



Trauma and mental health in young people seeking asylum

City of Sanctuary
Local authority network

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UK TRAUMA
COUNCIL



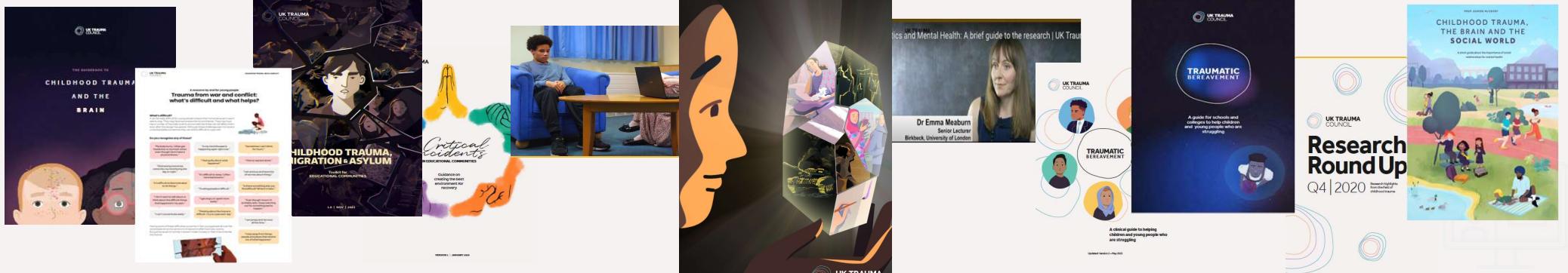
An Anna Freud project

UK Trauma Council

Creating a world that nurtures and protects children and young people following trauma.

Free evidence-based resources to improve professionals and carers' understanding of the nature and impact of trauma.

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Co-created with intended users and children & young people

Guidance, toolkits, videos, animations, research summaries, webinars and training

Council members
UK child trauma experts

Setting the scene

We all use language differently. My intention is to use language inclusively, respectfully and thoughtfully. Let me know where I can improve.



Hearing and thinking about trauma can be difficult and at times distressing.

Do what you need do to care for yourself.

Traumatic experiences

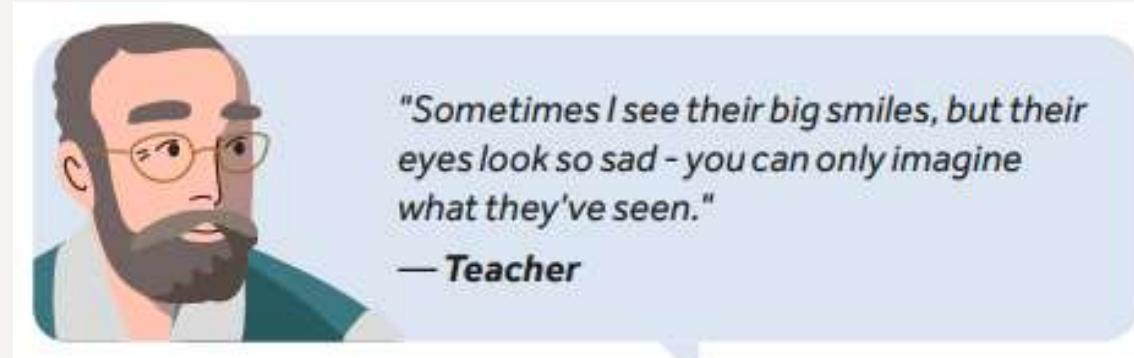
- Range of traumatic experiences: Children and young people seeking asylum are likely to have gone through a number of difficult and potentially traumatic experiences.
- Trauma timeline: This may include traumatic events in their country of origin, during their migration journey and here in the UK.
- Trauma significance: Many young people seeking asylum rate their journey to the UK as their most traumatic experience.
- Mental health: Rates of PTSD and other mental health conditions are significantly higher than for UK born peers.



However,



- **Avoid assumptions:** post traumatic stress and mental health difficulties aren't inevitable. Neither are they the only difficulties a child or young person may have- developmental, language, learning, neurodivergence.
- **Do your own homework:** You may well be working 'in the dark.' What can you find out about common experiences from their country of origin?
- **Identity:** Having experience of migration and asylum doesn't define someone. Remember the other aspects of their identity- faith, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. Consider their strengths, skills and hopes for the future.



So how might
traumatic
experiences impact
a young person
seeking asylum?

