



Sample
Helping Communities Heal:
Refugees

A Crisis Response Curriculum

SAMPLE

Helping Refugee Children and Youth

In this booklet:

Our Questions and God's Responses

Six Trauma-Informed Lessons

**Resource Articles to guide and equip Christian teachers, volunteers
and parents**

Helping Communities Heal: Refugees

A Crisis Response Children's Curriculum

Christ-centered, age-appropriate lessons
for children
(ages 8-13)

Who can teach this course?

Christian volunteers who work with refugee children and young teens

Christian parents helping their own children in a refugee situation

Dedicated to the brave refugees
around the world who have
left their homes because of
war, persecution, a natural
disaster, or economic crisis.
May God strengthen and
strongly support you.

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INTRODUCTION



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About These Resources

Our Questions and God's Response

When the unimaginable happens, we cry out to God for answers and explanations. We can find help for our questions and our children's questions in God's Word. Even though we may not know the answers to the "Why?" questions, we can know for certain that God is in control. This section contains questions that people who go through devastating situations often ask. In many cases, God does not give us complete answers, but His Word does provide help and comfort. Read this section several times and be prepared to respond in your own words if these questions come up.

Six Trauma-Informed Lessons

These lessons were developed to help children and young teens who have become refugees begin to heal. Many are emotionally vulnerable right now. They may have lost homes and possessions, friends, and all that is familiar. They may have friends or family members who have been left behind or died. They may wonder if they will have enough food and water in the weeks to come. They need to know that God has not forsaken them.

Children who need these lessons most may not have access to school supplies like paper, pencils and crayons, so these lessons do not use these things. Instead they will use only supplies that are commonly available and free, such as leaves, sticks, small pebbles, or a piece of cloth.

These lessons are written for a Christian volunteer or teacher to use with a group of children. The lessons are easy to follow and teach. Christian parents can also teach these lessons to their children by following the special instructions with any group activities.

INTRODUCTION



Resource Articles

These articles are written by experts in their field who work with children who have experienced tragedy and trauma. The articles represent the best practices in these fields, but the articles are not scholarly or difficult to understand. They are written to help equip a volunteer, teacher, or a parent handle difficult issues that children may be experiencing. The articles might also be helpful to adults who are struggling with loss, fear, and death.

There are easy-to-follow clues for teaching these lessons.

Clue One

At the beginning of the first 5 lessons, you will see an outline of the lesson as a short conversation between God and a child. The sixth lesson is a prayer walk and will follow a different pattern.

Clue Two

Information just for the teacher or parents will have regular type that looks like what you see here. Directions in this type will give you information to help you guide the children through the lessons. Do not read this to your children. You will sometimes be asked to put this information into your own words.

Clue Three

Information for you to read directly to the children will be bold like this. You can read this directly to your children, or you can put the information into your own words.

Clue Four

- **Questions for you to ask the children will have a dot in front of it and be slightly indented, like you see here. The questions will be in bold type.**

Sometimes you will be given a suggested answer following the question. It will look like this. Do not share this answer unless your children are unable to answer the question. The answer is there to guide you.

Clue Five

These lessons often suggest active ways to involve your children in the lesson. Do not skip these activities! Children learn best through activity and personal involvement. When you use the activities, your children will be more likely to put what they have learned into practice.

If you are using the lessons with just 1 child in a family setting, the lesson will give you tips on how you and your child can do the activities together.

A prayer for teachers and parents who will use this guide:

Holy Spirit, fill these teachers and parents so that in all they say and do, they will bring Jesus into the lives of hurting and questioning children and young teens. May the words of their mouths and the meditation of their hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, their strong Rock and their Redeemer. Amen.

Understanding Refugee Children and Youth

According to the United Nations, a refugee is someone who has been forced to leave his or her country because of fear of persecution, war, or violence due to race, religion, nationality, political opinions, or ethnic or social groups. In 2014, there were over 19 million refugees around the world. About 40% of them, close to 8 million, are children or youth.

Refugee children and youth have both benefits and challenges. The benefits you may see in refugee children and youth include:

- Resiliency in the midst of great change
- Doing well in school and socially
- Good coping skills for stress and unexpected outcomes
- Knowing how to rely on a social group during stressful times
- Feeling more in control when facing trauma than other children

The challenges you may see in refugee children and youth include:

- Loss of childhood, lack of ability to play
- Additional responsibility within the family
- Difficulty forming deep attachments and trust
- More street-smart than their years
- Struggles with communication
- Feelings of hopelessness

Signs of Stress

Refugee children and youth experience many different types of stress due to exposure to war and unrest, loss of home, malnutrition, separation from family members and friends, and lack of routine. This may result in a form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and other mental health issues.

