A Comprehensive School Mental Health Framework for Newcomer Students

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

A record number of newcomer youth have entered new communities around the world in recent years.[1,2] The term "newcomer youth" refers to children and adolescents who have arrived in a new country, including asylum-seeking, immigrant, refugee, and undocumented youth. Although they are resilient, up to 67% of newcomers experience trauma before migration, and many are at risk of facing adversities once resettled.[3]

The extent to which newcomer youth experience distress depends on protective factors, such as social support, resiliency, and acquired coping skills.[4,5] Schools are one of the first and most influential systems with which newcomer children interact upon resettlement and are an optimal setting to promote protective factors. Furthermore, schools can create systems that work to prevent mental health concerns and address existing symptoms in newcomer students.[5,6,7,8,9] By acknowledging the impact mental health may have across all major developmental domains (physical/health, cognitive/learning/academic, behavioral, social/emotional), a school that comprehensively supports the mental health of newcomer students promotes positive educational outcomes as well. Therefore, the focus of this document is to guide schools in using a strengths-based, ecological approach to promote resilience and provide mental health supports for newcomer students. This document illustrates how schools can build a multi-tiered system of mental health supports for newcomer students and why doing so is essential to fulfilling newcomer children's rights within our education system.

1   What Does It Mean to Be a "Newcomer?"

- **Newcomer**: a student who has entered a school as a new member of the community, usually after arrival from another country
- Immigrant: a person who leaves one's country to settle in another
- Refugee: an individual who flees one's country due to restriction or danger to their lives and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion
- Asylum seeker: someone who seeks international protection from dangers in their home country, but whose claim for refugee status has not been determined legally
- Undocumented: foreign nationals residing in the U.S. without legal immigration status
- Resettlement: the transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought refuge to another State that has agreed to admit them

2   The Challenges: Newcomer Experiences

Many newcomer children come with parts of their families or even unaccompanied along their journey. During their many transitions, newcomer youth may have faced significant adversity, including stressful and traumatic experiences.

Newcomer youth often struggle as they try to adapt to their new environments, as stressors may persist long after their journey.[3,4,5] At the same time, newcomers usually arrive with unique strengths and protective factors, and can flourish and contribute to their new communities.[7,10]

Adversities before and during their migration may include: 4,6,7

- Lack of basic needs (e.g., food)
- Separation from and loss of family members and friends
- Violence exposure (e.g., war)
- Lengthy stays in detention centers

After resettling, newcomer children and youth may face additional stressors including: 4,8,9,11

- Loss of their home, family, friends
- Material possessions
- Acculturation
- Unwelcoming communities and schools

Common Adverse Experiences of Newcomer Youth

COGNITIVE	SOCIAL	EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL
- Negative bias/pessimism - All-or-nothing thinking - Loss of perspective and critical thinking skills - Threat focus—see clients, peers, supervisors as enemy - Decreased self-monitoring - Intrusive thoughts	- Reduction in collaboration - Withdrawal and loss of social support - Functionalism - Conflicts—easily angered - Isolation - Difficulty trusting—worry about getting close - Avoidance	- Helplessness/ hopelessness - Feeling overwhelmed - Depression/feeling numb - Worry— realistic and unrealistic fears - Anger/irritability - Safety concerns - Hypervigilance	- Headaches - Tense Muscles - Fatigue/sleep difficulties - Nightmares - Stomach problems/ nausea - Feeling jittery - Frequent illness

3 The Opportunities: Why Schools?

Regardless of citizenship status, all children have a right to a free public education and the supports required for educational success. Thus, schools are a natural and important setting to welcome and support newcomer youth.