Post traumatic reactions might include:

- Internal and external
- Physical and bodily reactions
- Being on high alert
- Intrusive thoughts and memories
- Avoiding trauma reminders
- Feeling anxious
- Struggling with low mood
- Impact on wellbeing, home life, education and social life

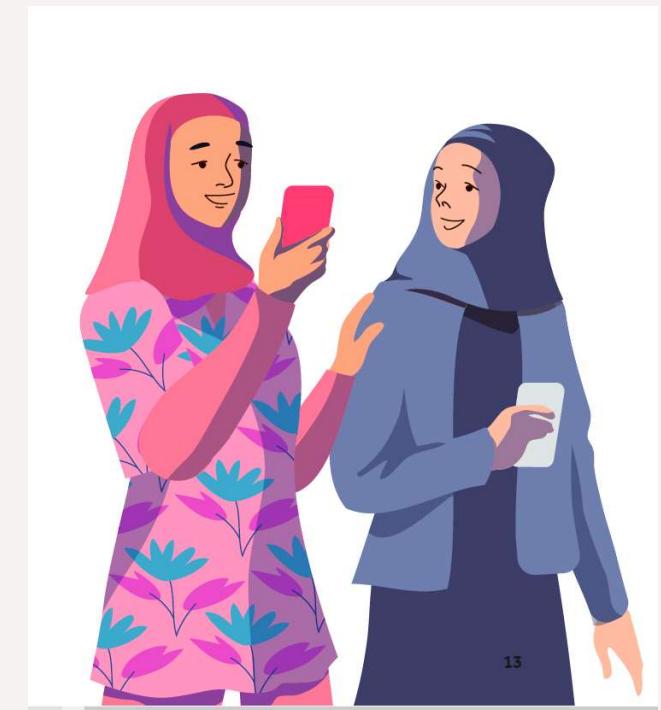
Additional stressors of migration

Is this framework culturally appropriate?

How a child or young person makes sense of their traumatic experiences and their reactions and how they speak about (or don't speak about them) might be different according to their culture, faith, gender or socio-economic status etc.

BUT

these kind of reactions are seen to be generally universal.



Supporting recovery for children and young people seeking asylum

Whilst rates of mental health problems are higher, they aren't inevitable.

Although some young people will need specialist help, there is a lot adults can do to buffer and protect from longer term mental health difficulties.

What is being done and can be done to help children feel....



(Hobfoll et al 2007)

When to seek specialist help

Trauma reactions are natural and understandable responses for children and young people who have experienced the trauma of war, conflict and persecution. Even though you can play an important role in their recovery through the environment you have created, sometimes extra help is needed.

- Consider impact
- A considered approach
- Collaboration
- Prioritise relationships

Adjustment, recovery and healing is possible.

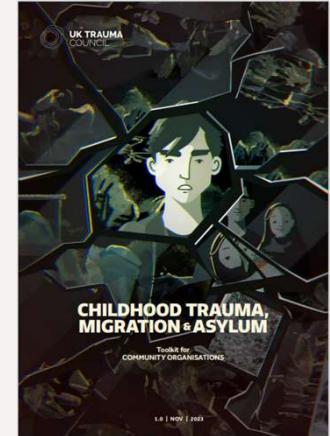


The resources were co-produced
with a range of partners including:

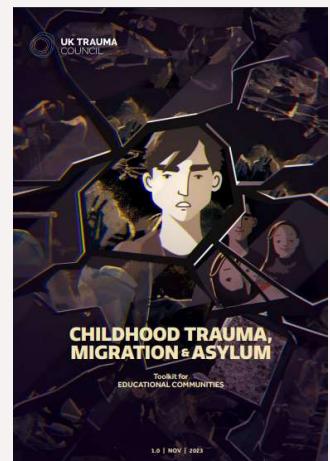
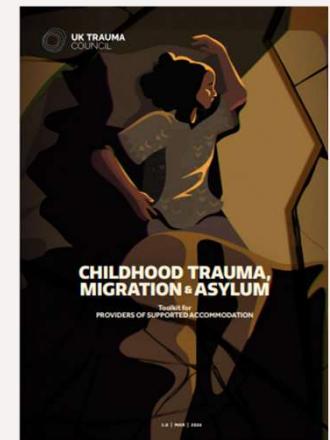
- Kent Refugee Action Network
- Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team (NEST)
- St Mary's Ukrainian School
- Mellers Primary School
- British Red Cross



Three toolkits: for community organisations, for supported accommodation providers and for educational communities

