U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

USCRI

Addressing the Mental Health of Refugee Children & Youth, Part III

Supporting Refugee Children & Youth Experiencing Suicidal Ideation and Self-Harm

Refugee Youth Resource Center

July 29, 2026

INTRODUCTIONS

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WHO ARE WE?

U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

- Refugee Services
- Policy and Advocacy
- Humanitarian Legal Services
- Anti-Trafficking Services
- International Programs
- Children’s Services

**Note: USCRI is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)*

REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER

- Building provider capacity to foster refugee youth resilience and child safety

- Services include:
  - Monthly webinars
  - Targeted trainings
  - Case consultation helpline
  - Resource website for clients and providers
  - Community resource directory

- Visit us at refugee-youth.org

CONTENT WARNING

- This webinar covers suicide prevention and mental health crises. The presentation and discussions will include direct references to suicide, self-harm, and emotional distress.
- Please feel free to step away or take a break at any time during the session if you need to.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available 24/7:

Call or text 988 to reach the Suicide or Crisis Lifeline
or
Dial 911 for emergencies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize early warning signs and identify key approaches to prevent and prepare for mental health crises, including suicidal ideation and self-harm, among newcomer children and youth

2. Apply core strategies for crisis response, including de-escalation and safety planning, with newcomer children, youth, and families

Newcomer Youth Suicide:

The Need for Awareness & Preparation

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS AMONG U.S. YOUTH

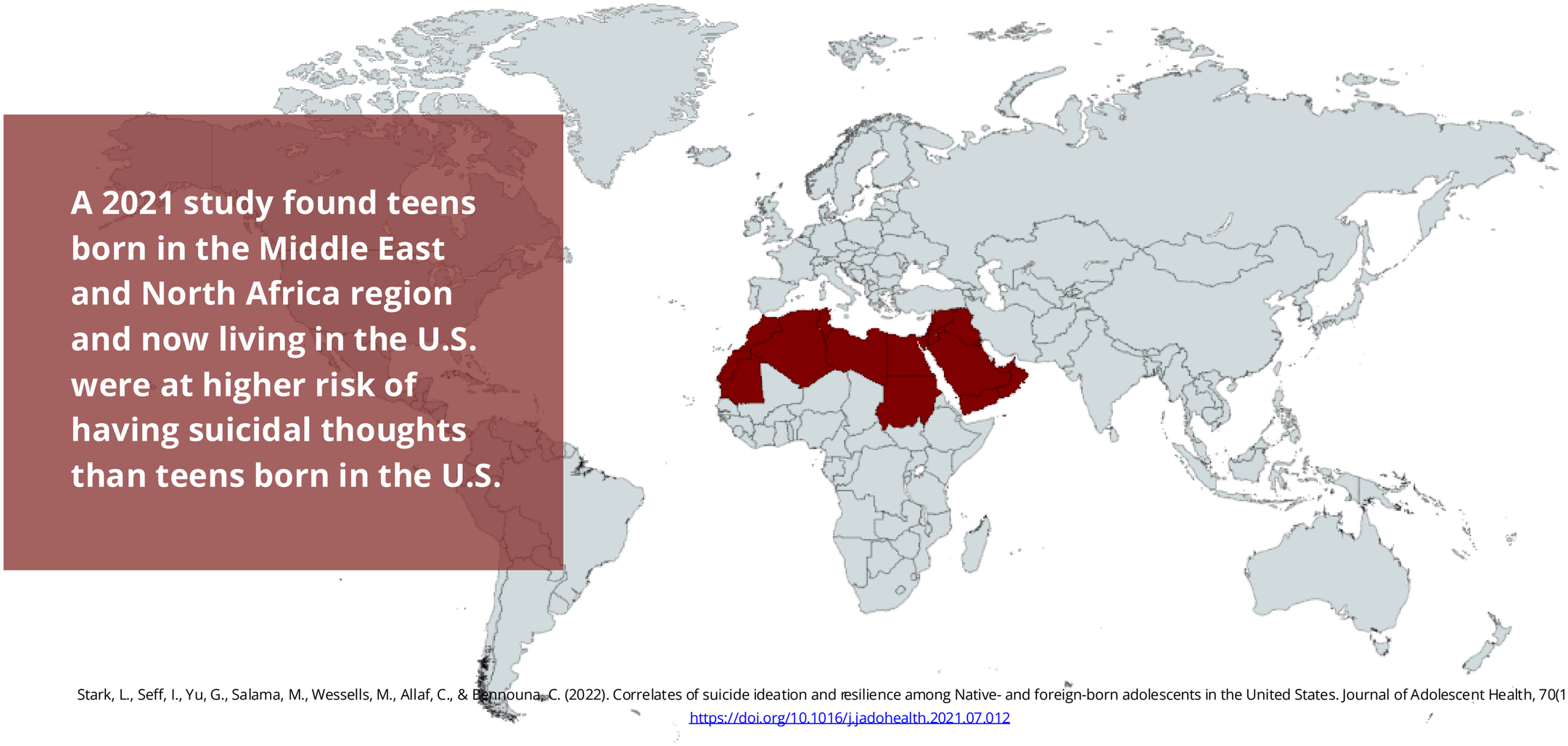
- Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** among children ages 10-14, and 3rd among ages 15-24

- **20%** of high schoolers report serious thoughts about suicide and **9%** report a suicide attempt

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2024.

