

If interested, this topic can be learned in greater detail through a full day workshop called “Trauma Informed Classrooms.” Please contact Sara at [sara@growingrootstherapy.ca](mailto:sara@growingrootstherapy.ca) or 204-333-9804 for more information or to book a workshop.

## Being Trauma Sensitive

# Trauma and Stress Often Experienced by Refugees/Newcomers

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The majority of refugees and some newcomers have experienced trauma and stress in their home countries before immigrating to Canada. They are also challenged by new stressors during and after their resettlement.<sup>2</sup> The following are stressors commonly experienced by refugees and newcomers before, during, and after their immigration that can affect their ability to engage meaningfully in life activities.

### Before Immigration:

- Exposure to violence and/or war
- Fear of persecution
- Experience of life threatening situations
- Experience or witness of torture, starvation, and/or injury
- Witness of murder and/or disappearance of family members
- Disruption to familiar social roles and supports
- Disruption of education

### During Immigration:

- Separation from family members and peers remaining in home country
- Waiting a long and uncertain period for citizenship status
- Living in dangerous and harsh environments (ex. refugee camps)
- Exposure to violent situations
- Fearing detention or imprisonment
- Burn out from long and frequent travels
- Feeling uncertain about future and living in a new country
- Limited access to food and resulting malnutrition

## After Immigration:

- Continued uncertainty about citizenship status
- Language barriers and difficulty with learning a new language
- Difficulty with finding jobs and resulting financial strain
- Difficulty with adjusting to new culture and environment
- Limited awareness and access to community resources
- Worrying about family members and peers left back home
- Living in dangerous environments due to limited access to safe housing
- Experiencing racial discrimination and difficulty with fitting in at school, work place, or any other social settings
- Difficulties with education due to having to learn in a new language
- Conflicts arising within family due to intergenerational differences<sup>1,2</sup>

## Resources

1. Kirmayer, L. J., Narasiah, L., Munoz, M., Rashid, M., Ryder, A. G., Guzder, J., ... & Pottie, K. (2011). Common mental health problems in immigrants and refugees: general approach in primary care. *Cmaj*, 183(12), E959-E967.
2. Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (2016). *Evidence In-Sight: Best practices for working with trauma-affected newcomers* [PDF file]. Retrieved from <http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca/resource-hub/best-practices-working-trauma-affected-newcomers>

*“I immigrated to Canada when I was 12 years old. I was with my mom and my 7 year old sister, but my dad had to stay in my home country for a couple years to work and support us financially. I am now 26 years old, but I still remember all the hardships that my family had to go through as new immigrants. We lived in an old apartment in an unsafe neighbourhood, and I remember always having to come home as soon as school was done and having to stay home for the rest of the day. Learning in school was very difficult as I did not understand anything because all I knew were a couple Alphabets. Until my dad came to join us after a couple years, my mom struggled greatly as she could not speak English but had to manage all the legal paperwork and take care of us by herself. It was the most difficult time of my life.”*

—Jane Doe, University of Manitoba Student

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