- Along with other family and youth organizations, schools have a responsibility to welcome any student who joins the community and are uniquely positioned to do so.
- Schools have a team of adults trained to support the whole student, including their social, emotional and academic needs.
- Adults and students' peers can be equipped to create welcoming environments, leverage the strengths of newcomer students, and understand and support some of their unique needs.
- Importantly, schools are well-suited to educate the community, including educators and peers, about the strengths and needs of newcomer students and families.
- Furthermore, schools are well positioned to overcome barriers such as stigma and accessibility related to mental health services.
  - Broadly, research suggests providing mental health supports in schools decreases financial and logistical barriers.[12] As newcomer families are in the process of resettlement in a new country, these barriers may be particularly salient, further emphasizing the importance of school-based supports.[11,13]

> **Schools provide an important opportunity to intervene with refugee children** as a setting of utmost importance where they spend a great deal of time and encounter acculturative struggles. Placing interventions in school can help **reduce stigma**, and also provide an opportunity to intervene with the school setting itself, having an impact on its ecology. For example, affecting a school's norms, policies, and attitudes with respect to immigrant and refugee children can help support individualized interventions for refugee children.
> **Review of Child and Adolescent Refugee Mental Health: White Paper from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network Refugee Trauma Task Force (2003)**

> Schools could provide **an ideal setting to implement interventions** to address the mental health needs of refugee children... In disrupted environments, schools are often one of the earlier institutions to be introduced... Schools can facilitate **early identification** and provide interventions to **maximize cognitive, emotional and social development**.
> **Tyrer, R. A., & Fazel, M. (2014). School and community-based interventions for refugee and asylum seeking children: a systematic review.**

Addressing Trauma and Promoting Resilience

- Given the potentially traumatic experiences newcomer youth face during the stages of migration, they may be in need of mental health supports to address trauma.
- At the same time, many who have migrated to this country have overcome tremendous adversity to be here and have become integral, productive, and engaged members of our communities.
- Acknowledging both these realities, this framework aims to support newcomer student's unique mental health needs and promote their resilience, defined as the capacity of individuals and communities to cope with stress and adversity, by utilizing a strengths-based approach.

Addressing Trauma

The prevalence of mental health concerns such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression among resettled refugee children is estimated to be three to ten times higher than youths with these disorders in the general population.[14,15,16]

- For example, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder in resettled refugee children is estimated to be as high as 54% compared with an estimated 5% of youths in the general population.[17]
- While not all newcomers have experiences of trauma, understanding the backdrop of some potentially traumatic experiences that they might encounter helps educators understand student responses to current stressors and their ability to cope.

Potential Traumatic Experiences

Pre-Flight Trauma	Flight Trauma	Post-Flight Trauma
• Violence • War, persecution • Poverty and starvation • Torture • Physical illness and lack of medical care • Forced labor • Sexual assault • Loss of loved ones • Disrupted/limited access to education	• Violence • Separation from family and community • Mistreatment by authorities • Hazardous travel, hunger, thirst • Sexual assault • Kidnapping • Coercion/abuse by smugglers • Border detention	• Community violence • Acculturation stress • Financial hardship • Isolation and discrimination • Lack of access to resources • Separation from loved ones • Survivor's guilt • Fear of deportation

> Despite these high rates of mental health needs, newcomer youth may not access the supports they need due to a variety of factors.

- For all children in the U.S., on average, only 1 in 5 children in need of mental health supports receive services.[18]
- Refugee and immigrant families face additional substantial barriers in accessing mental health care, such as:
  - The primacy of meeting basic needs (e.g., legal issues, housing, jobs, food)
  - Language barriers
  - Lack of transportation
  - Stigma
  - Lack of familiarity with mental health care services

> To address this gap, schools can implement a multi-tiered system of supports for newcomer students that provides universal welcoming and prevention strategies, as well as early identification and supports.

- Schools serve as an ideal setting for the implementation of interventions, given they often are the first service system available to refugees and are accessible to refugees and their families.[7,8,9,19]
- Further, schools offer an environment for the early identification of distress and concerning behavior.
- When considering the potentially traumatic experiences faced by newcomer students, schools can utilize a multi-system ecological framework to understand mental health challenges as a consequence of environmental stressors.
- Frameworks such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be used to build coping strategies, while a resilience framework can use strengths and protective factors to reduce exposure to adversity.

Promoting Resilience

Schools may promote resilience by:
- Helping newcomer youth leverage their internal strengths and the collective strengths of their family, community, and culture
- Specific examples of assets and resources to promote resilience include helping newcomer youth:
  - Build social connections
  - Develop and maintain strong bonds and connectedness with parents and caring adults
  - Experience positive involvement in their community (school, church, neighborhood)
  - Foster a positive sense of cultural identity
  - Develop personal qualities (leadership) as well as coping tools.

5   What Do Newcomer Supports in Schools Look Like?

- A school that comprehensively supports newcomer students is one in which all administrators, staff, students, families, and community members **create a welcoming, safe, responsive, and culturally competent environment** for newcomer students.
- At the school-wide level, awareness, knowledge, and skills are provided to school staff and peers to recognize the unique experiences of newcomer students.

- Specifically, individuals in the school appreciate and promote the strengths and resilience of newcomer students, while also understanding how potentially traumatic experiences before, during, and after migration may impact their learning, behaviors, and emotions in school.
- The school system embeds welcoming and culturally responsive practices as a part of the school culture and policies, and acts in collaboration with families and community agencies to support newcomer students.
  - For newcomer students who may need additional support, schools can provide culturally relevant targeted prevention and early intervention services.

6 The Role and Goal of a System Framework

- The System Framework for Newcomer Supports in Schools provides strategic guidance for schools to realize the vision of creating welcoming, supportive environments that address the needs and promote the strengths of newcomer students.
- Core areas in the framework can be applied to relevant intervention tiers to create a supportive and responsive environment within the school system for newcomer students, and to identify those who are at risk or might need more intensive support to address stressors related to pre-flight, flight, and resettlement trauma.

7 System Framework

- The framework for newcomer supports in schools is designed in alignment with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework, which is a proactive and preventative model for the early identification and support of students with learning and emotional/behavior needs.[20]
- Supports range from universal practices that promote welcoming and well-being of all newcomer students to more intensive supports that provide coping skills and mental health interventions based on student needs.
- Embedded within the system framework is a recognition of the broader contexts in which the tiers of support operate, including the school environment/culture, community, and family partnerships.

WELCOME

Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for Newcomer Students

Key Strategies: Newcomer-Specific Intensive Individual and Family Treatment, Trauma-Specific Treatment

(Tier 3) MEnd: Intensive Support for Individual Student Needs
For students in need of more intensive interventions due to distress or difficulties related to the newcomer experience or transition, schools provide individualized support in ways that account for their unique experiences, and meet their developmental, cultural, and personal needs.

Key Partnerships: School Community, Community Mental Health Organizations, Families

Key Strategies: Screening Newcomer Students, Newcomer-Specific Group Interventions (STRONG, TST)

(Tier 2) COpe: Early Intervention for Students At-Risk
Through early identification, schools utilize targeted prevention and early intervention to support newcomer students by promoting coping and resilience skills as they transition to a new school and community.21 At the Tier 2 level, group interventions are often used to meet the needs of students who share common experiences or needs.

**Key Partnerships:** School Community, Community Mental Health Organizations, Families

(Tier 1) WELcome and WELL-being: Universal Supports to Create a Welcoming School Community
At a foundational level, schools create and support welcoming and safe environments that promote well-being for newcomer students.

Key Strategies: School Staff and Peer Education and Strategies including Promoting Positive School Climate, Psychological First Aid, Bullying Prevention

Key Partnerships: School Community (administrators, teachers, student support staff, peers, coaches, nurses), Community Mental Health Organizations, Youth Development Organizations, Advocacy Groups, Families

7 CORE AREAS OF NEWCOMER SUPPORTS IN SCHOOLS
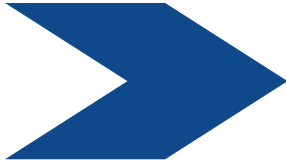
1. Cultural Responsiveness and Cultural Humility.

- A culturally responsive school community practices continuous cultural humility to intentionally co-create inclusive spaces respecting and celebrating intersecting identities (race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, abilities, etc.) of students, families, and parents/caregivers.
- Cultural responsiveness is an ongoing process of learning about students' and families' cultures, traditions, strengths, and needs, rather than a final destination
- Cultural humility is the mindset on this journey that requires self-reflection and self-criticism.
- Through cultural humility, school communities better meet newcomer families' needs.
- Critically thinking about more inclusive and equitable practices for families and schools establishes a culturally sensitive and engaging environment for newcomers.

Culturally-Responsive Approaches Integrated School-Wide (Tier 1)
The first step to creating an equitable, inclusive, and supportive school environment to promote student's sense of belonging involves school staff practicing cultural humility to be mindful of how they engage and interact with every student, with explicit attention to newcomer students.

For example, educators can:
- Reflect critically to reveal any implicit biases about their own contextual understanding of newcomers before being able to authentically support them
- Practice mindful and active listening to deeply connect with individuals, enabling authentic dialogues that promote a richer understanding of diverse beliefs and practices
- Address issues of power, diversity, privilege, and oppression to promote awareness, advocacy and negate any negative mental health outcomes that may arise in newcomers
- Allow for more immersive experiences for school staff (e.g., self-reflection and discussion, hands-on learning), to increase understanding of and support for newcomer students and families
- See the **STRONG Manual** for strategies educators can use to demonstrate cultural responsiveness and humility with students and families.

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Adapting Interventions Using Culturally-Responsive Strategies (Tiers 2 & 3)
Youth who have experienced adversity will benefit from culturally contextualized interventions designed to enhance promotive and protective factors for successful adaptation, rather than solely interventions designed to reduce risk and pathology 22,23,24.

- Tier 2 interventions such as **Supporting Transition Resilience of Newcomer Groups (STRONG)** were co-developed with members of the newcomer community and emphasize that newcomer youth will benefit from culturally-based protective factors and cultural traditions as they transition to a new school and community. 24,25,26 Specific strategies are used to:
  - Increase newcomers' positive sense of cultural identity
  - Buffer newcomers from the impact of racism and xenophobia
- Multi-tiered interventions such as **Trauma Systems Therapy** for Refugees include specific strategies to promote cultural responsiveness such as:
  - Tier 1: Community Engagement
  - Tier 2: School-based group intervention for students
  - Tier 3: School-based counseling
  - Tier 4: Home-based counseling
  - Identifying treatment goals that are consistent with the families' view of what is most important to them
  - Including community figures (such as teachers, spiritual leaders, community advocates, and case managers) in treatment planning
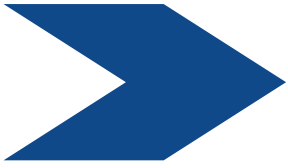
2. Newcomer Education and Awareness for School Personnel & US-Born Peers.

To establish support for newcomer students, its vital for the school community to learn about their experiences. Avoiding assumptions and adopting a learning stance, educators and peers can understand newcomer students better through initiatives like professional development and classroom instruction/book clubs, which highlight the value that newcomers bring to the school community as well as ways that the school community can support their transition.

School-Wide Awareness of Newcomer Experiences (Tier 1)

School-wide policies and education should include specific strategies administrators, educators and peer students can employ to make students feel welcomed, supported, and empowered to contribute to the school community.

- Education initiatives such as professional development can provide educators and peer students with information about newcomer experiences.
- Teachers may share information with their class to help peer students understand and welcome newcomers.
  - Several resources, such as **Learning for Justice** and **Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services** have ideas about promoting diversity in the classroom and examples of books that share aspects of the refugee experience. Educators can read parts of the books in their classroom and have students discuss the material.

Awareness of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) In Educators (Tier 1)

School personnel may experience **secondary traumatic stress** (STS), the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another, as they listen to the firsthand traumatic experiences of newcomer students.

- School staff should be informed of signs or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (compassion fatigue, burnout, vicarious trauma) such as:
  - Low mood and energy
  - Headaches
  - Concentration issues
  - Increased anger
  - Isolation
  - Lack of motivation

- If school staff recognize signs of compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress in **themselves** or their colleagues, resources such as **in-school peer support** and **stress-management**, or employee assistance programs can be used.
- The National Child for Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) also offers a **webinar** for secondary traumatic stress for educators.

