

USCRI

Best Practices for Mentoring Refugee & Newcomer Youth

Refugee Youth Resource Center

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the training, you will be able to...

- ① Understand the role and responsibilities of a mentor working with refugee and newcomer youth
- ② Incorporate trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice in mentorship
- ③ Set healthy boundaries with refugee and newcomer youth and families
- ④ Recognize signs of burnout and identify self-care strategies to support



Refugee & Newcomer Youth Mentoring

THE ROLE OF YOUTH MENTORS



What Youth Mentors Are:

- Trusted adults or peers
- Support figures who provide guidance, emotional support, practical help, and positive role-modeling
- Guides to young newcomers as they navigate and adjust to life in the U.S.

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What Youth Mentors Are Not:

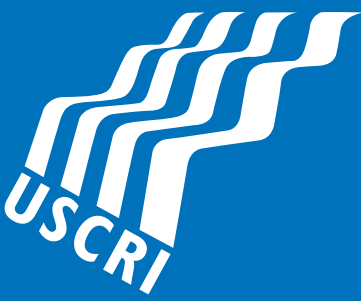
- Case managers
- Therapists or psychologists
- Immigration or legal advisors
- Decision-makers

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Adapted from [Harvard School of Education](#)

WAYS TO SUPPORT NEWCOMER YOUTH



Mentors can support newcomer youth by...

- Providing **consistency** during a time of abrupt or significant transition
- Offering **encouragement** and helping to build confidence
- Helping newcomer youth **understand** U.S. systems
- Supporting newcomer youth with **goal setting** and building successful futures
- Creating a **safe space** to discuss challenges
- **Connecting** newcomer youth to community resources, activities, and opportunities



CASE EXAMPLE: ZAHRA

Zahra, a 17-year-old Afghan youth, arrived in the U.S. two years ago. Back in her home country, she loved to draw and often helped her younger siblings with school work.

When Zahra enrolled in high school in the U.S., she was placed in classes with peers her age. While she is still learning English, she often understands more than she feels comfortable speaking. She tends to stay quiet, worried about making mistakes or being judged.

Zahra and her mentor have met a few times and are beginning to build trust. During a recent conversation, Zahra told her mentor she isn't smart enough for her grade because she missed so much schooling. She also mentioned thinking about dropping out and finding a job, and asked her mentor what she should do.

- **What is the mentor's role in this situation?**
- **What type of support would fall outside of the mentor's role?**
- **How could the mentor support Zahra based on the concerns she identified?**



Trauma-Informed Mentorship & Best Practices

CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA INFORMED CARE



Safety

Collaboration
& Mutuality

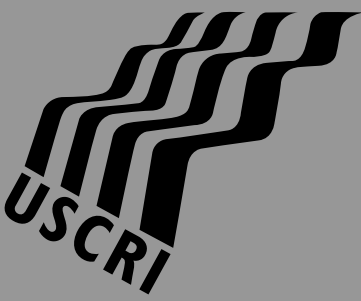
Trustworthiness
& Transparency

Empowerment, Voice,
& Choice

Peer Support

Cultural Humility
& Responsiveness

SAFETY



- Create a **predictable and consistent** environment where youth feel physically and psychologically safe during your interactions
- Listen actively and use a **calm and regulated approach** to model safety and consistency
- Invite youth to express themselves, ask for help, and make mistakes **without judgment**
- Build rapport and respect **personal preferences and comfort levels**
- Avoid asking about past trauma and **respond supportively** if youth share something difficult

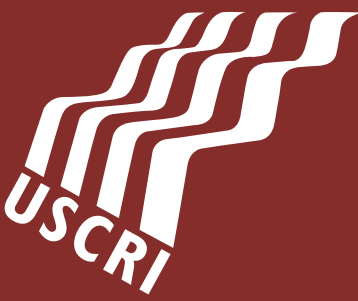


TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY



- **Be transparent** about expectations, boundaries, and limitations
- Use **developmentally appropriate language and activities** to ensure understanding
- **Be consistent and follow through** on your commitments and promises
- Share **clear information** about processes and timelines
- Discuss **confidentiality and its limits** early, and revisit as needed
- Respect **the privacy and boundaries of youth**, as you would with any other relationship

