

young refugees

Providing emotional support to young separated refugees in the UK



Save the Children

what is this guide about?

This guide offers advice on how to provide emotional support to young separated refugees and asylum-seeking young people in the UK (often described as unaccompanied children). These are children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or their legal/customary primary care giver.¹ In this guide the term young separated refugee² is used to describe these children and young people.

This guide focuses on the emotional support needs of young separated refugees and provides the following information to support workers:

- an introduction to young separated refugees and their experiences
- practical ways of providing emotional support and guiding principles in this work
- mental health issues for young refugees
- a guide to mental health services
- further reading and key contacts.

This guide is *not* about specialist psychiatric support for young refugees with serious or complex mental health problems. These cases should be referred to professional mental health services.

This guide is aimed at support workers who are likely to have the most contact with young separated refugees, including:

- social care workers
- hostel workers
- Connexions personal advisers
- further education college tutors, support workers and teachers
- voluntary agency and refugee community organisation workers
- youth workers.

Providing the right kind of emotional support can reduce the risk of mental health problems emerging. Also, early recognition of mental health problems and appropriate intervention can prevent the escalation of these problems.³

We hope this guide will help you understand the experiences that young separated refugees have been through and the circumstances that they find themselves in. This is the first step to providing the emotional support that many young separated refugees in the UK need.

introduction

“Mental health means much more than just the absence of mental illness. It is about physical and emotional well-being, about having the strength and capacity to live a full and creative life, and also the flexibility to deal with its up and downs.”⁴

There are an estimated 8,500 young separated refugees in the UK, the majority are 16 and 17-year-olds.⁵ Research carried out by Save the Children found that many of the young separated refugees interviewed as part of the research appeared to have emotional or, possibly, mental health problems, although very few of them were receiving any kind of emotional or mental health support.⁶

According to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, it is generally accepted that there is a higher than average rate of mental health problems in refugee communities and that refugees may experience emotional and mental health problems related to their particular experiences.⁷

Experiences that cause acute stress and distress to children and young people include:⁸

- violence, including torture and sexual violence
- loss and bereavement
- sudden change
- injustice
- absence of supportive relationships
- extreme poverty and deprivation
- persecution because of, for example, skin colour, gender, culture
- displacement
- uncertainty about the future.

Many young separated refugees will have had distressing experiences like these. As the next section illustrates, these harrowing experiences might have occurred in the country they have fled from, during their journey to the UK and on arrival in the UK.

Young separated refugees are vulnerable young people who are in need of support and are entitled to it under the Children Act (1989). Support workers can play a key role in supporting the emotional well-being of young separated refugees and helping build up protective factors to limit the impact of the experiences the young people have been through.

The state of an individual's mental health is liable to fluctuate, varying across a spectrum that goes from good through mild problems to severe and complex needs. It should not be assumed that all young separated refugees have mental health problems. This not only stigmatises young separated refugees but can also lead to counter-productive generalisations being made about individuals who in fact come from different cultures, have different experiences and have individual needs.

young refugees' experiences

The experiences affecting the emotional and mental health of young separated refugees can be grouped under three themes: experiences in the country they have fled from; experiences during their journey to the UK; and experiences on arrival in this country. Each theme is looked at in more detail below.

Experience in home countries

Many of the young separated refugees seeking asylum in the UK have fled countries where major conflicts have taken place or where serious human rights abuses occur, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia and Somalia. Some will have witnessed massacres or individual killings. They may also have been tortured or raped, or witnessed this happening to someone else, sometimes a member of their family. A lot of young separated refugees will have been forced from their homes, and will have been separated from and lost members of their family and friends.

“I was 14 years old when I came to Europe. My mother died when I was young. In Zaire my father belonged to an anti-Mobutu party. Secret police entered our home at night and beat my father in front of me. They took him away and I was taken in a separate car to prison. The police questioned and threatened me. They beat me badly and I still have pains when it is cold. I got sick in prison and they took me to the hospital. I managed to escape and went to my uncle's house. He helped me leave the country. I don't know what became of my father.”⁹
(Young man, Democratic Republic of Congo)

Some young separated refugees may have been directly involved in conflict. In 2001 it was estimated that more than 300,000 children below the age of 18 were fighting in armed conflicts around the world. While some children are recruited forcibly, others are driven into armed forces by poverty, alienation and discrimination. Children and young people who are abducted to become child soldiers are sometimes forced to commit violent acts. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers states that child soldiers not only lose their childhood and opportunities for education and development – they also risk physical injury, psychological trauma and even death.¹⁰

The journey

A 17-year-old travelled with her small baby, fleeing persecution of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in 1998. She travelled on foot to Montenegro. They then spent seven days with other Kosovans in a lorry. They were given food and water in order to survive the journey. They had to go to the toilet in plastic bags. At the end of the journey the truck driver put them on a train and they arrived in the centre of a large city where they applied for asylum.¹¹

A recent UNHCR report stated that “refugees are now forced to use illegal means if they want to access Europe at all”.¹² This is true for the great majority of young separated refugees who travel to and enter the UK.

Save the Children research has shown that separated children travel to or across Europe using a variety of routes and many means of transport, including foot, horseback, hitch-hiking, car, lorry, train, bus, small boat, shipping vessel and plane. Their journey may take anything from a few days to many months. The journey is fraught with risk either due to the means of transport or from the dangers of sexual or physical abuse and exploitation. There have been numerous incidents of people suffocating in lorries or ship containers, or drowning or dying in the landing-gear of planes.¹³

A girl was helped to leave a refugee camp in Ethiopia where she had been raped. People in the camp paid her way to Addis Ababa where others helped her go to Europe. She travelled with a business man as his 'wife' and he too sexually abused her.¹⁴

Experiences in the UK

According to recent research undertaken by the British Medical Association, the health of refugees often deteriorates after their arrival in the UK.¹⁵ Young separated refugees face particular problems when they arrive in the UK which are described below.

Loss of family

Often young people lose someone close to them during a time of conflict (this could be because of war or because an individual is being persecuted). The young person may lose parents, siblings, members of their extended family or close friends.

young refugees' experiences

According to the Child Psychotherapy Trust there are two particular concerns relating to loss of family. First, for those whose parents have been killed, they are likely to have been badly affected by the shock and be struggling even to begin to mourn their loss. Second, there are those who have lost their parents without knowing what has happened to them who will probably be full of almost inexpressible fears and anxieties about what might have happened.¹⁶

The financial cost of seeking asylum is phenomenal (human smugglers can charge over \$10,000 per person). It is therefore common for families who cannot afford to seek asylum as a family to save up and pool their resources in order to send at least one of their children to safety. In such situations the young person will feel a sense of loss for the family they have left behind and anxiety for what might happen to them.

Racism, discrimination and bullying

*"At first people would swear at me and I didn't know why... It makes me feel bad, maybe they had a problem with someone else."*¹⁷

Some young separated refugees will experience racism or discrimination in the UK, either direct or institutional, because of their race, colour or immigration status. Bullying is also commonplace in schools and colleges.¹⁸ It can be very difficult for young separated refugees to deal with this, particularly if they are already feeling isolated. Many young separated refugees will have seen the UK as a 'safe' place and to realise that it can also be dangerous is often difficult to accept and young people may start to question if they are safe anywhere. This can have adverse consequences on a young person's health.¹⁹ It may also evoke very distressing memories of persecution.²⁰

Waiting for a decision

Young separated refugees suffer considerable anxiety as a result of delays in getting a decision on their asylum claim,²¹ not knowing whether they will be able to stay in the UK if they get a positive decision or if they will be refused asylum and removed from the UK. One 15-year-old separated refugee, who was waiting for a decision, said

*"...[you shouldn't have to] deal with all these things, you're going to go mad.... They do whatever they want to you. They can throw you out."*²²

While the wait for a decision on an initial asylum application has decreased, the appeals process still takes time and young people are often left in a state of limbo until they receive a final decision.

Some young people may also become apathetic. Not knowing whether they will be able to stay or be sent back may make the young person feel that everyday activities like going to college or making friends are futile.

Asylum-seekers do not have the same entitlements as those with refugee status or other forms of leave to remain. For example, a recently introduced Home Office policy does not allow asylum-seekers to work. This reduces the control people seeking asylum have over their current lives, and which can otherwise help re-build confidence and self-esteem and improve a person's general well-being.

Identity issues

Loss of nationality status, cultural links with their country of origin and immersion in a new culture can bring up issues of identity. According to research undertaken by the King's Fund, identity issues, arising from feeling different from other people, are at the heart of the problems experienced by young refugees.²³ Young separated refugees have been displaced from their familiar environment – their country, culture, home and the values linked with these places. They may find it difficult to adjust to a new culture and country with its different value systems. Living in an unfamiliar home with unfamiliar people can also be disconcerting. Identity issues are exacerbated by the negative media portrayal of refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. In addition, insecurity over identity is particularly common during adolescence, a time of rapid inner change and vulnerability.

A young person may arrive with or without false identification documentation on them when they arrive in the UK. The only ID they will be provided with when they claim asylum is issued by the Home Office and clearly identifies them as an asylum-seeker. This is called an Asylum Registration

young refugees' experiences

Card (ARC), previously known as a Standard Acknowledgement Letter (SAL). The ARC can cause problems in accessing services, for example, people seeking asylum can find it difficult opening a bank account. It also serves as a constant reminder that their status is different. In addition, personal details are sometimes taken down incorrectly on ARCs and SALs, compounding young people's difficulties.²⁴

Loneliness and social isolation

Young separated refugees can often feel isolated from their peer group because of communication difficulties (if the young person has a low level of English), cultural differences, different attitudes to life, a lack of confidence or just because they do not get the opportunity to mix with non-refugee young people. This exacerbates the loneliness young separated refugees are already likely to be feeling, separated from their family and friends in their country of origin.

Lack of support

Save the Children research found that 16 and 17-year-old separated refugees are particularly disadvantaged and lack support. Social services are responsible for their support, which is usually provided for under Section 17 of the Children Act (1989). This means they are not usually allocated a social worker and therefore do not receive much, if any, emotional support through social services assistance. Many young separated refugees in this age group are living in poor-quality or inappropriate accommodation, with little money.²⁵ They are often given minimum support to access mainstream services that they are entitled to, such as registering with a GP, accessing benefits and finding a place at college.