Here are some of the symptoms that show a child or youth needs help:

- Anxiety
- Nightmares
- Insomnia
- Withdrawal from interaction with others
- Depression
- Relationship problems
- Behavioral problems
- School difficulties
- Inability to remain focused and attentive

A child or youth who shows these symptoms most likely needs professional help.

How to Help

- **Create a New Normal:** Help the child or youth find patterns of what is normal in the new culture.
- **Establish Routines:** Having stability and predictability for things such as when and where they eat, going to school, and having playtime, creates a feeling of safety.
- **Help Families Settle:** Aid families in finding and settling into more normal living conditions. As the family settles, it will help the child or youth as well.
- **Create opportunities** in their new environment where they can feel competent

Create opportunities for children and youth to express their culture.

Children might enjoy games, dancing, music, drawing, painting, telling stories, and singing.

Youth might enjoy group activities such as sports, group discussions, and youth-led projects to help the community.

For more ways to care for refugee children and youth, read the “Teaching Across Cultures” and “Meeting the Needs of Cross-Cultural Kids” Resource Articles.

This article was compiled from information from the following references:

<http://www.brycs.org/>

http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/refugee_children_guidelines_on_protection_and_care.pdf

Dona M Abbott MA, LLP, Branch Director, Refugee and Immigrant Services

God Listens to My Fears

Lesson 2

Outline for Today

1. *I say to God:* "I am afraid bad things will keep happening."
2. *God says to me:* "I care about your fears and what you are feeling."
3. *I say to God:* "I will share my feelings with You and listen for Your voice."



SUPPLIES

- None

1. I say to God, "I am afraid bad things will keep happening."

You may have experienced some terrible things in your country or in the time since you had to leave. War. Unrest. A natural disaster. All of these things can make you frightened that something else bad might happen. There are many people who care for you and want to help you.

- **Maybe relief workers, doctors, or others have helped you or someone you know. Share a story about someone who has helped you.**

After your students have shared, read or tell the following story. This story is compiled from several different refugee stories to protect the refugees.

Ahmed was 12 when he had to leave his country. His younger sister and brother were only 6 and 3. One day, when Ahmed was playing with friends, he heard loud noises a short distance away. His father ran toward the group of boys and yelled at them all to run home.

Some men were going through the town and taking prisoners, and shooting those who resisted. The men were especially targeting Christians like Ahmed's family.

Ahmed and his family stayed hidden within their home. As they huddled together, Ahmed's mother tried to comfort the younger children. His father kept watch through a small crack in the door. Just when all hope seemed lost, the bad men left but everyone knew they would be back.

Over the next day Ahmed's parents made quick plans to leave this place that was no longer safe. They packed a few clothes on their backs and quickly left the home at night so no one could follow them.

After 2 long weeks of walking every day, they arrived at a refugee camp. The camp was crowded with others who had fled too. There was not enough room, so they crowded into a tent with 2 other families who had fled from their town. There was not enough food, so Ahmed was hungry all the time. There was no school.

Eventually, Ahmed's family traveled to another country to live with some cousins. It was crowded there too. It was hard for his father to find enough work to feed the family. So Ahmed began selling small packages of tissues each day at the park. The little money he earned helped feed his family.

Ahmed still misses his home and friends and school. But he and his family are thankful that God provided a way for them to live someplace that was safe. He is learning the new language and has even made a couple of new friends. He has

hope that he will get to go back to school one day and things will get better.

- **How do you think Ahmed felt when his father rushed the family into hiding? When he had to leave his home? When he did not know where they would get enough food?**
- **What are some things God has done to help Ahmed and his family?**

Ahmed must have worried that he or someone in his family would be hurt or die. Stop now and have the children pray for those who may be worried.

I am going to share another story from the Bible about a boy and his mother who had to leave their home and face death. You will hear how God was with them.

The fighting in the household began soon after Hagar found out she was going to have a baby. Here is the problem. Hagar was not the first wife to Abraham, the father of her baby. She was only a servant in the household, a foreigner. Abraham's first wife was Sarah. But Sarah was not able to have children.

At first, Sarah had thought it would be a great idea for Abraham to have a baby with Hagar. But when it actually happened, it did not seem like such a good idea anymore.

When Hagar's baby was born, she called him Ishmael, a name that means, "God hears." Ishmael enjoyed being the only son of his very old father, Abraham. But one day a miracle happened—even though Sarah was really old, God gave her a baby too. This made Sarah very happy. Because this new son, Isaac, was the son of Abraham's first wife, Ishmael did not like this new baby and he let everyone know it.

You can imagine that neither of the mothers was very happy. Sarah complained to Abraham. She wanted Hagar

and Ishmael to leave. This upset Abraham terribly. He loved Ishmael. But God told him that He would take care of Ishmael. So, Abraham packed some food and water for Hagar and Ishmael, and sent them away.

