

Education and Support Group
for Karen Youth

Building Leaders in the Community

A Manual for Co-leaders



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE
.....
Restoring the Dignity of
the Human Spirit

A product of the Healing in Partnership Project

Education and Support Group for Karen Youth

This is a curriculum based on a Schools Group Project that worked with Liberian and other African refugee youth in the northwest suburbs of the Twin Cities, Minnesota, from 2005 to 2010. It was developed for the New Neighbors/Hidden Scars Project at the Center for Victims of Torture. It has been adapted for use with youth refugee survivors of Karen ethnicity from Burma living in St. Paul, Minnesota.



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Introduction

Refugee youth face a myriad of challenges adjusting to new lives in the United States. Many have lived some or all of their lives in refugee camps, and have survived war, persecution and poverty. All have had to leave their countries of origin behind, and many have friends and family who remain in harm's way.

Refugees cope with these many losses while rebuilding their lives in a new culture and society. Youth are often the first to make this adjustment, as they enter the local school system and apply the English language. They often experience the stress of living between two cultures, using their language skills and knowledge of American society to take on new familial roles.

The purpose of this curriculum is to provide leadership and stress management skills and support to refugee youth. The sessions are designed to educate participants about the effects of fear and trauma on the mind and body, and offer techniques that can be used to control and manage these impacts. The curriculum also recognizes students' inherent strengths and creativity, and encourages them to apply leadership skills and values in their daily lives.

The manual was developed for use by educators or community workers in after-school and community settings. The curriculum consists of six sessions, each 1.5 to 2 hours in length. It was piloted as a partnership between CVT, community organizations and schools, and co-facilitated by adult refugee leaders and mental health professionals.

The curriculum is intended to be accessible and flexible, and can be used in conjunction with existing community programs or within schools. While the manual focuses on Karen Burmese youth, it may also be adapted to other cultures and communities. Group co-leaders should maintain flexibility, adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of their particular group while delivering the educational content.

History of School Programs at the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT)

The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) has long been involved in community projects, extending services to torture survivors and their communities beyond the clinic setting. This has included training, teaching, mentoring, and collaboration with many agencies, providers and survivor communities. As part of these initiatives, CVT has also offered services to youth within school settings.

One community-based effort was the New Neighbors Hidden Scars Project (NNHS), a collaborative of CVT and agencies serving Liberian refugees in the northwest suburbs of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The project included a partnership with the Anoka-Hennepin school district to pilot a school-based initiative focused on addressing the mental health needs of refugee youth.

The pilot initiative revealed a number of challenges in working on mental health issues with refugee youth. These included cultural barriers, stigma in the refugee community around discussing traumatic experiences, and limited staff background and training in mental health programming.

In response to these challenges, the NNHS school staff worked to build a new curriculum that would address the specific needs of refugee youth. One key component was a shift from a trauma-based approach to an emphasis on leadership skills. This helped to mitigate fears of stigma within the community. It also supported the students' personal growth while addressing trauma symptoms. The new approach promoted the use of mind-body skills to improve the participants' ability to respond to their emotional experiences and cope with trauma. The intentional change in focus also helped to bring the group together within the context of schools. Providing needed support to refugee youth is intended to improve academic success as well.

The NNHS program demonstrated that offering education and support in nonclinical settings can be a powerful way to serve the refugee community. In implementing community-based projects, CVT dedicated resources to support and educate the existing leaders and to develop additional leaders within each refugee community. The leadership development component was emphasized to increase the community's capacity to provide mental health services, improve working relationships between service providers and refugees, and support community integration.

CVT's current community-based programming, the Healing in Partnership (HIP) project, builds on the experiences with the NNHS initiative. It was also designed in response to feedback from refugees in the community. Surveys and focus groups with area refugees revealed a strong interest in community-based support groups to share emotions and experiences.

As part of this work, the HIP project developed an ongoing collaboration with the Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM), adapting the youth leadership curriculum that had been created for the NNHS project for use with Karen youth. With support from a youth impact grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement, five school groups were established in the St. Paul school district and the Roseville school district in 2011.

Most students enrolled with KOM's youth impact grant had been in the United States for less than one year, and included both male and female group members. Many had rudimentary English skills but had received some schooling in the Karen or Thai language. To meet the needs of this group, the curriculum was co-led by a mental health worker and a Karen staff member from KOM who served as co-facilitator and interpreter, and many of the written exercises were completed in Karen. CVT provided training on trauma and the curriculum to the KOM staff to build the capacity of the organization to implement the program independently in the future.

Background on Refugees

International law defines a refugee as a person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." (UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3be01b964.html> [accessed 17 March 2013]). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), there are approximately 10.5 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2012).

Each year, a proportion of the global refugee population is resettled in third countries such as the United States. The United States has admitted over three million refugees from around the world in recent decades, as many as half of them children (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Just as their adult counterparts have suffered war, torture, displacement and numerous other losses, so, too, have the children. In addition to the significant challenges all immigrant families face in adapting to a new culture and society, many refugee children and adults also suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression due to the traumatic experiences they encountered prior to coming to the United States.

Karen Refugees

The Karen people from Burma represent a growing refugee population in the United States, and specifically in Minnesota. Between 2007 and 2012, approximately 3,500 Burmese refugees were resettled in Minnesota, mostly Karen (Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Refugee Arrival Reports, 2012*, available at: <https://rpo.dhs.state.mn.us/Resources/RefugeeArrivalReports.aspx> [accessed 17 March 2013]).

Over 140,000 Karen refugees have fled to Thailand to escape war and human rights abuses. From 2005-2009, fifty thousand refugees from Thailand, mostly Karen, were resettled in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and several European countries. In 2010 alone, 24,400 refugees from Burma were resettled.

The Karen is the largest of seven ethnic minority groups living in Burma. There are between six and seven million Karen people living in Burma, and about 300,000 “Thai-Karen” living in Thailand. The Karen people have been fighting against the Burmese regime to regain autonomy and cultural rights for over sixty years. In 1962, the military, led by General Ne Win, took control of the republic of Burma through a coup d'état and the government has been under direct or indirect control by the military ever since. Nearly every ethnic group in Burma has engaged in armed rebellion against the regime. Recently, the Burmese regime has negotiated ceasefires with most armed groups, including the Karen rebels.

Burma's military regime is dominated by the majority ethnic Burmans. The government has been responsible for widespread human rights violations over a period of decades. In 1988, there was a national democratic uprising in Burma. The military killed hundreds of protesters and jailed thousands. In 1990, prodemocracy parties won more than 80 percent of the seats in parliamentary elections, but the regime ignored the results. The government has repeatedly cracked down on any opposition or dissent. However, over the past two years, the regime has begun what many hope will be a peaceful transition to democracy, and the country has enjoyed a gradual expansion of political freedoms. (“Timeline: Reforms in Burma,” *BBC News*, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16546688> [accessed 17 March 2013]).

Over the years, the Karen people have suffered greatly under the military regime. From 1995 to 2003, the Burmese Army relocated hundreds of Karen villages and turned mountainous areas into “free-fire zones” where the military could indiscriminately target the civilian population. Many Karen fled persecution and death by journeying for weeks through the jungle to cross the border into Thailand and live in refugee camps. The Karen faced forced labor, lack of food, forced displacement, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, army attacks on villages, landmines, rape, and torture at the hands of the Burmese military

regime. In a 2004 study of Karen refugees living in Thai-Burmese border camps, Cardozo et al. discovered that 79 percent reported hiding in the jungle, 69 percent experienced forced relocation, 66 percent lost property, 48 percent had their homes and crops destroyed, and three percent of men and women were raped. Other trauma reported includes forced labor, missing family members, and witnessing the death of family and friends. Of those surveyed, 42 percent reported anxiety and 41 percent reported depression.