Turning 18

Research by Save the Children found that there is considerable confusion, anxiety and a lack of information about what happens to a young person when they reach the age of 18.²⁶

At 18, if a young person has not had a decision on their asylum application or they are appealing against a decision they will be transferred from social services support to the National Asylum

Support Service (NASS – the adult and family asylum service run by the Home Office). For the majority of young people in this situation this will mean dispersal to another part of the country.²⁷ This will mean losing the support systems they have established since their arrival, including friends, school, college, local community and once more they are uprooted and forced to start again.

Many young separated refugees are refused asylum, but are granted permission to stay until their 18th birthday. Unless the young person has successfully appealed against this decision or has been granted an extension on their leave to remain, they will be expected to return home when they turn 18. For young people in this situation, turning 18 is a constant worry.

Detention

Some young separated refugees, whose ages are being disputed, are detained in the UK.²⁸ Research by Save the Children found that young people who were detained did not understand why they were in detention and felt criminalised although they had done nothing wrong. The problems they mentioned included: being incarcerated with adults, the length of time in detention, the lack of information and the living conditions.²⁹ An added anxiety in detention is that they are not told of the length of detention, unlike British people in prison. A recent report on detention centres by prison inspectors found that the vast majority of detainees did not feel safe and residents were subject to "unacceptable and unnecessary" random strip searches after visits from friends or relatives.³⁰ Detention can be particularly harrowing for young people who have previously been imprisoned in their country of origin.

Trafficking

Young people are being trafficked to the UK to work in the sex trade, in sweatshops and restaurants. There is also evidence to show that the UK may be a stop-off point to other European countries.³¹ Some young people who are trafficked may claim asylum in the UK. Young people who are trafficked will often experience sexual, physical or psychological abuse. They are extremely vulnerable young people.

10 top tips

on providing emotional support



Young separated refugees may have very little support, particularly 16 and 17-year-olds who get limited support from social services and arrive after compulsory school age. You may be one of very few adults that they know. It is recognised by mental health professionals³² that it is particularly helpful for young refugees to have a specific adult that they can talk to and who is there to support them through bad times. This person does not have to have professional skills in emotional support but needs to be someone who is interested and sensitive to the young person's needs. Here are ten practical ways of providing emotional support to young people:

1 Culture, orientation and settling in

Arriving in a foreign country often with no knowledge of how things work and with little or no English can be overwhelming. It is recognised that for many refugees, restoring some form of normality to their life can be the most effective promoter of good mental health and can do much to relieve feelings of sadness and anxiety.³³ You can help a young person bring some form of normality back to their life by explaining how things operate here. This could include where to go shopping, using public transport, finding a solicitor, how to get a school or college place, where the local English language courses are held and where to meet people.

Providing information on the local culture is also important so that the young person understands why people act as they do and so they know what is and is not acceptable behaviour in this country. The young person you are supporting may find it good to talk about their culture and how this differs from the UK.

2 Supportive listening

Help the young person to cope and come to terms with their experiences by allowing them time and space to talk. Listen and help them make some sense of what has happened to them. Young people may feel confused, have

self-doubt, even blame themselves for what has happened in the past. Having a supportive adult to help them think through these issues can help a lot. As one GP put it: *"the catharsis of being listened to for long enough and patiently enough can be all that is needed to restore health to a nearly normal level."*³⁴

Be aware that some young people will not want to talk about past experiences. This may be their way of coping. Take the lead from the young person and don't push them to talk about things they don't feel comfortable talking about. Other young people may want to talk but not feel confident to start up a conversation and will need some encouragement. Therefore, don't wait for the young person to come forward – let the young person know that you are there to listen and help.

Be open with the young person about any concerns you may have about how they may be feeling. Explain why talking about their experiences can be helpful and indicate that it is safe to talk to you. Start with topics that are less likely to be distressing, for example, a general discussion about the country they have come from. Be sensitive to signs of stress. If the young person does get upset, acknowledge their feelings and explain that they are understandable given their experiences. Check with them that they are happy to carry on talking and continue if they want to do so. Try to end the conversation by focussing on a less distressing topic.

If you do not feel comfortable talking to the young person about their experiences or you have concerns about the impact their experiences are having on them, help them find a more appropriate person to talk to (see pages 10–12 and contact details on back cover).

3 Practical assistance

Young separated refugees will need practical support to help rebuild their lives. Research carried out by Save the Children found that many separated children do not receive the level of care and protection that they need

despite the fact that they have the same legal entitlements as British-born young people.³⁵ This includes the right to education and healthcare and the rights enshrined in the Children Act (1989) and Human Rights Act (1988). The list of problems young people may face in the UK is long and includes housing problems, difficulty in accessing school or college places, confusion over the asylum process and difficulty accessing mainstream benefits. Help in sorting out these problems can take an enormous strain off the young people, who are battling not only with immediate practical problems noted here, but also issues of loss and separation and the ramifications of past experiences in the country they have fled.

See the further reading section for information on a free Save the Children guide on the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees and ways to ensure these are met. The key to providing effective practical assistance is to get networked with the statutory and voluntary agencies supporting young separated refugees, for example, social services, solicitors, Connexions, the Panel of Advisers at the Refugee Council and local voluntary projects. Be aware when supporting the young person that they may not want to challenge or question the support they are being provided – they may be very grateful for any support they are getting. As a young separated refugee explains: *"As an asylum-seeker I feel I shouldn't say 'I want this'... I can't complain, who am I to complain?"*³⁶

4 Belonging and social support

Having a sense of belonging and developing a network of other people the young person can trust will help them deal with distressing experiences. Developing a sense of belonging could come from getting support from an individual such as a teacher or tutor, social worker, Connexions Personal Adviser, a hostel worker, a friend at school or college, a befriender or carer. It could also come from being part of a group, whether that's making friends at college, joining a football team, a youth group, or refugee group, or being a member of the religious community at the local mosque, church or temple.

It is important to encourage integration with British-born young people to help young separated refugees get to know the local culture and feel part of it. The young person may also be interested in keeping in contact with people from their country of origin, to retain a sense of belonging to their culture and to get support from people from their own culture.

5 Schools and colleges

*"It is no exaggeration to say that refugee children's wellbeing depends to a major degree on their school experiences, successes and failures."*³⁷

It is recognised by education, refugee and mental health professionals alike that school or college can provide one of the most important settings for activities that promote children and young people's good mental health.³⁸ Schools and colleges can foster a sense of safety and promote inclusion. They can also enable an individual to feel success and encourage personal development. If the young person you are supporting is not going to school or college, find out if they are interested in doing so, and if they are help them get a place. Encourage the young person you are supporting to get involved in extra-curricula activities at school or college, for example 'buddying' or mentoring schemes, homework or lunchtime clubs, which are often geared to helping young people settle into school or college.

6 Befriending and mentoring

Getting the young person linked up with a befriender or mentor at either the school or college they attend or through a local befriending project can provide emotional and practical support. This is an opportunity to have someone else they can regularly talk openly with, who will listen and support them, help them integrate into the local community and help resolve practical problems they might be experiencing. According to research undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation, peer

...10 top tips

befriending support can also help increase a young person's self-confidence and self-esteem.³⁹ See further reading for information on a free Save the Children guide on how to set up mentoring schemes for young refugees.

7 Moving support services

Young people need to be prepared for and supported through the transition from one support service to another. The timing of this change will depend on age and status. For example, if a young person has not received a decision on their asylum claim by the time they reach 18, they will move from social services support to NASS. Young people may be particularly vulnerable and concerned about moving from one support service to another. Transferring support will often mean being dispersed to another part of the country, having to leave friends and start again in an unfamiliar place.

Help the young person understand their rights and entitlements as they change support services. For example, young people who are told they will be dispersed can choose to remain where they are, although if they do stay where they are, they will only receive subsistence support, not accommodation. See the further reading section for details about a free Save the Children guide on the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees, which has a section on moving support services and how to help.

8 Social and cultural activities

Young separated refugees should be encouraged to have fun. It brings a relief from the ongoing pressure in their lives. Developing new interests and hobbies can be a good way of making new friends and reducing isolation.

School and college holidays can be a particularly lonely time for young people. Summer activities are often run by the local youth service or voluntary agencies. Find out if the young person you are supporting would be interested in getting involved and, if so, check out local projects in your area.

Acting, music, writing, painting and drawing can help in combating isolation, communicating meaning, enhancing self-esteem and strengthening identity and belonging. Where young people find it hard to talk, this might be an alternative approach to supporting and engaging the young person.

Sport activities, such as football or tennis, can help the young person deal with stress. It is a good way of meeting other young people, getting exercise, feeling part of something and can be light relief from problems they have to deal with.

9 Dealing with bullying and racism

If you are aware, or suspect, that a young person is being bullied or is experiencing racial abuse or discrimination, acknowledge this with the young person and ask if they would like to talk about it. It is important to show that you are concerned and that you are willing to help. You may be in a position to tackle this if the problem is at your work place. If you are unable to directly tackle it, you should, with the permission or involvement of the young person, inform the appropriate authority and help ensure that it is dealt with. See contact details and internet resources at the back of this guide for organisations dealing with racism, discrimination and bullying.

10 Tracing family

Young people will be worried about relatives back home and may want to contact them. The Red Cross and International Social Services provide family tracing services. Help young people contact either of these two agencies and support them through the process of trying to find their relatives. This will sometimes mean preparing and supporting the young person in the event that their family members cannot be traced, or have been killed. See contact details at the back of this guide for more information

alone and confused

David arrived in a city in the north of England from Zimbabwe at the age of 17. He was placed in a shared house with two other young separated refugees and received very little advice on what to do next.

David was anxious about many things, including claiming asylum, getting an education and generally not knowing how the system works here. He often felt very sad about the death of his father and worried about the disappearance of his mother and sisters in Zimbabwe.

David sought help at a group run for young separated refugees. At first David wanted advice on practical issues. After some time, once a relationship had been built up with the support workers running the group, David started to talk about his emotional problems.

