Caring for Syrian Refugee Children

Welcoming Young Children & Their Families

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Supporting Child Care in the Settlement Community / Soutenir les services de garde d’enfants dans la communauté d’accueil
Agenda

- CMAS
- Caring for Syrian Refugee Children Program Guide
- The Impact of the Refugee Experience on Families with Young Children
- Children’s Settlement Needs
- How You Can Help
- Helpful Resources
Question

Does your organization offer child care support to parents?
CMAS

- Supports Care for Newcomer Children (CNC)
- Supports settlement organizations
- Provides information and resources

cmascanada.ca
The biggest challenge when assisting refugee families with young children is:

__________________________________________________

(fill in the blank)
Caring for Syrian Refugee Children

Caring for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children & Their Families
The Impact of the Refugee Experience on Families with Young Children

- Culture Shock
- Trauma and Mental Health
- Separation Anxiety

**The Impact of the Refugee Experience on Families with Young Children**

For a period of time or to speak very little in their first language. They may even stop speaking at home and will not respond to a caregiver who speaks their language. Children may also block the new language and can have difficulty listening to and processing it.

A child’s self esteem is also impacted by culture shock. This may decrease their confidence to try new things. They may look for more assistance and reassurance from adults about how to play with things. Children who feel insecure may also need extra support (e.g., being held if they will accept this, or being in a smaller or other protected space).

**Trauma and Mental Health**

Because many Syrian children have witnessed violence or been victims of violence, they may have some form or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In extreme cases, there may be permanent damage to the child’s development.

However, if children are resilient and have strong family bonds, they may be able to overcome the impact of these traumas.

*Traumatised children may be unresponsive and almost catatonic and may not have the words to express their traumas. Children who are “wooden” and unresponsive are more at-risk than those who cling to their parent and cry for attention. Traumatised children may refuse touch or other comfort, even from family members. This is a response by which they form a “shield” to keep out any possible harm from others. Many children also try to block all memory of trauma.*

**Separation Anxiety for Young Refugee Children**

A child’s first attachment to their parent is vital. As the parent responds to their needs, a nurturing bond is built. This bond is the basis for the child’s sense of security, self-esteem and a cornerstone for their development. For this reason, a child and family’s attachment must always be respected and valued. Ensuring a gradual and respectful separation of parents from children is especially vital when dealing with families who have recently experienced trauma and loss.

*Imagine you are a refugee child. Everything has changed in your life. Your grandmother who lived you so much and took care of you isn’t with you. Your winter clothes, hat, tunic and scarf. Everything feels and smells very different. You don’t understand what is happening but you sense the tension in your family, especially from your mother.*

One day you are taken to a children’s room. It is noisy and bright. There are less other children there without their mothers. Your mother speaks reassuring words to you but her voice is strained and she is upset. Suddenly you realize that she is leaving you. Will she ever come back? You are terrified.
Children’s Settlement Needs

- Home Language Maintenance
- Language Acquisition
- Dealing with Change
- Building Social Networks
- Achieving Well-being
Do parents / instructors encourage children to speak English?
Supporting
Home Language Maintenance

1. Maintenance of home language

• Learn a few key words and use the child’s language

• Talk to parents about why it’s important to keep their home language

• Have books available in the home language
1. **Maintenance of home language**

1. **Language acquisition**

- Use simple and consistent language and phrases
- Face the child when you talk to them to assist their learning
Helping Children Deal With Change

1. Maintenance of home language

1. Language acquisition

1. Dealing with change

- The parents’ migration experience is different from the child's
- Expect children's behaviour to change
- Have a gradual separation plan
Helping Children Develop Social Networks

1. Maintenance of home language
   - Allow child to participate in group activities when they are ready

1. Language acquisition
   - Partner the child to encourage friendship and build a safety net

1. Dealing with change

1. Developing social networks
Supporting Children’s Well-being

1. Maintenance of home language
2. Language acquisition
1. Dealing with change
1. Developing social networks
2. Achieving well-being

Consider the whole child

- Physical health
- Emotional health
- Mental health
- Social experiences

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Caring for Syrian Refugee Children
Poll

How often do you currently work with child care staff to support families?

1. Never
2. Not often
3. Sometimes
4. Often
How You Can Help!

1. Work as a team with child care staff
   - Be informed about the child care
   - Tell the parents what to expect
How You Can Help!

1. Work as a team with child care staff

1. Provide information on a child’s settlement
   - Maintain the home language
   - Expect the child to have behaviour changes
   - Importance of gradual separation
Helpful Resources

• “New in Canada” Parenting Support Series - Health and Safety brochures
• All About Child Care
• CMASCCanada.ca
• Caring for Syrian Refugee Children: Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and Their Families
Thank you!

Presented by Tricia Doyle