Awareness of Newcomer Needs (Tiers 2 & 3)
- School personnel providing intensive, individualized supports for newcomer students can dedicate ample time for intake interviews with newcomer parents and children to become more aware of their hopes, strengths, and needs.
- NCTSN offers a Refugee Services Core Stressor Toolkit: **Refugee Services Core Stressor Assessment Tool | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nctsn.org)**.

3. School Environment.

The school policies, mission, and vision create a school environment that is supportive to newcomer students.

Creating a Welcoming School Environment (Tier 1)
- Schools can welcome newcomer students and families to schools by first establishing a school reception team to assist with orientation (e.g., administrator, office administrative assistant, ESL/ELD teacher, interpreter, settlement worker).
- Policy and practice guidance for all school administrators, educators and peer students to ensure that all newcomers in school are welcomed and supported and to promote newcomer wellbeing.
- Within the school, signs can be posted and announcements can be made in the languages of newcomer students. Strategies described in the **SMH-ASSIST Info-Sheet for Welcoming Newcomer Students & Families to School** can be adapted for use with various newcomer groups in other countries such as the United States.
- Schools can adopt trauma-informed and culturally competent discipline policies and practices to promote a safe school climate.

- Schools may wish to gather input from newcomer youth in the school and incorporate youth voice into policy and practice guidance to create a positive school environment that meets the needs of the specific population.

Invite us to hang out and include us in activities.

Help us with translations.

Teach us the rules of sports.

Be kind and encouraging; help us to speak up!

- For additional guidance, see the **Welcoming Newcomers to a Safe, Inclusive, and Thriving School Environment chapter** in the U.S. Department of Education's 2023 Newcomer Toolkit.

Bolstering Sense of School Belonging for Newcomer Students (Tier 1)

- Many newcomer students experience barriers to school engagement and retention. Barriers, such as the following, may make newcomers feel like they do not belong:
  - Gaps in education resulting in placement of older adolescents with younger peers and less developed academic skills resulting in low-self efficacy
  - Pressure to contribute to family income (survivor's guilt and pressure to send money home, immediate financial hardship coupled with strong family obligation may result in pressure to help caregivers meet basic needs)
  - Possibly the first generation to have the opportunity to complete schooling or to pursue post-secondary education
- School personnel can increase retention of newcomer students by:
  - Ensuring that while older students are placed in core classes with younger students, that they get specials, study halls, free periods with same-age peers
  - Starting a peer ambassador program (older native born or later-generation students, preferably who speak the same language, who can mentor/guide newcomers)

- ELL supports, tutoring to help with academic catch-up
- Newcomer alliance group/Dreamers Club to help combat isolation and enhance a sense of belonging
- Getting all staff on board with repeated visual and verbal communication that newcomers DO belong at the school and CAN graduate and pursue higher education

Promoting an Inclusive Classroom (Tier 1)
- Educators can greet students individually by name daily and with a smile, and building relaxation breaks into the day, particularly during transitions. Ensuring and practicing correct pronunciation of newcomers' names is a simple way to demonstrate respect and humility.
- To provide inclusive peer supports, educators can share information with the class to help students understand and welcome newcomers, pair each newcomer with a peer helper to help with orientation and routines, and seek out opportunities for paired and small-group work to support social integration.
- Educators can ensure the classroom environment reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of students, as many newcomer students will be learning a new language, and supplement class materials with visual aids or other creative techniques (e.g., acting, drawing, dancing, or oral storytelling).

Predictable and Supportive Learning Environments (Tier 1)
- Physical safety can be promoted in the school by meeting students' basic needs, creating a non-threatening and predictable environment, providing orientation about the school and expectations, and maintaining routines and consistency using schedules in multiple languages and with visuals.
- Psychological safety can be developed by creating a trustworthy environment and trusting relationships, using verbal and visual communication that demonstrates the school is a safe and welcoming environment.
- Some newcomer students may have lost their faith in adults, given some of their experiences before moving. It is important to be patient when forming relationships with newcomers and to establish a sense of safety and trust in your classroom.