Karen Religion and Culture

The Karen do not identify as Burmese and experience a cultural rift with the Burmese. They also do not use the official government name “Myanmar,” but instead refer to their country as “Burma.”

The majority of Karen practice Buddhism and Animism, but approximately 15 percent are Christian. The two largest groups of Karen are Pwo and Sgaw. The majority of Pwo Karen is Buddhist, and most Sgaw Karen people are Christian. During the British rule of Burma, some Pwo Karen people were given special treatment by the colonial government. This resulted in a history of mistrust between the Pwo and Sgaw Karen.

The Karen value education very highly. Those who flee into the jungle after their villages have been destroyed often construct temporary schools for their children to attend.

The Karen do not traditionally have family names. Instead, they have introductions that include the titles Saw (for men) and Naw (for women). It is important to include the full name when referring to a Karen person. There is a high degree of equality between men and women in Karen society, as well as an emphasis on responsibility to the family. The eldest child is responsible for their parents until death.

Out of respect, Karen people do not make eye contact when greeting. When entering a Karen home, it is important to remove your shoes. Karen people also typically avoid confrontation with others. They may prefer to avoid a person rather than discuss a difficult issue.

In the groups CVT led, the Karen students shared many similar stories. Some had early memories of life in Burma. Almost all of those that had memories from Burma recalled being forced from their homes, living in the jungle, and having to travel long distances to arrive in refugee camps. Many of these students shared memories of their villages being burned.

Many of the other students did not have memory of living in Burma. Some had been born in a refugee camp in Thailand and had lived their whole lives in a camp

until coming to the United States. The students also shared memories of the difficulties they faced in the camp. Resources were often scarce. They recalled times without enough food, or not having medicine when they were ill. There were active communities, but significant challenges in the camps. Many had some education in the camps, but all of them said this was not always consistent and ongoing.

The groups all shared a strong identification with their culture as well. Even those without concrete memories of Burma identified with the history of the Karen people, keeping customs and traditions such as Karen dance, and celebration of the Karen New Year. When discussing leaders the students admired, many talked about the leaders of the Karen community, and those who continue to fight for Karen independence in Burma.

Curriculum Overview

The content and sequence of session topics in this manual are designed to educate students about trauma and its impacts and to build mind-body skills to manage anxiety and stress. While some sessions may elicit strong emotions tied to experiences of stress and loss, the material and discussions are intended to address participants' immediate needs, build life skills, and strengthen connections between group members. Each session follows a similar structure, with opening and closing rituals that repeat each session.

The curriculum includes a sequence of six sessions, each with a particular theme:

Session 1 – Building Trust/Feeling Safe

Session 2 – The Impact of Stress

Session 3 – Learning to Relax and Calming Down

Session 4 – Leadership Decision-making

Session 5 – Living in a New Culture

Session 6 – Being a Leader in Community

For each session, the manual offers the following information for co-leaders:

Session Overview - A summary of the session's purpose and goals

Session Outline - The list of session activities

Needed Supplies – Any specific materials that may be needed for the week's activities

Notes for Co-leaders – Additional information co-leaders may need to prepare for the session's activities

Session Activities – Step-by-step instructions for each week’s content, following this general outline:

Check-in

Each session (after the first introductory session) starts with a question of the week. Group members are asked to answer a question from a question bag as the opening ritual for the group. The questions encourage students to share and set an expectation of active participation. Answering the question is optional and participants are instructed that they may “pass” their turn in this activity. Sample questions include: “What is one happy event that happened to you this week?” Or, “what is your favorite food?”

Following check-in, the material from the previous session is briefly reviewed. This is intended to reinforce learning and provide an opportunity for students to ask any questions that may have arisen during the week.

Session Activities

Each session focuses on a different theme. After check-in, the topic for the day is introduced. While there is limited time to delve deeply into the various topic areas, co-leaders will present several key points using activities that encourage participation and discussion. The manual provides step-by-step instructions, with additional details regarding learning goals and needed supplies for activities.

In addition to the educational content, each session includes the introduction or repetition of one or more relaxation techniques. These are techniques that group members can use on a regular basis to manage stress and emotions.

Closing Ritual

The closing consists of two parts.

Part one

Reinforcement of learning. Ask the following questions of the group:

- What did you learn today?
- What was the best part of today’s session?
- What part did you least appreciate?

Part two

Each session ends with a breathing/relaxation exercise and a simple closing ritual.

Key Information for Co-leaders

Due to the sensitive nature of the content covered in these groups and the experiences group members bring to the meetings, the role of the facilitator is particularly important for successful implementation of this curriculum. Training may be needed for new co-leaders, or for educators who do not have experience working with this population.

It is strongly recommended to involve two co-leaders as group leaders. The workload can then be shared between the two: preparing and delivering presentations, leading activities, observing and assessing group members, and so on. It can be highly beneficial to establish a place and time outside of group meetings for co-leaders to regularly debrief and consult one another regarding the progress of the group.

Co-leaders may face a number of difficulties in implementing this curriculum. Below we have outlined several strategies that may help co-leaders manage some of the most common challenges.

Dealing with Mental Health Stigma

Many refugee communities are unfamiliar with the idea of “mental illness” and may believe it is a sign of weakness to seek out mental health services. Refugees are often unaccustomed to discussing mental health issues or deal with trauma very differently in their own cultural contexts.

Since this curriculum does address some issues related to mental health, it is important to differentiate between “mental illness” and the effects someone may experience because they have a history of trauma. Reactions to trauma should be emphasized as normal and even necessary for survival. This will help reduce the stigma associated with participating in the group.

Co-leaders can also emphasize that this curriculum was developed to highlight the strengths and leadership qualities the youth bring from their experiences rather than the negative impacts of trauma.

Setting the Tone for an Effective Group Experience

The tone that is set within the group can be as important as the content of the curriculum. Because of the trauma group members may have experienced, there are a number of messages co-leaders can send with words and actions that will foster a successful group environment. Examples of this include:

- This is a safe place
- You are likable, capable, and needed
- You have choices

- You can influence what happens to you
- You cannot overwhelm me
- You are not alone
- I and others are here to listen and help
- You contribute to our school and community

The manual provides a consistent structure from week to week to create a feeling of safety and consistency. Co-leaders can help maintain this sense of predictability by explaining what is coming during each group meeting and subsequent meetings as well. This fosters a sense of safety and control. An outline of the group schedule is also given to group members in the first week.

Addressing Language and Cultural Barriers

Recent refugee arrivals may not be proficient in English, so in some cases it will be important for one of the co-leaders to be bilingual. However, even in circumstances where the group members are fluent in English, it is critical to involve someone with intimate cultural knowledge who can advise on “most-appropriate” language, activities, and metaphors to be used during group time. This individual will read each session’s materials before coming to the weekly session and be prepared to discuss it during the prep time.

One of the co-leaders may be able play this role or another representative from the community can advise the co-leaders on ways to tailor the lessons to include culturally appropriate examples, pictures and stories.

Facilitation and the Sharing of Traumatic Experiences

The material that is presented in this curriculum addresses trauma, sadness, and loss. This content may inspire group members to share information about their war experiences in the group setting, and they may do so in unpredictable or uncontrolled ways. Before the first meeting, co-co-leaders should discuss how to handle these moments. It is a delicate challenge to balance a sense of safety and openness in the group with the need to maintain an educational focus.

A central task of group co-leaders is to create a safe place for group members to acknowledge trauma histories and to recognize that any of the symptoms they may be experiencing are normal. At the same time, the approach used in this curriculum is distinct from group therapy. The goal is to provide education and support, but is not designed to be a group forum for processing traumatic experiences.