David found out about the group supporting young separated refugees by chance – it was located just across the road from where he lived. A support worker at the project first helped David with practical issues – explaining his rights and entitlements, helping him get a solicitor, contacting social services for support over his asylum claim.

David had many worries, but it took a while for him to share these worries with the project staff and ask for help. After some time, David spoke to a worker at the project about feeling dizzy, having poor concentration and nightmares. He also talked about the death of his father and about the disappearance of his mother and sisters. The support worker told David about the family tracing and counselling service at the Red Cross and with David's consent a referral to the Red Cross was made.

David became extremely anxious about his poor concentration and how this might affect his studies. A support worker at the project called the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to get some general advice. Following this discussion, the support worker talked to

David about meeting up with someone from CAMHS to get some additional support. David agreed and he now attends regular sessions with a clinical psychologist.

Unfortunately, following the encouraging progress David had been making, he has very recently received a negative decision on his asylum claim and is going through a very low period. A worker at the project is spending a lot of time supporting David. A key learning point from this experience has been how important it is to provide long-term support to young separated refugees, whose lives are very fragile and will inevitably have high and low periods.

David has made the following reflections on the support he has received:

- When he first arrived in the UK and visited the group for young separated refugees David felt personally responsible and guilty for not being able to cope and didn't want to burden workers with his problem. He was also embarrassed about his emotional health difficulties.
- David found the information he received about his rights and entitlements empowering as it made him feel less dependent on support workers at the project.
- David appreciated the support and advice he received from other young people who had been through similar experiences to him.
- David said that the most valuable support he has received from the group was the emotional support. He has valued the fact that someone knows he exists and he has someone to talk to, and not only when he has a particular problem. He said that he values the fact that he is treated as a person, not only as a refugee, but at the same time he appreciates that the group understands and accepts the reasons for why he had to leave Zimbabwe and live in the UK.

guiding principles in providing emotional support

This section provides some broad principles to keep in mind when providing emotional support to young separated refugees.

Individual needs

Remember that not all young people you work with will want or need emotional support. If they make it clear that they don't want support, respect this and do not get involved, unless you feel they need specialist help, when a referral to the appropriate agency should be made in consultation with the young person (see page 12 for more information on making a referral).

One approach to providing emotional support may be beneficial to one young person, but a very different approach may be required when supporting someone else. It is important to get to know the individual and their specific circumstances in order to get a sense of the type of support that might help them. For example, one young person may find talking about their past experiences helps, another young person may prefer to focus on the future and want help with this.

Early intervention

Having support as soon as possible after arrival, including having someone to talk to about initial worries and concerns, can help a lot and prevent serious problems from developing. However, a young person needs to be supported long term, not just on arrival, as emotional problems may present later on.

Control over their lives

Give young people the ability to solve their own problems. They are in control of very little and this can be debilitating. Supporting them to carry on their lives, as much as possible, in the way they want to, can help with their confidence and self-esteem. For example, informing young people of exactly what they are entitled to will help them feel more confident in confronting service providers directly when their entitlements are not being met. Help them to make their own complaint when they are not getting the service they are entitled to. Give the young person choices in their daily lives, rather than deciding things on their behalf. For example, if you are a hostel worker, involve the young people in

deciding the weekly menu. Or, if you are a Connexions Personal Adviser, provide as much information as possible on the education venues in the area and encourage them to make the choice of where they study, rather than referring them to just one place.

Child protection and confidentiality

Remember to follow your organisational child protection guidelines when supporting a young separated refugee. Young separated refugees are children first and foremost and your organisation's child protection guidelines are as relevant to them as to any other young person you are supporting.

You should never be left alone with a young person unless you have successfully been through the child protection vetting procedures of the organisation you work for, including a background check on criminal and other records. This is to protect you as much as the young person.

As you develop a relationship with the young person you are supporting, they will often begin to trust and confide in you. Make sure you make it clear that some information may have to be passed on to other supportive professionals, such as social workers, and that not everything can be kept confidential. For example, if the young person talks about being abused, physically or sexually (whether in the UK or elsewhere), you may need to inform social services in line with your organisation's child protection procedures. Explaining the limits of confidentiality should be done in a way that does not discourage the young person from talking about sensitive, personal issues – including abuse they may have experienced – but they do need to be clear what information may or may not be kept confidential, so they have control over what they say. When talking to a young person, find a quiet space where no one else can hear and where the young person feels comfortable talking.

Time and commitment

Be aware that it may take time to gain the trust of the young person you are supporting. People who are experiencing emotional problems may not respond immediately to your support and you may not see any positive change in their behaviour or attitude for some time. Don't be disheartened

or feel that you are not helping. Giving up on the young person may make things worse as they might feel that one of the only people who has shown they care is also abandoning them. Persist with your support and over time it will almost always help improve the emotional well-being of the young person.

Young refugees may start to show signs of having emotional problems after they have begun to settle here. People experience high and low times at different stages during the asylum process, which you may recognise with some of the young separated refugees you are supporting. These may include:

Arrival Initially the young person may be frightened but this is soon replaced with a sense of relief at being safe. Although young people may be anxious they will often have high expectations of what happens next.

Post arrival High expectations are often dashed and people may begin to feel down. This will obviously depend on the level and type of support they receive – in places where support is adequate, young people may not experience this low.

Waiting for a decision This is likely to be an anxious and low period as the person lives in limbo.

Positive decision People will often feel a great sense of relief about being able to stay and this is often a happy period although it raises problems, as young people often have to move support systems, which can be confusing and difficult.

Post-positive decision Often a low time as bad experiences that have been suppressed start to surface. It is also a time when long-term issues are confronted, for example, difficulties in integration and getting employment.

Negative decision This is inevitably a very low period. Some people may show signs of relief that finally a decision on their future has been made, but they will be very anxious about what is going to happen next.

Please bear in mind that young people you are supporting may not experience the highs and lows in the same way as described above. Young people are individuals who have very different past and present experiences.

Understanding different experiences and cultures

It is useful to have an understanding of the country and culture where the young person has come from. This will help you understand a little about their values and experiences. It will also show the young person that you are interested in them and where they have come from and may help foster a relationship. It might also help the young person come to terms with what has happened to them, help them remember happy times and generally allow them the space to talk about issues from their country of origin that they may want to talk to you about (see further reading section on page 13 on how to find out more about countries people are fleeing from). However, also keep in mind and acknowledge that you will inevitably have less knowledge of the young person's culture and country of origin than they do (unless you are from the same place and culture).

Some people will not want to think or talk about where they have come from. Respect this and don't push them to talk if they don't want to.

Your boundaries and support

Don't be frightened of engaging with young separated refugees you are in contact with. However, be confident about being able to deal with the young person getting upset before you get into a situation where the young person is likely to talk to you about upsetting experiences. If you feel out of your depth, get professional help.

As well as being a very rewarding experience, supporting a young person can also be distressing. Workers will respond differently depending on their personal and work experiences. You may have feelings of helplessness, impatience, frustration and isolation. These are all natural responses. Talking to colleagues may help you deal with these feelings. Also, managers have a responsibility for the well-being of their staff and should be pro-active in providing appropriate support.

mental health issues

A natural response to extraordinary circumstances

*"very few refugee children need psychiatric treatment"*⁴⁰

It is normal for young separated refugees to show signs of stress. However, while the majority of young separated refugees will not become mentally ill there will be a small fraction who will have mental health problems and need specialist professional care.

There is a common debate within refugee mental health circles about 'pathologising' or 'medicalising' refugee health. Some mental health professionals believe that the majority of refugees have a very natural response to extraordinary experiences and they should not be seen or treated as psychiatric conditions.⁴¹ Instead, they argue that the focus should be on supporting the enhancement of protective factors, such as developing a sense of belonging, being given time and space to think about their experience, having the opportunity to form consistent relationships with adults and children, having the chance to achieve in education, and undertaking leisure activities.⁴² However, it is also important that serious mental health problems in children are recognised so that these children get the specialist help that they need.⁴³

Refugees come from a wide range of cultures and have had very varied experiences. They therefore present their needs and difficulties in a variety of ways.⁴⁴ Many people have bad experiences, without developing any serious mental health symptoms beyond a natural increase in anxiety and occasional nightmares. Early intervention can help prevent these symptoms developing into more serious mental health problems.

Serious mental health problems

As noted above, some young people will need specialist help. A young person who is experiencing more serious mental health problems may show some of the following symptoms⁴⁵:

- Feeling sad all the time and crying a lot
- Consistent failure to function properly with daily tasks

- Not eating and getting thinner and thinner
- Being tired all the time and wanting to stay in bed
- Feeling so hopeless that he or she talks about ending their life
- Behaviour or talk that is abnormal within the person's own culture
- Social withdrawal and self-neglect
- Aggression
- Persistent re-experiencing of the stressful event, such as having daily nightmares or constantly thinking about the event
- Diminished interest in enjoyable activities and emotional detachment from friends or carers
- An increased state of alertness, such as extreme nervousness, exaggerated startle responses, poor concentration and sleep disturbances.

Culture and mental health

People deal with emotional and mental health problems in different ways depending on their individual character, their culture and beliefs. Mental illness carries marked stigma in many cultures, which may deter people from seeking help – problems with mental health may be perceived in some cultures as being 'mad'.

Young people may be experiencing mental health problems but may not describe them in a way that is understood in this culture. For example, they may describe their mental health problems in terms of physical symptoms, such as headaches or back pain. Some cultures do not have specific mental health vocabulary, for example, there may not be translatable words for 'stress' or 'anxiety'. Cultures have different ways of dealing with mental health problems. Some cultures may predominantly treat mental health problems through community healing, for example, ritual processes or religious ceremonies. The weight of cultural influences will vary according to the individual and may be reduced after spending some time in the UK.

mental health services

Types of mental health support services

There are three types of mental health services available to young refugees:

1. **Non governmental specialist mental health services** specifically supporting refugees, for example, the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture (see contact details). These services provide psychotherapy and counselling in an individual or group work setting. Each agency has its own referral procedures, including who is able to make a referral.
2. **Child and adolescent mental health services, or CAMHS** as it is widely known, is used to describe the range of government

health services and professionals working in the field of child and adolescent mental health. CAMHS teams vary in the upper age limit of their clients – some teams only take referrals from under-16s, some up to 18 and some are now considering covering over 18s. For more information on your service contact your local GP or primary care service.