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS AMONG NEWCOMER YOUTH

A 2021 study found teens born in the Middle East and North Africa region and now living in the U.S. were at higher risk of having suicidal thoughts than teens born in the U.S.



Stark, L., Seff, I., Yu, G., Salama, M., Wessells, M., Allaf, C., & Bennouna, C. (2022). Correlates of suicide ideation and resilience among Native- and foreign-born adolescents in the United States. Journal of Adolescent Health, 70(1), 91–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.07.012

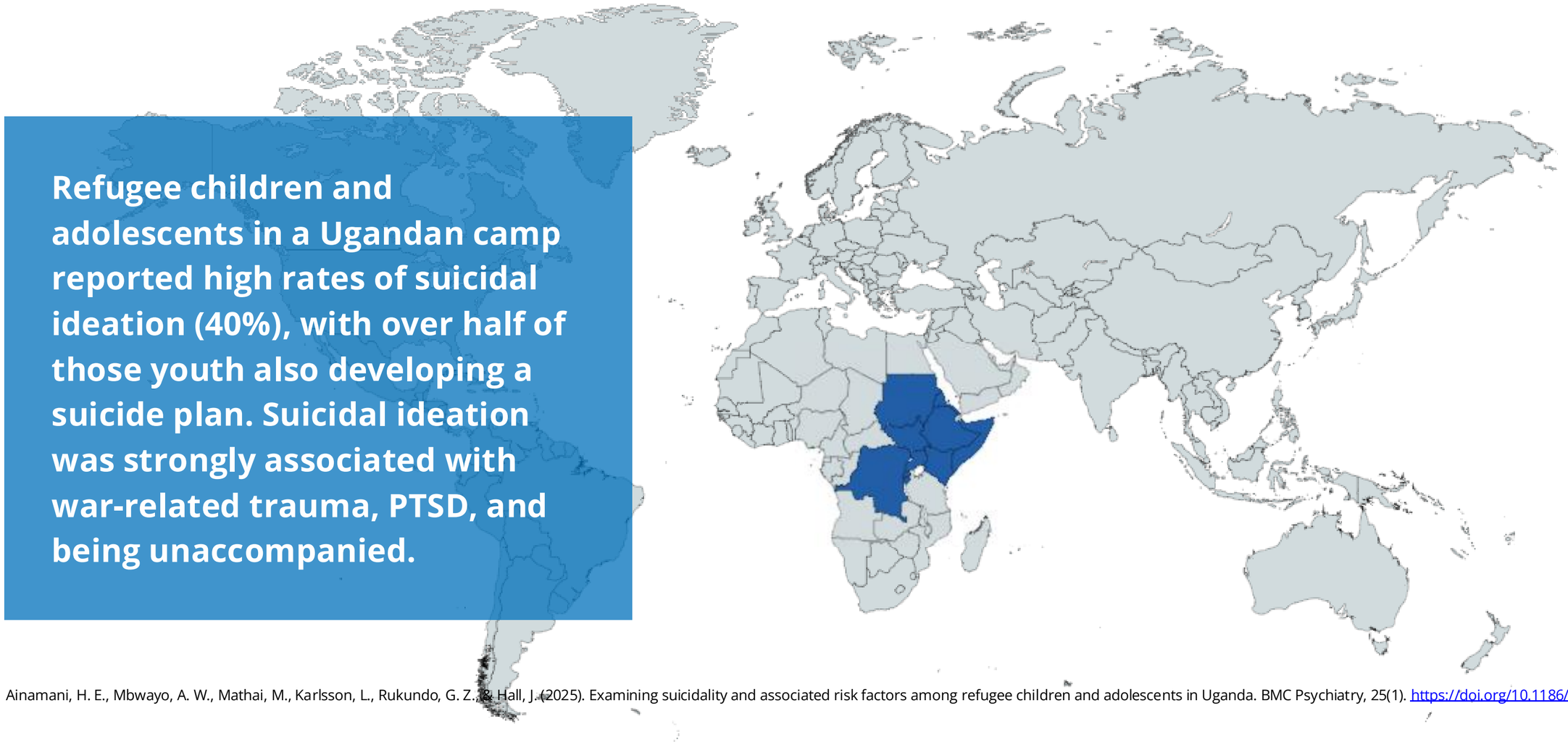
SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS AMONG NEWCOMER YOUTH

Multiple studies of migrant children living in the U.S. found that young Latina migrant girls were more likely to think about suicide than migrant boys. They were also 1.5 times more likely to have these thoughts than girls born in the U.S.

