

Six Fundamentals To Work with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds

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STARTTS
www.startts.org.au**

STARTTS Services

- The Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)
- One of eight not-for-profit specialist agencies that work with refugee survivors of T&T in each of the states and territories of Australia
- Direct services to survivors
- Training for service providers, policy development & capacity building
- Research & resource development

Statistics

- At least 25% of refugees have been physically tortured or subjected to severe psychological violation prior to their arrival in Australia. 70% will have been subject to traumatic experiences in violent circumstances
- State sanctioned torture is widespread in 106 countries

Trauma

- Trauma is the result of an uncontrollable, inescapable, unpredictable, overwhelming life threatening event
- Trauma can result from direct experience of an event to witnessing or hearing about an event
- In the general population about 10% go on to develop severe pervasive symptoms from exposure to trauma. This percentage is much higher in the refugee population

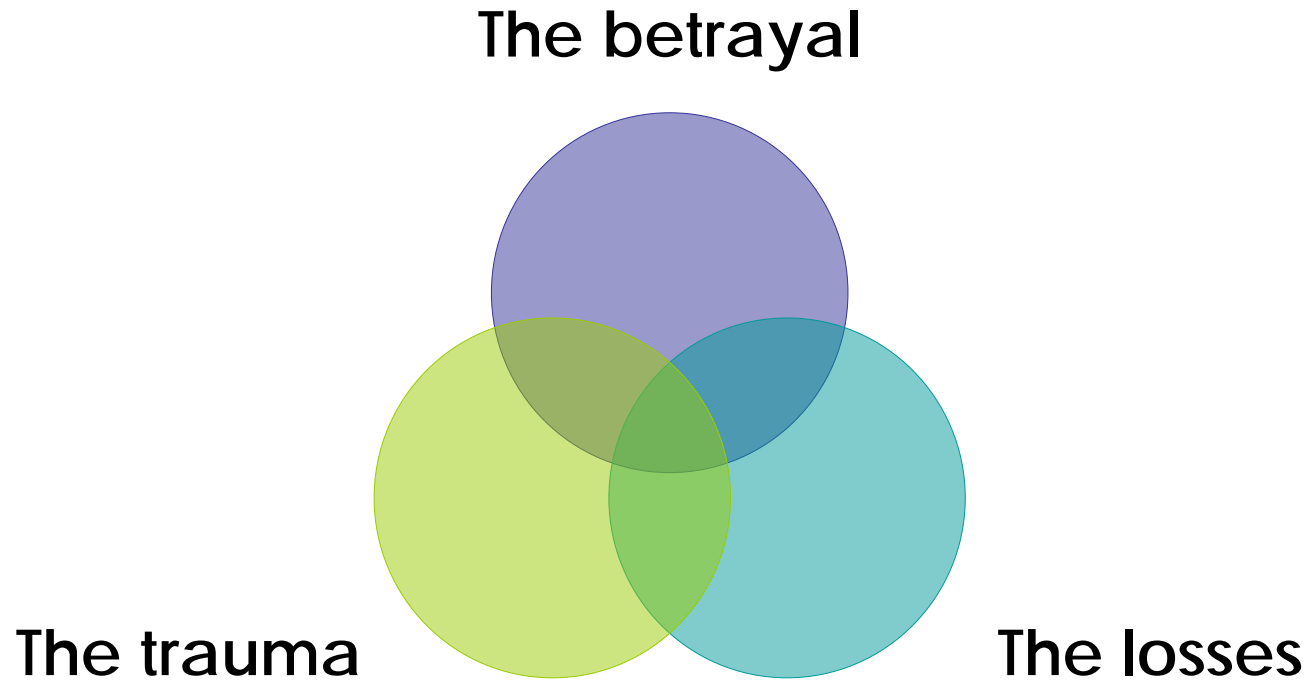
1

People from refugee backgrounds are disadvantaged on every key social determinant of health

2

Refugee trauma results in profound discontinuity and loss in all spheres of a young person's life.

The Refugee Experience for Young People



3

Refugee young people are not a homogenous group – the refugee experience affects individuals in different ways. (Resilience is also part of the picture).

Protective Factors	Risk Factors
Secure attachment	Loss of attachments
Parental mental health	Insecure attachments
Community	The nature of the trauma
Settlement	Isolation from community
Cognitive	Settlements problems

4

Recovery is about *restoration* - restoring **safety** and **enhancing control**; rebuilding attachment and **connections**; restoring **identity, dignity** and **value**

The road to recovery

Reconnection with ordinary life:

Taking initiative, carry out plans, exercising independent judgment.
Building trusting relationships.

Remembering & Mourning: grief, loss.

Naming and recognizing the feelings.
Acknowledging the problem, and allowing the feelings to emerge (sadness, anger, guilt etc).

Establish safety:

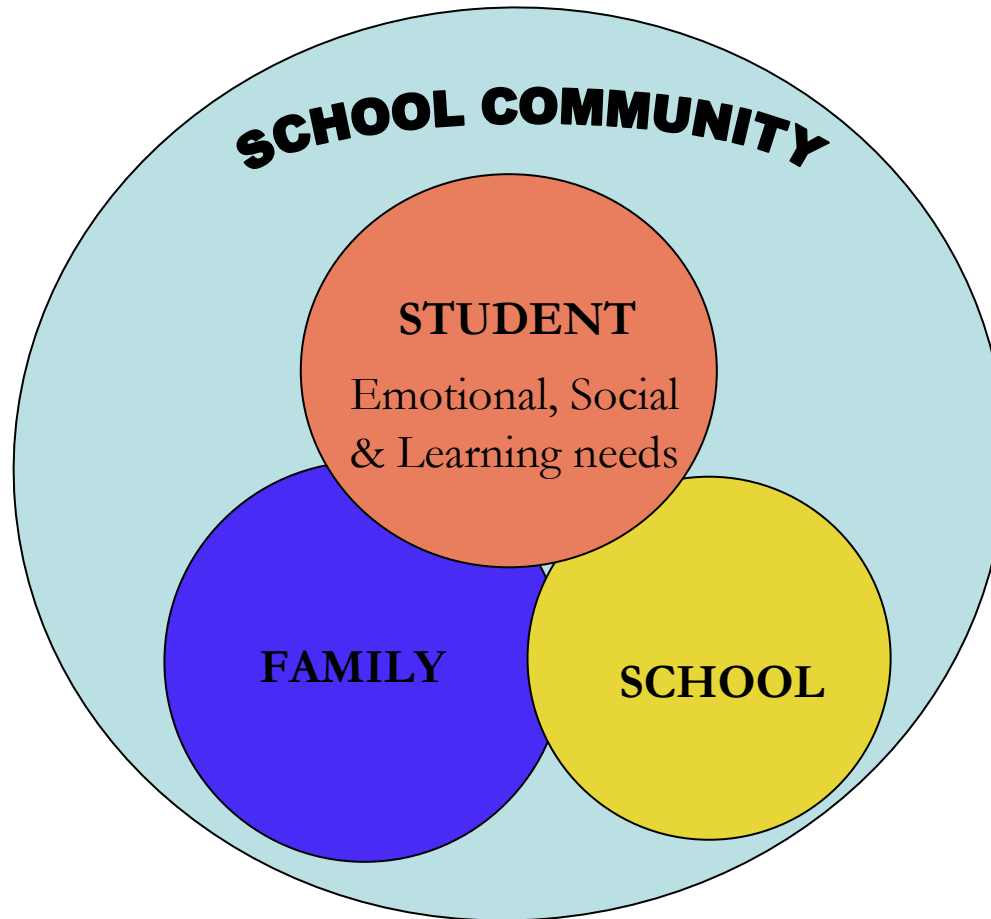
First body and bodily functions, then environment

5

'What works to heal is anything that increases the number and quality of a child's relationships. What helps is consistent, patient, repetitive loving care'

Bruce Perry

A comprehensive & coordinated school approach



6

Self care is essential - being exposed to a young person's refugee trauma often causes vicarious trauma (or compassion fatigue)

One client said:

“I apologise for leaving you with the memories that haunt me...I hope they don't disturb you’.

- Available online from STARTTS website at www.startts.org.au – (including e-zine for school personnel '*Hints for healing*'. Email: hintsforhealing@startts.org.au)
- *Promoting Positive Behaviour and Learning* (DET resource)
- *School's In for Refugees – A Whole School Guide to Refugee Readiness*

MAKING A REFERRAL TO STARTTS

STARTTS INTAKE LINE

9794 1905

What will we want to know from you?

- Demographics
- Refugee story
- Psychological symptoms/difficulties
- Physical health problems
- Treatment received
- Social supports
- Settlement issues
- Current status – how long here
- Service sought (counselling, group, camp, etc)

Summary of Ways to Assist Recovery

1

Contribute to:
Control
Safety

Help to reduce
fear and anxiety

- Provision of basic needs – health, welfare, education, accommodation etc.
- Provide a structured predictable environment
- Give explanations for things you do
- Facilitate access to services
- Maximise choice and autonomy
- Define your role
- Assess for risk
- Reduce exposure to identifiable triggers
- Acknowledge and accommodate blocks to learning
- Create opportunities for play and self-expression
- Create opportunities for achievable goals

Summary of Ways to Assist Recovery

2

Contribute to:
Attachment
Connections

Overcome grief
and loss

- Offer a consistent supportive relationship
- Encourage activities to reduce isolation and depression
- Foster links with family, church, community or group activities
- Encourage attendance at activities
- A trusting, continuing connection with an available caring adult
- Creating new goals which are valued and meaningful
- Building self esteem
- Creating opportunities for the experience of pleasure

Summary of Ways to Assist Recovery

3

Contribute to:

Identity

Meaning

- Respectful treatment
- Appropriate pace
- Assist understanding of the impact of the past on present
- Creation of new opportunities to form a view of the future
- Exploring concepts of self, other and the community
- Validation of the trauma experienced
- Integrating past, present and future
- Knowledge of political background to violence

Summary of Ways to Assist Recovery

4

Contribute to:
Dignity
Value

Reduce guilt

- Respect towards others
- Flexibility
- Respect privacy and fears of personal boundaries being invaded
- Self-disclosure may or may not occur
- Expect fear regarding 'invasive' contacts
- Bear witness to personal story and acknowledge injustices
- Sensitivity to cultural differences
- Allow expression of guilt and shame
- Events and stories need to be told and retold to reduce guilt (counselling the appropriate setting)