

SUPPORTING REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE IN MANITOBA SCHOOLS

Trauma reactions may show changes in students' behaviours that will impact their learning.

Examples include the following:

- Students with refugee backgrounds, including those from Ukraine, may find the events on their television screens traumatizing. Their reactions may overwhelm them and affect their ability to focus and engage in the classroom.
- These students may display increased absences and/or behaviours uncommon for them.
- Younger children may show regressive behaviour of an earlier developmental age, separation anxiety, clinginess, loss of appetite, or signs of withdrawal.
- Young people may display social withdrawal, anger, aggression, anxiousness, loss of trust, and disengagement from school; may exhibit risky behaviours; and may have feelings of helplessness, of sadness, and of being alone. They may become difficult to manage.

Support your students in the school and the classroom.

- Be a trusted adult, proactively and sensitively reaching out to talk with students, individually or in a small group, to check on their well-being and how they are feeling.

- Acknowledge current events and safety concerns clearly and repeatedly while the conflict is ongoing. Provide a confidential, safe, and a positive space for students to share their fears and to be heard.
- Offering the same safe place for families to engage with school staff may be helpful. Collaborating with your local settlement or ethnocultural association is a good first step.
- Be aware that being in the school and/or the classroom may make the students feel overwhelmed and may exacerbate their trauma.
- Help students stay active, and implement breathing and mindfulness exercises.
- Offer to take students for a walk to release energy. Activate their senses, drawing attention to what they see, feel, smell, and hear (e.g., the birds, cold, warmth of the sunshine).

To help students with trauma, teachers may offer the following supports:

- warm, welcoming, safe, secure, caring, nurturing, and protective environment
- predictable routines
- realistic expectations as students work through their anxiety and trauma
- meaningful and achievable goals
- strengths-based strategies
- validation students' home cultures, values, and feelings

- opportunities for participation in recreational and/or cultural activities
- storytelling using media and art
- opportunities for fun and joy
- resources and connections to local settlement agencies
- conversations with clinical staff if students are not responding or are struggling with trauma

Teachers may also do the following:

- Stay current on what is happening and how these events affect students and families from these backgrounds.
- Keep cultural considerations in mind and notice how these events influence the perception of students with regard to what they are seeing and feeling, and how they are reacting.
- Seek information on trauma resources and how to identify a student in distress.
- Reach out to your school counsellors, clinicians, student services administrators, and/or local settlement or cultural agencies to help support your students.
- Attend to how the impact of working with students dealing with trauma and of hearing about current events is affecting your own stress and trauma. You may experience vicarious trauma. Self-care is an essential act of survival.

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Additional Resources

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning Documents:

- *Life After War: Education as a Healing Process for Refugee and War-Affected Children* (available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/law/)
- *Safe and Caring Schools: A Whole-School Approach to Planning for Safety and Belonging* (available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/whole_school/index.html)

Other Resources:

- *Toolkit: Promoting Positive Opinion about Refugees by the Canadian Council for Refugees* (available online at <https://ccrweb.ca/en/positive-public-opinion-toolkit-2020>)
- "Addressing Student Trauma, Anxiety, and Depression" by Colorín Colorado (available online at <https://www.colorincolorado.org/immigration/guide/trauma>)
- "Talking about Ukraine with Our Children" by Dr. Aliza W. Pressman (available online at <https://draliza.bulletin.com/talking-about-ukraine-with-our-children>)
- "The Ukraine Crisis," a lesson plan from the Choices Program at Brown University (available online at <https://www.choices.edu/teaching-news-lesson/the-ukraine-crisis>)
- "Working with a Traumatized Child: Creating a Frame and Minimizing Harm" by Kate Porterfield (available online at <https://dartcenter.org/resources/working-traumatized-child-creating-frame-and-minimizing-harm>)

References

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- New Brunswick Multicultural Council. *How to Support Students and Families with Refugee Backgrounds in Schools*. Available online at <https://mansomanitoba.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SUPPORTING-STUDENTS-FAMILIES-WITH-REFUGEE-BACKGROUNDS-IN-SCHOOLS-2021.pdf>.
- Porterfield, Kate. "Working with a Traumatized Child: Creating a Frame and Minimizing Harm." Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, 19 Nov. 2019, <https://dartcenter.org/resources/working-traumatized-child-creating-frame-and-minimizing-harm>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.
- Pressman, Aliza W. "Talking about Ukraine with Our Children." *Raising Good Humans*, 25 Feb. 2022, <https://draliza.bulletin.com/talking-about-ukraine-with-our-children>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.