Bullying Prevention (Tier 1)
- Newcomer students may be **more likely to be bullied than native-born students**, therefore educators need to establish a sense of safety and trust in the classroom and address any instances of **bullying** and **discrimination**.

- To prevent bullying, educators can encourage newcomer students and native-born students to work together through group work and activities that foster mutual interests and promote friendship between students (e.g., clubs of mutual interest).
- Newcomers should receive clear instruction about how to report instances of bullying/discrimination and schools should act on these reports to ensure that this behavior does not continue. Restorative justice approaches and/or peace circles might provide ways for schools to intervene to ensure a safe school environment for newcomers.

Safe Spaces for Students (Tiers 2 & 3)
- Within the school and classroom, spaces can be made for newcomer students to feel physically and psychologically safe within the environment. Safe spaces can be used if students are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or distressed, and need to self-regulate.
- Additionally, educators can provide students with breaks to practice relaxation in classrooms.

4. Family Engagement.

Engaging families is a very important component of creating a system of supports for newcomer students. Newcomer groups may have had difficult experiences within their home country, and/or during their journey to get to this school. They may be fearful, distrustful, and suspicious based on these experiences. They may be cautious or not fully forthcoming, so patience and predictability can help families develop trusting collaborative relationships with the school.

Welcoming Families into Schools (Tier 1)

To create a welcoming environment and build trusting relationships with newcomer families:

- The school reception team can ensure school communications are made in the **languages of newcomer families**.
- For additional guidance regarding how to empower newcomer families to engage with schools, see the **Establishing Partnerships with Families chapter** in the U.S. Department of Education's 2023 Newcomer Toolkit. Specific strategies include:

  - Using multiple methods to communicate, such as newsletters, phone calls, a school website, and parent outreach workers
  - Enable families to share their needs and concerns via suggestion boxes or surveys
  - Provide opportunities for families to enrich the school community by sharing their cultural values through initiatives such as Diversity Nights
  - Hire interpreters or use headphones that enable translation when inviting parents to the school

- Ensure that caregivers are oriented to the school environment including the norms of the school, the expectations for parental involvement and the resources and supports offered for their children and families.

Use of Caregivers in Identifying Students in Need of More Support (Tier 2)

- Partnerships with families are critical in the efforts to identify needs and supports. Parents are uniquely positioned to recognize potential mental health needs in their children that could benefit from the support of a school or community-based mental health provider.

**Education for Caregivers (Tier 2)**

Engaging caregivers by building on their strengths and dispelling myths of mental health is another important design and implementation consideration.[27,28,29,30]

- It may be helpful to carefully review with families why their children were selected for participation in a Tier 2 program and to describe the skills that are taught during the program, as well as their role in reinforcing those skills.
- Additionally, it will be important to emphasize that students will not be penalized for their participation in Tier 2 interventions and that administrators and teachers are on board and will work together to minimize disruptions to the student's classwork.
- Optimal parent education will emphasize skill development (reduce negative stigma) and provide examples of how parents can facilitate generalization of skills at home (e.g. coping tools).

Engaging Families in Treatment (Tiers 2 & 3)

To encourage family members consenting to their child's participation in interventions, and to understand newcomer children's strengths and needs, school staff can meet with parents and develop goals and values for future growth.

- Communicating positive messages with parents (e.g., via phone calls or notes) about their child's progress and performance in school may be a positive step toward establishing trust and promoting a sense of welcoming.
- In interventions, such as the STRONG program, parents receive weekly letters about their child's progress and are included in sessions to review the core components of the intervention with other parents of students in the program so they are able to practice them at home with their child.
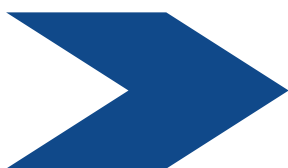
5. Identifying and Assessing.

A supportive school recognizes early identification of newcomer students in need of supports as an essential prevention and intervention strategy, and uses early identification to link students to targeted supports. A tiered approach suggests schools can continually monitor student progress by evaluating the impacts of ongoing intervention supports.