PEER SUPPORT



- Help youth create **friendships with their classmates and neighbors**
- Encourage youth to get involved in extracurricular activities and after-school programs where they can **meet others with similar interests**
- Introduce newcomer youth to cultural or spiritual organizations where they can connect with **peers with similar backgrounds and experiences**
- Network with other mentors to see if youth would be open to **socializing with fellow newcomers**
- Remind youth that **participation is always voluntary**

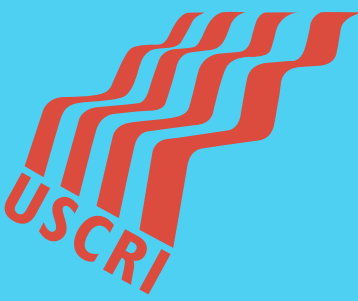
COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY



- Work to **minimize power imbalances**
- Recognize and empower newcomer youth and families as **experts of their own lives**
- **Use youth-led, client-centered approaches**, even if youth ask you to make decisions for them
- **Partner** with caregivers and family members, schools, healthcare providers, community and faith-based organizations, interpreters, and cultural brokers
- Solicit **feedback** from youth and their families
- Be open to **learning from the youth's lived experiences**



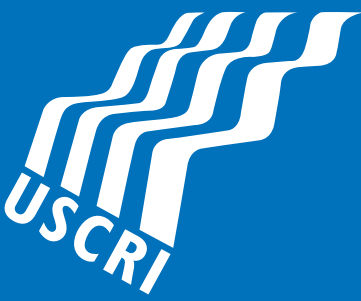
EMPOWERMENT, VOICE, & CHOICE



- Approach your work with youth through a **strengths-based lens**, focusing on what they've already accomplished and what they are capable of
- Ask for **the youth's preferences** and provide them with opinions
- Allow youth to **exercise their autonomy** and lead decision-making
- Let **youth set the pace** of conversations
- Find opportunities for youth to **voice their own opinions and express themselves**
- Reassure youth you are there to **support, not to lead**



CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS



- Hold the **posture of a life-long learner** and acknowledge what you don't know
- Examine **your own beliefs, assumptions, and stereotyping** based on culture, ethnicity, or religion
- Ask **respectful, open-ended questions** about youth's culture and listen intently to responses
- Consider how youth's culture may influence their behavior, family dynamics, and youth's goals
- Respect **family values and caregiver roles**
- Avoid taking things personally

CASE EXAMPLE: ISABEL

Isabel, a 14-year-old from Venezuela, has been matched with her mentor for six months. She trusts her mentor and looks forward to their weekly sessions. During a recent session, she seemed quieter than usual. After some time, Isabel shares that things at home have been difficult. She says she feels unsafe at home because of ongoing conflict and tension between her parents, and tells her mentor, "Please don't tell anyone. You're the only person I trust."

- **How could the mentor respond in a trauma-informed way?**
- **What are the mentor's responsibilities and limits?**
- **What should be the next steps for Isabel's mentor?**



CASE EXAMPLE: MESIDIEU

Mesidieu, an 18-year-old from Haiti, has been mentored for the last six months. Mesidieu's mentor shows up consistently every week, sometimes meeting with Mesidieu two or three times in a week.

In their first meeting, Mesidieu expressed an interest in getting his driver's license and earning more money. His mentor offered to give Mesidieu a car, but this is a gift too grand for Mesidieu's family to accept. His mentor also has been pushing for Mesidieu to attend college, stating that it will help him make more money throughout his life.