Diaz, A. D. (2024). Assessment of suicide risk and cultural considerations in forcibly displaced migrant youth. Academic Pediatrics, 24(5), 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2023.05.024

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS AMONG NEWCOMER YOUTH

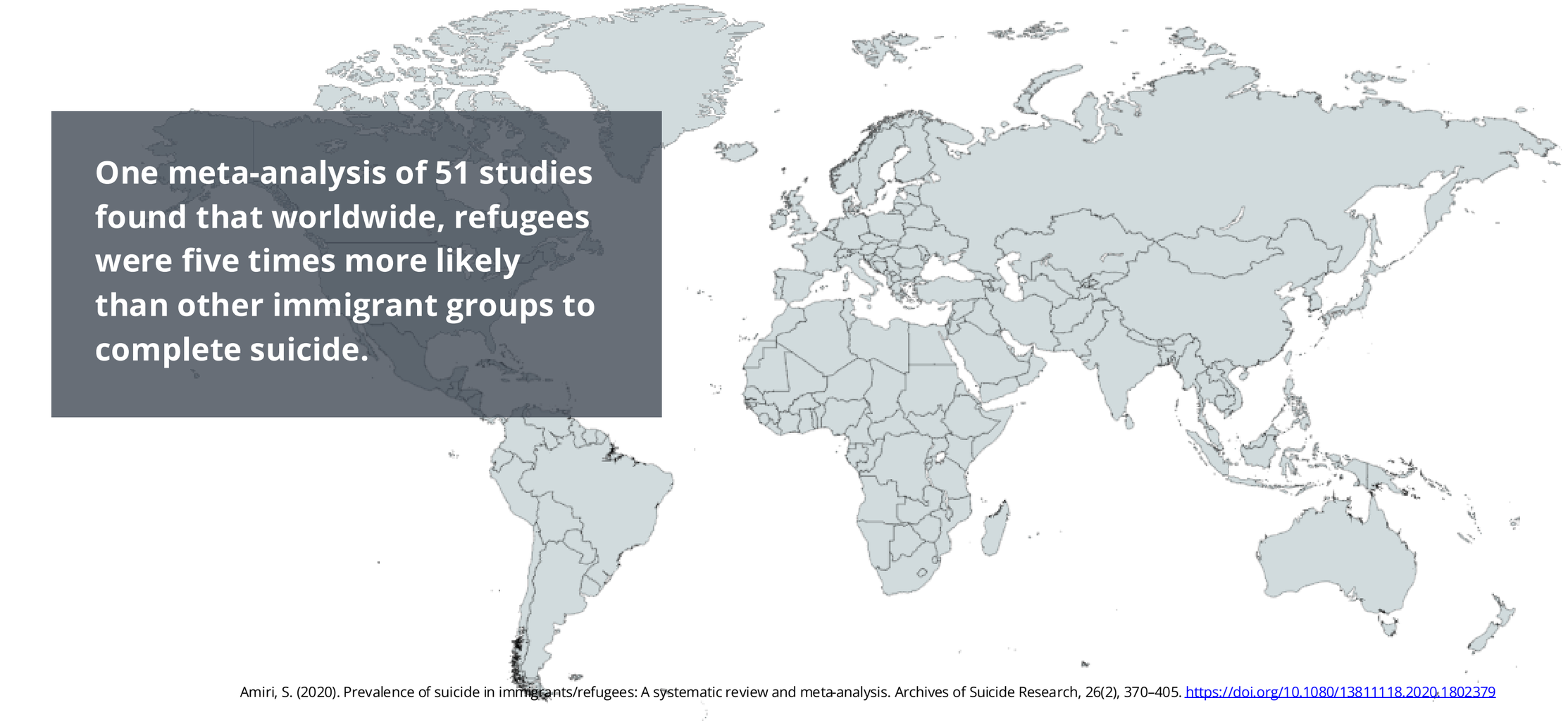
Refugee children and adolescents in a Ugandan camp reported high rates of suicidal ideation (40%), with over half of those youth also developing a suicide plan. Suicidal ideation was strongly associated with war-related trauma, PTSD, and being unaccompanied.



Ainamani, H. E., Mbwayo, A. W., Mathai, M., Karlsson, L., Rukundo, G. Z., & Hall, J. (2025). Examining suicidality and associated risk factors among refugee children and adolescents in Uganda. BMC Psychiatry, 25(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-025-07637-y

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS AMONG NEWCOMER YOUTH

One meta-analysis of 51 studies found that worldwide, refugees were five times more likely than other immigrant groups to complete suicide.



Amiri, S. (2020). Prevalence of suicide in immigrants/refugees: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Archives of Suicide Research, 26(2), 370–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2020.1802379

PREPARING FOR & PREVENTING CRISES

With youth:

- Build trust and rapport
- Teach coping
- Screen for mental health concerns regularly
- Refer to mental health services, where appropriate

