



Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

- Be explicit in giving information to students and families about attendance, timetables, daily routines, procedures for communicating between home and school, curricular objectives, etc. This information can be presented in a visual form (see [Sample Newcomer's Guide](#)), or translated if possible and as necessary.
- Take student and family on a tour of the school. Point out the places the child will be each day.
- Create a predictable environment characterized by routine.
- Use a visual schedule and visual timer to support activity transitions.
- Use social stories to rehearse transitions or activities that are difficult for students.
- Give plenty of notice of any changes in routines or personnel.
- Establish clear and consistent communication patterns, using the same vocabulary to describe and explain procedures and school policies.
- Be sensitive to refugee children who have experienced being in confined spaces and require an open environment. In planning the room setup, teachers should consider opening doors, curtains and windows or allowing students to step outside for a few minutes if they need to.
- Be aware that the classroom environment may be over stimulating for some refugee students. Reduce the amount of stimuli and limit choice of activities for them.
- Provide a safe and quiet place for a child to retreat to if needed.
- Rehearse the procedures for fire alarms, lock-downs and evacuations in advance.
- Help students to physically and psychologically prepare themselves in advance for topics, trips, visitors, etc.
- Create a secret non-verbal signal that students can use if they experience an episode of anxiety. The teacher and students should have agreed upon strategies the student can use.
- Articulate consistent strategies for resolving conflict within the classrooms.
- Rehearse dialogues that model social interactions.
- Help students to access opportunities for recreational and social activities.
- Use flexible groupings to cluster students in meaningful ways related to interests, skills, etc.
- Incorporate images, materials, activities, etc. that are familiar to and reflective of various cultural traditions.
- Build in breaks, activity changes and opportunities for physical movement.
- Use music in the classroom for instruction, to create atmosphere and as a choice activity.