

Supporting families who have had refugee or asylum seeker experiences

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Note: Careful consideration needs to be given to those families who may arrive in our settings already feeling alienated and unsure based on their previous experiences or circumstances (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p17). When working with any family, regardless of their background, it is critical not to make assumptions about experiences or situations. Refugee or asylum seeker experiences are different for every person and it is important to invite families to share their histories as individuals.

Understanding families' experiences

There are differences between the definitions of refugee experiences, asylum seeker experiences and migrant experiences. Community organisations such as those listed below offer some parameters for defining what these entail. Some families may not identify with these definitions.

- How does the service work with a family at enrolment to find out about their story and background? Who speaks with the family? What information is collected and how is this used? What other conversations could be valuable?
- How do we ensure that we are not making assumptions about a family's experience? What information or resources have we accessed to inform our views? On reflection, could there be biases that are influencing our approach to families?

Supporting a feeling of belonging

Past experiences may influence the way that families approach building relationships with educators (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p17). Families' experiences with education and institutions may have been limited, negative or extremely different to how your service approaches and interacts with families.

- What strategies are in place to show newly enrolling families that they are welcome and a valued part of the service?
- What practices in the service could be intimidating for children or families who are unsure based on their previous experiences or circumstances?
- How are educators supported to pursue trusting and secure relationships with families when there are initial difficulties in building a relationship? Where can additional support be accessed?

Language needs

To establish genuine relationships and partnerships with families, educators find authentic ways to listen to and speak with families (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p17). When there is little or no shared language between educators and families, support for facilitating conversations can be accessed through FKA Children's Services.

A child's cultural identity is closely linked to the language or languages spoken at home and in the community. Supporting a feeling of belonging involves strengthening the connections between family, community and the service (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p17). Hearing and using their own languages helps a child to develop a knowledgeable and confident self-identity and a strong sense of wellbeing (VEYLDF, p19, 23) and creates a strong and tenable connection to family and community. Bilingual resources and Bilingual Workers, accessible through FKA Children's Services, are first steps to encouraging and valuing the use of the home language at the service. Further information can be found on the FKA tip sheet Supporting Home Languages.

It is important to remember that under Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to learn and use the languages of their families, even if these are not shared by the majority of people in Australia (see 'Further Information' below).

- How are all children supported to express their feelings and thoughts and be understood? (VEYLDF, p28)

Additional needs and considerations

Children and families may have witnessed or experienced violence, torture and trauma. This may present as fearful or withdrawn behaviours or an inability to easily regulate emotions. If you have concerns that a child needs support around trauma experiences, it is critical to refer to specialist services by contacting your Inclusion Support Facilitator. Families may also be experiencing financial and emotional stresses, fear for loved ones in their home country or elsewhere. The organisations listed at the end of this document can provide further information on specialist support within your community.

- What are the specialist supports that educators can access or refer families to in the community? Who is responsible for accessing the service and what are the procedures for referral?



Further considerations

Educators are responsible for ensuring that all children's rights to have their cultures, identities, abilities and strengths acknowledged and valued (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p13). Not all families have had the same opportunities for this to happen and some children will require significantly more support to achieve educational outcomes (VEYLDF, p7).

- What opportunities and dilemmas arising from diversity have we identified in the service?
- How is unfairness identified, particularly in regard to children's cultural rights?
- What strategies are in place to redress unfairness? (Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p13).

How we can help

Bicultural Support is provided by FKA Children's Services throughout Victoria. It offers early childhood education and care services access to skilled and experienced professionals who provide specific language and cultural assistance to help enrol and settle children. The Bicultural Support Team can be reached on 03 9428 4471 or by contacting fkacs@fka.org.au.

FKA offers a range of professional learning opportunities for services, which are customised according to individual needs. Check our website for upcoming opportunities, or contact the Professional Learning Team by calling the office or emailing training@fka.org.au.

Further information

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre
<http://www.asrc.org.au>

How to request bicultural support <http://fka.org.au/bicultural-support/request-bicultural-support>

Free Interpreter support for Victorian Government funded early childhood services,
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/comms/Pages/interpreterservice.aspx>

Refugee Council of Australia
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

UNICEF - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Child Friendly Language
<http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

Victorian Government Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) - Child development and trauma
<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-service-providers/children,-youth-and-families/child-protection/specialist-practice-resources-for-child-protection-workers/child-development-and-trauma-specialist-practice-resource>



Research and frameworks

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Council of Australian Governments 2010, *Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia*.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Council of Australian Governments 2009, *Belonging, being & becoming: the early years learning framework for Australia*.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2009, *Victorian early years learning and development framework for all children from birth to eight years*.