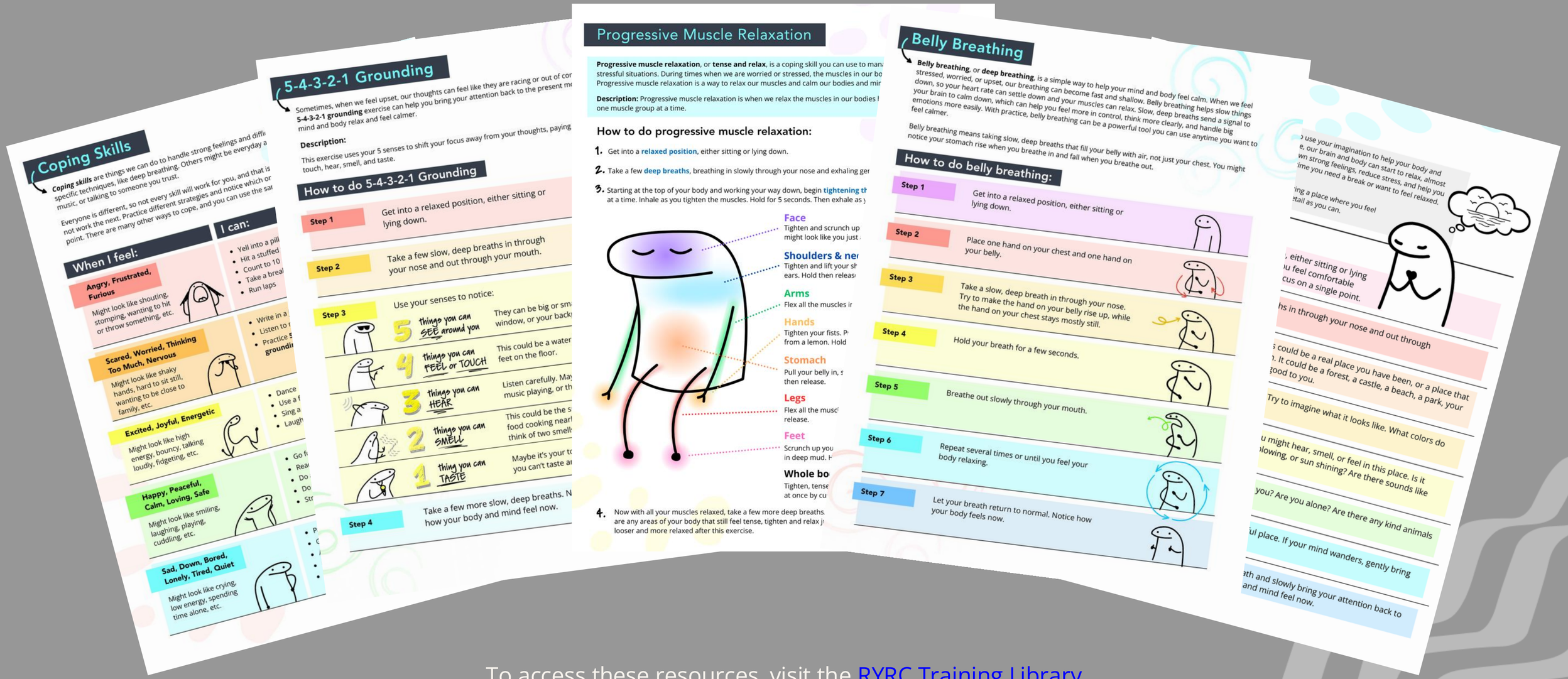
Individually:

- Foster your own self-awareness and coping tools
- Know your role in a crisis

As a team or agency:

- Communicate clear protocols
- Provide ongoing staff training
- Schedule routine supervision
- Regularly update community resource lists

COPING SKILLS RESOURCES



To access these resources, visit the [RYRC Training Library]

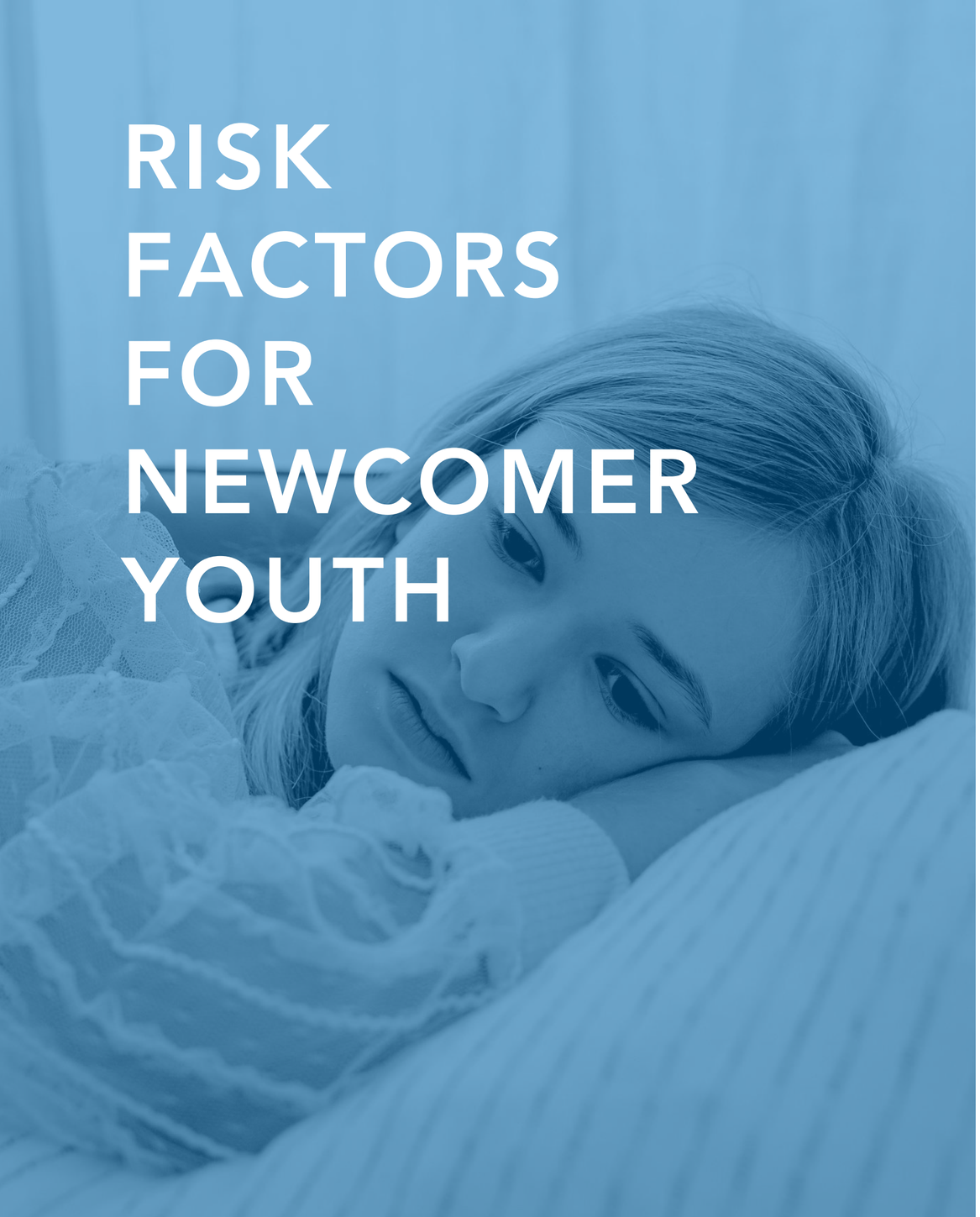
FOUR ACTIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

