



Welcoming refugee children to your school

A National Education Union teaching resource



On Good Days

On good days I laugh

On good days I am kind

On good days I am magical!

On Bad Days

On bad days I feel frightened

On bad days I feel like crying

On bad days I feel sorry

On bad days I feel like hitting

Poem by a pupil, from Newham Teachers' Association
Refugee Week Poetry Competition

Introduction

Refugee children joining your school may well have experienced trauma and have disturbing memories of leaving home and the journey that followed. They are now likely to be confronted with classes without a single familiar face and no-one speaking their own language.

Any pupil joining a school or class other than at the start of a key stage has a challenging transition facing them. For children from refugee families, whenever they start school, the challenge of fitting in is likely to be most acute.

In many ways, the task faced by teachers is the same with regard to all new children. The goal is to make them feel welcome, provide support, encourage friendships, and make sensitive assessments about language needs, learning needs and wellbeing.

Creating Refugee-friendly Schools

These practical suggestions are intended to help teachers to create refugee-friendly classrooms. Some are obviously more applicable to younger children whilst others require greater maturity; but most will be of benefit to children of all ages.

Only teachers can decide which are appropriate in their teaching situation and relevant to their subject. Teachers must judge how to make them appropriate to the ages of their pupils and in secondary schools the subjects they teach.

The suggestions are grouped under six headings.

- Ask for help and support
- Provide induction
- Utilise the skills of other children
- Create a climate in which refugee children feel welcome and valued
- Make the curriculum accessible
- Classroom organisation

Refugee Voices Project – National Education Union (NEU)

The NEU has produced a series of film clips of refugee children and young people talking about their feelings and experiences when joining a school in the UK. Teacher notes for use in training and discussion at staff meetings and INSET days accompany the film clips and also link to the practical information in this guide.

www.teachers.org.uk/equality/equality-matters/refugee-teaching-resources

Ask for help and support

Teachers should be able to:

- find out about the availability of interpreters – so there is not a reliance on other children as translators – for support, in making early assessments and talking to refugee children about their recent experiences;
- determine whether home language teachers or support assistants are available;
- identify the possibilities for refugee pupils to further develop their first language through links with supplementary schools, libraries or cultural centres;
- enquire about specialist resources and support which may be available either through the local authority, academy chain or other organisations;
- clarify the level of in-school support which will be available for refugee children and draw up a timetable for small group and/or individual support with a clear agreement about when it is most appropriate for that to be within or out of the classroom;
- contact other relevant agencies and seek counselling support for themselves where young people have made a distressing disclosure; and

- find out about local organisations and facilities which could be helpful to new children and their families – particularly after-school and holiday projects or local support groups for young people who are refugees or asylum seekers.

Provide Induction

Refugee children will benefit if teachers and schools:

- respect their right to a silent period (sometimes lasting several months) or to not talk about recent events;
- give them opportunities to talk, sensitively and not initially in front of an audience of other children, about their family history and their recent circumstances;
- find out about any religious or dietary requirements they may have;
- ensure that their names are pronounced and spelt properly by all staff;
- ensure they know the names of other pupils and other adults that they will meet, (particularly lunchtime supervisors and break time staff);
- teach 'survival' school and classroom terminology including toilet, book, desk, playtime, etc., and other important words;
- display key vocabulary for particular subjects in both English and, where possible, the child's first language;
- familiarise children with the layout of the school, playground, rules, expectations and routines;
- check on their well-being after break times;
- arrange for relevant local authority specialist staff to make visits home to involve parents or guardians of refugee children to as great an extent as possible;
- emphasise to parents or carers the importance of maintaining the children's first language.

Utilise the Skills of other Children

- arrange for introductions to any other same-language pupils and families;
- establish a 'buddy' system which has status, is supervised and monitored, involves a range of children, not just the usual helpful pupils, and is the focus of classroom work and discussion;
- encourage older, or more familiar, refugee children to provide support and comfort to newcomers;
- involve other pupils in making a book, or photographic record, or perhaps a film about the school that children can take home to show their families; and
- ensure they have 'tools' for homework such as pencils, colours and other necessary items.

Create a 'climate' in which refugee children feel welcome and valued

Schools can do this by:

- being sensitive to religious observances and dietary needs;
- structuring discussions about refugees, empathy, diversity, mutual respect and human rights within relevant places in the curriculum;
- approaching refugee children as resources for learning;
- encouraging use of home languages where appropriate, e.g., all pupils could learn greetings and goodbyes;
- using multilingual signs around the school and displays of representative cultural items;
- obtaining or involving pupils in creating multilingual dictionaries, storybooks and other resources;
- identifying and giving praise to children's strengths and successes; and
- using correct and precise language in clear 'easy to hear' sentences.

