

Moving countries can be stressful. It may also bring new joys and opportunities. When families work together they can support each other. Together they achieve more than if they just work alone.

You may have questions about the changes you see in young people you care about. Young people cope with trauma, change and uncertainty in different ways to adults. Sometimes this can impact on how happy they are at school, with their friends and family.

You may have moved here to give your children better opportunities in life or a safer place to live. You may be experiencing your own sadness and are not sure what to do about your child's wellbeing. The information below may help you and your children to adjust to your new life.

Moving to a new country can be hard

Most families leaving their home country and starting life in a new country feel sadness and grief mixed with a sense of hope and excitement about the future.

You may feel deep sadness about leaving your home land because:

- you miss family and friends you have left behind.
- you have lost some of the customs and culture of your people.
- you were forced to leave because of war or political or economic problems.
- your life plans have changed.
- you have experienced trauma.

Sadness and grief can affect your relationships with your children and their relationships with you. It can create tension and pressure on the family, especially if it touches everything you and your family do.

Think about how you came to be here

- Did you want to move to a new country or did you have little choice?
- Are you looking forward to your new life? Or do you look backward to your old life?
- What things are better for you and your family now in your new country?
- What things are the most difficult here?
- Do the many new changes make it hard for you to be a peaceful family?

- Or do you welcome the new opportunities your children may have?

How do your children feel about the many changes?

- Do they miss family members left behind?
- Do they have lots of new things to do?
- Are they excited by their new life?
- Or are they feeling lonely?
- Do you expect them to work hard? Are they finding this difficult?
- Are they worried that you won't approve of their new friends and values?

Refugee Experience

Young people who have experienced or witnessed torture or trauma or who are grieving for lost relatives or friends, may express their feelings in many different ways. They may become angry, quiet or withdrawn; tearful or very sad. In more extreme cases they may behave violently, start using alcohol or drugs to deal with their pain or develop mental health problems. If you or other family members have:

- experienced trauma or torture in your home country or on your journey here,
- witnessed others being tortured or assaulted, or
- lost relatives or friends

you should consider getting counselling to help you and your family recover from these experiences.

Young people need to know that these experiences are very difficult to leave behind. They may need

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Parents : Settling into a new country – the impact of migration

someone outside the family to hear and accept the horror of what they have been through.

Sharing stories of loss, pain and suffering can bring relief. There are counsellors who can help you and your children with the trauma of what you have been through. (See **Resources**)

No young person should have to carry the knowledge of the horror of war on their own. In sharing their secrets with a counsellor, the burden is sometimes lifted.

Settling in

Whether you chose to leave your home country or were forced to, settling into a new country is always stressful for families.

Parents need to:

- find a place for the family to live
- find work
- locate a doctor or a health worker the family can talk to and trust.
- find schools for children
- make new friends who understand the old way of life and can also help with the new life here.

This all creates a lot of stress.

Family Roles may change

If members of your family have died or you have had to leave some relatives behind it can have a deep impact on your family.

Not only do you all have to cope with the grief and loss, family roles change as well. Older children may have to take on a parenting role in the family because one or both parents have died or parents have been separated.

Children take on more responsibilities:

Children of new migrants and refugees might be asked to help their parents:

- Speak English.
- Write English and fill in forms.
- Work to help make money.
- Care for the younger children.
- Study hard and do well at school.

Your young person may feel that you are asking them to do too much and to take on too much responsibility for younger family members.

Young People want to fit in

Your teenager will want to spend time making new friends and may become very interested in new ways of doing things. They might think that their new friends' parents don't expect so much of their children.

You might get worried that your child no longer seems interested in your family and the old way of doing things. Parents often find young people's lack of interest in their family culture and customs very upsetting.

They might start to complain or start to fight with you. Be careful how you respond. If you use strict discipline to influence your child's choices, they may end up rejecting your family values altogether.

Parents can do some things to make the family happier:

- Give your young person some regular time to spend with new friends.
- Make their friends feel welcome in your home. Get to know them.
- Tell your young person when you are happy with their help.
- Reward the good work they have done.
- Tell your children stories about your old life and customs with humour.
- Celebrate theirs and your successes.
- Take time to listen to their stories about their new life.

Remember that when your young person grows into an adult they will probably begin to take more interest in their family history and customs. Adolescence is a time for young people to try new things and develop their own identity.

Racism

Unfortunately some migrants experience racism upon arriving in a new country. This can cause difficulties, particularly for children at school.

Racism in schools can have a serious impact on young people's health, and their willingness to engage in training and education.

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Perhaps you might try and find a school where there are other children from the same cultural background to help make your child feel more accepted.

It is important for parents to try and build relationships with teachers, school principals and other parents to help your child settle into school well.

This may be difficult when there are so many other demands on your time and when there may not be teachers who speak your main language, but it will hopefully be worth the effort. (See also **Your Child's Education**).

→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- Most families leaving their home country and starting life in a new country have mixed feelings.
- If you or other family members have experienced torture or trauma, it can help to see a counsellor who knows how to talk to you about what you have been through. If children don't get help with these experiences they may grow up to feel the world is unsafe and that they can't trust other people.
- Parents in a new country often need help and have to give their older children a lot of work to do. Tell your child when you are happy with their work and make sure they still have some time to spend with friends.
- Racism can affect childrens' experience of school. Try to help them build positive relationships with other children and teachers at school.

→ Related Fact Sheets

- Adolescent Development
- Your Child's Education
- Improving Communication

→ Useful resources

Foundation House

- the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture provides counselling and support services to people who are from refugee backgrounds and have survived torture or war related trauma.

Tel: (03) 9388 0022

Website: www.foundationhouse.org.au

Australian Department of Immigration & Citizenship

Tel: 131881.

Website: www.immi.gov.au

Migrant Settlement Information Kits

are available in several languages from the Department of Immigration or website:

www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/settle-in-australia/beginning-life

Centre for Multicultural Youth

CMY works with and for young people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Website: www.cmy.net.au

Strong Bonds

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