Co-leaders need to consider the safety and confidentiality of all group members, and redirect the group if it is moving towards a group therapy session. To aid in this process, it is helpful during the very first session to clearly explain the

differences between an educational group and a therapy group.

Participants are unlikely to know the difference between these two types of group, so these are some key points to share:

- The purpose of this group is to help them live here and now, in this culture.
- There will be opportunities during the sessions to share participants' experiences, so group members should be prepared to hear some of these stories.
- Any sharing that takes place during the group should be held in strict confidence.
- In-depth discussion of traumatic experiences will not take place during group sessions.
- Sharing difficult experiences can be an important element of the healing process, and there are many resources available for them to do this when they are ready.
- If any group members determine that they need additional help, they should come to one of the co-leaders.

Group co-leaders must be attuned to those students who exhibit mental health behaviors that may be outside of the scope of the curriculum to address. Consultation with clinicians and connections with community mental health agencies can be helpful in directing students to the appropriate services.

One effective facilitation model involves bringing together leaders from community organizations and mental health professionals to serve as co-co-leaders. If this is not possible, it may be helpful to engage mental health professionals as consultants.

In either case, it is essential that group co-leaders have access to referral networks and resources or handouts that can be given to group members who may need individual treatment/counseling to address more serious mental health concerns.

Finally, the experience of leading these groups can be both rewarding and challenging and can create emotional stress on the part of co-leaders. It is important to be attentive to these emotions, and to seek out necessary care and support for any symptoms of secondary trauma.

Session 1

Introducing the Group and Building Trust

Session Overview

The first session lays the foundation for the 6-week program. The purpose of the initial meeting is to build an atmosphere of trust and cohesion among group members. A key part of this process is the establishment of rules and expectations for the group, including concepts such as confidentiality, respect, and conflict resolution. It is also helpful, from the outset, to introduce some of the themes that will be explored over the course of the 6-week program, particularly the development of skills that build self-awareness and improve leadership capacity and decision-making abilities. Through activities that help group members get to know one another and collaborate on group rules and values, the students will begin to explore the connections they share as refugee youth. This session also introduces the first of a series of mind-body techniques that will be practiced throughout the program to reduce the impacts of stress and war trauma on group members' physical and mental health.

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Introduce the other participants in the group
- Explain the purpose and structure of the group
- Outline the group rules and conflict resolution processes that will guide the remaining sessions
- Perform a relaxation technique called “progressive relaxation”

Session Outline

1. Group Introductions
2. Overview of 6-Week Session
3. Icebreaker Activity
4. Establishing Group Rules
5. Progressive Relaxation Activity
6. Stick Exercise
7. Web of Connection Activity
8. Closing Ritual

Needed Supplies

Handout with Session Topics and Scheduled Group Meeting Dates

Board or flip chart with markers, pencils

Question Bag

M & M candies

A ball of colorful yarn

Enough small rocks or stones that each member can have one and still have some left over. Write a word on each rock, such as *hope, courage, confidence, family, or*



strength.

Talking piece (e.g., a stick or stone)

Thin sticks

String

Notes for Co-leaders

A lot of material is covered in this initial meeting, and it may be difficult to cover everything in one session. If you do not have sufficient time for all the activities, the essential activities are introductions, the establishment of group rules and the overview of the purpose and structure of the group. It is important for the students to leave with an understanding of the session outline and schedule so they know what to expect in the future. If time allows, you could also divide the material into two separate meetings.

Confidentiality and group rules are important for any group, but they are particularly critical with this population. One common experience of refugee students is the loss of control and predictability in their environment. This often leads to distrust of others, especially strangers. When discussing group rules and confidentiality, it is important to actively involve group members the process, instilling in them a sense of control.

Group Introductions

Prior to opening it up to the group, it is helpful for you introduce yourself as the group leader, and state why you are here and what you hope to gain and learn from the group. You may also want to give the group members a chance to ask questions of you as well. This models appropriate behavior and expectations, and can help build rapport with group members.

Introduce yourself.

Share with the group why you are interested in leading these sessions and what you hope to gain from the group:

- State your name.
- Share where you work.
- Share what experience you have working with refugees.
- If you are a member of a refugee community, share what feels comfortable, but do note that you may share some common experiences with the participants.
- Do emphasize that even though you are here to teach, you hope to learn from the participants as well.

Ask each group member to introduce him or herself by name and ask them to answer one of these questions:

- Is there a traditional meaning to their name?
- If not, what country are they from?
- How long have they been in the United States?

Overview of 6-Week Session

Explain the purpose of the group and hand out an outline (included at end of this section) and calendar for all future group sessions. Discuss the outline and calendar with the group and answer any questions students may have.

Explain that the purpose of this group is to help members understand themselves and their experiences as refugees.

Here are some key points to share:

- By the end of the sessions, you want them to be aware of how the experiences they have had in their lives affect them today.
- Refugees have often lived through some very difficult experiences that can result in painful memories.
- Difficult experiences and memories can influence thoughts and feelings and affect their bodies and their ability to learn and concentrate in school.
- Talking about their experiences can help them to make sense of them and grow as individuals.
- This group will provide them with skills to understand their feelings, cope with challenges, and make good decisions.
- The group will be an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

Describe the concept of *resilience*, which essentially is the idea that people who have lived through difficult experiences in their lives often also demonstrate strength and an incredible capacity to heal.

Emphasize that each of them is a survivor and their experiences as refugee youth have given them unique strengths, skills and creativity that they can use in leadership roles

Icebreaker Activity

Have each group member take a handful of M & M's.

Have a bag of candies prepared beforehand with questions that will be used to help group members to get to know one another.

For example, you may include questions such as, "What thing do you most enjoy about school?" or "What kind of music do you like?" or "What is your favorite

kind of music?" See additional sample questions at the end of this section.

Each group member has to answer with the number of M&M's they have for the color of a particular question. Purposely keep the questions lighthearted and easy to respond to. You are building the skill of sharing among the group, and want to establish trust before bringing up more difficult material with them.

This exercise can be modified to create an opening ritual for each group session that follows. In subsequent weeks, choose only one question and have each member answer. This game playing helps to create a predictable structure for beginning group session.

Establishing Group Rules

At this point, introduce the talking piece object.

Explain that it will be used to designate the current speaker. When a member has this object in hand, all others should be listening.

As the facilitator, you can model this behavior. This object can then be used throughout the weeks of the group. You may not find this necessary each week if the group creates its own way of handling this, but it can be useful to re-introduce this concept as needed to reinforce the importance of turn taking and active listening.

Have the group brainstorm appropriate rules for the group, and write their ideas on the board or flip-chart paper. The process should include some discussion of the following questions:

- What are some ways that the group can foster a spirit of mutual respect?
- What should be the group's decision-making process?
- How should conflicts be resolved in the group?
- What are appropriate consequences if someone breaks the rules? Note: If they answer in a harsh manner, i.e., being kicked out of group, guide them to a more inclusive approach.

As part of this discussion, highlight some of your practical expectations for the group:

- All sessions will start and end on time
- Process if they are unable to attend one of the group sessions

It is critical to include a discussion of confidentiality and privacy as part of the group rules.

Ask them to explain the difference between good secrets and bad secrets.

Emphasize that protecting privacy here is about building trust and respect for one another, and that this is a particular challenge for refugees who may have lived in places where promises were not kept or secrets are kept for survival.

Explain that as part of the group, they will be discussing the differences between good secrets and bad ones, and when it is appropriate (and important) to share secrets with trustworthy adults.