3. **Emergency and crisis services**, for example, hospital accident and emergency departments, Childline, the Samaritans and other support services are there to help with specific experiences, such as rape, bereavement or drug addiction. For more information see contact details on back cover.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

In many areas CAMHS have been organised into four different tiers or level of care:

Tier 1

A primary level of service that includes interventions by non-specialists such as GPs, teachers, health visitors, voluntary agencies, social services and carers. Interventions include preventing and identifying mental health problems. They may also offer general advice and, in certain cases, treatment for less severe mental health problems. Specialist health visitors work in some areas with refugees and asylum-seekers and support GP practices. For more information on this see the contact details for the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Network.

Tier 2

A service provided by CAMHS professionals, including child psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Services include: assessment and treatment with young people (and family

members if appropriate and possible); consultation to professionals or carers and outreach support. Many areas are now developing a network of CAMHS professionals who work within a range of agencies, for example, in schools.

Tier 3

A more specialist service for more severe, complex and persistent disorders. This is usually a multi-disciplinary team working in a community mental health clinic or child psychiatry out-patient service and includes child psychotherapists, child and adolescent psychiatrists, art, music and drama therapists, psychiatric social workers and clinical psychologists. Services include the assessment and treatment of more complex child mental health disorders.

Tier 4

Day units, highly specialised out-patient teams and in-patient units for children who are severely mentally ill or at suicidal risk.

how to help

If you have concerns about the mental health of a young person you are in contact with and feel that they might need specialist help, you can support them in a number of ways:

- Call **Young Minds Information Service** which provides free, confidential information and advice for any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person (see contact details on back cover).
- **Try to discuss your concerns** with the young person to find out if they would like some additional help in dealing with their problems. Be sensitive to cultural aversions to mental health illness.
- The usual way of getting a referral to a mental health service is through the young person's **GP**. Social services, school nurses or doctors, hospital or community paediatricians or health visitors can also usually refer young people or inform you who can. Encourage the young person to make an appointment with their GP, who should be in a better position to assess whether a referral to a specialist mental health agency is appropriate. If the young person wants you to, accompany them to their appointment with the GP, introduce them to the GP and ensure that a professional interpreter is available if necessary.
- With the permission of the young person, discuss your concerns with the **social worker** responsible for the young person. Social services should include an assessment of the young person's mental health, as part of their 'child in need' or 'care-plan' assessment, which should regularly be reviewed.
- With the permission of the young person, make a referral to a **specialist refugee mental health service**, or encourage the young person to make a self-referral. The referral procedure varies according to each agency. See contact details on back cover for information on refugee mental health services.

Supporting a young person after the referral has been made:

- Find out what will happen at the consultation and explain this to the young person to **allay any fears** they might have.
- If the young person wants you to, **accompany** them to the appointment and introduce them to the health professional. The consultation will normally be just between the health professional and the young person, and an interpreter if necessary.

- Make sure only **professional interpreters** are involved if required, and have experience of working in a mental health setting. It can be difficult involving an interpreter because the health professional will usually work on a one-to-one basis and the dynamics may change with three people in the room. Also the young person may not trust the interpreter to keep confidentiality.
- The young person may view the health workers with **mistrust**, as they may have been part of the system of oppression in their home country. Explain to the young person that they are there to help and encourage the young person to trust the health worker.
- **Respect the relationship** between the health professional and the young person and do not pry into what was discussed in the sessions. However, if the young person wants to talk about the meetings do not discourage this – it may help the healing process.
- Some agencies have a **lengthy waiting list**. Prepare the young person for this. If the young person's mental health is causing serious concerns then advocate for them to be a priority case and be seen sooner, otherwise seek alternative help.

A good service

To help you gauge whether a young person accessing a mental health service is getting a good service, here are some pointers to what a good mental health professional should do:

- make the young person feel comfortable
- be skilled in talking and listening to young people
- take a full history from the person – considering psychological, physical and social concerns
- allow the person to express themselves at their own pace
- ensure one person co-ordinates the integration of various treatments and services to meet the needs of the individual
- be culturally sensitive
- show respect
- have a good rapport with interpreter.

If the service falls short, look at alternative support, and if the young person wants to, help them make a complaint about the service.

further reading and information

Cold Comfort: Young separated refugees in England, Kate Stanley, Save the Children, 2001.

Research with young separated refugees in England and professionals working with them. Includes a section on health.

£7.50. To order a copy contact Plymbridge distributors, tel: 01752 202 301 or email orders@plymbridge.com

Series of short guides on working with young refugees, published between September 2002 and April 2003.

The guides are on: **the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees**; working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at ports of entry; **setting up mentoring schemes**; and setting up young refugee groups.

Free. To order copies contact Chris MacArthur on 020 8741 4054 x 101 or email c.macarthur@scfuk.org.uk

Far from the Battle but Still at War – Troubled refugee children in school, The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000

To order copies phone 020 7284 1355

A Bright Future for All: Promoting mental health in education, Mental Health Foundation, 2002

Free. Available on website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

SANE

A series of information leaflets on mental illness and treatments.

Available on website: www.sane.org.uk

Mind leaflets

Mind has a series of leaflets on different mental health issues for young people and adults. Available on website: www.mind.org.uk

Country Profile Information

Please bear in mind, however, that everyone's situation is unique and that country profiles will only give a general overview of the country as a whole.

Amnesty International www.amnesty.org.uk

UNHCR www.unhcr.org.uk

Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Internet resources for young people to access:

www.at-ease.nsf.org.uk

A website resource for all young people, from teens upwards who may feel stressed or worried about their thoughts and feelings.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds – the children's mental health charity – provides a series of information booklets aimed at young people that can be downloaded. Titles include *Do you ever feel depressed? Worried about self injury?*

www.unicef.org/voy

UNICEF's 'Voices of youth' website gives young people from around the world the opportunity to share ideas about important world issues.

www.pupiline.co.uk

A information source on issues from bullying, what to do after leaving school, relationships and self esteem.

www.kidscape.org.uk

A resource for children and young people on bullying, online safety, making friends and changing schools. It also provides information for teachers and parents.

www.bullying.co.uk

Website dedicated to information, help and advice about bullying.

www.britkid.org

An interactive site about racism.

notes

1 Separated Children in Europe Programme: Statement of good practice, 1995, UNHCR and Save the Children

2 The term 'refugee' is used to describe both people with leave to remain, including humanitarian protection, discretionary leave and refugee status as well as those seeking asylum.

3 Young Minds Policy – Mental Health Services for Adolescents and Young Adults, Young Minds

4 Young Minds leaflet – 'Mental Health and Young People'

5 Minutes of meeting Children and Families Overseas Network Meeting, September, 2002

6 K Stanley, *Cold Comfort: Young separated refugees in England*, Save the Children, 2001

7 *The Health of Refugee Children: Guidelines for paediatricians*, King's Fund, 1999

8 The first seven points in this list are taken from *Far from the Battle but Still at War*, The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000

9 W Ayotte, *Separated Children Coming to Western Europe*, Save the Children, 2000

10 *Child Soldiers Global Report*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, May 2001

11 Taken from Ayotte, 2000, op. cit.

12 *The Trafficking and Smuggling of Refugees: The endgame in European policy?*, UNHCR, 2001

13 Taken from Ayotte, 2000, op. cit.

14 *ibid*

15 *Asylum Seekers: Meeting their health care needs*, British Medical Association, 2002

16 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

17 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

18 *ibid*

19 Taken from King's Fund, 1999, op. cit.

20 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

21 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

22 *ibid*

23 *The Health and Well-Being of Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, King's Fund, 2000

24 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

25 *ibid*

26 *ibid*

27 *ibid*

28 *A Case for Change*, The Children's Society, Save the Children and Refugee Council, 2002

29 W Ayotte, *Separated Children in the UK*, Save the Children, 2001

30 'Asylum Centres Branded Unsafe', BBC News website, 8 April 2003

31 ECPAT, *What the Professionals Know*, Nov 2001

32 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

33 *Meeting the Health Needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK*, A Burnett and Y Fasil, NHS/Department of Health, 2002

34 *ibid*

35 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

36 *ibid*

37 *In the Midst of a Whirlwind: A manual for helping refugee children*, N Richman, 1998

38 *A Bright Future for All: Promoting mental health in education*, The Mental Health Foundation, 2002

39 *Peer Support: Someone to turn to*, The Mental Health Foundation, 2002

40 Taken from Burnett and Fasil, 2002, op. cit.

41 Taken from King's Fund, 1999, op. cit.

42 *Promoting the Health of Looked After Children*, Dept of Health, 2002

43 Taken from King's Fund, 1999, op. cit.

44 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

45 *Helping Children Cope with Stresses of War: A manual for parents and teachers*, UNICEF, 1993

contacts



Specialist refugee mental health support

The Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture

Nation wide referrals
London tel: 020 7813 7777
Manchester tel: 0161 912 1157

Tavistock Centre

GP referrals unless living in Camden and Islington then self-referrals are possible.
Tel: 020 7435 7111

The Traumatic Stress Clinic

Nation wide referrals
Tel: 020 7530 3666

Refugee Support Centre

London wide referrals
Tel: 020 7820 3606

Young Refugee Mental Health Project, Maudsley Hospital

Referrals from Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark
Tel: 020 7919 3381

Action for Children in Conflict

Provides psychiatric and psychological support to young refugees and asylum-seekers in selected schools in a number of UK cities.
Tel: 01865 821380

Other mental health agencies

Young Minds

Provides a free, confidential information and advice service to any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.
Free advice line: 0800 018 2138
Main reception tel: 020 7336 8445
www.youngminds.org.uk

SANE

Offering practical information, crisis care and emotional support to anybody affected by mental health problems.
Saneline: 0845 767 8000
www.sane.org.uk