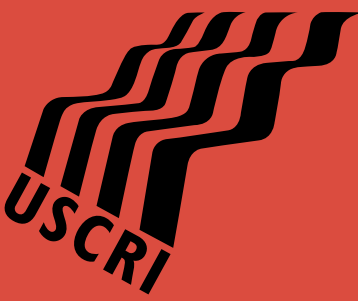
Recently, the mentor shared that he's researched a lot of colleges for Mesidieu and wants to share the information with him, even though Mesidieu never mentioned wanting to attend college. The mentor shares that he wants to 'open doors' for Mesidieu and help him to have opportunities that he didn't have growing up.

- **What do you see the mentor does that conflict with trauma informed care principles?**
- **Where do you see power dynamics show up between Mesidieu and his mentor and how might this impact Mesidieu's ability to express his own goals?**
- **What could the mentor say or do differently to support Mesidieu's goals while maintaining appropriate boundaries?**



Healthy Boundaries, Self-Care, & Sustainability

DISCUSSION

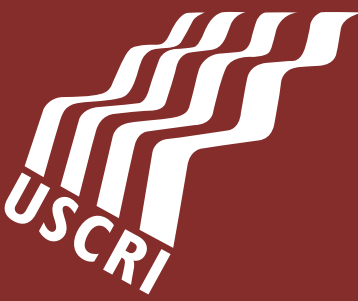


Take a moment and reflect on the question below:

When faced with stress or challenges, what helps you feel grounded, recharged, or supported?



BURNOUT PREVENTION STRATEGIES



- Check in with supervisors regularly and talk through challenges
- Acknowledge your own limitation
- Work to resolve interpersonal conflict
- Turn to other mentors for peer support
- Seek emotional support friends and family
- Set aside time for self-care
- Set healthy boundaries with newcomer youth

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES



Why Boundaries Matter:

- Prevent harm and protect the safety of both youth and mentors
- Limit role confusion and conflict by setting expectations
- Maintain trust, professionalism, and accountability
- Reduce the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES



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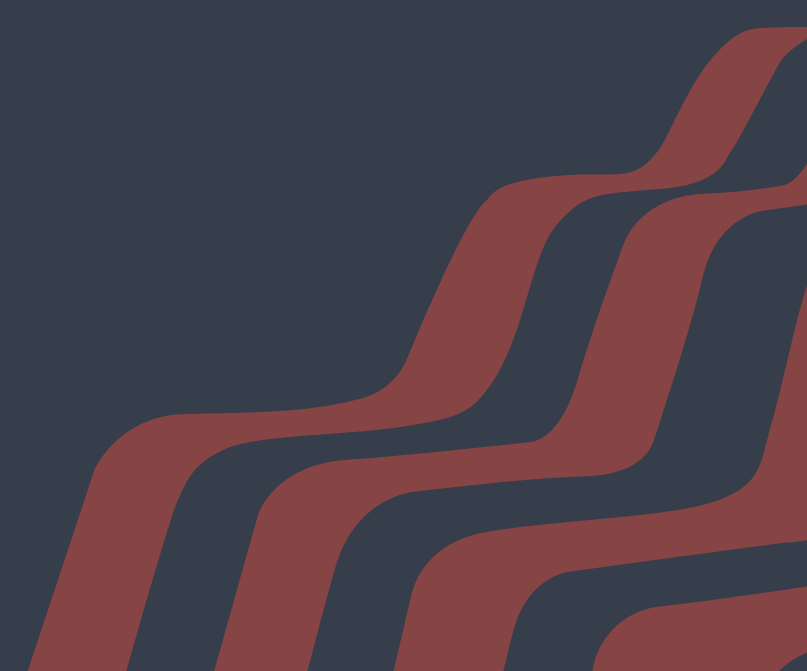
Guidelines for Healthy Boundaries:

- Be clear about your role as a mentor
- Provide clear examples of appropriate versus inappropriate boundaries
- Keep communication with the youth consistent and appropriate
- Review procedures and reporting requirements of the mentorship program
- Recognize when to refer youth to other supports as needed

COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES



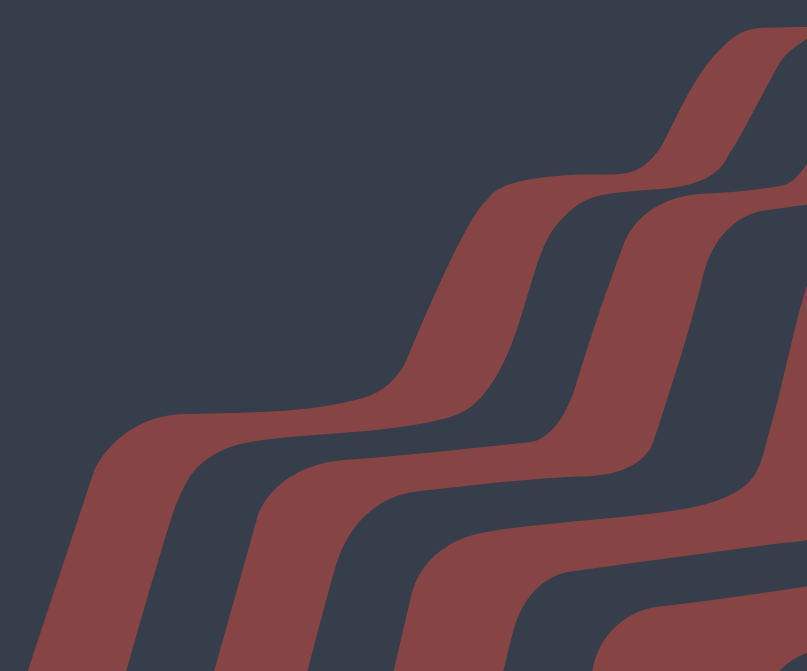
Over-sharing
personal
information



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES



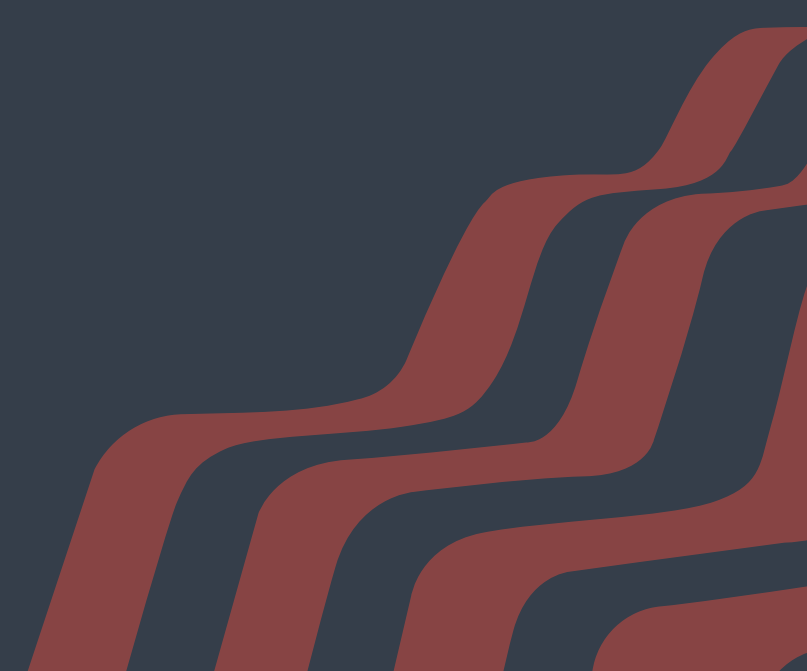
Keep the focus
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COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES

Over-sharing
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Giving money
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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

Keep the focus
on youth's
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Focus on
empowerment
rather than
dependency