Offer some guidance on how to respond if other students in school or peers in the community ask about the group or if group members see one another outside the context of the group: responses such as “it’s a group about leadership” or “it’s private” may help them learn to set boundaries and protect their privacy as well as the privacy of fellow group members.

Progressive Relaxation Activity

Explain that the group will learn many skills over the course of the group, and the following technique is called progressive relaxation, and is a relaxation exercise that they can also practice at home.

Use this script to lead the group:

“I’d like you to start by thinking of someplace that makes you really comfortable, like your bed, or a couch in a quiet place. Imagine you are lying down there or sitting comfortably. Take a breath in...”

Wait 3-4 seconds.

“and out...”

Wait 3-4 seconds.

“in...and out...in....and out. Try to keep breathing this way as we continue. And keep thinking of your comfortable spot.

Now I’d like you to make a fist and squeeze it really tight. You can open your eyes to see how if you’re not sure.

Hold it. Now relax it completely and shake it out.

Do it again, make a fist.

Now relax it completely.

Can you feel the difference between how it was when it was tight and now how it feels when it’s relaxed?

Let’s do the same thing for the rest of your arms. Tighten up your whole arm, like you are making a muscle and hold it. Now relax it completely.

Do it again, tighten... now relax.

“Now let’s move to your shoulders. Bring your shoulders up to your ears and tighten them, hold it, now relax them completely. Make sure your hands, arms, and shoulders are completely relaxed.

Breathe in and out, in and out.

“Let’s work on your face now. Scrunch up your face as tight as you can, close your eyes tight and scrunch up your mouth and hold it.

Now relax.

Try that again.

Tighten up your whole face and hold it, now relax.

Keep breathing like we did before.

“Next, your body. Arch your back as much as you can and put your shoulders way back. Hold it... now relax.

Next, lean forward onto your knees and curl your back the other way, and tighten your stomach as much as you can.

Hold it... now relax.

Do it again, hold it... now relax.

Breathe in and out, in and out.

“Now we move to your legs and feet. Straighten your legs up in the air in front of you and point your toes up in the air.

Now hold it... relax.

Do that again, hold it, now relax.

“Next, point your toes the other way as far from your face as you can and tighten your leg muscles.

Hold it... now relax.

Do it again, hold it... now relax.

Breathe in and out, in and out.

“Think about all the parts of your body and relax any part that is tight now.

Let all the tension go out of your body.

Breathe in and out, in and out.

When you are ready, open your eyes and return your attention to the group again.

If you have time when you are done, ask the participants what they noticed. Do they notice a difference between how they feel before and after this exercise?

You may do one or both of the following exercises, if you have time:

Stick Exercise

Explain to the students that the purpose of this activity is to show the need for a cohesive group and team, and how coming together makes us stronger.

Give each member a stick.

Ask the group members to break their stick in half. (Each member should be able to break a stick)

Then give each member another stick. This time, go around and take each stick one by one in one of your hands. Then, tie the whole bunch of sticks into one bundle with the string.

Note to leaders: The sticks *may* break. The participants usually still understand the concept and often react with laughter.

Link this back to the refugee experience. Here are some key points to share:

- Often to survive they may have shut off parts of themselves, and avoided talking about their experiences
- When it is safe to do so, it is important to learn to ask for help from others
- If they can stay strong as a group, they will not break

Web of Connection Activity

Take the colorful ball of yarn and explain that the group will do an exercise together.

Ask group members to stand in a circle.

Explain the process:

- The ball of yarn will be tossed around the circle.
- When each person receives the ball of yarn, they should answer the question:
- “What are you hoping to gain from being part of this group?”
- After they have answered the question, they should hold a piece of the yarn and toss the ball to another member of the group.

As the facilitator, hold the yarn and model the process by answering the question. Then hold one end of the yarn and toss the ball of yarn to one of the group members.

He or she then answers the question, holds a piece of the yarn, and then tosses the yarn ball to another member.

This is repeated until each member of the group has answered a question and tossed the ball of yarn. When the process is completed, there is a web created by the tosses.

Lead a brief discussion about what this “web” represents and discuss the answers that the group offers. The goal is to highlight the interconnections between all the group members and the community the group is creating together.

Closing Ritual

The activity below is one option for a closing ritual that will be repeated during each week of the program. If they choose to do so, the group members can also replace it with a different closing ritual that is meaningful to them. For example, they could each state a goal or hope for the week, or share a word that captures their thoughts and feelings. The main goal of the closing ritual is to create a frame and structure that is repeated every week, providing predictability and a sense of trust and safety.

Have each group member choose one of the rocks with words written on them. Explain these words like hope, courage, confidence, family, or strength represent some of the feelings and connections you want to build upon through the group.

Tell them that each week they will take this rock with them to remind them of what they are learning through the group.

Outline of Sessions

Session 1 – Building Trust/Feeling Safe

Session 2 – The Impact of Stress

Session 3 – Learning to Relax and Calming Down

Session 4 – Leadership Decision-making

Session 5 – Living in a New Culture

Session 6 – Being a Leader in Community

Sample Questions for Icebreaker Activity

- What is your favorite subject in school?
- Who do you admire, and why?
- What do you do for fun?
- What is something you are good at?
- What color do you like?
- What kind of music do you listen to?
- Do you have a hero?
- What activities do you do on the weekend?
- Who is your favorite teacher?
- What is your least favorite subject in school?
- What kind of snacks do you like?
- Do you have brothers and or sisters? How many?
- What is your favorite activity to do outdoors?
- What is your favorite sport?
- What is a job or career you would like to do in the future?
- What makes someone a good leader?

Deeper Questions:

- When I feel stressed out, I try to . . .
- What is something that makes you feel afraid?
- I would make a good leader because . . .
- What is a way that you offer support to your friends?
- When I feel upset, where do I feel it in my body?

Session 2

The Impact of Stress

Session Overview

This session introduces group members to the physical and emotional impacts of stress and trauma. The goal is to help students understand how stress impacts their bodies, and recognize that any emotional and physical states they may be experiencing are normal.

Group members will discuss common responses to stress and trauma, and identify interconnections between the mind and body. Through the activities and auto-genie exercise, students are exposed to additional knowledge and skills that can help them manage the effects of stress on their physical and mental health.

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Distinguish between various feeling states
- Use an expanded vocabulary to describe feelings and impacts of stress on emotions
- Describe how emotions affect their bodies, energy levels and relationships
- Identify how these physical and emotional states are connected to their experiences as refugee youth
- Perform an auto-genic technique, an exercise to calm the mind and body

Session Outline

1. Check-in
2. Defining Stress and Trauma
3. Flight-Fight-Freeze Activity
4. Interconnected Effects of Stress Activity
5. Auto-Genie Relaxation Exercise
6. Closing Ritual

Needed Supplies

Flip chart paper

Paper

Markers, pens

Handouts describing the auto-genie exercise so students can practice at home

Notes for Co-leaders

This session introduces an auto-genic exercise that group members can use to calm their minds and bodies. As with the progressive relaxation technique, you may return to this approach in subsequent weeks. While you will not have time

to repeat each activity in every session, it is important to repeat at least one of them every week and encourage group members to practice at home.

The techniques are intended to complement the education they are receiving on trauma, and help them cope with challenges they may face as refugee youth. In addition, the exercises may be useful in improving students' behavior and performance in school.

It may help to explain that, with certain emotions, it is easy to *react without thinking*, especially in dangerous situations. The goal is to begin to foster an understanding among group members that good leaders have the ability to know themselves and to be able to reflect (think before acting). This can help them make better decisions and build better relationships.

Please note that the drawings for the "Fight – Flight – Freeze" Activity should be completed before the beginning of the session.

Check in

Select the question of the week to open the session.
Review Session 1.