1. **Be aware of risk factors and notice warning signs**
2. **Ask directly**
3. **Make a safety plan**
4. **Connect with trained mental health professionals as needed**

Each Mind Matters Resource Center

STEP 1:
Notice Risk Factors & Warning Signs

RISK FACTORS FOR NEWCOMER YOUTH



Acculturative Stress

- Bullying & isolation
- Family conflict
- Trauma exposure & triggers
- Stigma & low mental health literacy
- Barriers to accessing care
- Low socioeconomic status
- Discrimination and hostility toward immigrants
- Intergenerational trauma

Diaz, A. D. (2024). Assessment of suicide risk and cultural considerations in forcibly displaced migrant youth. Academic Pediatrics, 24(5), 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2023.05.024
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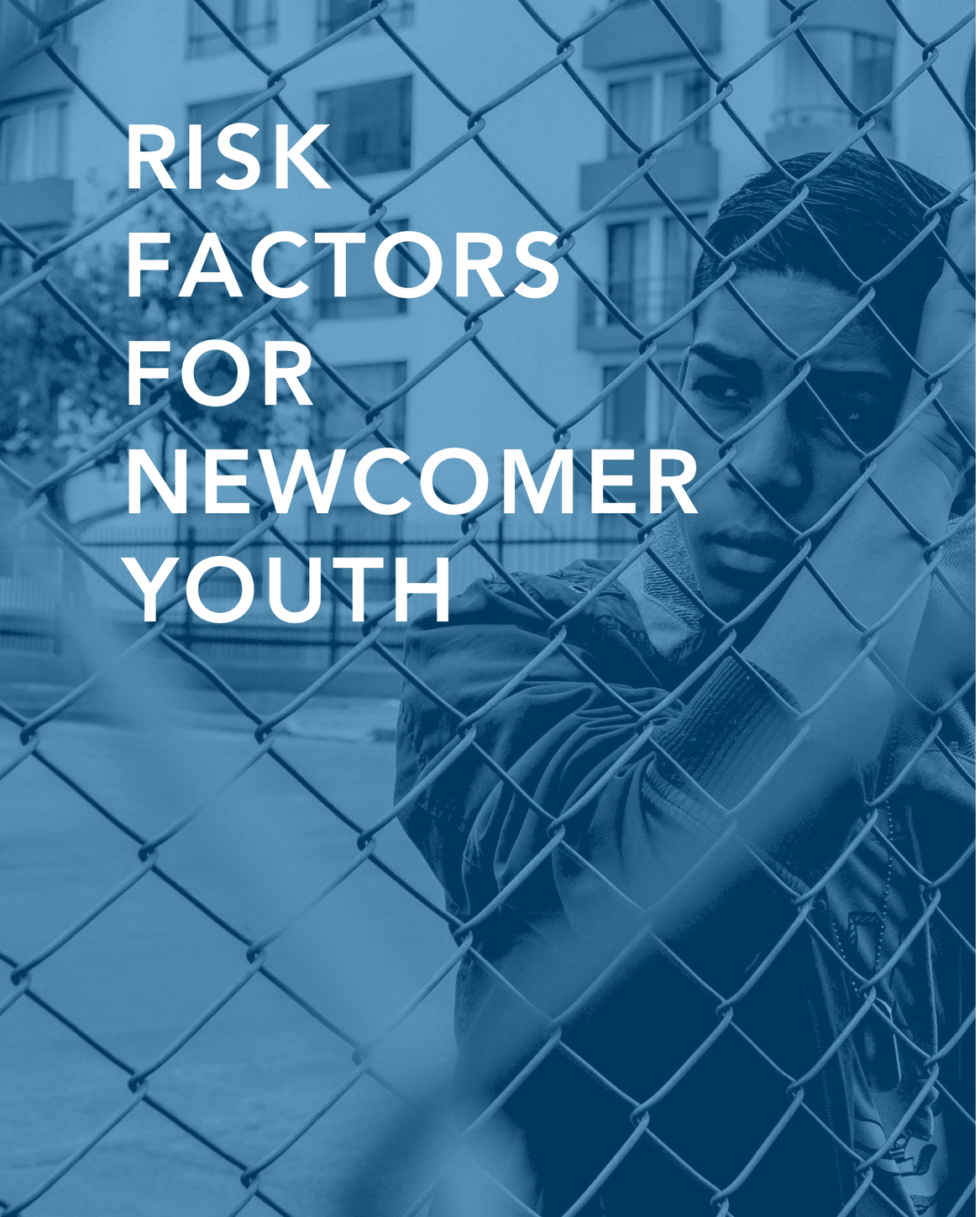
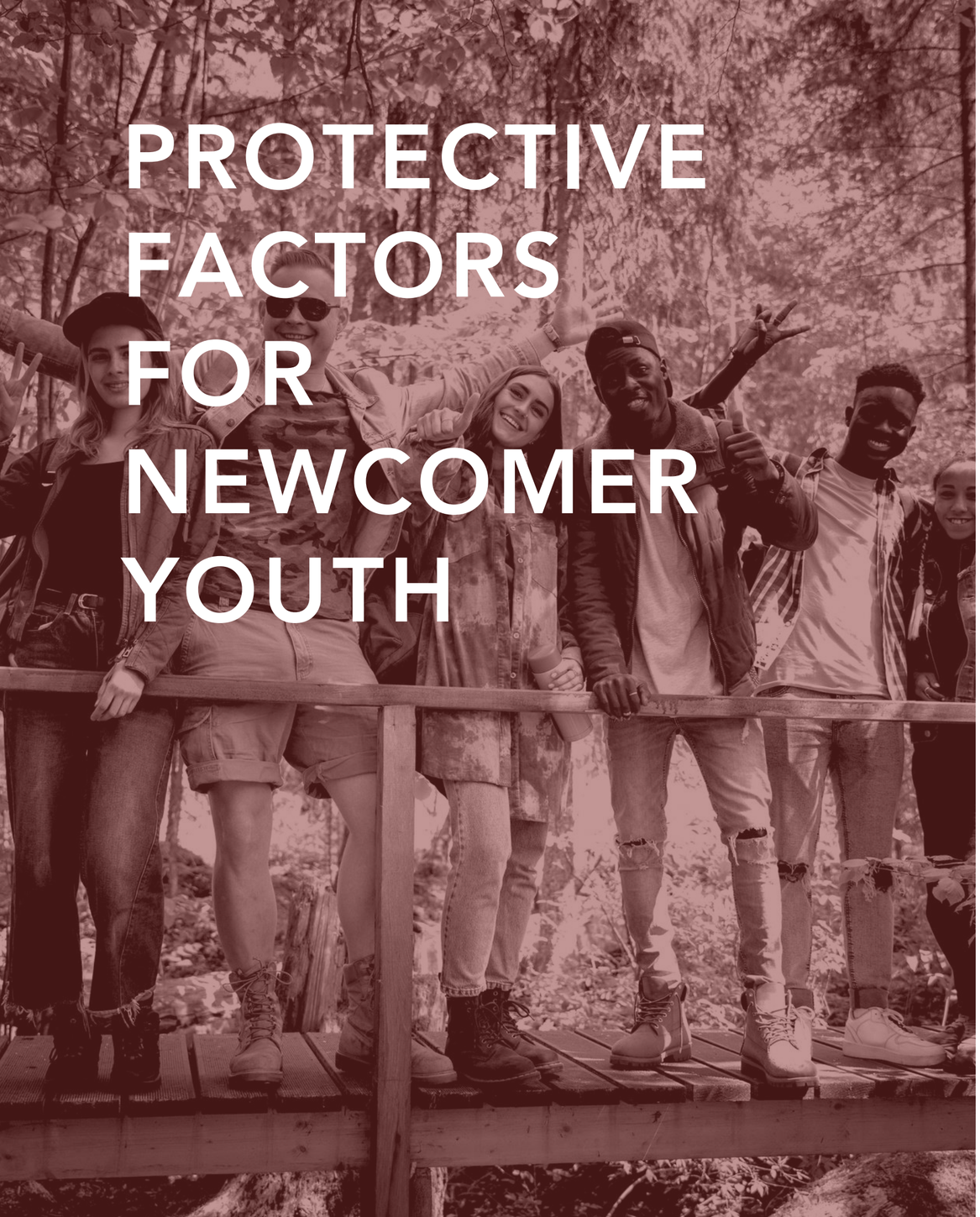


