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Strategies for Educators: How to Support Refugee Children

Maisie Pollard : 12-15 minutes : 6/8/2022

This 'Strategies for Educators: How to Support Refugee Children' blog gives practical tips when welcoming an international new arrival into your classroom.



A refugee is someone who has been forced to leave their country. The diaspora of people can be caused by war, natural disasters, famine, poverty, and persecution. As a result, these people may flee their home country during crisis, in the hope of a safer life in another.

The charity Children's Society writes that there are currently [13 million child refugees in the world](#). This staggering figure mirrors the current events in the news, that the Ukrainian refugee crisis may well become ['Europe's largest refugee crisis this century.'](#) As an educator, you might have already, or will in the future, enrol a new child into your class who's an international new arrival in the country. It's important to plan ahead and be aware of strategies to make their transition into your class a smooth, comfortable, and welcoming one. It's also vital so that you can prepare for ways to support their development and wellbeing.

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Let's take a look at some strategies for educators and how to support refugee children:

Provide an induction

When refugee children arrive in your classroom, this might be the first time they've been in the country, or even been around others who don't speak their first language. It's important to prepare an induction process with the child, including elements like:

- **Learn their name.** A name is a big part of someone's identity and understanding how we place ourselves in the world. That's why you should take steps to learn the correct pronunciation of the child's name. You can also help the refugee child learn other children's names, by wearing name badges or having name cards on each table.
- **Provide a tour around the school.** The child will be now confronting the fact that they're away from their home country, in a new school, with no familiar faces. Help children feel settled into their new environment by giving them a tour around the school, showing them all the exciting resources the school has to offer.
- **Provide equipment for them.** Ensure that refugee children have equipment ready and waiting for them when they arrive in school. This can range from having their own coat peg with their name on, to general classroom equipment and PE kits.
- **Help them to learn survival vocabulary.** If the children are new to English, ensure that you provide ways for them to learn survival vocabulary. These are important words and phrases to help them communicate their everyday needs. If children feel more comfortable, let them carry around their own [EAL Survival Vocabulary Cards](#) to refer back to.
- **Familiarise refugee children with classroom and school rules.** This can help them to feel settled in their new surroundings. You can do this through representing clear school routines and making visual symbols. These [Editable Now and Next Cards for a Visual Timetable](#) can support this.
- **Make a conscious effort to learn more about them.** Help children to feel valued by making a conscious effort to learn more about their family and hobbies. [All about me resources](#) can be a perfect way to do just that. Getting to know refugee children in this way can also support your planning process; you'll be able to adapt lessons and activities based on their interests. This can engage and excite your learners.
- **Establish positive relationships.** This is an important factor to build trust and understanding. Ensure that you regularly offer support for the child, including if they want to talk about any concerns they have.



Adapt learning to the needs of the children

As well as helping children with induction aspects to settle into a new school, changing the way that the learning process happens is also essential. When considering strategies for educators and how to support refugee children, differentiation needs to occur. This is so that the necessary adaptations are made for their needs. Here are some ways to do this:

- **Use dual language resources.** Some refugee children may have fled from their home country, where the language differs to their new country of residence. If this is the case, ensure that you use [dual language resources](#), including providing a dual language dictionary. This can allow children to still be included in the learning, and support them to become bilingual.
- **Value their own language.** It's also important to let children know you value their own language, as this is part of their identity. Learn key phrases in their language to make them feel more welcome and accepted in the classroom. Trying to navigate a school curriculum in a different language can be challenging; include books from their language in your reading corner, for them to use and enjoy.
- **Incorporate play-based learning into the classroom.** This can help [EAL](#) learners to fully take part in activities, even if they're new to English.
- **Use visual cues.** Visual cues are a brilliant way to help children learn new vocabulary, topics, and school routines. These [visual support resources](#) can help to aid children's communication skills. They include resources from visual timetables, to traffic light feeling fans. You can also incorporate visual cues in other aspects of learning, like reading class books; have props readily available for stories. Younger learners can even read along to [sensory stories](#), to engage their imaginations even more.
- **Examine topics taught within the curriculum.** It's important to use your professional judgement when thinking about the topics covered in school. Be aware of topics such as war or other worldwide crises, as this can have a direct impact on trauma that some children may encounter when becoming a refugee. If you'd like more support in this topic, take some time to reflect on this guide, [Supporting Young People With Traumatic Events](#).