Defining Stress and Trauma

Ask the students to define the terms "stress" and "trauma"

Facilitator's Note:

Stress can be defined as a time of hardship or increased worry.

Trauma can be defined as something that happens out of one's control. It also involves intense fear, danger and even the threat of loss of life.

Explain that there are many types of events that can cause stress and trauma. As a group, make a list of a range of events and experiences that might fit into these categories. For example, you may try to encourage participants to think of natural events (flooding, earthquakes) as well as human-centered events (car accidents) to illustrate this point.

Introduce the idea that experiences during war often lead to feelings of stress and trauma.

Ask the students to share in what ways war causes stress and trauma, and how these may be different from accidents or natural disasters.

Some points to emphasize:

1. People are causing harm to other people

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2. War affects certain basic human needs including a sense of trust, safety and security

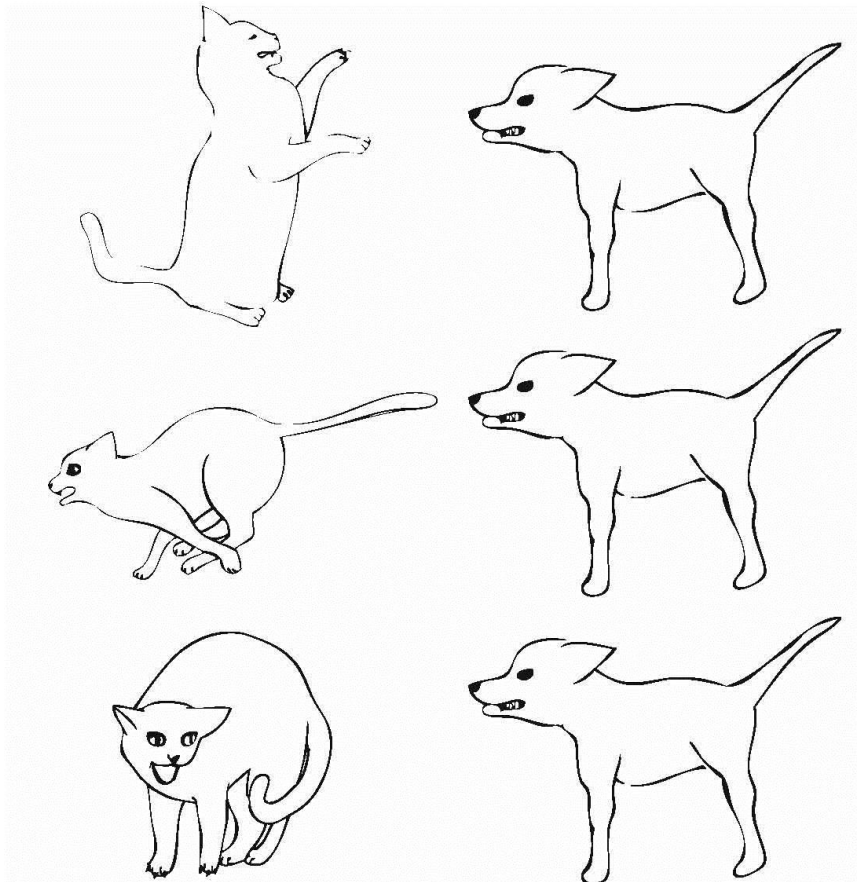
“Fight – Flight – Freeze” Activity

This activity will explore the way people respond to fear through an illustration of a cat that has been cornered by a dog.

Prior to the session, draw three pictures on a flip chart (sticklike figures are fine and imperfect drawings can lighten the atmosphere).

In the first picture, show a cat cornered by a dog, its claws out prepared to fight. In the second picture, show a cat attempting to run away from the dog. In the third picture, draw a cat that appears to be stuck or not moving.

See drawing below for an example.



Ask group members what they observe in the drawings. Follow this with a brief presentation of the fight/flight/freeze response.

Elements of this presentation can include:

Fight/Flight

The first two pictures show fight and flight.

Begin the discussion by asking group members about the cat's two action choices in this situation.

Lead a conversation about the implications of the cat's choice to fight or escape:

Explain to the group that the small cat will require extra energy to be able to defeat the dog in this situation. For a short period of time, the cat is, in a sense, "super powered."

Highlight the fact that this also happens to people's bodies in times of danger.

Ask group members if they have witnessed this or experienced this themselves (e.g., not feeling pain while fleeing, being able to run faster or longer than ever before).

Explain some of the things that happen in our bodies during moments when we experience intense fear or believe our lives are threatened:

- The body eliminates waste to become lighter
- The heart pumps more blood to the body
- The lungs pump more oxygen to the body

Point out the key difference between humans and cats that experience life-threatening situations: after the traumatic event, the cat returns to its normal life and does not think about its experiences. In contrast, humans can think about what has happened to them. When they do, the same physical symptoms can return as if the trauma is happening all over again. This is the body's way of protecting a human from future harm. This can actually save people who are in a life-threatening situation. However, once a person is removed from that situation, the body's response may no longer be helpful. The body's ongoing reactions can instead be scary, stressful, and draining.

Freeze

The third picture depicts the cat "frozen" in place.

Point out that freezing can happen if the cat does not know what to do or if it is not possible to escape or fight back.

Ask if group members have seen this response in an animal (e.g. when a bright

light shines in the animal's eyes or when a lizard freezes and can't be seen by prey due to camouflage). Students may have other examples of this to share.

Explain that humans may react in this same way by sharing the following key points:

- In life-threatening situations, what happens in the body is similar to a light switch. When individuals have experienced war, sometimes their bodies “turn off” like a light switch.
- Living under constant threat of violence can cause the body's trauma response to go beyond flight vs. flight into the freeze mode. One consequence is that traumatic experiences and emotions remain “frozen” in the body and mind.
- “Freezing,” in the midst of a crisis, is a natural response, and intended to protect both animals and humans. For example, students may have seen images of prey “freezing” at the point when they are in the jaws of a lion.
- It can be overwhelming for the human body to process violent events while they are happening. “Freezing” can protect people from feeling too much pain at the point of death, or in near-death experiences.
- When a person is finally safe, the body can be “turned back on.” Memories and emotions can return repeatedly, like a movie that is being played over and over again. It is as if the individual is re-experiencing the traumatic event. This is the body's way of trying to understand what happened, but it can cause a lot of stress. One way to help end this cycle is to talk about it in a safe environment.

Interconnected Effects of Stress

On a flip chart make four columns, labeling each with one of the following terms: *psychological, physical, social, and spiritual*. See below for a sample.

Ask group members to define each term.

PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL	SPIRITUAL

- Ask group members to name ways that war can affect people in each of the four areas listed and write their responses in the appropriate column.
- It may work to have the group break into smaller groups of three or four to work on this exercise.

The group may come up with examples like this:

PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL	SPIRITUAL
Sadness	Don't leave house	Headache	Questioning faith
Worry	Not trusting	Stomach ache	Angry at God
Bad dreams	Unable to engage in enjoyable activities	High blood pressure	Questioning meaning of life
Thinking too much			

After a number of examples have been provided under each category, ask group members if any of the effects in one column are connected to any of the other terms listed (e.g., feeling sad under “psychological” could be related to not going out of the house under “social”).

Draw lines connecting symptoms across columns until it becomes apparent that many of the effects of trauma are interrelated.

Point out that these symptoms can build on one another to create a downward

spiral. In other words, difficulties in one area can worsen the symptoms in other areas. As a result, it is helpful to be aware of the interconnections and focus on multiple effects at the same time.