RISK FACTORS FOR NEWCOMER YOUTH

- **Mental health concerns**
- **Substance use**
- **Chronic medical illnesses**
- **Impulsivity**
- **Physical, sexual, & emotional abuse**
- **Internet & social media stress**
- **Previous suicide attempts**
- **Peer influences or family suicidality**
- **Access to lethal means**

NAMI, What You Need to Know About Youth Suicide



PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR NEWCOMER YOUTH

- Resilience & emotional well-being
- Hope
- Feelings of belonging & social support
- Family connection/positive attachment to at least one caregiver
- Cultural values
- Strong religious/spiritual beliefs
- Connectedness to resources
- Engaged in meaningful activities
- Coping skills

Stark, L., Seff, I., Yu, G., Salama, M., Wessells, M., Allaf, C., & Bennouna, C. (2022). Correlates of suicide ideation and resilience among Native- and foreign-born adolescents in the United States. Journal of Adolescent Health, 70(1), 91–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.07.012

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE IN NEWCOMER YOUTH

CHILDREN UNDER 10

- More physical symptoms
- Intense behavioral outbursts and impulsivity
- Acting out in play
- Statements like “I want to go to sleep and never wake up”
- Regressive behaviors (bed-wetting, thumb-sucking)
- Self-harm

Diaz, A. D. (2024). Assessment of suicide risk and cultural considerations in forcibly displaced migrant youth. Academic Pediatrics, 24(5), 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2023.05.024

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE IN NEWCOMER YOUTH

YOUTH 10+

- Rapid mood swings
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Isolation from friends and family
- Increasing physical complaints
- Extreme agitation, violence, or other out-of-control behavior
- Risky or self-destructive actions
- Hearing or seeing things that other people don’t

Mental Health America, Know the Signs

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE IN NEWCOMER YOUTH

YOUTH 10+

- Talking about feeling like a burden or not belonging
- Talking about feeling trapped, hopeless, or worthless
- Talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or disappearing
- Saying final goodbyes to people
- Giving away belongings
- Lack of interest in future plans
- Changes in clothing: wearing long pants and sleeves in hot weather to cover signs of self-injury

Mental Health America, Know the Signs

Case Scenario: Part I

Hassan is a 12-year-old boy from Syria who is currently in the 7th grade. He was resettled to the United States 3 years ago with his mother, father, and five siblings. Usually outgoing and friendly, school staff have noticed Hassan has recently been quieter and more withdrawn, no longer sitting with his usual friends. On recent tests, he's received unusually low marks, when he is typically a high scorer in math and science.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Please share responses in the chat

- What warning signs did you notice in the case example?
- What other internal warning signs might Hassan be experiencing that may not be outwardly noticeable to school staff?

STEP 2:
Ask Directly

DE-ESCALATION SKILLS

- Stay calm and present
- Use simple, clear language in a calm tone
- Validate emotions without reinforcing harmful beliefs
- Prioritize safety and reduce stimulation
- Engage with coping skills and calming activities
- Give choices when possible
- Avoid escalation, power struggles, and shaming

TALKING TO NEWCOMER CHILDREN & YOUTH ABOUT SUICIDE

Depending on your role, ask about suicide regularly and/or when warning signs have been identified:

- **Ask about well-being**

  “How have you been feeling lately?”

- **Normalize**

  “I ask everyone this question, because I want to make sure you’re safe.”

  “Some young people who have gone through big changes, like you have, feel really overwhelmed and even think about hurting themselves.“

- **Ask directly**

  “Are you having any thoughts of hurting or killing yourself?”

SUICIDAL IDEATION & SELF-HARM IN YOUTH: PROVIDER RESPONSE

If the child/youth discloses suicidal ideation and/or self-harm

- Stay calm and present
- Thank them for telling you
- Assess immediate safety
- Do not leave them alone if there are immediate safety concerns
- Seek support from trained professionals (mobile crisis, 911, etc.)
- Contact caregivers
- Involve schools, and other support networks
- Create a safety plan

SUICIDAL IDEATION & SELF-HARM IN YOUTH: PROVIDER RESPONSE

If the child/youth denies suicidal ideation and/or self-harm (but you still have concerns)

- Stay curious, and pay attention to warning signs
- Let them know you are available to talk
- Continue to listen and demonstrate concern
- Normalize help-seeking, and encourage connection to additional supports
- Strengthen protective factors and coping strategies
- Create a safety plan

UNDERSTANDING RISK

NON-SUICIDAL INJURY: Intentionally hurting oneself without the desire or intent to end one's life.

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & IDEATION: Thoughts about suicide, death, or dying.

PLAN FOR SUICIDE: The specific method, time, and place a person plans to end their life.

BEHAVIORS: Action(s) taken in preparation for suicide. May include past attempts, rehearsals, or self-injurious behaviors.

MEANS: Access to the objects, substances, or conditions to carry out the plan.

INTENT TO ACT: The intention, determination, or desire to actually act on the plan.

Individuals with suicidal ideation with a plan and/or intent are high risk and emergency action may be needed to ensure safety.

