



HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS & FAMILIES WITH REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS IN SCHOOLS

As New Brunswick prepares to welcome families through humanitarian streams into our communities, it is important that we understand how to support them and their grief, trauma and anxiety. Students and families of Afghan backgrounds already in New Brunswick may also experience these emotions, including fear for their loved ones, as the crisis in their home country unravels in the news.

Trauma reactions may show in changes in their behaviour, for example:

- **In young children:** regressing to behaviours of an earlier developmental age, clinginess, separation anxiety, appetite disturbance, nightmares or becoming withdrawn.
- **In young people:** social withdrawal, sleep difficulties, irritability, anger, lack of motivation, risk-taking behaviour, anxiety, and feeling alone and sad.

Trauma impacting student learning

Youth with refugee backgrounds (including those with origins from Afghanistan, Syria, Rohingya and others) may experience "trauma reactions" as news coverage and the media report on the events happening in Afghanistan.

These reactions may be overwhelming and may impact on the students' ability to focus and engage in the classroom.



News coverage & exacerbated trauma

- The news coverage of the situation in Afghanistan may trigger memories of living with war, violence, persecution and oppression and of fleeing such situations.
- Students and their families may be unable to connect with extended family and community, leaving them with heightened emotions of grief, anxiety and fear as ongoing violence is being reported.

How to support your students in the classroom

When a student is struggling with the strong emotions triggered by trauma or traumatic events, it is important to create a safe, ordered environment to support them in. Here are a few things you can do to support them:

- Implement a predictable classroom routine where possible. This creates a sense of order in a student's life.
- Work with affected students to establish achievable and flexible deadlines.
- Understand that in-person learning may also cause them to feel overwhelmed. Try to keep them connected in the classroom.
- Create a safe, positive space for refugees and students of refugee background by communicating positive views on the subject. Be sensitive, but educate your students as well.
- Check in on their wellbeing, and how they are feeling, privately. Provide a safe, confidential space where they feel they can share if they choose to.

If you notice a student struggling with their trauma, consider accessing resources from local settlement agencies & school workers:

- Moncton- MAGMA settlement services email: crisiscounsellor@magma-amgm.org
- Saint John- YMCA settlement services call: 506-634-4860
- Fredericton- MCAF SWIS program email: SWIS@mcaf.nb.ca

Cultural and trauma awareness

It is important to understand what is happening, not just what is being covered in the news, but also culturally, and how that may affect people of those backgrounds and their perception. Take a moment to self-educate yourself on the events unravelling in Afghanistan and in other countries that are sending refugees families our way.

- Seek information on what is happening and being shared in the media and the news.
- Take into consideration the cultural implications of these events, and how they may affect students and their perception of what is happening and how they react.
- Educate yourself on trauma resources and how to identify a student in distress
- Familiarize yourself with resources available to your school and with networks that can help support your students and their families. Consider familiarizing yourself with resources supplied by local settlement agencies and connect with the school settlement worker to better support your students.

Trauma & Cultural support resources

There are regional settlement agencies that you can reach out to for resources:

- School settlement workers (MCAF-SWIS) in the Fredericton area
- Saint John YMCA Newcomer connections & settlement services
- MAGMA settlement services for the Moncton area

A useful toolkit has been curated by the Canadian Council for Refugees to promote positive communication of refugees. It can be accessed [here](#).

Visit the [NBMC-CMNB](#) website for cultural resources and contact information for other regional settlement agencies & ethno/cultural organizations.

This PDF is adapted from one of the resources created and made accessible to the public by the Foundation House, an organization supporting refugees in Australia. More resources such as useful webinars about supporting refugees can be found [here](#).