- **Use ICT to your advantage.** Maximise the use of ICT; think about whether documents can be presented digitally so that they can be easily translated and accessed.

Sensory Stories



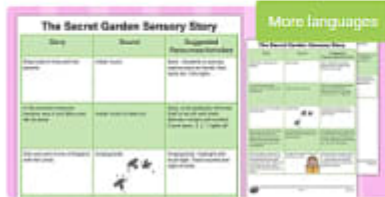
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Sensory Story Sheet
★★★★★ ~ 4.8 (16 reviews)



How to Write a Sensory Story Information Sheet
★★★★★ ~ 5.0 (1 review)



Early Years (Ages 3-5) Literacy: The Little Red Hen Sensory Story Video Lesson



The Secret Garden Sensory Story
★★★★★ ~ 5.0 (2 reviews)



Goldilocks and the Three Bears Nursery Sensory Story
★★★★★ ~ 4.7 (6 reviews)

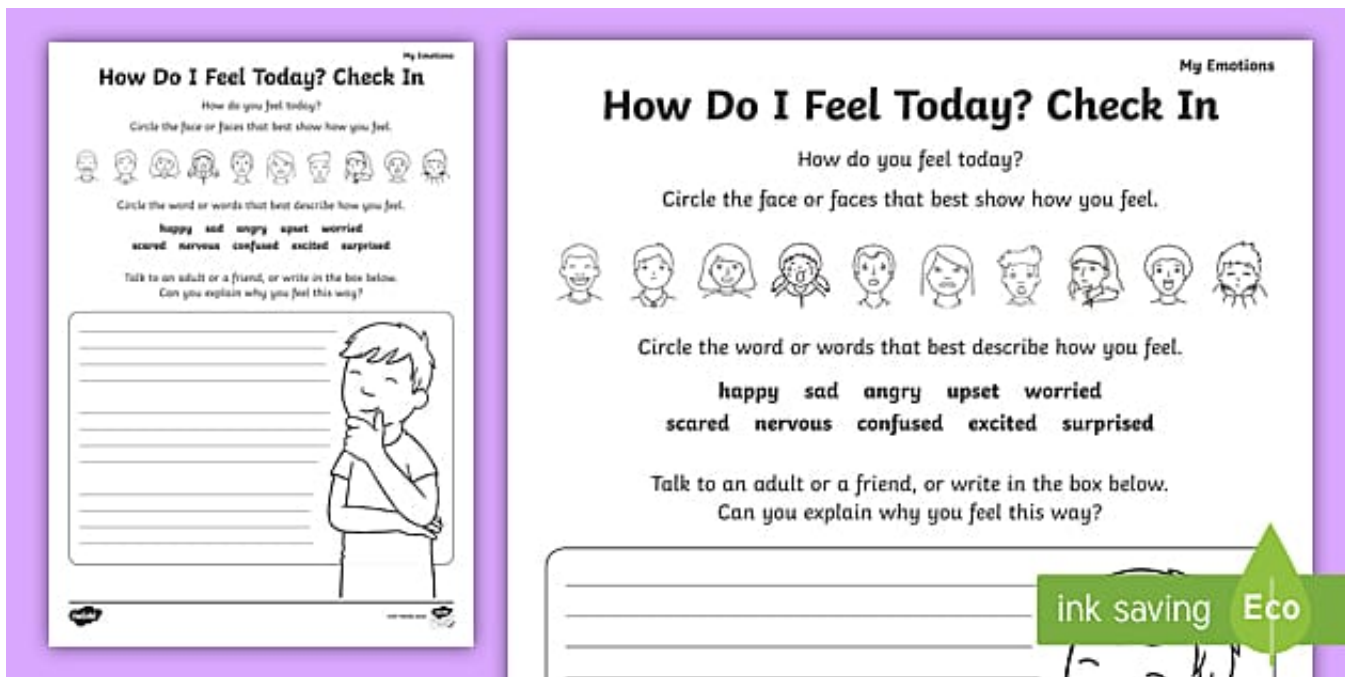


Sensory Story to Support Teaching on The BFG
★★★★★ ~ 4.8 (5 reviews)

Provide pastoral support

Pastoral care is a valuable aspect in education, which can have a positive impact on wellbeing. Provide support for refugee children, using these strategies:

- **Regularly check in with the child.** Children can feel supported by educators if they have regular wellbeing check-ins. Use our [emotions check in worksheet](#) to help with this.
- Remind yourself that they may not feel comfortable talking to you about **past trauma or experiences** - this is normal. Let them know who they can talk to if they do ever want to discuss their feelings or emotions.
- Signpost the child and family to **talking therapies**, like [counselling](#), if needed.



Create a welcoming classroom environment