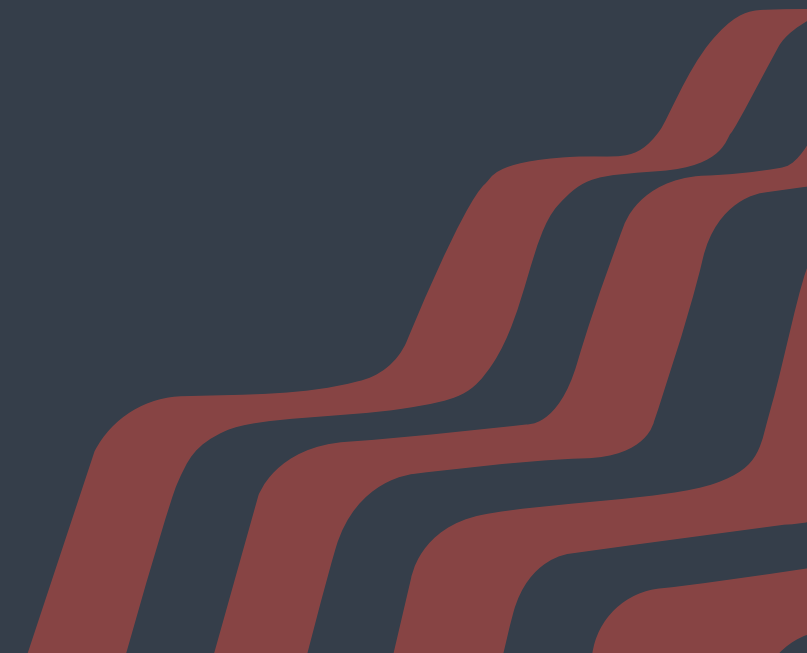


COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES

Over-sharing
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Giving money
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Becoming the
“only support”
for the youth



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

Keep the focus
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Focus on
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Assist youth in
building a
broader support
network



COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES

Over-sharing
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Communicating
outside
approved
platforms

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PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

Keep the focus on youth's experiences and goals

Focus on empowerment rather than dependency

Assist youth in building a broader support network

Use program approved communication tools

COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES

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Being alone
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on one

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

Keep the focus on youth's experiences and goals

Focus on empowerment rather than dependency

Assist youth in building a broader support network

Use program approved communication tools

Meet with supervision, in public, or program approved spaces

COMMON CHALLENGES IN SETTING BOUNDARIES

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Becoming the
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Being alone
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Not allowing
youth to do
things they are
capable of
doing

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

Keep the focus on youth's experiences and goals

Focus on empowerment rather than dependency

Assist youth in building a broader support network

Use program approved communication tools

Meet with supervision, in public, or program approved spaces

Empower youth to build confidence in their own abilities

CASE EXAMPLE: ERIC

Eric, a youth mentor, was connected with Iván, a 13-year-old from Cuba, through a local resettlement provider's youth mentorship program. Eric has been supporting Iván and his family for three months, with limited supervision or guidance. Eric is beginning to feel emotionally drained by the amount of crises he has been asked to help with, including mediating with the family's landlords, helping them move apartments, and accompanying Iván and his mother to the hospital.

Eric has invested much more time into his mentorship with Iván than he originally talked about with the organization's program coordinator. He has been feeling overwhelmed, has trouble sleeping, and has started to dread sessions, but feels guilty about taking a break.

- **What signs of compassion fatigue/burnout are present in Eric?**
- **How can Eric continue to provide mentorship to Iván while establishing healthy boundaries?**
- **What self-care steps or support would you recommend for Eric?**