The Mental Health Foundation

Runs a series of projects with children and young people, including research and promoting good practice, peer support projects in schools and colleges and promoting services to young adults.
Tel: 020 7802 0301
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Other services

Refugee Council

Panel of Advisers, Children's Section tel: 020 7582 4947
Main reception, tel: 020 7820 3000
Information line, tel: 020 7820 3085
www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal – HARPWEB

A new website resource for professional working to support the health of asylum seekers and refugees. It includes a link to a free on-line multi-lingual appointment card.
www.harpweb.org.uk

NHS Direct

For information on local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and contacts at Primary Care Trusts who can provide details of languages spoken by GPs and local access to interpreting.
Tel: 0845 4647

Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Network

A contact database for health professionals and others working on a daily basis in this field. Contact: Justine Osborne, tel: 0113 254 6605

International Social Services

Assistance with tracing family members and providing home assessments in countries of origin.
Tel: 020 7735 8941

British Red Cross

Try to restore family links and family reunion with people separated by war or disaster.
To contact any local Red Cross Office freephone: 0800 169 2030
www.redcross.org.uk/trace

NSPCC

Runs a free 24 hour child protection helpline which is a confidential counselling service for any child.
Tel: 0800 800 5000

Childline

Confidential 24-hour counselling service for any child or young person with any problem.
Tel: 0800 1111

The Samaritans

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.
Helpline: 08457 90 90 90
To find a local centre go to www.samaritans.org.uk

RAPE Crisis Federation

Acts as a referral service to individual women who are seeking advice or support around the issue of rape or sexual abuse.
Tel: 0115 900 3560
www.rapecrisis.co.uk

CRUSE Bereavement Care

Helpline: 020 8940 4818

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)

Provide information to people who think they have suffered racial discrimination or harassment. There are racial equality councils across the UK which are detailed on CRE's website.
Tel: 020 7939 0000
www.cre.gov.uk

Save the Children

For information on Save the Children activities in England contact:
London team, tel: 020 8741 4054
North West team, tel: 0161 434 8337
West Midlands team, tel: 0121 555 8888
Yorkshire and Humberside team, tel: 0113 242 4844
North East team, tel: 0191 222 1816
www.savethechildren.org.uk

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Diana

THE WORK CONTINUES

Published May 2003
Written by Elli Free, Save the Children

REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 213890

what is this guide about?

This guide offers advice on how to provide emotional support to young separated refugees and asylum-seeking young people in the UK (often described as unaccompanied children). These are children under 18 years of age who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or their legal/customary primary care giver.¹ In this guide the term young separated refugee² is used to describe these children and young people.

This guide focuses on the emotional support needs of young separated refugees and provides the following information to support workers:

- an introduction to young separated refugees and their experiences
- practical ways of providing emotional support and guiding principles in this work
- mental health issues for young refugees
- a guide to mental health services
- further reading and key contacts.

This guide is *not* about specialist psychiatric support for young refugees with serious or complex mental health problems. These cases should be referred to professional mental health services.

This guide is aimed at support workers who are likely to have the most contact with young separated refugees, including:

- social care workers
- hostel workers
- Connexions personal advisers
- further education college tutors, support workers and teachers
- voluntary agency and refugee community organisation workers
- youth workers.

Providing the right kind of emotional support can reduce the risk of mental health problems emerging. Also, early recognition of mental health problems and appropriate intervention can prevent the escalation of these problems.³

We hope this guide will help you understand the experiences that young separated refugees have been through and the circumstances that they find themselves in. This is the first step to providing the emotional support that many young separated refugees in the UK need.

introduction

“Mental health means much more than just the absence of mental illness. It is about physical and emotional well-being, about having the strength and capacity to live a full and creative life, and also the flexibility to deal with its up and downs.”⁴

There are an estimated 8,500 young separated refugees in the UK, the majority are 16 and 17-year-olds.⁵ Research carried out by Save the Children found that many of the young separated refugees interviewed as part of the research appeared to have emotional or, possibly, mental health problems, although very few of them were receiving any kind of emotional or mental health support.⁶

According to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, it is generally accepted that there is a higher than average rate of mental health problems in refugee communities and that refugees may experience emotional and mental health problems related to their particular experiences.⁷

Experiences that cause acute stress and distress to children and young people include:⁸

- violence, including torture and sexual violence
- loss and bereavement
- sudden change
- injustice
- absence of supportive relationships
- extreme poverty and deprivation
- persecution because of, for example, skin colour, gender, culture
- displacement
- uncertainty about the future.

Many young separated refugees will have had distressing experiences like these. As the next section illustrates, these harrowing experiences might have occurred in the country they have fled from, during their journey to the UK and on arrival in the UK.

Young separated refugees are vulnerable young people who are in need of support and are entitled to it under the Children Act (1989). Support workers can play a key role in supporting the emotional well-being of young separated refugees and helping build up protective factors to limit the impact of the experiences the young people have been through.

The state of an individual's mental health is liable to fluctuate, varying across a spectrum that goes from good through mild problems to severe and complex needs. It should not be assumed that all young separated refugees have mental health problems. This not only stigmatises young separated refugees but can also lead to counter-productive generalisations being made about individuals who in fact come from different cultures, have different experiences and have individual needs.

young refugees' experiences

The experiences affecting the emotional and mental health of young separated refugees can be grouped under three themes: experiences in the country they have fled from; experiences during their journey to the UK; and experiences on arrival in this country. Each theme is looked at in more detail below.

Experience in home countries

Many of the young separated refugees seeking asylum in the UK have fled countries where major conflicts have taken place or where serious human rights abuses occur, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia and Somalia. Some will have witnessed massacres or individual killings. They may also have been tortured or raped, or witnessed this happening to someone else, sometimes a member of their family. A lot of young separated refugees will have been forced from their homes, and will have been separated from and lost members of their family and friends.

“I was 14 years old when I came to Europe. My mother died when I was young. In Zaire my father belonged to an anti-Mobutu party. Secret police entered our home at night and beat my father in front of me. They took him away and I was taken in a separate car to prison. The police questioned and threatened me. They beat me badly and I still have pains when it is cold. I got sick in prison and they took me to the hospital. I managed to escape and went to my uncle's house. He helped me leave the country. I don't know what became of my father.”⁹
(Young man, Democratic Republic of Congo)

Some young separated refugees may have been directly involved in conflict. In 2001 it was estimated that more than 300,000 children below the age of 18 were fighting in armed conflicts around the world. While some children are recruited forcibly, others are driven into armed forces by poverty, alienation and discrimination. Children and young people who are abducted to become child soldiers are sometimes forced to commit violent acts. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers states that child soldiers not only lose their childhood and opportunities for education and development – they also risk physical injury, psychological trauma and even death.¹⁰

The journey

A 17-year-old travelled with her small baby, fleeing persecution of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in 1998. She travelled on foot to Montenegro. They then spent seven days with other Kosovans in a lorry. They were given food and water in order to survive the journey. They had to go to the toilet in plastic bags. At the end of the journey the truck driver put them on a train and they arrived in the centre of a large city where they applied for asylum.”¹¹

A recent UNHCR report stated that “refugees are now forced to use illegal means if they want to access Europe at all”.¹² This is true for the great majority of young separated refugees who travel to and enter the UK.

Save the Children research has shown that separated children travel to or across Europe using a variety of routes and many means of transport, including foot, horseback, hitch-hiking, car, lorry, train, bus, small boat, shipping vessel and plane. Their journey may take anything from a few days to many months. The journey is fraught with risk either due to the means of transport or from the dangers of sexual or physical abuse and exploitation. There have been numerous incidents of people suffocating in lorries or ship containers, or drowning or dying in the landing-gear of planes.¹³

A girl was helped to leave a refugee camp in Ethiopia where she had been raped. People in the camp paid her way to Addis Ababa where others helped her go to Europe. She travelled with a business man as his 'wife' and he too sexually abused her.”¹⁴

Experiences in the UK

According to recent research undertaken by the British Medical Association, the health of refugees often deteriorates after their arrival in the UK.¹⁵ Young separated refugees face particular problems when they arrive in the UK which are described below.

Loss of family

Often young people lose someone close to them during a time of conflict (this could be because of war or because an individual is being persecuted). The young person may lose parents, siblings, members of their extended family or close friends.

young refugees' experiences

According to the Child Psychotherapy Trust there are two particular concerns relating to loss of family. First, for those whose parents have been killed, they are likely to have been badly affected by the shock and be struggling even to begin to mourn their loss. Second, there are those who have lost their parents without knowing what has happened to them who will probably be full of almost inexpressible fears and anxieties about what might have happened.¹⁶

The financial cost of seeking asylum is phenomenal (human smugglers can charge over \$10,000 per person). It is therefore common for families who cannot afford to seek asylum as a family to save up and pool their resources in order to send at least one of their children to safety. In such situations the young person will feel a sense of loss for the family they have left behind and anxiety for what might happen to them.

Racism, discrimination and bullying

*"At first people would swear at me and I didn't know why... It makes me feel bad, maybe they had a problem with someone else."*¹⁷

Some young separated refugees will experience racism or discrimination in the UK, either direct or institutional, because of their race, colour or immigration status. Bullying is also commonplace in schools and colleges.¹⁸ It can be very difficult for young separated refugees to deal with this, particularly if they are already feeling isolated. Many young separated refugees will have seen the UK as a 'safe' place and to realise that it can also be dangerous is often difficult to accept and young people may start to question if they are safe anywhere. This can have adverse consequences on a young person's health.¹⁹ It may also evoke very distressing memories of persecution.²⁰

Waiting for a decision

Young separated refugees suffer considerable anxiety as a result of delays in getting a decision on their asylum claim,²¹ not knowing whether they will be able to stay in the UK if they get a positive decision or if they will be refused asylum and removed from the UK. One 15-year-old separated refugee, who was waiting for a decision, said

*"...[you shouldn't have to] deal with all these things, you're going to go mad....They do whatever they want to you.They can throw you out."*²²

While the wait for a decision on an initial asylum application has decreased, the appeals process still takes time and young people are often left in a state of limbo until they receive a final decision.

