

EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONALS RESPONDING TO TRAUMA DISCLOSURES FROM FAMILIES OF REFUGEE BACKGROUND



Foundation
House

The Victorian Foundation
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Sensitively responding to families' trauma disclosures supports their recovery from traumatic refugee experiences and addresses the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) Practice Principles (2, 4 & 8).

Trauma disclosures in early years settings

If families feel safe and trust service staff, they may talk about their past and current traumatic refugee experiences—even without encouragement to do so.

Such instances are called 'disclosures' and can occur in various situations, including:

- ⇒ at drop-off/pick-up times
- ⇒ during formal parent/teacher interviews
- ⇒ during informal meetings (such as phone calls).

Responding sensitively to disclosures

Acknowledge traumatic refugee experiences

- ⇒ If you listen and acknowledge experiences without judgement or striving to change their feeling, the person disclosing is more likely to accept their feelings as understandable.
- ⇒ Acknowledgement involves saying things such as:
 - 'It is a terrible experience you have been through'

- 'That sounds very frightening/upsetting'
 - 'That must have made you feel sad/lonely/worried/angry'
- ⇒ This contributes to restoring dignity and value by reducing the excessive shame that is caused by families blaming themselves or others for what happened.

Listen without judgement

- ⇒ People who share traumatic experiences can fear being overwhelmed by their feelings.
- ⇒ When a person expresses strong feelings, you can provide comfort and enhance their sense of safety and control by simply listening without judgement.
 - Allow the person to control the level of disclosure about past and current experiences.
 - Do not challenge, interrogate or correct what they are saying.
 - Remind the person that they are in a safe place now, and that it is normal to feel afraid, even if things happened a while ago.
 - Pay attention and be mindful of your body language, especially if you are in a busy room.

Sensitively close a conversation with an offer of your service's help

- ⇒ Closing a conversation when traumatic content has been shared requires sensitivity. It is difficult to leave a person after they have disclosed personally traumatic events.
- ⇒ It is useful to remember at such times that, although you have just heard this information, the family has to carry the memory and legacy of their experiences every day.



- ⇒ Offer follow-up support. You can simply ask: ‘Do you want to talk about how we could help you during this difficult time?’
- ⇒ Know what services/agencies exist in the community that may benefit the family and establish referral pathways to link them with these services. For example, local government children and family services, parenting support and education programs, [Foundation House individual and family support](#).

Managing sensitive content during busy times

- ⇒ Disclosures may happen at busy times when staff/educators/teachers cannot readily respond.
- ⇒ It may be best to redirect and resume a conversation later in a more appropriate setting and time.
 - For example, say: ‘Thank you. It sounds as though you have something important to talk about. Why don’t we have a chat after drop-off tomorrow?’ Then redirect the conversation, ensuring that you follow-up.

Useful Resources

Foundation House Self-Care and Sustainable Practice

- ⇒ [Self-Care: A resource for those working with survivors of traumatic refugee experiences](#)
- ⇒ [Balancing your involvement as an Early Years Professional working with children and families of refugee background](#)

VEYLDF Practice Principles

- ⇒ [Partnership with Families - principle 2](#)
- ⇒ [Respectful Relationships and Responsive Engagement - principle 4](#)
- ⇒ [Partnerships with Professionals - principle 8](#)

“After talking to my daughter’s teacher... I felt that someone knows...It’s good to be believed. It’s good someone knows... now I understand why I miss my family so much...”

-Parent Advice



Department
of Education

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