Identifying Newcomer Students in Need of Supports (Tier 2)

Students can be selected for additional supports based on their newcomer status and if they require support to successfully participate in this new school and community.

- Some newcomer students may exhibit no signs of distress and no need for additional support.
- Other students may struggle to engage with peers or staff and/or may experience distress related to their newcomer journey. These students may benefit from developing skills to participate effectively at school.
- Students may be self-referred to tiered supports or recommended by families or school staff who may have observed the student struggling at home or in school. The STRONG program provides an **Eligibility Checklist (see p. ix)** for guidance on student selection, that can be useful for schools.

Mental Health Screening for Newcomer Students (Tier 2 & Tier 3)

- The school can utilize evidence-based and culturally and linguistically appropriate screening tools (Screening and Assessing Immigrant and Refugee Youth in School-Based Mental Health Programs; **Measures that are Appropriate for Refugee Children and Families**) to screen students who may be experiencing distress for mental health concerns, such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, or depression, and use screening information to inform intervention decision-making.

Progress Monitoring (Tiers 2 & 3)

To evaluate the ongoing impact of the intervention, outcome measures may wish to assess student engagement, psychosocial functioning, and sense of belonging.

- For example, the STRONG program has included a **student engagement and functioning rating (see p. 18)** to be completed after each session.
- The STRONG program has also included pre- and post-assessments of student resilience, specific skills (e.g., goal setting, cognitive coping), post-traumatic stress symptoms, psychosocial functioning, and school climate and connectedness.
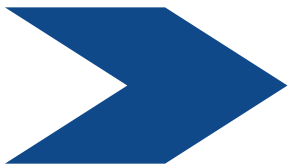
6. Addressing and Treating.

For students who are identified as needing supports, in school early interventions, support plans, and referral systems are essential for newcomer students.

Teaching Relaxation Skills (Tiers 1 & 2)

- Educators can be trained to identify signs of adjustment difficulties and incorporate efforts to support newcomers in managing emotions and behavior in the classroom.
  - For example, **relaxation** exercises, such as deep breathing and the use of quiet spaces, can be infused into the class schedule.

Psychoeducation for Newcomer Students on the Effects of Stress and Trauma (Tier 2)

- Psychoeducation and awareness serve as a foundational component of many interventions, and directly connects to the teaching of coping skills.
- To address any distress experienced by newcomer students, small group targeted prevention and early intervention efforts can focus on psychoeducation to help students understand the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical impacts of mental health.

Group Supports (Tier 2)

Targeted group supports for newcomer students aim to build resilience and promote healthy adjustment to a new school and country, and to develop strategies to cope with stress.

- Specific efforts may focus on:
    - Identifying and building upon strengths
    - Increasing social support and connections
    - Expressing and regulating emotions
    - Building problem-solving and goal-setting skills
    - Engaging in pleasurable activities
    - Maintaining a positive cultural identity
- Components of cognitive behavioral interventions may be used, such as:
    - Relaxation training
    - Behavioral activation
    - Cognitive coping
    - Goal setting
    - Exposure
    - Problem solving
- STRONG is one example of an evidence-informed, school-based intervention for newcomer youth that includes group sessions delivered by a school mental health clinician.

- Some cultural considerations when providing group mental health supports are:
  - Awareness and sensitivity to cultural observances and holidays (for example, when students might be fasting)
  - Worries about missing instructional time
  - Hierarchy and power
  - Interactions between genders

Individualized in School Supports (Tier 3)

Individualized interventions for students experiencing psychological distress or difficulties related to the newcomer experience and transition can be provided at the Tier 3 level.

- More intensive intervention supports, often provided via one-on-one time with a school mental health clinician, may aim to normalize distress through cognitive behavioral interventions and narrative exposure interventions (trauma-focused CBT, narrative exposure therapy).

Referral to Community-Based Services (Tier 3)

- For newcomer students needing more intensive supports than what can be provided in a school setting, educators can facilitate connections to relevant community providers.