Example:

PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL	SPIRITUAL
Sadness	Don't leave house	Headache	Questioning faith
Worry	Not trusting	Stomach ache	Angry at God
Bad dreams	Unable to engage in enjoyable activities	High	Questioning meaning of life
Thinking too much			

An alternate visual way to illustrate interconnectedness using five categories is to draw a hand on the board and label the palm "the whole person." Fingers are labeled "physical," "emotional," "social," "spiritual," and "mental."

In this case, ask group members to share effects of war on people and record the list next to the hand drawing.

Ask members where they would categorize or "put" each of the effects they identified. Group members will probably articulate that some of the effects fit into more than one category.

Invite conversation about how symptoms are connected.

Encourage members to comment on the picture as it relates to the categories (e.g., how the hand is most functional when the fingers work together well).



Auto Genics (Auto-Genie) Exercise

Auto Genics is an exercise that we can do to help calm ourselves down. “Auto” means self and “genic” means produced or made from. “Auto-genics” means that we create or bring this about for ourselves. When we learn and then practice the following, we can learn how to relax and calm ourselves.

Write the following statements on a whiteboard or flipchart paper:

- My arms and hands are warm and relaxed
- My legs are quiet and still
- My shoulders are soft and relaxed
- My forehead is cool and free of tension
- My face and jaw are loose and relaxed
- My neck is warm, relaxed and free of tension
- My stomach is soft and relaxed
- My body knows how to balance itself perfectly as I relax

Tell the group that this activity is a way to help them deal with the impacts of stress on their bodies by focusing on different parts of their body and visualizing relaxation. Read the following script:

“Begin by breathing through your nose fully – all the way down to your stomach and breathing out very slowly (your stomach will rise and fall)”

Ask the students to read the series of statements, and select at least 5 areas of the body to focus on. When they are ready, ask them to softly or silently repeat these phrases 3-5 times for one part of the body.

While they repeat the statements, ask them to visualize that part of their body softening and relaxing (perhaps like Jell-O or butter softening).

When they have completed this process for one part of the body, they should move on to the next one.

After the activity, pass out a handout with the list of questions so the group can practice the activity at home.

After the exercise, you may also want to ask the participants how this felt. Ask if they noticed a difference between how they feel before and after doing this. Emphasize that this takes practice, and they might not notice much difference the first time they try.

Closing Ritual

Repeat the closing ritual from previous session.

Session 3

Learning to Relax and Calming Down

Session Overview

This session focuses on the impacts of trauma on physical and emotional health, exploring ways to equip refugee youth with the skills needed to cope with trauma and promote self-care. The purpose of this module is to introduce the group to techniques they can use to manage stress and anxiety. The mind-body approaches outlined here will build upon the progressive relaxation and auto-genic exercises that were presented in the first sessions, offering group members a range of tools they can draw upon in their daily lives to manage difficult emotions and reduce the negative impacts of stress. These techniques may have an added benefit for those students who are facing behavioral and performance issues in school.

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Identify specific ways emotions are experienced in the body
- Use breathing and visualization techniques to calm the mind and relax the body

Session Outline

1. Check-in and Review
2. Simple Breathing Exercise
3. The Inside Story: A Discussion of Emotions
4. Drawing Exercise
5. Visual Imagery Exercise
6. Closing Ritual

Needed Supplies

Whiteboard and/or Flip chart paper

Paper

Markers, pens

Notes for Co-leaders

The exercises introduced in this session are among the core components of this curriculum. It is important to connect these activities to previous sessions so participants recognize that they are building skills to deal with normal reactions they may experience as refugee youth.

These are techniques that participants can take with them and use on a regular basis. You may want to consider repeating some of these activities in future sessions, where appropriate.

Check in and Review

Select the question of the week to open the session.

Review Session 2:

Ask group members to briefly define stress again. Remind them of the information that was covered in the last session. Ask them to briefly describe what they learned about the effects of stress during the previous week's session.

Introduce this week's meeting by telling the group that they will be practicing a variety of exercises that will help them cope with stress.

Simple Breathing Exercise

Explain to the participants that one of the most effective ways to control their emotions or calm down relies on something they always have with them—their own breath.

Demonstrate what a deep breath looks like. Explain it can be like filling a balloon in their stomach. Show them how the diaphragm moves while the belly moves in and out.

Demonstrate that this is different from the reaction of the body to a shallow breath, when breathing stays in the chest, and the shoulders go up and down.

Introduce the “elevator breathing” technique. Ask them to imagine going up five flights in an elevator. As they arrive to each floor, they take a deeper breath. As the elevator ascends, they exhale slowly.

Lead this activity with the group, counting each floor for them: one... two... three...four... five.

Repeat for each floor going down.

Invite the group members to observe and share any differences in how they feel after completing this exercise.

The Inside Story: A Discussion of Emotions

Explain that you will be reading a few sentences, and the group should try to determine what is being described.

Read aloud the following script:

“They are very fast, even faster than thought. At times they’re invisible – we can’t see them and don’t even know they exist. At other times, they’re as loud as a thunderstorm booming inside of us, and they’re visible on our faces and in the way we move. Without them, we can’t enjoy food, have fun with friends, or feel the stir of music. And yet, with them we can feel miserable and confused.”

Ask the group, “What are they?”

Group members should eventually come to the conclusion that the quote is describing feelings and emotions.

Lead a brief discussion about the quote with the group.

Drawing Exercise

Introduce this activity with an overview of the ways feelings affect our bodies.

Key points to share with participants:

- When people are scared, worried, angry, upset or excited, they feel those emotions in their bodies
- When people feel safe and secure, cared for, loved and appreciated, these emotions are also felt in the body
- It is common for people to be unaware of the ways feelings affect their bodies and their energy levels
- By paying attention to the experiences in the body, it is possible to identify the ways emotions affect us. For example, some emotions may cause people to experience tension in certain places or an upset stomach. Sometimes people will have the sense that their hearts are pounding in their chests, or that their hearts might burst with joy, or they will experience the sensation of feeling warm all over.

Explain that during this activity the group will have the chance to share where they experience various emotions in the body.

As a group, draw a large outline of a human being in the middle of the room. The participants should then form a circle around the outline.

Ask the group members to list various emotions and identify where in the body they feel those emotions. You may want to use examples of recent experiences to draw connections between emotions, feeling states, and the experience of feelings in the body.

Variation: Instead of a large group drawing, you could ask each student to draw a separate outline of a body and label the places where they experience emotions.

Visual Imagery Activity

Explain to the group that the next activity involves using their imagination and their senses to visualize a place where they feel a sense of calm.

Ask the group members to close their eyes.

Invite them to take a few moments to think of a real or imagined place where they feel a sense of safety or calm.

Encourage them to gather as much detail as possible about this place. You may want to prompt them with some questions to think about, such as:

- *What does the place look like? What do you see when you look around in different directions?*
- *What sounds do you imagine in this place?*
- *What are the textures of this place? What would it feel like to touch the surroundings?*
- *What kinds of smells are there in this place?*
- *Can you imagine what tastes you might experience in this place?*

Once they feel as familiar as possible with their chosen place, ask them to open their eyes. Emphasize that by using their imaginations, they always have the ability to return to this place where they feel safe or calm.

Following the visual imagery exercise, you may want to ask them to draw a picture of the place as a reminder of the activity and the possibility of returning to the place they imagined.

Closing Ritual

Repeat the closing ritual from previous sessions.

Session 4

Leadership Decision-Making

Session Overview

The cognitive behavioral treatment model is an approach that is widely used in the field of mental health. The model emphasizes connections between thoughts, feelings and actions. The goal is to equip individuals with skills to become more aware of these connections in their daily lives so they can make better decisions and experience improved emotional and mental health.