Conclusion & Resources

TRAINING TAKEAWAYS



Clarified mentors' roles and responsibilities



Discussed trauma-informed and culturally responsive mentorship practices



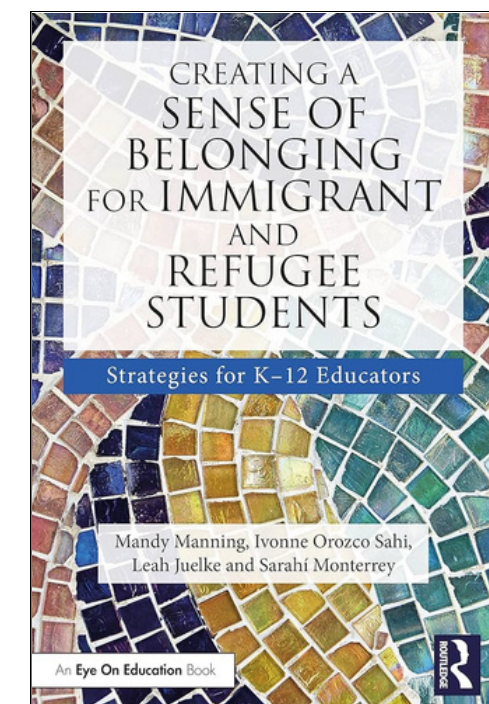
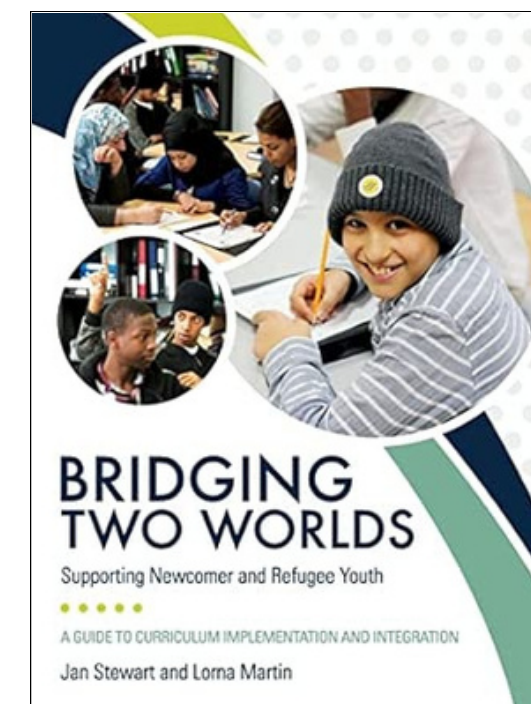
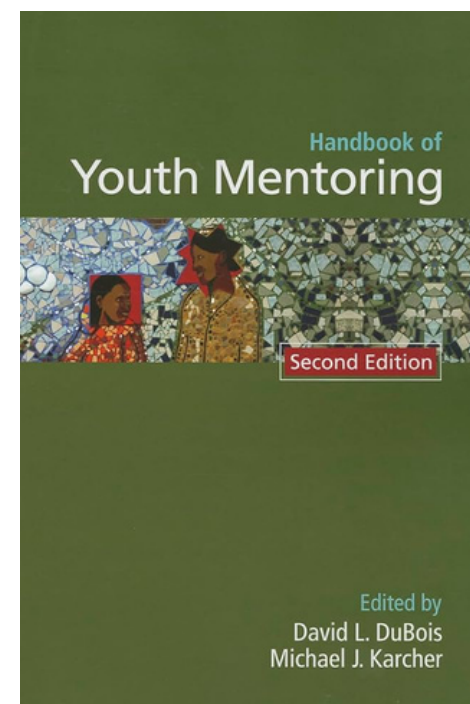
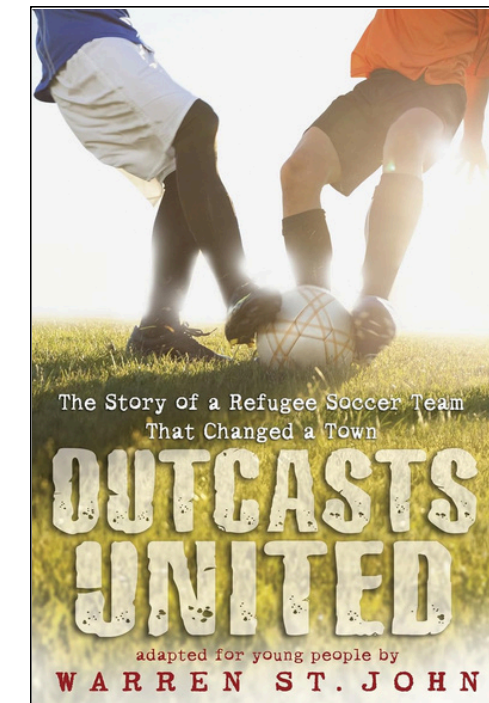
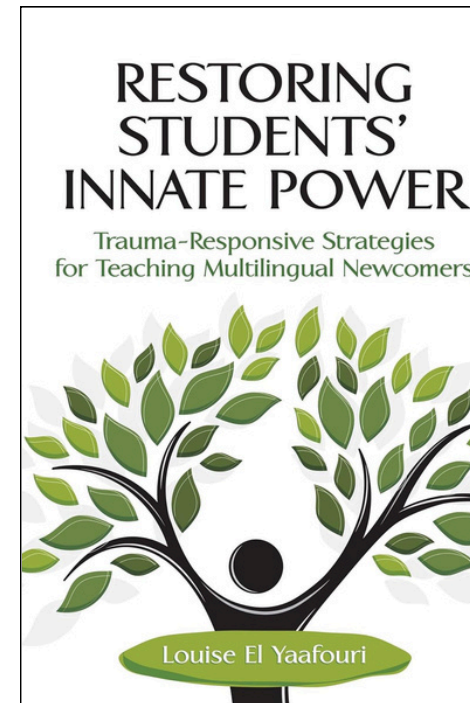
Identified the importance of setting healthy boundaries and self-care



CONTINUED LEARNING RESOURCES



BOOKS ON SUPPORTING NEWCOMER YOUTH



CONTINUED LEARNING RESOURCES



TRAUMA INFORMED CARE

- World Health Organization | *Mental Health of Refugees and Migrants: Risk and Protective Factors and Access to Care*
- Bev Moss-Reilly | *Understanding the Three E's of Trauma: A Path to Healing*
- USCRI Refugee Youth Resource Center | *Simple Ways to Support Your Child's Well-being*
- Switchboard | *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Newcomers*
- Switchboard | *Working Across Cultures in Mental Health Services*
- Center for Adjustment, Resilience, and Recovery (CARRE) | *Essential Concepts and Best Practices in Delivering MHPSS to People who have Experienced Forced Displacement*
- First Aid Arts | *Mental Health Toolkit*
- UNDOC | *Caring for Children through Conflict and Displacement*
- Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D. | *The Body Keeps the Score*

CONTINUED LEARNING RESOURCES



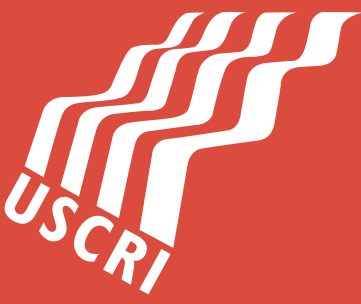
CULTURAL HUMILITY & RESPONSIVENESS

- Melanie Tervalon & Jann Murray-Garcia | [Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in Multicultural education](#)
- Public Health & Equity Resource Navigator | [Cultural Humility and Competence](#)
- California Health Advocates | [Cultural Humility: What Is It & Why It Matters](#)

SELF CARE & HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- SAMSHA | [Compassion Fatigue and Self-Care Resources for Crisis Counselors](#)
- Mental Health First Aid | [6 Steps to Turn Your Self-Care Strategies into a Routine](#)
- Cascade Centers Incorporated | [Tips for Compassion Fatigue](#)
- University of Washington CARELINK | [Combating Compassion Fatigue](#)

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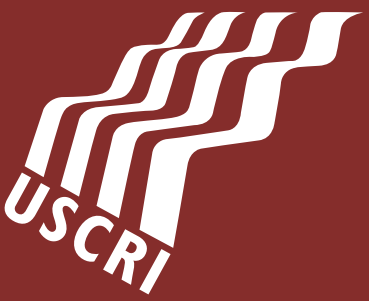


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REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER

Improving outcomes for refugee children, youth, and their families through resources, education, and provider support



Thank You!

Contact Us:

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