

Advice, support, and coping suggestions

Remember that mental health can be difficult to talk about, so if your child approaches you and tells you how they are feeling, make sure you listen to them, to the things they say, and the words they use

Although there are still some stigmas around mental health, remember that it is improving, and that it shouldn't deter people from speaking up about how they are feeling

Speak to their school and ask them if they would speak to the school as a whole about refugees and what asylum is and why it is needed. This can help reduce possible bullying and ignorance to the situations

Recognise the difficulties and obstacles your child(ren) may have to overcome, including getting used to a new way of life – ie cultures and behaviours, and that it could take time for you all to integrate into your new society and communities

There is a possibility of hostility between parent and child – perhaps your child feels a level of resentment towards you/parents for removing them from their home, or from loved ones, especially for those without an understanding as to why asylum was necessary

Take the time to learn about the social events that happen in your new community, that you may not have experienced before – such as sleepovers, or birthday party etiquette – anything really that differs to what you are used to, so not to be caught off-guard

Refugees & Asylum Seekers information



The Lotus Mental Health

www.thelotusmentalhealth.org

About refugees and asylum seekers

A large number of refugees and asylum seekers will have likely experienced traumatic events and suffered losses that others may not be able to comprehend. This could be due to exposure to violence, war, or separation from loved ones – either permanent or temporary.

Many children who are seeking asylum will encounter a variety of mental health disorders and difficulties including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), self-harming, depression, anxiety, and other behavioural problems.

Once a family arrives at their new place of residence, they can often be met with isolation, loss of loved ones, cultural changes, community changes, and struggles with accessing home, social, health, and financial means.

A combination of these difficulties, as well as the possibility of being met with hostility, along with the trauma and upset that resulted in their asylum status, can all result in significant mental health difficulties.

Signs and symptoms of exposure to traumatic events:

- Regular stomach-aches
- Headaches
- Fear/anxiety/worry in excess
- Sadness
- Irritability
- Thoughts about the trauma that won't go away
- Refusal to talk about anything that has happened
- Behaviour that suggests the trauma is happening now
- Struggle to regulate emotions and behaviours
- Pain without a physical cause
- Feeling hopeless
- Having nightmares/trouble falling asleep/struggle staying asleep
- Difficulty paying attention
- Getting distressed when they hear/see things that remind them of the trauma
- Don't want to play/join in with others/activities they used to enjoy

Coping Mechanisms

If your child(ren) are struggling there are things that you can encourage your child to do that can help them. They are:

- Nobody should go through difficult times alone, and this is something that your child needs to learn to understand, because of this, it is important for your child to learn how to open up to people about how they are feeling. A parent, carer, trusted family member, a trusted friend, a counsellor – it doesn't matter who, as long as your child feels comfortable talking to someone who they trust, about how they are feeling.
- Encourage your child to get the thoughts that are in their head – out. An effective way that they can do this by keeping a diary. Simply writing down how they are feeling can be really useful. Not only will that work because it helps them put a place for their negative thoughts, but it can also be used as a point of reference for any particular anxiety triggers that they didn't realise they had.
- Writing a letter – this might seem a bit daft, but if they can write letters to themselves, particularly after particular difficult days, they can use the letters to read back and see themselves, through their own words, that they have overcome bad days in the past, and therefore they know that they are capable of overcoming them again