From the moment the child walks into the classroom, take steps to make them feel comfortable and welcomed. Here are some tips to do just that:

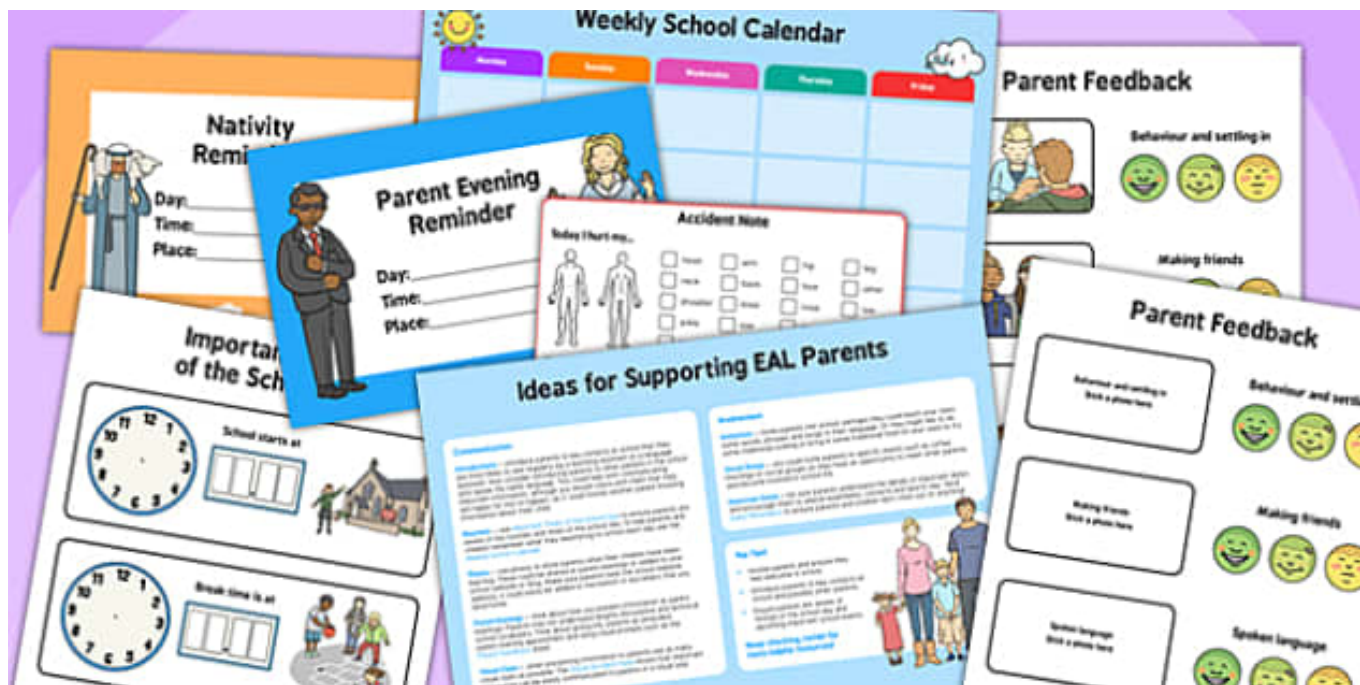
- **Welcome signs.** Display [mixed language hello posters](#) around your classroom. This is a brilliant way for them to feel represented.
- **Root your classroom values in respect for others.** By ensuring that children accept others as equals to themselves, they'll be supporting diversity within the classroom. Teach children about these values in PSHE lessons, so that the international new arrivals feel accepted. You can also do this through cultural events throughout the year, such as [World Refugee Week](#).
- **Focus on strengths.** Motivate children by focussing on the positive aspects and their achievements.
- **Use circle times.** Circle times are a brilliant way to discuss conflict, values, and happy stories. It also gives children the opportunity to 'show and tell' aspects of their lives to others, giving them a sense of pride. Don't pressure the refugee child to partake in speaking if they don't want to. But, always make sure that you give praise when they do take part.
- **Encourage children to take part in positive action based on their experiences.** A brilliant idea for this can be to guide them in creating their own fundraising event, such as a bun sale. Proceeds could be donated to a refugee charity, helping them to turn an often negative experience into positive action.



