



Welcoming Refugee Students

What Teachers Can Do

Understanding the Refugee Journey

Every refugee student carries a story of strength. Many have fled conflict, persecution, or natural disasters, and have left behind their homes, friends, and familiar routines. Their journey may have included long periods of uncertainty, disrupted schooling, or time in refugee camps. **By the time they arrive in your classroom, they've already overcome incredible challenges.** What they need now is a sense of safety, belonging, and hope.

School as a Safe Haven

For refugee students, school can be more than a place to learn. It can be a stable, supportive environment that helps them begin to heal. Teachers are often among the first trusted adults they meet. A caring and consistent presence in the classroom can help students begin to feel grounded again. **Simple actions like learning to pronounce a student's name correctly, acknowledging their home language and culture, or welcoming their family into the school go a long way.**

Meeting Social-Emotional Needs

Refugee students may show signs of stress, anxiety, or grief in different ways: withdrawal, difficulty focusing, frequent absences, or emotional outbursts. It's important not to try to diagnose these behaviors but to respond with empathy and flexibility. **Building routines, offering choices, and checking in privately can help students feel seen and supported.**

Family Engagement with Compassion

Many refugee families are navigating unfamiliar systems, new languages, and the stress of resettlement. They may face barriers to communication or feel unsure of their role in U.S. schools. **Reach out with interpreters when needed, provide translated materials, and create welcoming opportunities for families to connect with the school community.** Assume families care deeply about their child's education, even if they show it in different ways.

Practical Strategies for Teachers

- Greet students warmly each day to build consistency and connection.
- Use visuals, gestures, and modeling to support understanding.
- Offer quiet spaces and routines that promote calm and predictability.
- Pair students with a peer buddy for classroom and school transitions.
- Avoid putting students on the spot to share their story.
- Celebrate multilingualism and incorporate diverse stories into the curriculum.
- Collaborate with counselors, psychologists, and family liaisons for wraparound support.

You don't have to be an expert in trauma or refugee law to make a difference.

Your classroom, just as it is, can offer the safety, structure, and compassion that refugee students need to thrive.