Into the desert they went. Both of them were sad. They were refugees because they had been forced to leave their home. Although she did not say this to Ishmael, Hagar was sure they would die. When their water ran out, she settled Ishmael under a bush where he could at least have shade. Then she moved away from him a little because she did not want to watch him die.

So there they both were, Ishmael crying under his bush, Hagar sobbing a few meters away from him. And what do you suppose happened next?

Do you remember what Ishmael's name means? It means, "God hears." If you guessed that God heard their cries, you are right!

God heard the boy crying and called to Hagar from heaven. He said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid. I have heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift him up and take him by the hand. I am going to make him into a great nation!"

Then God helped Hagar see what she had not been able to see before—a well of water! She went to it and gave Ishmael a drink. From that day on, even though they lived in the desert, God was with Ishmael. He and Hagar had enough to eat because Ishmael learned to hunt with a bow, and they had enough to drink because God had shown them the well.

God saw them. He heard them. Even before Ishmael was born, God saw him and proved that He cared for him. And He cares about you like that, too!

2. God says to me, "I care about your fears and what you are feeling."

Encourage your children to discuss the story:

- **Why do you think I told you this story? How is it similar to what has happened to you?**

Hagar and Ishmael went through something really hard, but God cared about them. God was with them and they were aware of His presence. Those who are refugees also need to know that God is with them and He cares about them.

- **How did God show that He cared about how Hagar and Ishmael were feeling?**
- **Think of times in your past. Can you see ways that God cared about what you were feeling? For example: someone gave you food, was kind to you, or helped you in some way.**

Allow the children to share their thoughts.

- **Today many are worried, wondering if we will live a normal life again. How do you know God knows and cares about these feelings of worry?**

Allow children to share their ideas before adding the following. For one thing, God gives you these lessons. This is a way God is telling you not to be sick with worry. God also sent me as your teacher (or parent). I care about you. God uses the aid workers and others who are helping to show that He cares.

3. I say to God, "I will share my feelings with You and listen for Your voice."

Now let's do something special. It is called "Listening Prayer." We know God listens to us, but today we are going to be quiet and listen to Him. I want you to close your eyes and follow my instructions.

Give the following suggestions to your children and pause between each statement so they can think and pray and listen.

Picture yourself in a room with just you and God. Imagine looking into His face and seeing that He cares for you. He loves you. You imagine Him welcoming you like a father does a beloved child. Pause.

God cares about what is worrying you. Silently tell Him your fears about what happened and what may happen next. Pause.

Listen for a short time. Is He saying something to you? What is it? Longer pause. If needed, remind children that whatever God says will agree with the Bible—it might be something like He loves them, or He will take care of them.

Do you believe He cares about you? Pause. **How does that make you feel?** Pause.

God wants you to give your fears to Him, because no matter what happens, He will be with you. Even if you are faced with another scary situation, He will be with you. He wants you to be with Him forever and ever, on earth today and in heaven some day in the future.

Tell Him how you feel about Him. Pause. **Ask Him to help you see how much He loves you.** Longer pause.

Close your time today by asking children to open their eyes. If it would be comfortable for the children, walk around to each child and put your hands on the child's head or shoulders and say, "(Child's name,) God wants to take away your fears."

If you are using this lesson with just 1 child, close in the same way. If appropriate, ask the child to say the words back to you, "God wants to take away your fears."

Creating Safety for Traumatized Children and Youth

Children and young teens who have had to flee their homes are hurting. They are victims of an event they could not have predicted or avoided. Their world has not been safe, and it may still not be safe. So how do you create safety for a child or teen who believes he or she will never feel safe again?

Step 1: Understand trauma

Children and young teens who have been through trauma may feel overwhelmed and helpless. They may have an overactive alarm system that is easily triggered. When something happens to make them feel unsafe again, they choose to do 1 of 3 things. They may fight. This may happen when they are in an unsafe personal relationship. They may take flight—run away from the situation, even when that is dangerous. Or, they may freeze and be unable to make any response. They may not be able to think clearly.

Feeling safe is what calms their trauma response.

Step 2: Understand your children and teens

Work hard at knowing what your children and teens do well and what they struggle with. Identify their strengths and weaknesses. This can help you predict what their response will be when they feel unsafe.

Step 3: The safe environment—consistency

Be as consistent as possible in your relationship with the child or teen. They thrive with consistent responses from you. Children and young teens feel safe when they know what to expect from the adults they are with—teachers and parents. This includes knowing what the rules for behavior are and how discipline is handled.

Trauma is triggered by the unknown and unexpected. Consistency creates predictability.

Children and teens feel safe when they can predict what will happen in their day. When things need to change, giving children plenty of information about when and why change will happen will help them deal with it.

Provide transition warnings. Fleeing home and becoming a refugee has changed everything. Let the child or teen know what the new routine will be and why. Traumatized people need to feel a sense of control. Suddenly being pushed from one activity and moved quickly to something else without giving the child or teen time to adjust can trigger explosive behavior.

