

Trauma-Informed Strategies to Engage with Youth Seeking Asylum

Children who have been exposed to trauma can experience learning difficulties, regression in development (e.g., bed-wetting, speech), sleep disruption, clinginess, or may break rules and push boundaries. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you engage with youth seeking asylum.

What Not to Do

Do not focus on the children's trauma.	Do not tell children to stop crying.	Do not shame children for bed-wetting or hoarding food.	Do not threaten to withhold food or access to others to control behavior.	Do not ignore the children.
--	--------------------------------------	---	---	-----------------------------

What to Do

Do ask "What do you need right now?"	Do validate their emotions, use a soft tone, and be empathic.	Do explain what is being done to protect them.	Do refer to posted reminders of rules, values, or safety measures.	Do find ways to connect, like storytelling, singing, board games, etc.
--------------------------------------	---	--	--	--

What Not to Do

Do not tell them
"Everything will be okay."

Do not make promises you cannot keep.

Do not ignore reports from children about abuse.

Do not threaten people by mentioning the border patrol or police.

Do not ignore statements or actions about suicide or self-harm.

What to Do

Do say *"We will try to help as best as we can."*

Do increase sense of control by providing choices (*Do you want to read or to draw?*).

Do tell shelter staff all allegations of abuse.

Do sit next to the child and talk directly to them if they are cursing, crying, or yelling.

Do tell shelter or behavioral health staff of any such statements or actions.

Remember: Incorporate professional interpreters as needed and where possible; note that youth may speak an indigenous language.

More Resources



<http://bit.ly/asylum-seeker-support-resources>



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration