

What do children need?

Protection and openness:

- First and foremost they need to know that their parents and others are there for them and care for them.
- They need patience and much attention.
- Children need clear limits, not punishment. Stop them if they're aggressive or destroy something, but don't hit or pinch them.
- Children need explanations for the things happening around them.
- Children need routines. Even if they're not going to school or if their parents are working, it's important for children to get up in the morning, and to eat and go to bed similar to the routines they had in their native country.
- Children need praise. Even three-year olds can be given small tasks. This makes them feel important and that they're needed.
- Listen to what children have to say about what they have experienced, about the feelings they have, about their thoughts and hardships. Sharing experiences and talking together are important.
- Let children draw what they are focused on. Look at their pictures together.
- Children often need an adult's help to think of activities and games to play, and much the better if

the adults can take part. This gives the children a sense of security. Play is a child's way of dealing with bad experiences and memories.

- Let children tell fairy tales and sing. Older children could keep a diary of their own thoughts, stories and poems.
- Show children that what they're doing is good and interesting.
- Parents should let their children pray and take part in religious ceremonies with them.
- Try to give them hope.

Remember that no parent can manage to be perfect for his or her child all the time. But a good goal may be to give children something they need during the day.



ENGELSK

To parents

ABOUT

**CHILDREN, WAR AND BEING A
REFUGEE**



ADVICE TO PARENTS ON CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO WAR AND BEING A REFUGEE

More and more families and children are suffering from the ravages of war and must flee their homes. Exile is often the end of a long journey which started many years before arrival in Norway. They may have been displaced persons in their own country, moving often and haunted by uncertainty. Perhaps family members are still in jail or have been killed in the war. Even though they are now in a peaceful country, their worries are not over. Uncertainty as to whether the family can stay in Norway and start a new life here is a constant concern of many adults and children.

Children notice what's happening around them:

In some cases children have been directly involved in terrible things. They may have seen or heard their parents and other family members being treated badly so that they're afraid. Sometimes they have simply heard adults talking about their war experiences, police raids and the danger of being thrown out of the country. Even very young children notice what's going on and hear what's being said. They're filled with fear and anxiety. We adults might not see just how much the children have understood. Sometimes they're so young that they can't talk, nevertheless they have noticed what's happening around them. Older children might be quiet and it's hard to find out what they think about all the things that have happened around them. But regardless their age, fear and dejection can quickly sink into their thoughts and torment them.

Children's reactions:

Even children who can't talk can "tell" about the things that worry them in other ways. Children might reveal their problems through their way to be or use body

language to "tell" us about their worries. Here are some normal reactions children might have after experiencing traumatic events, something which has been extremely frightening:

- Insomnia: They might have nightmares or can't sleep at all. They may wake in the middle of the night or cry when they try to go to sleep. Many don't want to go to bed.
- Psychosomatic problems: They won't eat, they throw up, they eat too little or far too much and get a tummy ache. They may have pain in different parts of their body.
- Sadness: They may be very sad, cry often, refuse to play and become apathetic.
- Troubles at school: They may have concentration problems and be restless. They might never be quiet, make trouble and destroy things around them.
- Aggressiveness: They may hit, bite and argue with other children and adults, things which often occur because they're afraid.
- Fear and anxiety: They might be afraid of sounds, of people in uniform and of things or people who remind them of painful experiences. Some children may be so sad or confused that they never want to play.
- Some children develop language problems and begin to stutter.

All these reactions are normal for children who have experienced hardship. Frightening events and frequent moving make children very uncertain, which in turn can make them afraid. They're afraid to be away from their parents and fear that all the terrible things will happen again. Older children may fear they've gone "crazy" and won't share their thoughts. It's important that adults ensure them that these are normal reactions to abnormal events, which will often go away in time. If they don't, it's important to ask for assistance from someone who

can help children and parents, like a public health nurse, doctor, psychologist or teacher.

The whole family is affected:

It can be hard for parents to tackle their children's reactions. It's easy to become irritated and angry with demanding children, especially when you also feel exhausted and uncertain. But scolding only makes children even more uncertain and they'll cling to you even more. It's important to talk to other parents in the same situation.

One thing is certain, children who have had to flee from their native country miss people they loved and the places they are used to. But it may be difficult to talk about such things. It may also be painful for the parents to be reminded about these things which they are hurting about too. It can be difficult for parents to know what to say or how to comfort their children.

As parents we want to protect our children and perhaps we're afraid we'll make them even sadder if we begin to talk about all the pain. Some parents are afraid they'll start crying themselves. But children will tolerate this if they are told why and that it isn't their fault, but just that mummy or daddy also miss granddad, the house and so on.

As adults we may feel helpless when we see that a child is in pain. We often say to them: "Don't think about it - go out and play", "don't talk about it - do your homework", "don't snivel - you're a big boy now," "don't hit your brother - you're naughty." But children feel sad and lonely if they don't get to talk to others about what they feel. They need to be allowed to put into words what is worrying them.