Utilise other children's skills

A brilliant strategy for educators on how to support refugee children, is actually utilising the skills of other children in the class, for example:

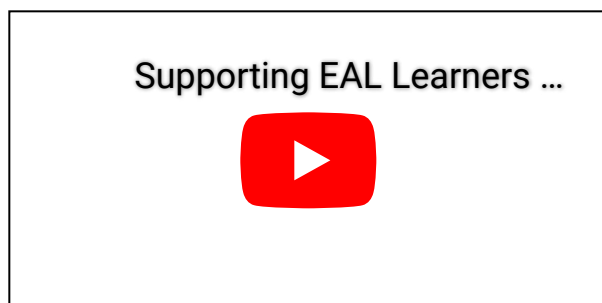
- **Create a buddy system.** Pair the refugee child up with another child who's a good role model, creating a 'buddy system'. This'll allow the child to make at least one new friend when they're first settling into school. Their buddy can show them around the school and any class routines. Make sure there's more than one buddy, so that the responsibility doesn't fall on just one child. This technique can help the new starter to get to know and trust a range of different children.
- **Use group work.** Group work is a brilliant way for the refugee child to learn from other peers, not just the teacher or teaching assistants. Children in the class can also learn from the new starter. This can help them to think about topics in new ways, and feel part of a wider team. You can utilise group work, using our helpful [EAL Around the World Pack](#) for older learners.
- **Create a memento for the child.** Make the new child in your class feel welcomed by curating a project for them before they arrive. You can create your own class book, and get the children to stick a picture in or draw a self-portrait, writing about themselves underneath. Each child can have a dedicated page. You can share this book during circle time, letting the new child take this book home as a memento of their first day and meeting peers.



Other things to consider when supporting refugee children and families:

- **Don't assume that children want to talk about their culture;** they may have lived through a traumatic event, or be worried about other family members still living in that country. They also may not want to be made to feel different to their peers.
- **Don't assume that all refugee children are the same.** This includes referencing 'all refugees' and generalising them. They have all come from different circumstances, so it's important to recognise that.
- **Avoid referring to refugee children from 'overseas.'** This may not be the case for all children fleeing countries, especially if they have connecting borders. It also encourages discourse whereby refugees are seen as 'others.'

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read this 'Strategies for Educators: How to Support Refugee Children' blog. I hope it's given you some practical tips, to help you settle international new arrivals into your classroom. You can also follow us on our EAL socials, [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#), where you'll find more teacher tips and extra relevant EAL content.



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