

General Cultural Considerations for Refugee Populations

- Many refugees have lost loved ones and/or leave family members and friends behind when they move to resettlement areas. Some have few family ties and may struggle with feelings of isolation.
- Like others who have experienced trauma, refugees may have a difficult time trusting others. An increased focus on relationship-building when working with refugees is beneficial for both refugees and providers.
- Although stigma around mental health and mental illness continues in America, this stigma seems to be even greater among refugee groups who have different belief systems about and treatments for mental health problems.
- The effects of traumatic experiences are compounded by the fact that refugees did not have the time and/or the resources to address these in their home countries / refugee camps. Unresolved grief is very common.
- Refugees have familiarity with weapons of war that are not used in America. Sadly, food and rape, for example, have been used as weapons of war.
- Learning new methods of disciplining their children, as well as becoming familiar with American laws regarding domestic abuse, can be challenging for refugee parents.
- The language and communication barriers that exist for refugee groups cannot be over-emphasized. Unfortunately, it is common for refugee children to become their families' translators and interpreters, which sets up a challenging power differential between family members.
- Children and youth, women, and older refugees are sub-groups within refugee groups who may experience a more difficult time adjusting to their new ways of life.
- Due to their histories, refugee groups arrive to their resettlement areas without financial resources and support, perpetuating their status in low social classes.
- Refugee parents may not understand American school staff's expectations around parent involvement in their children's schools. They may think of school staff as experts whom they respect and they may be under the impression that their children are the school's responsibility.
- Refugee groups will likely have a different relationship with time than Americans have. For example, refugees may be unfamiliar with keeping a calendar and the idea of being "on time."

