

# Trauma-Informed Work with Asylum-Seeking Youth at the Border

## Through Dr. Bruce Perry's 6 R's of Trauma Work

- 1. Relational** - building connection, safety.
- 2. Relevant** - matched to the individual.
- 3. Repetitive** - patterned, predictable.
- 4. Rewarding** - positive, pleasurable.
- 5. Rhythmic** - grounding, soothing.
- 6. Respectful** - of person, culture, language.

### Five key suggestions for your work:

- 1. Keep clear on your role.** We're doing crisis work. This is more than supporting youth by handing out clothes and food. Staff and volunteers need to understand that the work is different, especially with the current overcapacity. It's helpful to remember to:
  - Always introduce yourself and tell the youth your role and why you're there.
  - Don't make promises to the children and youth.
- 2. Manage expectations and have a clear purpose.** Your work, important and so needed, is not going to create major changes in the system issues. Examine your purpose or why you're doing the work. Your purpose should focus on "How can I make children and youth less scared in the next few seconds or minutes?" If your expectations are too high, it is like trying to fix a bone fracture with a Band-Aid. Volunteers are the Band-Aids, the therapeutic "cast" will come later.
- 3. Establish boundaries (guidelines for interactions). Be aware of immigrant trauma and stress.** Asylum-seeking children and youth have experienced trauma before immigration, during immigration, and will experience trauma afterwards. The asylum-seeking process is never ending until they have legal stability. The traumatic experience didn't just start in the facility. Avoid asking about immigration or trauma if you don't need to. Find other ways to connect, including games and stories. Establish a clear relationship and remember that it will be short-term.
- 4. Provide culturally responsive care.** Be aware of any assumptions you may have based on past experiences. Bring in what you know, but be aware that everyone's experience is unique. It is impossible to have a clear understanding of all of the different countries, cultures, values, religions, languages, political and economic realities and reasons for leaving the countries of all the children and youth in the facility. Sometimes an individual may associate cultural traditions and cultural reminders with trauma experienced in their country, and so it is important to consider the unique circumstances of each youth.
- 5. Remember that youth are MORE than asylum seekers.** Immigrant children and youth are not ONLY bodies who have suffered. They're survivors and are strong and capable, with so many positive identities beyond being asylum-seekers. If you find yourself feeling frustrated, hopeless, or distressed in the work, stop to intentionally identify and name the strengths, positive behaviors, and qualities of the children and youth you are supporting.

Watch the [accompanying video](#) on our YouTube channel.

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