The purpose of this session is to introduce group members to the basic elements of the cognitive behavioral approach. Through this session's activities, group members will begin to learn how to recognize different aspects of their daily experiences. They will reflect on interconnections between thoughts, feelings and actions, and explore how awareness of these connections can help them navigate their daily lives. The session also emphasizes how self-awareness and deliberate reflection can strengthen their leadership skills.

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Analyze and assess the connections between their thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Identify ways they can influence their thoughts, feelings and actions
- Articulate some of the challenges they face as new immigrants that may result in difficult thoughts and feelings

Session Outline

1. Check in and Review
2. Triangle Activity
3. Leadership Chair Activity
4. Progressive Relaxation Exercise
5. Auto-genie Exercise
6. Closing Ritual

Needed Supplies

Whiteboard or flip chart paper

An envelope with small pieces of paper with situation descriptions (see Leadership Chair Activity for further details)

Check in

Select the question of the week to open the session.

Review Session 3

Triangle Activity

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate how thoughts, feelings and actions are interconnected.

Draw a large triangle on the board or flip chart paper. Write these three words, one on each corner of the triangle:

Thoughts

Feelings

Actions

To begin, ask the group a simple question about the day's events, such as: "What was the first thing you did this morning?"

Group members may respond that they went to the bathroom, ate breakfast, talked to a brother or sister, etc.

Mark these activities at the "Actions" point of the triangle, and ask the group to define what the related thoughts and feelings might be.

As an example, you may share the following:

Action: Eat breakfast

Thought: I'm hungry

Feelings: Stomach discomfort, sleepiness, calm

Invite the students to identify thoughts and feelings that might connect with the other actions they identified.

Introduce a more difficult situation the group members have experienced: the first day they attended a new school after arriving in the United States.

Ask them to share some of the thoughts they remember about this experience, and write these on another triangle. After the group has shared these thoughts, remind them that while they are all discussing the same experience of attending a new school, the thoughts can lead to very different feelings and actions.

Offer a few different examples based on this scenario:

Possible thought #1: I don't want to go to school

Feeling: Scared

Action: Decision to stay home

Possible thought #2: I think that education is important in a new country

Feeling: Excited

Action: Go to school and pay attention

Possible thought #3: I am bored when I stay home and I want to make friends
Feeling: Excited, happy, nervous
Action: Go to school and introduce myself to new people

Repeat this exercise a few times, with the participants offering examples of the ways thoughts are connected to feelings and actions. If time permits, ask each group member to describe one thought, feeling and action that are connected to one another.

NOTE: While it is preferable to do this activity as a group so participants can learn from one another, it can also be done individually.

Leadership Chair Activity

Building on the triangle activity, the leadership chair activity helps members to think through increasingly complex situations. It helps them to *help and encourage one another* in solving problems.

Write a series of problem statements on small pieces of paper and place them in an envelope.

Examples might include:

“Another student in school wants to start a fight.”

“I believe this teacher treated me unfairly.”

“I fight with my brothers at home.”

“I can’t learn English.”

Invite one student to sit in a chair. Explain that this individual is the “help seeker.”

Ask another group member to sit next to him or her. Tell the group that this person is the “leader.”

Ask the “help seeker” to choose a scenario from the envelope and state what might be done to face this problem.

Then, invite the “leader” to offer alternative responses. Other group members can also participate by helping to generate additional alternatives.

Using the responses the group members offer, emphasize how the different feelings, thoughts and actions change depending on the way people react to problems.

Ask members how they think a leader would respond to the problem.

Explain that not all “leaders” are good leaders and that there are many positive ways to respond to any given scenario.

Indicate to the group that the purpose is not to look for the “right” answer, but rather to see that things are not “black and white.” Emphasize that this activity is also intended to demonstrate how peers can help one another when faced with challenges.

The group does this several times with their own examples.

Progressive Relaxation Exercise

Repeat the progressive relaxation technique from earlier sessions.

Auto-genie Exercise

Repeat the auto-genie technique from earlier sessions.

Closing Ritual

Repeat the closing ritual from previous sessions.

Session 5

Living in a New Culture

Session Overview

The goal of this session is to help group members understand how cultural differences can create challenges in adjusting to a new society. Students will examine the issue of culture, exploring similarities and differences between life in their countries of origin and life in the United States. Through a discussion of the common phases of refugee adjustment, this session also builds awareness in the group about the stresses associated with adapting to a new society, and the uneven path toward adjustment to U.S. society.

By the end of the session, group members will be able to:

- Provide a working definition of “culture”
- Define common phases of refugee adjustment to a new society
- Identify multiple challenges facing refugees as they adapt to a new society, including cultural differences and barriers

Session Outline

1. Check in
2. Defining Culture Activity
3. Life Comparison Activity
4. Phases of Refugee Adjustment
5. Auto-genie or Progressive Relaxation Exercise
6. Closing Ritual

Needed Supplies

Whiteboard or flipchart paper

Notes for Co-leaders

This session can promote lively discussion, as students share experiences of their families’ adjustment to life in the United States. The opportunity to discuss these experiences can help war survivors attain a greater sense of safety and stability, and contribute to the acculturation process, the process of learning to live in a new country, in a new culture. It can be very empowering for refugee youth to recognize that their experiences and reactions to life in the U.S. are normal.

It is important to be sensitive to differences between the refugee youth in your group. Depending on the group, some participants may have already lived in the United States for several years, while others may be new to the country. Students who have been in the U.S. for longer periods of time may share more

nuanced cultural experiences. This session can still be useful for this group, as even highly acculturated individuals may still be adapting to life in the United States.

Check in

Select the question of the week to open the session.
Review Session 4

Defining Culture Activity

The purpose of this activity is to explore the definition of the term “culture.”

Ask the group to respond to the following question: “What does culture mean to you?”

Write down the words and definitions they provide on a whiteboard or flip chart paper.

Share some other common definitions of culture with the group, including:

- A way of life of a group of people
- Symbols of a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, motives
- The tradition of a people
- Shared knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, and roles, acquired by a people over generations

Read this quote from refugee literature, which offers another way to describe culture:

“We are like fish and culture is the water we swim in. The water is all around us. When we jump out of the lake into the air, we understand how much we need the water. When we leave our culture, we understand how important it is to us.”

(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration & Refugee Services Bridging Project)

Ask participants what they think this quote means. Does it make sense to them or describe their experiences in any way?

Life Comparison Activity

This activity explores cultural differences between communities in Burma and Thailand and the United States. The purpose of the activity is to build awareness about the cultural challenges associated with adaptation to a new culture.

On a whiteboard or flipchart, create two columns with the following headings:

- “Life in Burma and Thailand”
- “Life in the U.S.A.”

Ask group members to compare and contrast life in the United States with the country/countries where they lived prior to moving to the U.S.

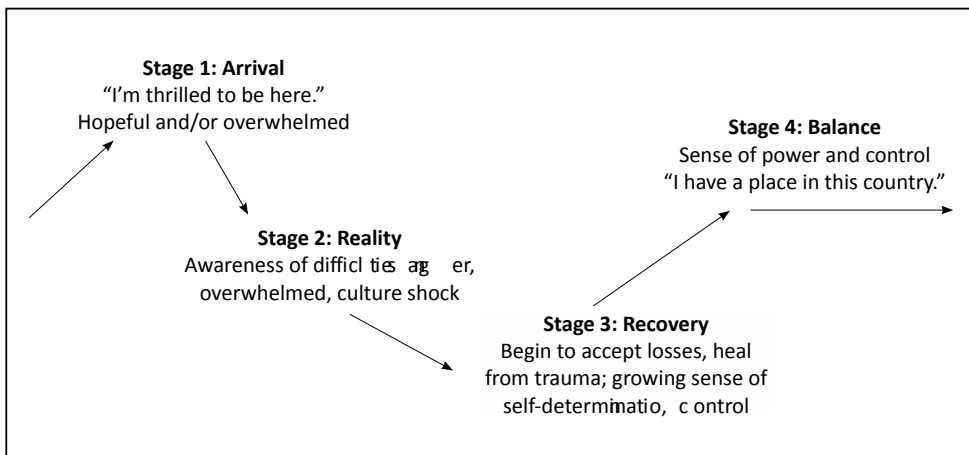
Here are some categories you may use as a starting point for comparison:

- School systems
- Clothing
- Money
- Dating
- Age of marriage
- Typical breakfast food
- How to act at work
- Cigarette smoking
- Treatment of the elderly
- Care of children
- Peoples’ views on what is most important in life

Ask the students if there are any other differences or similarities they would like to add.

