

Refugee Week

Day 2: Consideration of best practice and general advice for supporting Refugee children and young people in schools and settings

For schools, it may be a helpful starting point to consider that many of these children show great resilience and cope well with school, seeing it as a place of safety and stability. Practical help and advice maybe a helpful starting point as opposed to a therapeutic care plan."

(Mitchell, 2015)

Refugee children & young people may have experienced difficult situations, leading to them fleeing their homes and countries to seek safety in another country. It is noted that they may have experienced situations, which they may find distressing or continue to affect their learning and behaviour. By using best practices, schools can help these children thrive.

Dr Tina Rae (2023) has identified 4 key aspects educational professionals need to provide support for refugees:

1) Develop an understanding of trauma and anxiety

Chronic stress, and the effects of trauma and anxiety can impact on our thinking, including affecting concentration, memory, and task organization. Staff can allow extra time for tasks and provide structured support.

Staff to be aware that feelings of anxiety may appear to present as anger or embarrassment, and recognise behaviour as a form of communication. See Day 3 information for more about trauma.

2) Develop an understanding of how to create trauma-informed classrooms and safe spaces

Implementing a trauma-informed classroom is supportive for all young people, not just refugee children, and it provides:

- Belonging:** Make them feel welcome, part of the group & valued.
- Organisation:** Offer consistent routines, with visual task lists/tools.
- Predictability:** Explain routine changes clearly with visuals.
- Regulation:** Teach emotional literacy, model & communicate emotions, and provide safe spaces.
- Adaptation:** Reduce processing demands, adjust tasks recognising any language barriers, and give clear structure & plans for tasks, which are demonstrated & modelled clearly.
- Relationships:** Build empathetic, supportive connections, modelling social skills and valuing and celebrating strengths and achievements.

3) Develop an understanding of how to use self-regulation skills and strategies from key therapeutic approaches

Self-regulation skills develop through co-regulation from a consistent, sensitive and nurturing caregiver relationship, which over time develops the skills and strategies to understand and manage their own emotions, by connecting the emotional parts of the brain (limbic system) to the 'thinking' part of the brain (cerebral cortex). See Day 3 information for approaches to try.

4) Develop awareness of how to maintain self-care routines and peer support for staff teams

Support the staff working with and offering therapeutic or emotional support with managing their own emotional needs to be able to effectively assist students. See Day 4 information for ideas to support staff wellbeing.

Refugee Week

Day 2: Consideration of best practice and general advice for supporting Refugee children and young people in schools and settings

Top tips or aspects for supporting refugee children

National Education Union for teachers (NEU, 2015) suggests providing support in 6 main areas:

Ask for help & support

- Identify how to get interpreters when needed
- Seek advice from services like Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Advisory Teaching Service or Educational Psychology Service
- Check if they are entitled to funding e.g. Free School Meals
- Determine home language & if any staff speak this language
- Use trauma-informed practice & best practice advice
- Use resources like Children of War Council website

Provide induction

- Ensure their names are correctly pronounced/spelt
- Respect their right to talk about their experience
- Teach key terminology e.g. break/toilets/book/pencil etc.
- Familiarise them with routines and the environment
- Find out about religious/dietary needs
- Support them to know the adults & children in the school
- Display vocabulary in their home language (widget offers dual language templates)
- Encourage use of their home language to secure skills

Create a 'welcoming climate' where they can feel valued

- Structure discussions with empathy & understanding
- Use a culturally-sensitive lens & language
- Use clear, concise language with visual support/modelling
- Use their home language in greetings, where possible/desired
- If they wish to, use refugee pupil voice in learning
- Recognise and celebrate all pupil successes & strengths

Utilise the skills of other children

- Arrange for introduction to other same-language families
- Encourage older or more familiar refugee children to support newer refugees
- Make sure they have access to equipment needed for work
- Establish a 'buddy system' to support them through the day
- Involve pupils in making a book or media about school to take home

Make the curriculum accessible

- Set suitable goals & make them clear
- Recognising all curriculum subject progress, including subjects which are less language-based
- Use worked examples and modelling
- Use multi-sensory approaches & associated visuals
- Maximise technology & bilingual dictionaries
- Support for EAL to develop English skills
- Have consistent routines & familiar activities
- Use 'everyday' items in teaching

Classroom organisation maximise support & inclusion

- Encourage refugee children to be in pairs or part of small groups of pupils to model good language
- Emphasise non-verbal communication/body language
- Promote sharing similarities & interests to connect pupils
- Prioritise collaborative activities & games in the class/group
- Practice listening & speaking

"Perhaps most important is to focus on the positive. These children will have skills and a range of abilities that can shine through the language barrier and cultural differences. Helping them to find their strengths and sharing these with the class can provide the basis for assimilating the child into school."

(Suzanne O'Connell, 2015)