Some young people may also become apathetic. Not knowing whether they will be able to stay or be sent back may make the young person feel that everyday activities like going to college or making friends are futile.

Asylum-seekers do not have the same entitlements as those with refugee status or other forms of leave to remain. For example, a recently introduced Home Office policy does not allow asylum-seekers to work. This reduces the control people seeking asylum have over their current lives, and which can otherwise help re-build confidence and self-esteem and improve a person's general well-being.

Identity issues

Loss of nationality status, cultural links with their country of origin and immersion in a new culture can bring up issues of identity. According to research undertaken by the King's Fund, identity issues, arising from feeling different from other people, are at the heart of the problems experienced by young refugees.²³ Young separated refugees have been displaced from their familiar environment – their country, culture, home and the values linked with these places. They may find it difficult to adjust to a new culture and country with its different value systems. Living in an unfamiliar home with unfamiliar people can also be disconcerting. Identity issues are exacerbated by the negative media portrayal of refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. In addition, insecurity over identity is particularly common during adolescence, a time of rapid inner change and vulnerability.

A young person may arrive with or without false identification documentation on them when they arrive in the UK. The only ID they will be provided with when they claim asylum is issued by the Home Office and clearly identifies them as an asylum-seeker. This is called an Asylum Registration

young refugees' experiences

Card (ARC), previously known as a Standard Acknowledgement Letter (SAL). The ARC can cause problems in accessing services, for example, people seeking asylum can find it difficult opening a bank account. It also serves as a constant reminder that their status is different. In addition, personal details are sometimes taken down incorrectly on ARCs and SALs, compounding young people's difficulties.²⁴

Loneliness and social isolation

Young separated refugees can often feel isolated from their peer group because of communication difficulties (if the young person has a low level of English), cultural differences, different attitudes to life, a lack of confidence or just because they do not get the opportunity to mix with non-refugee young people. This exacerbates the loneliness young separated refugees are already likely to be feeling, separated from their family and friends in their country of origin.

Lack of support

Save the Children research found that 16 and 17-year-old separated refugees are particularly disadvantaged and lack support. Social services are responsible for their support, which is usually provided for under Section 17 of the Children Act (1989). This means they are not usually allocated a social worker and therefore do not receive much, if any, emotional support through social services assistance. Many young separated refugees in this age group are living in poor-quality or inappropriate accommodation, with little money.²⁵ They are often given minimum support to access mainstream services that they are entitled to, such as registering with a GP, accessing benefits and finding a place at college.

Turning 18

Research by Save the Children found that there is considerable confusion, anxiety and a lack of information about what happens to a young person when they reach the age of 18.²⁶

At 18, if a young person has not had a decision on their asylum application or they are appealing against a decision they will be transferred from social services support to the National Asylum

Support Service (NASS – the adult and family asylum service run by the Home Office). For the majority of young people in this situation this will mean dispersal to another part of the country.²⁷ This will mean losing the support systems they have established since their arrival, including friends, school, college, local community and once more they are uprooted and forced to start again.

Many young separated refugees are refused asylum, but are granted permission to stay until their 18th birthday. Unless the young person has successfully appealed against this decision or has been granted an extension on their leave to remain, they will be expected to return home when they turn 18. For young people in this situation, turning 18 is a constant worry.

Detention

Some young separated refugees, whose ages are being disputed, are detained in the UK.²⁸ Research by Save the Children found that young people who were detained did not understand why they were in detention and felt criminalised although they had done nothing wrong. The problems they mentioned included: being incarcerated with adults, the length of time in detention, the lack of information and the living conditions.²⁹ An added anxiety in detention is that they are not told of the length of detention, unlike British people in prison. A recent report on detention centres by prison inspectors found that the vast majority of detainees did not feel safe and residents were subject to "unacceptable and unnecessary" random strip searches after visits from friends or relatives.³⁰ Detention can be particularly harrowing for young people who have previously been imprisoned in their country of origin.

Trafficking

Young people are being trafficked to the UK to work in the sex trade, in sweatshops and restaurants. There is also evidence to show that the UK may be a stop-off point to other European countries.³¹ Some young people who are trafficked may claim asylum in the UK. Young people who are trafficked will often experience sexual, physical or psychological abuse. They are extremely vulnerable young people.

10 top tips

on providing emotional support



Young separated refugees may have very little support, particularly 16 and 17-year-olds who get limited support from social services and arrive after compulsory school age. You may be one of very few adults that they know. It is recognised by mental health professionals³² that it is particularly helpful for young refugees to have a specific adult that they can talk to and who is there to support them through bad times. This person does not have to have professional skills in emotional support but needs to be someone who is interested and sensitive to the young person's needs. Here are ten practical ways of providing emotional support to young people:

1 Culture, orientation and settling in

Arriving in a foreign country often with no knowledge of how things work and with little or no English can be overwhelming. It is recognised that for many refugees, restoring some form of normality to their life can be the most effective promoter of good mental health and can do much to relieve feelings of sadness and anxiety.³³ You can help a young person bring some form of normality back to their life by explaining how things operate here. This could include where to go shopping, using public transport, finding a solicitor, how to get a school or college place, where the local English language courses are held and where to meet people.

Providing information on the local culture is also important so that the young person understands why people act as they do and so they know what is and is not acceptable behaviour in this country. The young person you are supporting may find it good to talk about their culture and how this differs from the UK.

2 Supportive listening

Help the young person to cope and come to terms with their experiences by allowing them time and space to talk. Listen and help them make some sense of what has happened to them. Young people may feel confused, have

self-doubt, even blame themselves for what has happened in the past. Having a supportive adult to help them think through these issues can help a lot. As one GP put it: *"the catharsis of being listened to for long enough and patiently enough can be all that is needed to restore health to a nearly normal level."*³⁴

Be aware that some young people will not want to talk about past experiences. This may be their way of coping. Take the lead from the young person and don't push them to talk about things they don't feel comfortable talking about. Other young people may want to talk but not feel confident to start up a conversation and will need some encouragement. Therefore, don't wait for the young person to come forward – let the young person know that you are there to listen and help.

Be open with the young person about any concerns you may have about how they may be feeling. Explain why talking about their experiences can be helpful and indicate that it is safe to talk to you. Start with topics that are less likely to be distressing, for example, a general discussion about the country they have come from. Be sensitive to signs of stress. If the young person does get upset, acknowledge their feelings and explain that they are understandable given their experiences. Check with them that they are happy to carry on talking and continue if they want to do so. Try to end the conversation by focussing on a less distressing topic.

If you do not feel comfortable talking to the young person about their experiences or you have concerns about the impact their experiences are having on them, help them find a more appropriate person to talk to (see pages 10–12 and contact details on back cover).

3 Practical assistance

Young separated refugees will need practical support to help rebuild their lives. Research carried out by Save the Children found that many separated children do not receive the level of care and protection that they need

despite the fact that they have the same legal entitlements as British-born young people.³⁵ This includes the right to education and healthcare and the rights enshrined in the Children Act (1989) and Human Rights Act (1988). The list of problems young people may face in the UK is long and includes housing problems, difficulty in accessing school or college places, confusion over the asylum process and difficulty accessing mainstream benefits. Help in sorting out these problems can take an enormous strain off the young people, who are battling not only with immediate practical problems noted here, but also issues of loss and separation and the ramifications of past experiences in the country they have fled.

See the further reading section for information on a free Save the Children guide on the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees and ways to ensure these are met. The key to providing effective practical assistance is to get networked with the statutory and voluntary agencies supporting young separated refugees, for example, social services, solicitors, Connexions, the Panel of Advisers at the Refugee Council and local voluntary projects. Be aware when supporting the young person that they may not want to challenge or question the support they are being provided – they may be very grateful for any support they are getting. As a young separated refugee explains: *"As an asylum-seeker I feel I shouldn't say 'I want this'... I can't complain, who am I to complain?"*³⁶

4 Belonging and social support

Having a sense of belonging and developing a network of other people the young person can trust will help them deal with distressing experiences. Developing a sense of belonging could come from getting support from an individual such as a teacher or tutor, social worker, Connexions Personal Adviser, a hostel worker, a friend at school or college, a befriender or carer. It could also come from being part of a group, whether that's making friends at college, joining a football team, a youth group, or refugee group, or being a member of the religious community at the local mosque, church or temple.

It is important to encourage integration with British-born young people to help young separated refugees get to know the local culture and feel part of it. The young person may also be interested in keeping in contact with people from their country of origin, to retain a sense of belonging to their culture and to get support from people from their own culture.

5 Schools and colleges

*"It is no exaggeration to say that refugee children's wellbeing depends to a major degree on their school experiences, successes and failures."*³⁷

It is recognised by education, refugee and mental health professionals alike that school or college can provide one of the most important settings for activities that promote children and young people's good mental health.³⁸ Schools and colleges can foster a sense of safety and promote inclusion. They can also enable an individual to feel success and encourage personal development. If the young person you are supporting is not going to school or college, find out if they are interested in doing so, and if they are help them get a place. Encourage the young person you are supporting to get involved in extra-curricula activities at school or college, for example 'buddying' or mentoring schemes, homework or lunchtime clubs, which are often geared to helping young people settle into school or college.

6 Befriending and mentoring

Getting the young person linked up with a befriender or mentor at either the school or college they attend or through a local befriending project can provide emotional and practical support. This is an opportunity to have someone else they can regularly talk openly with, who will listen and support them, help them integrate into the local community and help resolve practical problems they might be experiencing. According to research undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation, peer

...10 top tips

befriending support can also help increase a young person's self-confidence and self-esteem.³⁹ See further reading for information on a free Save the Children guide on how to set up mentoring schemes for young refugees.

7 Moving support services

Young people need to be prepared for and supported through the transition from one support service to another. The timing of this change will depend on age and status. For example, if a young person has not received a decision on their asylum claim by the time they reach 18, they will move from social services support to NASS. Young people may be particularly vulnerable and concerned about moving from one support service to another. Transferring support will often mean being dispersed to another part of the country, having to leave friends and start again in an unfamiliar place.

Help the young person understand their rights and entitlements as they change support services. For example, young people who are told they will be dispersed can choose to remain where they are, although if they do stay where they are, they will only receive subsistence support, not accommodation. See the further reading section for details about a free Save the Children guide on the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees, which has a section on moving support services and how to help.

8 Social and cultural activities

Young separated refugees should be encouraged to have fun. It brings a relief from the ongoing pressure in their lives. Developing new interests and hobbies can be a good way of making new friends and reducing isolation.

School and college holidays can be a particularly lonely time for young people. Summer activities are often run by the local youth service or voluntary agencies. Find out if the young person you are supporting would be interested in getting involved and, if so, check out local projects in your area.

Acting, music, writing, painting and drawing can help in combating isolation, communicating meaning, enhancing self-esteem and strengthening identity and belonging. Where young people find it hard to talk, this might be an alternative approach to supporting and engaging the young person.

Sport activities, such as football or tennis, can help the young person deal with stress. It is a good way of meeting other young people, getting exercise, feeling part of something and can be light relief from problems they have to deal with.

9 Dealing with bullying and racism

If you are aware, or suspect, that a young person is being bullied or is experiencing racial abuse or discrimination, acknowledge this with the young person and ask if they would like to talk about it. It is important to show that you are concerned and that you are willing to help. You may be in a position to tackle this if the problem is at your work place. If you are unable to directly tackle it, you should, with the permission or involvement of the young person, inform the appropriate authority and help ensure that it is dealt with. See contact details and internet resources at the back of this guide for organisations dealing with racism, discrimination and bullying.

10 Tracing family

Young people will be worried about relatives back home and may want to contact them. The Red Cross and International Social Services provide family tracing services. Help young people contact either of these two agencies and support them through the process of trying to find their relatives. This will sometimes mean preparing and supporting the young person in the event that their family members cannot be traced, or have been killed. See contact details at the back of this guide for more information

alone and confused

David arrived in a city in the north of England from Zimbabwe at the age of 17. He was placed in a shared house with two other young separated refugees and received very little advice on what to do next.

David was anxious about many things, including claiming asylum, getting an education and generally not knowing how the system works here. He often felt very sad about the death of his father and worried about the disappearance of his mother and sisters in Zimbabwe.

David sought help at a group run for young separated refugees. At first David wanted advice on practical issues. After some time, once a relationship had been built up with the support workers running the group, David started to talk about his emotional problems.

David found out about the group supporting young separated refugees by chance – it was located just across the road from where he lived. A support worker at the project first helped David with practical issues – explaining his rights and entitlements, helping him get a solicitor, contacting social services for support over his asylum claim.

David had many worries, but it took a while for him to share these worries with the project staff and ask for help. After some time, David spoke to a worker at the project about feeling dizzy, having poor concentration and nightmares. He also talked about the death of his father and about the disappearance of his mother and sisters. The support worker told David about the family tracing and counselling service at the Red Cross and with David's consent a referral to the Red Cross was made.

David became extremely anxious about his poor concentration and how this might affect his studies. A support worker at the project called the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to get some general advice. Following this discussion, the support worker talked to

David about meeting up with someone from CAMHS to get some additional support. David agreed and he now attends regular sessions with a clinical psychologist.

Unfortunately, following the encouraging progress David had been making, he has very recently received a negative decision on his asylum claim and is going through a very low period. A worker at the project is spending a lot of time supporting David. A key learning point from this experience has been how important it is to provide long-term support to young separated refugees, whose lives are very fragile and will inevitably have high and low periods.

David has made the following reflections on the support he has received:

- When he first arrived in the UK and visited the group for young separated refugees David felt personally responsible and guilty for not being able to cope and didn't want to burden workers with his problem. He was also embarrassed about his emotional health difficulties.
- David found the information he received about his rights and entitlements empowering as it made him feel less dependent on support workers at the project.
- David appreciated the support and advice he received from other young people who had been through similar experiences to him.
- David said that the most valuable support he has received from the group was the emotional support. He has valued the fact that someone knows he exists and he has someone to talk to, and not only when he has a particular problem. He said that he values the fact that he is treated as a person, not only as a refugee, but at the same time he appreciates that the group understands and accepts the reasons for why he had to leave Zimbabwe and live in the UK.

guiding principles in providing emotional support

This section provides some broad principles to keep in mind when providing emotional support to young separated refugees.

Individual needs

Remember that not all young people you work with will want or need emotional support. If they make it clear that they don't want support, respect this and do not get involved, unless you feel they need specialist help, when a referral to the appropriate agency should be made in consultation with the young person (see page 12 for more information on making a referral).

One approach to providing emotional support may be beneficial to one young person, but a very different approach may be required when supporting someone else. It is important to get to know the individual and their specific circumstances in order to get a sense of the type of support that might help them. For example, one young person may find talking about their past experiences helps, another young person may prefer to focus on the future and want help with this.

Early intervention

Having support as soon as possible after arrival, including having someone to talk to about initial worries and concerns, can help a lot and prevent serious problems from developing. However, a young person needs to be supported long term, not just on arrival, as emotional problems may present later on.

Control over their lives

Give young people the ability to solve their own problems. They are in control of very little and this can be debilitating. Supporting them to carry on their lives, as much as possible, in the way they want to, can help with their confidence and self-esteem. For example, informing young people of exactly what they are entitled to will help them feel more confident in confronting service providers directly when their entitlements are not being met. Help them to make their own complaint when they are not getting the service they are entitled to. Give the young person choices in their daily lives, rather than deciding things on their behalf. For example, if you are a hostel worker, involve the young people in

deciding the weekly menu. Or, if you are a Connexions Personal Adviser, provide as much information as possible on the education venues in the area and encourage them to make the choice of where they study, rather than referring them to just one place.

Child protection and confidentiality

Remember to follow your organisational child protection guidelines when supporting a young separated refugee. Young separated refugees are children first and foremost and your organisation's child protection guidelines are as relevant to them as to any other young person you are supporting.

You should never be left alone with a young person unless you have successfully been through the child protection vetting procedures of the organisation you work for, including a background check on criminal and other records. This is to protect you as much as the young person.

As you develop a relationship with the young person you are supporting, they will often begin to trust and confide in you. Make sure you make it clear that some information may have to be passed on to other supportive professionals, such as social workers, and that not everything can be kept confidential. For example, if the young person talks about being abused, physically or sexually (whether in the UK or elsewhere), you may need to inform social services in line with your organisation's child protection procedures. Explaining the limits of confidentiality should be done in a way that does not discourage the young person from talking about sensitive, personal issues – including abuse they may have experienced – but they do need to be clear what information may or may not be kept confidential, so they have control over what they say. When talking to a young person, find a quiet space where no one else can hear and where the young person feels comfortable talking.

Time and commitment

Be aware that it may take time to gain the trust of the young person you are supporting. People who are experiencing emotional problems may not respond immediately to your support and you may not see any positive change in their behaviour or attitude for some time. Don't be disheartened

or feel that you are not helping. Giving up on the young person may make things worse as they might feel that one of the only people who has shown they care is also abandoning them. Persist with your support and over time it will almost always help improve the emotional well-being of the young person.

Young refugees may start to show signs of having emotional problems after they have begun to settle here. People experience high and low times at different stages during the asylum process, which you may recognise with some of the young separated refugees you are supporting. These may include:

Arrival Initially the young person may be frightened but this is soon replaced with a sense of relief at being safe. Although young people may be anxious they will often have high expectations of what happens next.

Post arrival High expectations are often dashed and people may begin to feel down. This will obviously depend on the level and type of support they receive – in places where support is adequate, young people may not experience this low.

Waiting for a decision This is likely to be an anxious and low period as the person lives in limbo.

Positive decision People will often feel a great sense of relief about being able to stay and this is often a happy period although it raises problems, as young people often have to move support systems, which can be confusing and difficult.

Post-positive decision Often a low time as bad experiences that have been suppressed start to surface. It is also a time when long-term issues are confronted, for example, difficulties in integration and getting employment.

Negative decision This is inevitably a very low period. Some people may show signs of relief that finally a decision on their future has been made, but they will be very anxious about what is going to happen next.

Please bear in mind that young people you are supporting may not experience the highs and lows in the same way as described above. Young people are individuals who have very different past and present experiences.

Understanding different experiences and cultures

It is useful to have an understanding of the country and culture where the young person has come from. This will help you understand a little about their values and experiences. It will also show the young person that you are interested in them and where they have come from and may help foster a relationship. It might also help the young person come to terms with what has happened to them, help them remember happy times and generally allow them the space to talk about issues from their country of origin that they may want to talk to you about (see further reading section on page 13 on how to find out more about countries people are fleeing from). However, also keep in mind and acknowledge that you will inevitably have less knowledge of the young person's culture and country of origin than they do (unless you are from the same place and culture).

Some people will not want to think or talk about where they have come from. Respect this and don't push them to talk if they don't want to.

Your boundaries and support

Don't be frightened of engaging with young separated refugees you are in contact with. However, be confident about being able to deal with the young person getting upset before you get into a situation where the young person is likely to talk to you about upsetting experiences. If you feel out of your depth, get professional help.

As well as being a very rewarding experience, supporting a young person can also be distressing. Workers will respond differently depending on their personal and work experiences. You may have feelings of helplessness, impatience, frustration and isolation. These are all natural responses. Talking to colleagues may help you deal with these feelings. Also, managers have a responsibility for the well-being of their staff and should be pro-active in providing appropriate support.

mental health issues

A natural response to extraordinary circumstances

*"very few refugee children need psychiatric treatment"*⁴⁰

It is normal for young separated refugees to show signs of stress. However, while the majority of young separated refugees will not become mentally ill there will be a small fraction who will have mental health problems and need specialist professional care.

There is a common debate within refugee mental health circles about 'pathologising' or 'medicalising' refugee health. Some mental health professionals believe that the majority of refugees have a very natural response to extraordinary experiences and they should not be seen or treated as psychiatric conditions.⁴¹ Instead, they argue that the focus should be on supporting the enhancement of protective factors, such as developing a sense of belonging, being given time and space to think about their experience, having the opportunity to form consistent relationships with adults and children, having the chance to achieve in education, and undertaking leisure activities.⁴² However, it is also important that serious mental health problems in children are recognised so that these children get the specialist help that they need.⁴³

Refugees come from a wide range of cultures and have had very varied experiences. They therefore present their needs and difficulties in a variety of ways.⁴⁴ Many people have bad experiences, without developing any serious mental health symptoms beyond a natural increase in anxiety and occasional nightmares. Early intervention can help prevent these symptoms developing into more serious mental health problems.