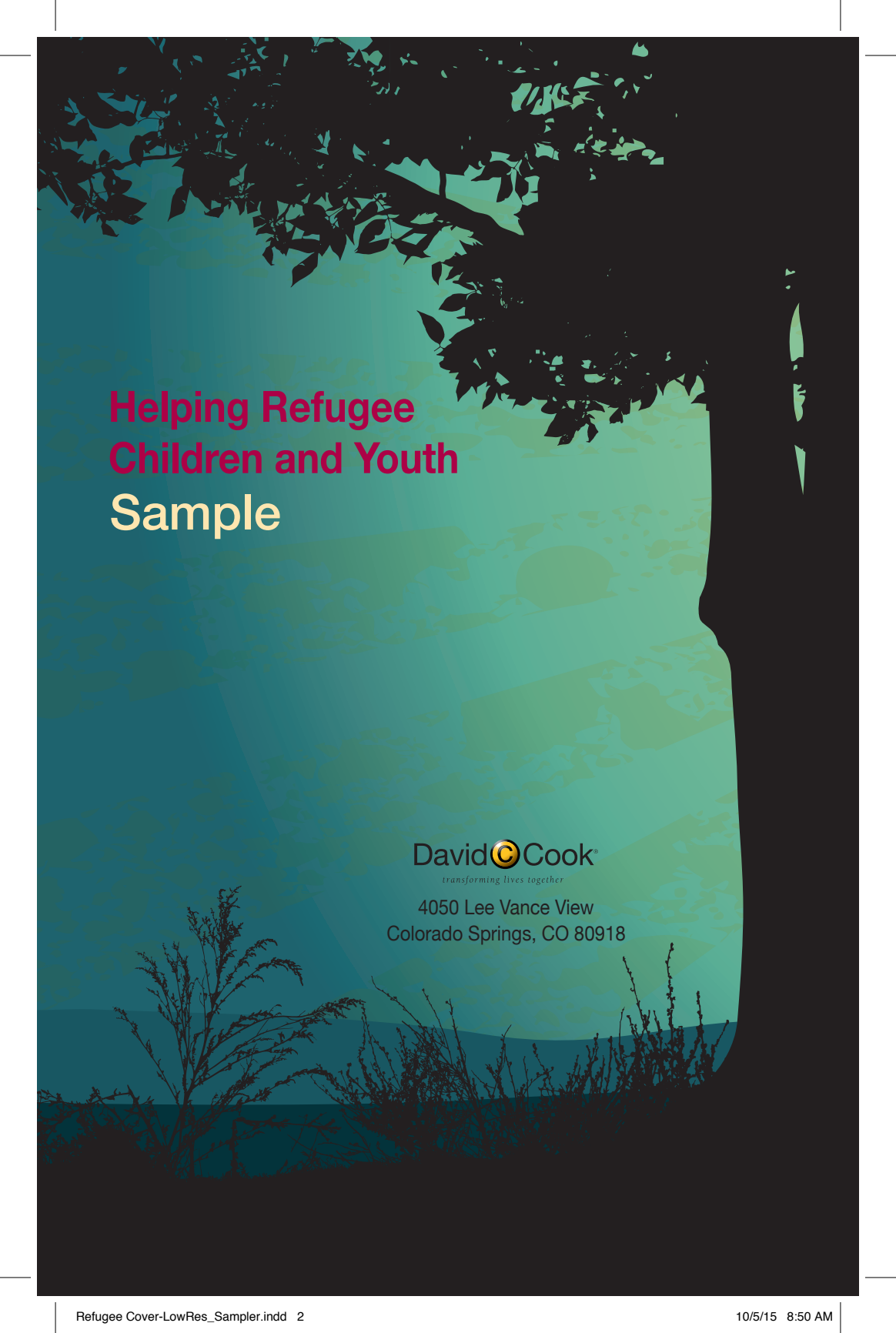
Step 4: The safe environment—relationships

Children and teens heal when they have safe and trusting relationships. Be there, be consistent, and know what the children are feeling. Spend time playing and getting to know the child or teen.

If the child or teen resists the relationship you want to build, move slowly, and do not push too hard. Eventually, he or she will see that you are a safe adult. Then the relationship can blossom.

Step 5: Prevention

All of these steps will help children and teens feel safer after a traumatizing event, but sometimes you need to do more to create safety. If you know what triggers a child or teen, or what activities and transitions are the most challenging, think about what you can do to prevent negative reactions. For example, a child may become triggered (scared or even angry) when it gets dark. This may happen because his family had to flee at night. Sometimes something as simple as having him close to you when it gets dark can work beautifully. Be creative, and you will find that creating safety is a very powerful tool in the lives of children, young teens—and even adults—who have gone through trauma.



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