Make the curriculum accessible

This includes:

- making purposes and goals as clear as possible;
- using drama, puppets, art, mime and pictorially-based tasks – including photographs, charts, flow diagrams, storyboards, maps;
- ensuring that achievements in subjects which are less language-based, e.g., mathematics, science and PE, are recognised;
- assessing literacy and English language skills;
- using bilingual dictionaries and web-based translators and apps;
- maximising use of ICT;
- using cards, draughts, chess, backgammon, dominoes, noughts and crosses and board games, which may already be familiar, perhaps in different forms, as learning resources and to encourage interaction with peers;
- playing music and singing songs;
- using pictures for labelling, matching, sorting, classifying;
- using books with a strong visual content, or no words, for a range of year groups;
- making available a wide variety of mathematical apparatus; and
- providing audio visual support; taped stories and other ICT based support tools.

Classroom Organisation

This includes:

- grouping refugee children with other children and young people as language models;
- encouraging all pupils to bring in toys, artefacts, and/or photographs so they can share 'stories', interests and hobbies;

- generating discussion about pupils' common experiences of change, moving home, being frightened and loss;
- exploring with pupils visual, non-verbal methods of communication e.g., body language, facial expressions;
- prioritising interactive activities which encourage collaboration between pupils and help to speed up English language acquisition, for example, information gap activities and barrier games;
- emphasising listening and speaking skills;
- using dolls, artefacts, toys, food and other 'everyday' items as teaching aides; and
- using tickets, shopping lists, bills, 'everyday' documents, newspapers and magazines.

Refugee Week – Different Pasts Shared Future

Refugee Week is held every year in the third week of June. It is a great opportunity for schools and colleges to celebrate the enormous contribution made by refugee pupils and staff. The National Education Union is the first education partner to be involved in Refugee Week.

Find out more at
www.refugeeweek.org.uk

Principles of Effective Practice

Key guiding principles for teachers new to teaching refugee children are set out below:

- A 'can do' approach focused on children's strengths
- Getting communication with parents right
- Active steps to counter prejudice about refugees
- The host children are central to creating refugee-friendly schools

- Understand the impact of trauma, separation, bereavement or post-traumatic stress
- Celebrate the contribution made to your school community by new arrivals
- Take a child-centred approach

(i) **A 'can do' approach focused on children's strengths**

Teachers know, as research has shown, that self-esteem and learning are linked. Self-esteem is boosted by a combination of achievement and a sense of worth and being valued. A focus on what refugee children can do – as with all children – will help them learn more quickly and allow other children and staff to recognise more readily the contribution which refugee children and their families can make to the class, school and community.

It can be difficult to accurately assess a child's real age. Some children will look older than they are because they might have lived lives where they cared for younger children, or have travelled extensively over Europe.

(ii) **Getting communication with parents right**

Send clear communications to all parents that your school welcomes all children and is refugee-friendly.

Explain the actions that the school is taking to ensure that pupils joining the school, who are refugees, and their families, feel welcome, safe and supported.

Emphasise the expectation that it is the role of the whole school community, including parents, to contribute to making the school refugee-friendly.

You may wish to hold a parents' meeting at which you can explain the school's ethos around inclusivity and allow parents/carers to raise concerns or ask questions openly.

(iii) **Active steps to counter prejudice about refugees**

Stereotypical representations or media-fuelled simplifications about refugees do not help to generate understanding and empathy amongst the adults and children of the host community. Each new refugee child is an individual with a unique story to tell.

Refugee children are not likely to have had much if any say about ending up in a school in the UK. Some will be unaccompanied and will have left family members behind.

Education provides the key to new and hopefully more secure lives for refugees. Many schools and teachers are succeeding in providing a haven of peace, stability and opportunity for refugee children. Teachers play a fundamental and positive part in the lives of refugee families and especially for refugee children.

The arrival of new children provides opportunities for children of all ages to learn about empathy, sharing and caring, respect and kindness. Teaching can challenge and deconstruct racism and stereotyping and can help to develop positive attitudes.

Empowering members in Croydon

Croydon NEU invited members to come together to discuss practical classroom steps and strategies alongside how to campaign locally to ensure Croydon local authority is funded adequately. Croydon is one of several gateway authorities and has welcomed many unaccompanied refugee youngsters over the decades.

Taking part in whole school programmes has enabled hundreds of schools to promote a broader and more positive approach towards inclusion, tolerance, cohesion and citizenship. Two include:

- the International Values-based Education Quality Mark; and

- UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award

(iv) **The host children are central to creating refugee friendly schools**

Establishment of 'buddy' systems whereby newcomers are allocated individual guides from amongst other pupils is a good way to involve pupils in supporting refugee children new to a school. Discussion about the roles and responsibilities associated with being a buddy is essential and enables as many children to become buddies as possible.