Serious mental health problems

As noted above, some young people will need specialist help. A young person who is experiencing more serious mental health problems may show some of the following symptoms⁴⁵:

- Feeling sad all the time and crying a lot
- Consistent failure to function properly with daily tasks

- Not eating and getting thinner and thinner
- Being tired all the time and wanting to stay in bed
- Feeling so hopeless that he or she talks about ending their life
- Behaviour or talk that is abnormal within the person's own culture
- Social withdrawal and self-neglect
- Aggression
- Persistent re-experiencing of the stressful event, such as having daily nightmares or constantly thinking about the event
- Diminished interest in enjoyable activities and emotional detachment from friends or carers
- An increased state of alertness, such as extreme nervousness, exaggerated startle responses, poor concentration and sleep disturbances.

Culture and mental health

People deal with emotional and mental health problems in different ways depending on their individual character, their culture and beliefs. Mental illness carries marked stigma in many cultures, which may deter people from seeking help – problems with mental health may be perceived in some cultures as being 'mad'.

Young people may be experiencing mental health problems but may not describe them in a way that is understood in this culture. For example, they may describe their mental health problems in terms of physical symptoms, such as headaches or back pain. Some cultures do not have specific mental health vocabulary, for example, there may not be translatable words for 'stress' or 'anxiety'. Cultures have different ways of dealing with mental health problems. Some cultures may predominantly treat mental health problems through community healing, for example, ritual processes or religious ceremonies. The weight of cultural influences will vary according to the individual and may be reduced after spending some time in the UK.

mental health services

Types of mental health support services

There are three types of mental health services available to young refugees:

1. **Non governmental specialist mental health services** specifically supporting refugees, for example, the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture (see contact details). These services provide psychotherapy and counselling in an individual or group work setting. Each agency has its own referral procedures, including who is able to make a referral.
2. **Child and adolescent mental health services, or CAMHS** as it is widely known, is used to describe the range of government

health services and professionals working in the field of child and adolescent mental health. CAMHS teams vary in the upper age limit of their clients – some teams only take referrals from under-16s, some up to 18 and some are now considering covering over 18s. For more information on your service contact your local GP or primary care service.

3. **Emergency and crisis services**, for example, hospital accident and emergency departments, Childline, the Samaritans and other support services are there to help with specific experiences, such as rape, bereavement or drug addiction. For more information see contact details on back cover.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

In many areas CAMHS have been organised into four different tiers or level of care:

Tier 1

A primary level of service that includes interventions by non-specialists such as GPs, teachers, health visitors, voluntary agencies, social services and carers. Interventions include preventing and identifying mental health problems. They may also offer general advice and, in certain cases, treatment for less severe mental health problems. Specialist health visitors work in some areas with refugees and asylum-seekers and support GP practices. For more information on this see the contact details for the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Network.

Tier 2

A service provided by CAMHS professionals, including child psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. Services include: assessment and treatment with young people (and family

members if appropriate and possible); consultation to professionals or carers and outreach support. Many areas are now developing a network of CAMHS professionals who work within a range of agencies, for example, in schools.

Tier 3

A more specialist service for more severe, complex and persistent disorders. This is usually a multi-disciplinary team working in a community mental health clinic or child psychiatry out-patient service and includes child psychotherapists, child and adolescent psychiatrists, art, music and drama therapists, psychiatric social workers and clinical psychologists. Services include the assessment and treatment of more complex child mental health disorders.

Tier 4

Day units, highly specialised out-patient teams and in-patient units for children who are severely mentally ill or at suicidal risk.

how to help

If you have concerns about the mental health of a young person you are in contact with and feel that they might need specialist help, you can support them in a number of ways:

- Call **Young Minds Information Service** which provides free, confidential information and advice for any adult with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person (see contact details on back cover).
- **Try to discuss your concerns** with the young person to find out if they would like some additional help in dealing with their problems. Be sensitive to cultural aversions to mental health illness.
- The usual way of getting a referral to a mental health service is through the young person's **GP**. Social services, school nurses or doctors, hospital or community paediatricians or health visitors can also usually refer young people or inform you who can. Encourage the young person to make an appointment with their GP, who should be in a better position to assess whether a referral to a specialist mental health agency is appropriate. If the young person wants you to, accompany them to their appointment with the GP, introduce them to the GP and ensure that a professional interpreter is available if necessary.
- With the permission of the young person, discuss your concerns with the **social worker** responsible for the young person. Social services should include an assessment of the young person's mental health, as part of their 'child in need' or 'care-plan' assessment, which should regularly be reviewed.
- With the permission of the young person, make a referral to a **specialist refugee mental health service**, or encourage the young person to make a self-referral. The referral procedure varies according to each agency. See contact details on back cover for information on refugee mental health services.

Supporting a young person after the referral has been made:

- Find out what will happen at the consultation and explain this to the young person to **allay any fears** they might have.
- If the young person wants you to, **accompany** them to the appointment and introduce them to the health professional. The consultation will normally be just between the health professional and the young person, and an interpreter if necessary.

- Make sure only **professional interpreters** are involved if required, and have experience of working in a mental health setting. It can be difficult involving an interpreter because the health professional will usually work on a one-to-one basis and the dynamics may change with three people in the room. Also the young person may not trust the interpreter to keep confidentiality.
- The young person may view the health workers with **mistrust**, as they may have been part of the system of oppression in their home country. Explain to the young person that they are there to help and encourage the young person to trust the health worker.
- **Respect the relationship** between the health professional and the young person and do not pry into what was discussed in the sessions. However, if the young person wants to talk about the meetings do not discourage this – it may help the healing process.
- Some agencies have a **lengthy waiting list**. Prepare the young person for this. If the young person's mental health is causing serious concerns then advocate for them to be a priority case and be seen sooner, otherwise seek alternative help.

A good service

To help you gauge whether a young person accessing a mental health service is getting a good service, here are some pointers to what a good mental health professional should do:

- make the young person feel comfortable
- be skilled in talking and listening to young people
- take a full history from the person – considering psychological, physical and social concerns
- allow the person to express themselves at their own pace
- ensure one person co-ordinates the integration of various treatments and services to meet the needs of the individual
- be culturally sensitive
- show respect
- have a good rapport with interpreter.

If the service falls short, look at alternative support, and if the young person wants to, help them make a complaint about the service.

further reading and information

Cold Comfort: Young separated refugees in England, Kate Stanley, Save the Children, 2001.

Research with young separated refugees in England and professionals working with them. Includes a section on health.

£7.50. To order a copy contact Plymbridge distributors, tel: 01752 202 301 or email orders@plymbridge.com

Series of short guides on working with young refugees, published between September 2002 and April 2003.

The guides are on: **the rights and entitlements of young separated refugees**; working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children at ports of entry; **setting up mentoring schemes**; and setting up young refugee groups.

Free. To order copies contact Chris MacArthur on 020 8741 4054 x 101 or email c.macarthur@scfuk.org.uk

Far from the Battle but Still at War – Troubled refugee children in school, The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000

To order copies phone 020 7284 1355

A Bright Future for All: Promoting mental health in education, Mental Health Foundation, 2002

Free. Available on website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

SANE

A series of information leaflets on mental illness and treatments.

Available on website: www.sane.org.uk

Mind leaflets

Mind has a series of leaflets on different mental health issues for young people and adults. Available on website: www.mind.org.uk

Country Profile Information

Please bear in mind, however, that everyone's situation is unique and that country profiles will only give a general overview of the country as a whole.

Amnesty International www.amnesty.org.uk

UNHCR www.unhcr.org.uk

Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Internet resources for young people to access:

www.at-ease.nsf.org.uk

A website resource for all young people, from teens upwards who may feel stressed or worried about their thoughts and feelings.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Young Minds – the children's mental health charity – provides a series of information booklets aimed at young people that can be downloaded. Titles include *Do you ever feel depressed? Worried about self injury?*

www.unicef.org/voy

UNICEF's 'Voices of youth' website gives young people from around the world the opportunity to share ideas about important world issues.

www.pupiline.co.uk

A information source on issues from bullying, what to do after leaving school, relationships and self esteem.

www.kidscape.org.uk

A resource for children and young people on bullying, online safety, making friends and changing schools. It also provides information for teachers and parents.

www.bullying.co.uk

Website dedicated to information, help and advice about bullying.

www.britkid.org

An interactive site about racism.

notes

1 Separated Children in Europe Programme: Statement of good practice, 1995, UNHCR and Save the Children

2 The term 'refugee' is used to describe both people with leave to remain, including humanitarian protection, discretionary leave and refugee status as well as those seeking asylum.

3 Young Minds Policy – Mental Health Services for Adolescents and Young Adults, Young Minds

4 Young Minds leaflet – 'Mental Health and Young People'

5 Minutes of meeting Children and Families Overseas Network Meeting, September, 2002

6 K Stanley, *Cold Comfort: Young separated refugees in England*, Save the Children, 2001

7 *The Health of Refugee Children: Guidelines for paediatricians*, King's Fund, 1999

8 The first seven points in this list are taken from *Far from the Battle but Still at War*, The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000

9 W Ayotte, *Separated Children Coming to Western Europe*, Save the Children, 2000

10 *Child Soldiers Global Report*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, May 2001

11 Taken from Ayotte, 2000, op. cit.

12 *The Trafficking and Smuggling of Refugees: The endgame in European policy?*, UNHCR, 2001

13 Taken from Ayotte, 2000, op. cit.

14 *ibid*

15 *Asylum Seekers: Meeting their health care needs*, British Medical Association, 2002

16 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

17 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

18 *ibid*

19 Taken from King's Fund, 1999, op. cit.

20 Taken from The Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2000, op. cit.

21 Taken from Stanley, 2001, op. cit.

22 *ibid*

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