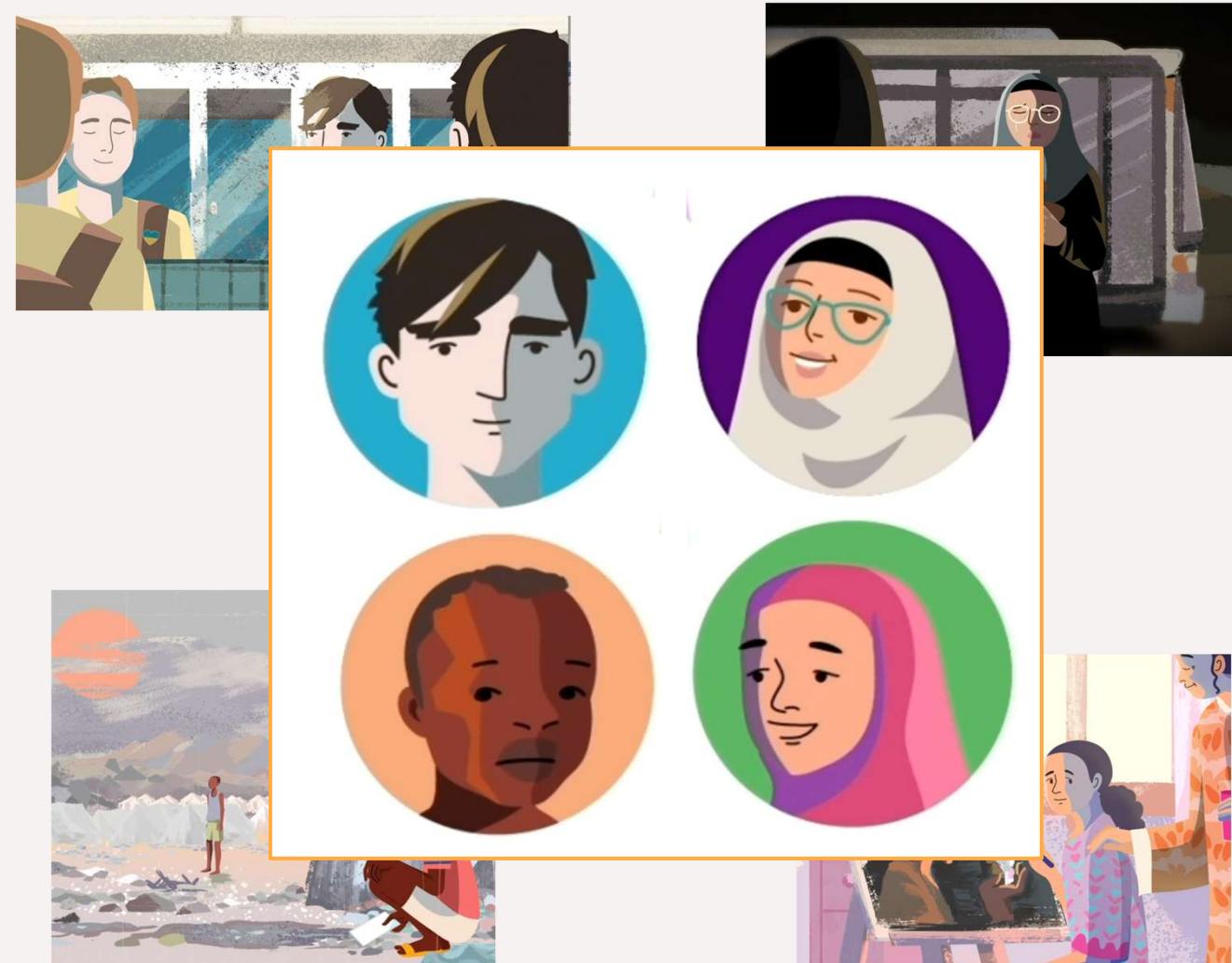


- To recognise trauma reactions
- To support professionals to respond to their needs and best support their recovery
- When to refer on for specialist help
- Self care for staff, vicarious trauma and vicarious resilience
- A workshop plan for community organisations



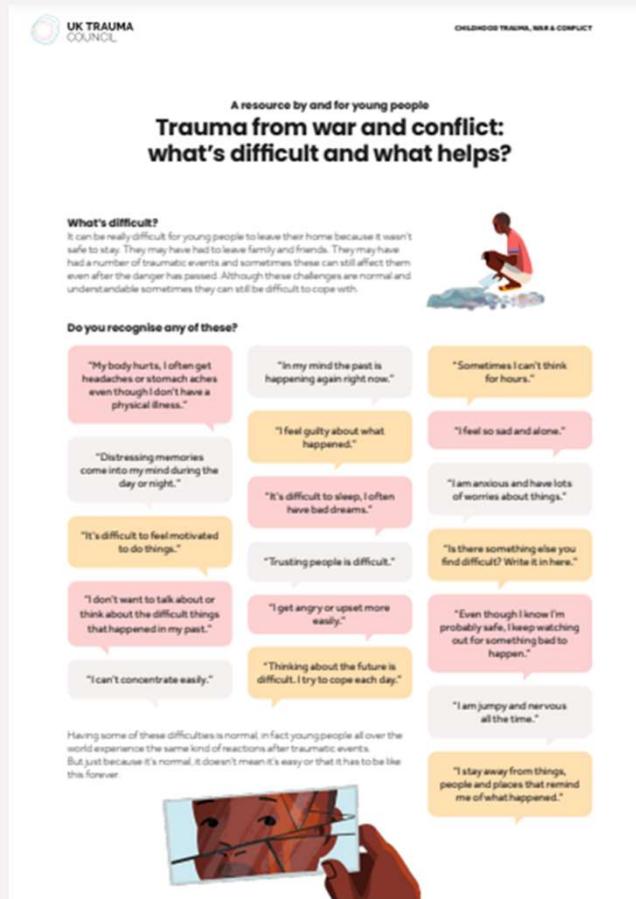
Film

- A short, animated film for young people experiencing the long term affects of war and conflict. It highlights the importance of social connections and addressing traumatic memories from the past.
- Arabic, English, Farsi, Hebrew, Pashto, Tigrinya and Ukrainian versions
- Co-produced with young people with lived experience
- International dissemination



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= YSA7-xCz4k>

Self-help resource for young people



The image shows the front cover of a booklet titled 'Trauma from war and conflict: what's difficult and what helps?'. The cover features the UK Trauma Council logo at the top left. The title is in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the title, there's a sub-headline 'A resource by and for young people'. The main title is 'Trauma from war and conflict: what's difficult and what helps?'. The cover is divided into several sections: 'What's difficult?' (with a small illustration of a person sitting on the ground), 'Do you recognise any of these?' (with a grid of 18 statements in various colored speech bubbles), and 'Having some of these difficulties is normal...'. The background of the cover is white with some light gray and yellow accents.

Printable resource helping young people to:

- identify trauma reactions,
- find ways to manage overwhelming feelings in the moment
- think about seeking support

Arabic, English, Farsi, Hebrew, Pashto, Tigrinya and Ukrainian versions



Workshop plan for community organisations

Workshop plan for staff in community settings without mental health training. The workshop uses the animation and young people's self-help resource to:

- open up conversation about mental health
- make sense and normalise trauma reactions
- identify and communicate their needs
- help them identify ways of coping in the short term
- recognise those who might benefit from longer term support.

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Approx. 60 - 75 mins

GROUP WORKSHOP PLAN

Age range 11+

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA, MIGRATION & ASYLUM

This workshop is designed to help non-mental health staff to facilitate a conversation about trauma and its impact on young people in a safe space. The plan outlines ideas and activities for you to use flexibly and adapt to the needs of your group. As a staff team with existing relationships with your young people and potentially your own lived experiences of war and conflict you are ideally placed to do this. You will then be able to check in and follow up with those young people in the weeks and months that follow using your shared understanding about the impact of trauma.

The workshop is part of the wider resources about supporting children and young people seeking refuge and asylum. You will find further information about the themes in this workshop within the toolkit for community organisations, as you might want to be familiar with it prior to running the session. All resources needed for this workshop are available for free on our website (uktraumacouncil.org/childhood-trauma-migration-asylum) in Arabic, English, Farsi, Hebrew, Pashto, Tagalog and Ukrainian.

Aims for the workshop

This workshop is an opportunity for staff working with young people affected by the trauma of war and conflict to:

- open up the conversation about how your young people are doing
- make sense and normalise some of the reactions they might be having due to their traumatic experiences
- identify their own trauma reactions and be able to communicate their needs
- help them identify ways of coping in the short term
- help you recognise those who might benefit from longer term support

Resources needed:

- [Links to the UK Trauma Council's 'Childhood Trauma, War and Conflict' animation and something to screen on](#)
- [Printed version of the UK Trauma Council's resource for young people 'Trauma from war and conflict - what is difficult and what helps'](#)
- You might want to have the following resources available to support the coping strategy activities:
 - In Touch** – different textures e.g. feathers, play dough, a smooth pebble, fabric, slime
 - Bubble breathing** – pot of bubbles
 - Cool it** – cups of cold water and paper straws
 - Mind travel** – paper and pens

Creating a safe space and ground rules

This is not a therapy group and is designed that adults without mental health expertise can help their young people make sense of the impact of their traumatic experiences. It is intended that young people can take part without having to share anything personal, in fact we suggest that you ask them not to share personal stories in the group because not everyone might be ready to hear them.

The young people might however be able to share some of the ways in which the conflict has impacted them, and this could lead to some emotions being triggered. That is okay. In fact, that can be really useful. Many of them will be experiencing strong emotions anyway, and they will often be doing this on their own. Using your knowledge of the young people in your group and going gently with the content will help you feel safe. In this workshop the young people can get some ideas about how to cope with their overwhelming feelings, and what's more, they won't

To find out more see

[Childhood Trauma, War, Migration
and Asylum - UK Trauma Council](#)

Thank you

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