturation
Stress

Mourning many losses and dealing with family stress

Current Acculturation Stress



Cultural, religious and linguistic differences between home and school

Pressures from refugee community to keep to their traditions

Pressures at school to fit in and be like others

Racial and ethnic discrimination

Language proficiency

Inadequate educational preparation

Current Family Stress



Different levels of acculturation among family members

Refugee youth serve as primary interpreters for family

Role reversal, ambiguity of family roles

Unresolved conflict: marital, generational, community

Bad news from country of origin

Immigration issues, family reunification, reconfiguration

Socio-economic stresses

Losses Experienced by Refugee Families



Family/extended family and community support systems

Economic security, possessions, and social status

Geography, climate of home

Social, cultural and political structures of home

Shared cultural values, shared faith, spiritual beliefs

Familiarity, stability, and sense of trust and control

Helping Refugee Families in Schools



Recognizing signs of trauma

Helpful messages for refugee families and youth

Learning about cultures and countries of origins

Recognizing Signs of Trauma



Easily startled with everyday noise and movement

Struggle with sustaining attention on the assignment and retaining new information

Can have recurrent memories of traumatic experiences

Display lots of anxiety and can be easily agitated

Sleep problems (nightmares, irregular sleep pattern)

Experience body aches and pains or other physical problems

Recognizing Signs of Trauma



Strong emotions (anger, sadness) are easily provoked and hard to control

Marked lack of emotions, and feeling empty inside

Sense that no one REALLY CARES

Fearful, especially when faced with new and unfamiliar situations

Difficulty trusting adults or youth

Show heightened sensitivity to issues of fairness

Helpful Messages for Traumatized Families and Youth



This is a safe place

You are likable, capable, needed, and can contribute to our school and community

You have choices, you can influence what happens to you

You cannot overwhelm me

You are not alone; I and others are here to listen and help

There's hope for you to have a good future

Resiliency Among Refugees



Recognize that refugee families and youth had to overcome many challenges before arriving to the US

Emphasize strengths and help refugees build strong communities with leadership opportunities

Most refugees have a high regard and value education

Outreach to refugee families by sharing information about US school system and parent involvement

Learning About Cultures/ Countries

Educate yourself about families cultural background

- ☒ Excellent resource Center for Applied Linguistics @ www.cal.org/rsc/ Cultural monographs on major refugee groups resettled in U.S called Fact Booklets available online in full text.

In addition:

- ☒ Learn about cultural background from refugees
- ☒ Consult with families, community leaders to learn about schools in the students' country of origin and refugee camps
- ☒ Follow the world news, consider important events, Sep. 11th

Important Websites



United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) web site: www.unhcr.org UN agency that leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Variety of news and videos with stories and updates about refugees.

U.S. Committee for Refugees: www.refugees.org Updates on refugee news and testimonials from refugees. Refugee Voices section.

International Rescue Committee: www.rescue.org Variety of video clips highlighting refugee stories. Look for Ten Refugee, One Journey.

Important Websites



Colorado Refugee Services Program:

www.colorado.gov/cdhs/refugee-services Information about refugees in Colorado.

Respect International: www.respectrefugees.org Canadian organization working on raising awareness on refugee issues. Lists many resources for educators.

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children Services BRYCS:

www.brycs.org Resources and publications designed specifically to help schools provide quality education to refugee children and youth.

How can we help refugee families?



“ Make their spirit alive like by not ridiculing their language, listening with patience to their problems though hard to understand and trying hard not to offend or discourage them.”

High School student from Tibet

Jewish Family Service Can Help



Consultations and additional training sessions for school staff on social-emotional and mental health needs of refugees are available

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To learn about other JFS programs such as *Refugee Mental Health Program* and *Russian Mental Health Program*

call 303.597.7777