Being a buddy must not be thrust upon children without preparation and guidance. Nor must the responsibility of being a buddy be allowed to become tokenistic or routine. The more that being a buddy is an opportunity open to many children not just a chosen few, the more successful it is likely to be. Perhaps the 'honour' of being a buddy should rotate or different children should be chosen for different activities or times of the day.

High status, clear expectations and proper recognition are likely to make buddy systems successful. They require adult monitoring by teachers and all support staff, including play leaders and meal time supervisors.

Buddying can only be part of the successful induction of refugee children. All children must be encouraged to contribute to the creation of a supportive and welcoming environment.

(v) **Understand the impact of trauma, separation, bereavement or post-traumatic stress**

Many young refugees, and especially unaccompanied refugees, will have experienced extreme, distressing and traumatic events that led them or their families to flee from home. This can include witnessing family members being killed or losing their lives, surviving rape, being recruited as a child soldier or living for extended periods in a war zone, disaster zone or refugee camp. Every refugee child will cope in different ways. Often, children begin to confide in trusted adults after a period of time and this can include teachers.

Ask your SMT for clarity as to where and how to refer children for emotional or psychological support so you know what you can offer children/families if they want support.

You should follow your school procedures for seeking psychological support if needed.

Creating Space and Belonging in Schools – The Art of Possibilities

The world is now a place in which more people have been forced to flee their homes than at any other period since the Second World War. Half the world's 50 million refugees are children.

'Belonging' is that sense of being somewhere where you can be confident that you will fit in, and where you feel safe in your identity. In this transient world, the importance of young people finding a place where they feel rooted and that they can belong cannot be underestimated.

In these turbulent times, teachers have a critical role to play in helping develop that sense of place and belonging; opening the minds and hearts of children and young people; and contributing to the development of a 'wise' democracy.

The NEU - NUT section worked with Professor Kathryn Riley (UCL, Institute of Education) and Cuban Dance Poet Tio Molina, on a project called Creating Place and Belonging in Our Schools: The Art of Possibilities.

Learn more in this short video.

Video 1: The Art of Possibilities: Place, Belonging & Schools in Our Global World www.lcll.org.uk/leadership-of-place.html.

Freedom from Torture

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims from Torture

This organisation has training and information for teachers and other professionals who are working with those who have survived torture.

www.freedomfromtorture.org

(vi) Celebrate the contribution made to your school community by new arrivals

Refugee children and their families are additions to the community and bring their strengths, abilities and cultural knowledge into the classroom. Think about how you can celebrate this addition as part of your work to value every child's cultural background and individual strengths.

Many organisations have ideas of activities which your class could use to welcome refugees, even if your school is not currently receiving refugees.

Why become a School of Sanctuary?

- Create a sense of safety and inclusion for all
- Develop pupil understanding of what it means to seek sanctuary
- Dispel negative myths
- Increase student voice and promote active citizenship

Meeting the three principles to becoming a School of Sanctuary

1. Learn about what it means to be seeking sanctuary
2. Take positive action to embed concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within your school
3. Share your vision and achievements – be proud

<https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org>

(vii) Take a child-centred approach

Try and think about which parts of the curriculum might need adaptation. If the PSHE topic includes relationships and family references, think about the needs of students separated from family or with bereavements in their past. Survivor guilt can be a powerful influence and unpredictable behaviour may be linked to previous experience. Young people will choose different times – if at all – to disclose to you what has happened that led them to leave their home.

NEU Resources

Whole school and class based assemblies, lesson plans and booklists about refugees and their experiences produced and recommended by NEU teachers can be downloaded from www.teachers.org.uk/equality-matters/refugee-teaching-resources

Useful Websites

Further information about the Refugee Voices Project resources, other teaching resources and books for primary and secondary teaching about issues relating to refugee children and young people can be found at:

National Education Union – Refugee Teaching Resources

www.teachers.org.uk/equality/equality-matters/refugee-teaching-resources

Amnesty

www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/lesson-refugees-and-asylum#.VfMH9n2y7W5

www.amnesty.org.uk/tags/education

www.amnesty.org.uk/tags/teachers#.VfMlfX2y7W4

International Values-Based Education Quality Mark

www.valuesbasededucation.com

My Bright Kite

www.mybrightkite.org

Nola Ellen Training

www.nolaellenttraining.co.uk/refugee-awareness

Oxfam

www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/schools-of-sanctuary

Red Cross – Teaching Resources

www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Teaching-resources

Refugee Action

www.refugee-action.org.uk

Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Schools of Sanctuary

<https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/>

Star Network (Student Action for Refugees)

www.star-network.co.uk

TES

www.tes.com/teaching-resource/refugees-lesson-resources-6020241

UNHCR – Educational Resources for Teachers

www.unhcr.org/pages/4ab346796.html

www.unhcr.org.uk/resources/educational-resources.html

UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award

www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa

