Understanding and supporting the needs of refugee and asylum seeking children in the Early Years

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16 March 2017
Today’s session is intended to raise awareness of the effect of the global refugee crisis on children and families by considering:

• the impact of life in warzones/transit camps on children’s development, wellbeing and education

• the implications on practice for practitioners and how to better prepare children for transition to the setting
Alison and Janet

Information gained from first-hand experience and interviews/discussions ....
Children's lives in war zones

What have they experienced and what are the implications for children’s physical, emotional and cognitive development?
Their journeys: refugees embark on journeys because they fear for their lives.

Emotions/Feelings/experiences: fear, panic, shock, fatigue, malnutrition, shock, panic, loss, exhaustion, violence, ...
Many children and their families will be coping with:

- Loss of close family
- Loss of other family members
- Separation from family
- Bereavement
- Suffering violence against themselves
- Witnessing killing and other atrocities
- Experiencing fear and uncertainty during flight

Parents may be unable to respond to their children’s emotional needs
Some of these feelings clearly seen as you walk through the camp
Where facilities are set up there are many challenges:

• Many of the children have been out of provision for several months/years
• Attendance is sporadic
• Stability of teaching team/volunteers
• Curriculum – focus on language and maths
• Resources
• Behaviour
So what could you expect ..... ?

We also know that prolonged periods of stress can have detrimental effects on a child’s ability to reason and think rationally and some children may lack self-regulation strategies, resorting to “fight or flight” responses in the face of perceived threat.

Much higher incidence (around 40 per cent) of other, mental health difficulties, such as depression and anxiety, for children and adolescents who have experienced war-related trauma.
So what .... can you do?

Don’t make assumptions – each child is an individual
Prepare other children and families at the setting
Finding out key information such as the child’s name, first language and current home circumstances
Focus on building resilience and positive behaviours
Find out about their cultures
Activities such as circle time, autobiographical and life story writing, music drama and play
Revisit/review behaviour bullying policies

COMMUNICATE – COMMUNICATE – COMMUNICATE
Backed up by existing and ongoing research

Whilst Whitmarsh (2011) states that: ‘Although mothers initially felt welcomed when they arrived at the setting, there was no follow on from this and no mother was aware of any resources in their home language’, ‘... there was little understanding of their culture ... [for example] in many cultures autonomy and decision making amongst children is the least desirable attribute’
Questions or comments

http://www.insideebiz.com