Phases of Refugee Adjustment

Present the common phases of refugee adjustment on a whiteboard or flipchart, as illustrated below. These phases may describe your mood, or level of happiness over time. It is a normal part of cultural adjustment.



Adapted from International Organization of Migration (1997). Cultural Orientation Africa.

On the whiteboard or flipchart, make a column for each of the following stages:

- Arrival
- Reality
- Recovery
- Balance

Under each column invite the group members to share any of their experiences that come to mind as they consider these stages.

Take some time to explore each phase of adjustment. Use the common elements of each phase described below to initiate the conversation.

Begin by reading the description of the *Arrival* phase, and ask if it accurately reflects their own experiences when they arrived in the United States. Invite them to identify any challenges or positive experiences they had during this phase of their own adjustment to life in the U.S.

Repeat the process for the other three phases.

Ask the group members if they currently see themselves in any of these descriptions.

Point out that individuals can move back and forth between these phases many times, and most refugees and immigrants periodically “revisit” previous stages while they are moving forward.

To illustrate this point, you may want to stand up, take a few steps forward, then take one or two steps backwards. Repeat a few times to show that over time, it is still possible to make significant advancements.

Phases of Refugee Adjustment

Arrival: This phase is characterized by feelings of relief, hope, and elation. During this phase, refugees often feel happy to have left the dangerous situation back home and are looking forward to the prospects of rebuilding their lives.

Reality: During this phase, most people find that it is very challenging to adjust to American society. The long and difficult journey did not end upon arrival on American shores. Many begin to realize that they are considered members of a minority group or “underclass” in U.S. society. They may not feel appreciated for their skills and life experiences, and U.S. cultural practices may seem strange or unhealthy.

Recovery: During this phase, refugees begin to adapt to, or embrace, the new culture. They blend their own culture with elements of the new culture. Refugees begin to heal from loss and past trauma, and experience a sense of control over their lives. It is important to note that some individuals struggle to reach this phase, and may become further isolated or marginalized.

Balance: During this phase, the reality of life in a new country becomes acceptable. Refugees begin to experience a sense of belonging in the new country. While they may still feel a strong attachment to the place where they came from, they are making the best of their current situation by engaging in meaningful relationships and fulfilling activities.

Ask group members to reflect on this discussion over the course of the coming week. Explain that during the next session, they will be invited to share some of the approaches they have used at various phases of their adjustment to U.S. society to cope with the many changes in their lives.

Auto-Genie or Progressive Relaxation Exercise

Repeat one of the two relaxation techniques from previous sessions.

Closing Ritual

Repeat the closing ritual from previous sessions.

Session 6

Being a Leader in the Community

Session Overview

This final session focuses on leadership skills and values. The activities in this session are intended to help group members recognize their innate resilience and creativity, and identify ways they can apply these strengths as leaders. Participants identify the attributes of positive leadership in themselves and others, and explore the unique abilities and perspectives each individual brings to the group. The session ends with a closing ceremony to honor the students and recognize the work they have accomplished together.

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Identify role models in their lives and the leadership qualities they exhibit
- Describe a range of qualities that contribute to positive leadership abilities
- Articulate their own leadership strengths and goals

Session Outline

1. Check in
2. Positive Leadership Qualities Discussion
3. Personal Leadership Qualities Activity
4. Optional Leadership Keychain/Bracelet Activity
5. Auto-Genie or Progressive Relaxation Exercise
6. Closing Ceremony

Needed Supplies

Whiteboard or flipchart paper

Sheets of thick paper for each member of the group (a sheet that would fit taped to someone's back)

Markers (avoid any markers that will soak through paper and stain clothing)

Tape

Certificates of completion for each group member (see sample at end of section)

Easy-to-string beads in several bright colors (for optional leadership keychain/bracelet activity)

Cord or chains (for optional leadership keychain/bracelet activity)

Notes for Co-leaders

This is the last session of the curriculum, so it is important to acknowledge this, and recognize what the group has accomplished together. The closing ritual involves providing certificates of completion for each member of the group. You may also want to organize a celebration of some kind, depending on what seems appropriate to the group and the setting.

Check in

Select the question of the week to open the session.
Review Session 5

Positive Leadership Qualities Discussion

Ask the group members to share the names of people who they admire or who have transformed their lives in some way. Clarify that these individuals can be famous people, family members, teachers, or others who have had a positive impact on their lives. Write this list on a whiteboard or flipchart paper.

Select one person on the list that all the group members may be familiar with, and invite the group to identify some of the qualities that may make this person a good leader.

Create a list of these qualities on a whiteboard or flipchart paper. It may also be helpful to create a separate column of unfavorable qualities in case they come up during the discussion.

After discussing the well-known individual as a group, encourage the participants to return to some of the people that they had identified as having a positive impact on their lives. Ask them to share additional leadership qualities that they admire in these individuals.

Continue until you have a fairly comprehensive list. Ask the students if they can think of any important leadership qualities that are missing, and add any of these to the list.

Personal Leadership Qualities

Tape a large sheet of paper to the backs of each member of the group.

Give each participant a colored marker, and explain that this activity involves writing one or more positive qualities they see in their fellow group members.

Emphasize that NO NEGATIVE statements are allowed during this activity.

Ask them to walk around the room until they have written at least one positive quality on the backs of every member of the group.

When everyone has completed this process, the students can remove the paper from their backs.

One by one, ask each group member to share some of the leadership qualities that others identified in them, as well as qualities they see in themselves.

You may need to assist group members to identify personal leadership qualities. This may include suggestions like:

- A good listener
- Fair
- Smart
- Hard worker
- Dedicated
- Talented
- Patient
- Organized

To conclude the discussion, ask the group if there are leadership qualities they may not have today but would like to develop in the future.

Leadership Keychain/Bracelet Activity (Optional)

Separate the beads by color and place them in different piles.

Ask group members to assign a particular leadership quality to each set of colored beads. Write these qualities on a piece of paper by each set of beads.

Hand out a cord or chain to each member of the group.

Explain that they should make a keychain or bracelet, selecting beads that represent the qualities they think are most important for a good leader.

After they have created the keychain or bracelet, ask some or all of the group members to share why they chose their beads and the significance of the keychain or bracelet to him or her.

Auto-Genie or Progressive Relaxation Exercise

Repeat one of the two relaxation techniques from previous sessions.

Closing Ceremony

Hand a certificate of completion to each student, one at a time, and share some of your thoughts about leadership qualities you have seen in him or her, or what you have learned from them as individuals.

Close with any celebration or ritual you have planned (see Notes for Co-leaders).

Name of Organization

*Education and Support
Group*

Date XXX, 2013

Participant's Name

Congratulations!

Thank you for all you contributed and for sharing your thoughts and feelings with the group. We hope that you will continue to learn about your unique qualities and continue to move toward healing. We also hope that you will continue to find the support that you need. We wish for you peace throughout your life, and we will always remember you.

References

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