7. Cross-System Collaboration and Community Partnerships.

Developing and Sustaining Policies and Practices to Support Newcomer Students (Tier 1)

- Policies and funding streams can be cultivated and maintained to support schools in the development of a comprehensive system of supports for newcomer students.
- Schools and districts can collaborate with local, state, and federal partners to sustain newcomer supports.

Resource Mapping and Service Access (Tier 1)

- Schools can collaborate with community agencies, as well as local, state, and federal agencies to integrate support services into the school setting and to connect students to community resources.
- Schools can generate a catalogue of services available within the school and community to provide to newcomer parents. Newcomers may not be familiar with local services available, so putting such information together in a familiar language can help newcomers navigate this new setting more easily.
- **Relevant resources** that may be of interest to newcomer families include:
  - Community organizations that support newcomers
  - Free/low-cost case-management/social workers that can help link newcomers to resources
  - Free/low-cost health care
  - Free/low-cost English language classes
  - Job training/employment services
  - Local faith institutions
  - Parent groups and organizations in the school setting
  - Organizations to help newcomers with housing
  - **Legal services** for newcomers, such as **Know Your Rights** workshops

Multidisciplinary Team-Based Approaches (Tier 2)

- Schools can advocate for the integration of case management, management of resettlement stressors, and mental health support within existing systems.**27,31,32,33**
- Coordinated efforts with community leaders, business owners, service providers and school staff to understand the circumstances and cultural differences of newcomers can help create a consistent, welcoming environment.

Consultation and Partnership with School Staff and Community Members (Tier 3)

- Students and families may identify additional mental health concerns that may not be feasibly addressed in schools that could benefit from the support of a community mental health provider.
- To prepare for this, schools can identify **community mental health providers that offer culturally responsive services to newcomer families** and establish a seamless referral pathway for when supports are needed.

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RESOURCES

- **STRONG Manual:** Available in multiple languages on Google Drive: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VO4XQOeRENbHLDjRB9ovHdaHyXYL-uog
- **Trauma Systems Therapy:** https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/interventions/tst_fact_sheet.pdf
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS):**
  - Signs: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/secondary_traumatic_stress_child_serving_professionals.pdf
  - Peer Supports: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-core-competencies-for-trauma-informed-support-and-supervision-cross-disciplinary-version
  - Webinar: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/secondary-traumatic-stress-educators
  - Self-Assessment: https://proqol.org/proqol-measure
  - Coping with Stress: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/copingwith-stresstips.html
  - Provider Self-Care Toolkit: https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/care/toolkits/provider/index.asp
  - Self-Care Starter Kit: https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html
- **Bullying:**
  - Stop Bullying: https://www.stopbullying.gov/
  - Counter Anti-Immigrant Bullying: https://reimaginingmigration.org/countering-bullying/
  - Refugee and Immigrant Youth and Bullying: Frequently Asked Questions: https://brycs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/tool4.pdf
- **Relaxation Exercises:** https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/relaxation-techniques
- **Screening Tools:**
  - NCTSN Webinar on Best Practices in Screening and Assessment of Refugee Youth: https://www.nctsn.org/resources/best-practices-screening-and-assessment-refugee-youth
  - Measures: https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/refugee_standardized_measures_list.pdf
  - Screening and Assessing Immigrant and Refugee Youth in School-Based Mental Health Programs: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED509829.pdf

RESOURCES

- **Legal Resources:**
  - National Immigrant Justice Center: **https://immigrantjustice.org/**
  - International Refugee Assistance Program: **https://refugeerights.org/how-we-work/legal-services**
  - World Relief Legal Support Network: **https://worldrelief.org/legal-support-network/**
  - Know Your Rights: **https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights**
- **US Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit:** **https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/NewcomerToolkit-06222023-508_OELA_Chapter5.pdf**
- **School Communication in Different Languages:**
  - **https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html**
  - **https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-el-students-201501.pdf**
- **Service Access:**
  - Mental Health Resources for Immigrants and Refugees: **https://usahello.org/health/mental-health/help-and-services/**
  - Immigrant Services Directory: **https://www.aclu.org/documents/immigrant-services-directory-public-resource-intake-referrals**