

SURVIVING WAR, SURVIVING PEACE SESSION 3

HOPES FULFILLED OR DREAMS SHATTERED THE CHALLENGES OF RESETTLEMENT

Suggested time – 120 minutes

Session content

Loss and grief
Cultural adjustment
Learning a new language
Adjusting to school
Lack of community networks
Social exclusion and racism
Trauma of parents and family
The compounding of previous trauma
The impact of detention

Session outcomes

At the end of this session participants will be able to:

- Identify the range of difficulties refugee students can face on resettlement
- Differentiate between the settlement needs of refugee students as compared to those of migrant students
- Apply this knowledge to the school setting
- Understand the importance of good settlement services and family support in nurturing the resilience and integration of refugee students
- Identify the additional supports which may be required by students who have been in detention.



Participant handouts

- Copies of PowerPoint slides for Session 3, printed as handouts
- Copies of background readings for Session 3

Materials needed

- DVD *Surviving War, Surviving Peace*
- PowerPoint presentation for Session 3
- Data projector and laptop with external speakers or DVD player, TV monitor and OHP
- Plain flipchart and marker pens

Session structure

Display slide 1 – The Challenges of Resettlement

Use the following notes to introduce this session:

- Resettling in a new country is usually a very difficult process.
- The trauma that refugees experience on the refugee journey is compounded when they arrive in their resettlement country and face a whole range of new difficulties to do with fitting into a new culture and learning a new language, while dealing with everything they have experienced.
- It is very important for people working with refugee students to understand the importance of settlement environment to either heal or exacerbate trauma.
- For children and young people, school is usually the most important portal they have into their new community.
- Although resettlement can enable refugee families to positively and successfully reconstruct their lives, it can also be a time of additional trauma and family breakdown, especially soon after arrival.
- This situation can be exacerbated if there is inadequate access to appropriate support and services.
- This session looks at ways in which the settlement experience can present challenges for refugee families.
- It is just as important as the refugee journey in explaining why some refugee students experience difficulties in school and in the broader society

Display slide 3 – Challenges include

(This slide is referenced to Session 3 background readings, Sections a, b & c.)

Use the following notes to talk about the challenges faced by refugee students:

- **Loss and Grief**

Refugees have lost all that they know and love. They:

- are separated from family, friends and community, and often members of their family have been killed.
- have left behind their homes and homeland and their familiar way of life.

- **Cultural adjustment**

Refugees come from very different and diverse cultural backgrounds. When they arrive here they are suddenly expected to fit into Australian society.

For children and adolescents, this creates tension between their:

- traditional roles
- customs and behaviours, and
- the “Australian” way of life.

- **Language difficulties**

Once refugee children have learnt English, they often have to assume the adult role at home to translate for their parents who can't speak the language.

This role reversal is very unhealthy for children who are already traumatised by the refugee experience.

- **Adjusting to school**

Refugee children have often experienced a disruption to their education prior to their arrival. This disruption tends to continue for some time in Australia.

When they first arrive at school refugee children:

- can have trouble making friends
- experience difficulty keeping up at school because they don't understand English
- are very behind other children their age.

Display slide 4 – Challenges include

(This slide is referenced to Session 3 background readings, Sections d, e, f & h.)

Use the following notes to present further challenges:

- **Lack of community networks**
 - One of the great traumas of the refugee experience is the social disintegration and family upheavals that occur.
 - In resettlement, refugees are cut off from their traditional community networks and their extended families
 - This leads to feelings of isolation and lack of support.

- **Social exclusion and racism**
 - Refugees are marginalised and often made to feel unwelcome in Australian society.
 - They experience racism such as verbal abuse, harassment, job discrimination and violence.
 - This has an extremely negative impact on children's and adolescent's psychosocial development.

- **Trauma of parents and family**
 - The parents and family of refugee children are also traumatised by the refugee experience.
 - They are often unable to provide for the developmental needs of their children, and unable to give them the support they require.

- **The compounding of trauma**
 - Because of the trauma refugee children have already experienced prior to arrival, challenges in resettlement can themselves be very traumatic and can produce extreme behavioural reactions.

Display slide 5 – Refugee Girls in Resettlement

(This slide is referenced to Session 3 background readings, Section g.)

Use the following notes to explain the different needs of refugee girls:

- Refugee girls have different experiences and needs from boys in resettlement.
- They often experience more of a clash between the traditional roles expected of them by their parents, and Australian culture.
- They may also have specific:
 - psychological
 - sexual and
 - reproductive health needs
- These specific health issues need to be approached sensitively and in a culturally appropriate manner.
- Refugee girls might not want to talk to men about these problems.

Display slide 6 – Children in Detention

(This slide is referenced to Session 3 background readings, Section i.)

Use the following notes to discuss the additional issues for refugee students who have been in detention:

- Most children who have been in detention will have survived all of the experiences of other refugee children.
- In addition they will have lived through:
 - The trauma of detention in a country of hoped for freedom
 - Witnessing violence and self harm by other detainees
 - Parental depression

Activity

- Divide the participants into small groups, and divide the listed challenges for refugees between them, so that each group is working on different aspects of the issue.
- Ask the groups to list at least three examples of difficulties for each of the areas they are looking at. For example, what are three difficulties that young people might have adjusting to school?
- Ask them to think how the trauma of previous experiences might be compounded. For example
 - how they might react to the police when they first arrive in Australia if the police brutalised their family while they were refugees
 - how it must feel coming into an Australian school, when you have only ever sat in an open sided hut and repeated work parrot fashion, with a teacher who often beat the children
 - what it must be like in a home where every family member is scared and depressed.

Share the small groups' work with the combined group and conclude with a discussion of:

- how these challenges make refugee students feel,
- how they impact on their ability to resettle happily,
- how they influence their behaviour and ability to do well at school, and
- how they affect their psychosocial development.

Display slide 7 and/or 8

- Ask if participants understand how difficult the resettlement process can be for refugee students and their families.
- Conclude by pointing out that trauma is not only something in the refugees' past but often continues while they are adjusting to life in Australia.
- Participants should appreciate the critical importance of the resettlement environment in helping refugee children recover.



Refugee Children at the Sudanese Border, Kenya