Case Scenario: Part II

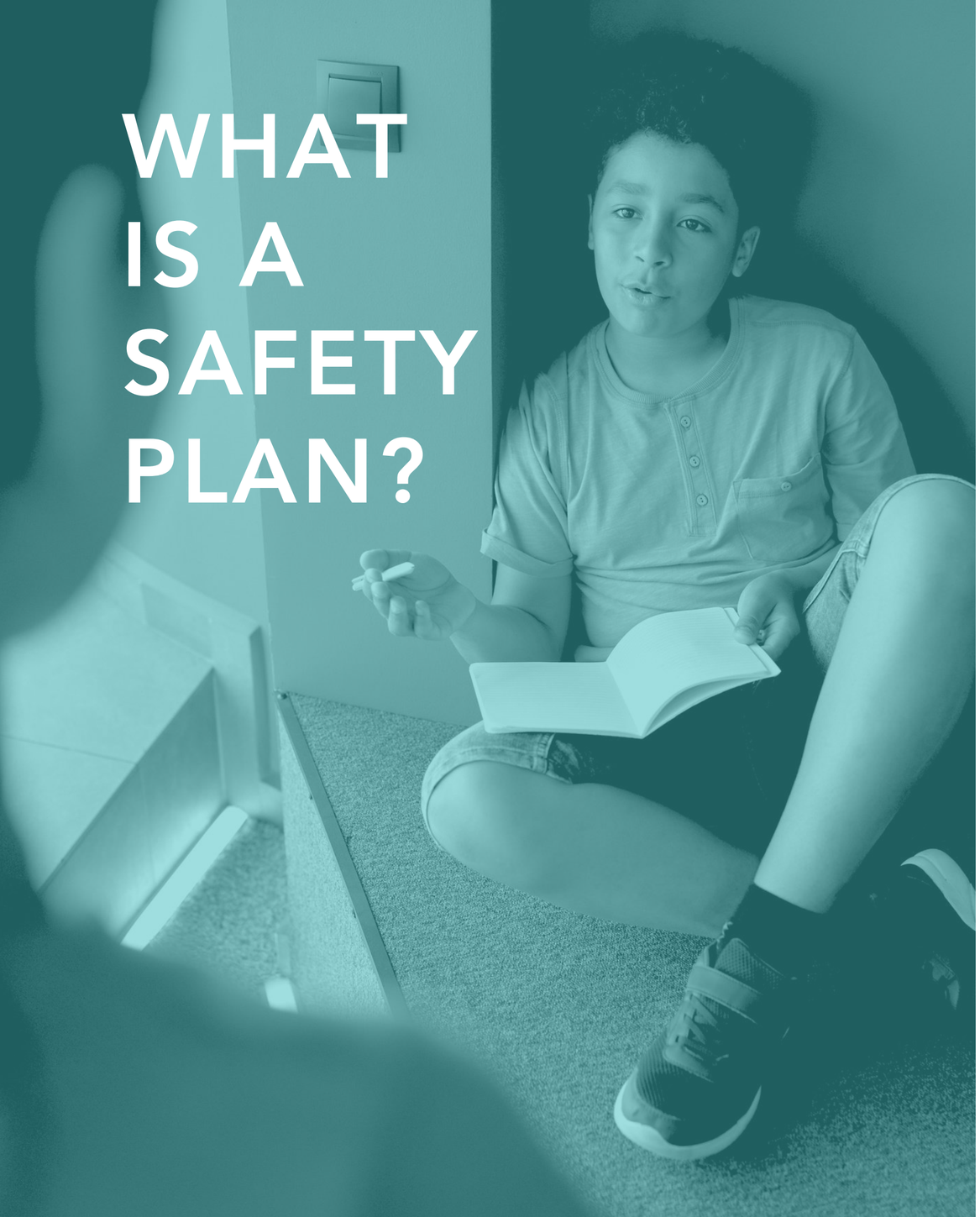
During the meeting, Mr. Madison notices marks on Hassan's arm that look like cuts when his sleeve moves, raising concern about self-harm. Mr. Madison gently checks in about the injuries, asking if Hassan has been hurting himself and working to understand when it happens and what he is feeling in those moments, while continuing to respond in a supportive and nonjudgmental way.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Please share responses in the chat

- What de-escalation techniques did you notice in the case scenario?
- What should Mr. Madison do if Hassan expresses suicidal thoughts?
- What should Mr. Madison do if Hassan denies suicidal thoughts?

STEP 3:
Make a Safety Plan



WHAT IS A SAFETY PLAN?

- Personalized plan to prevent and manage crises and other unsafe situations
- Created collaboratively between youth and staff when risk factors are present or crises develop
- Should be discussed preventatively (before a crisis arises) and revisited often
- Key components:
  - Triggers
  - Warning signs
  - Coping strategies
  - Safe places
  - Trusted adults
  - Important phone numbers & professional resources
  - Youth’s commitment
  - Responsible adult’s commitment

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE SAFETY PLANNING

Safety Planning with Children (ages 3-10)

- Use simple concepts when providing education to the child
  - Explain concepts like safety
  - Assist with identification of feelings
  - Teach children to use a phone, practive calling 911
  - Help the child memorize their address, phone number, parents' name, etc.
- Include drawing or art
- Collaborate with caregivers

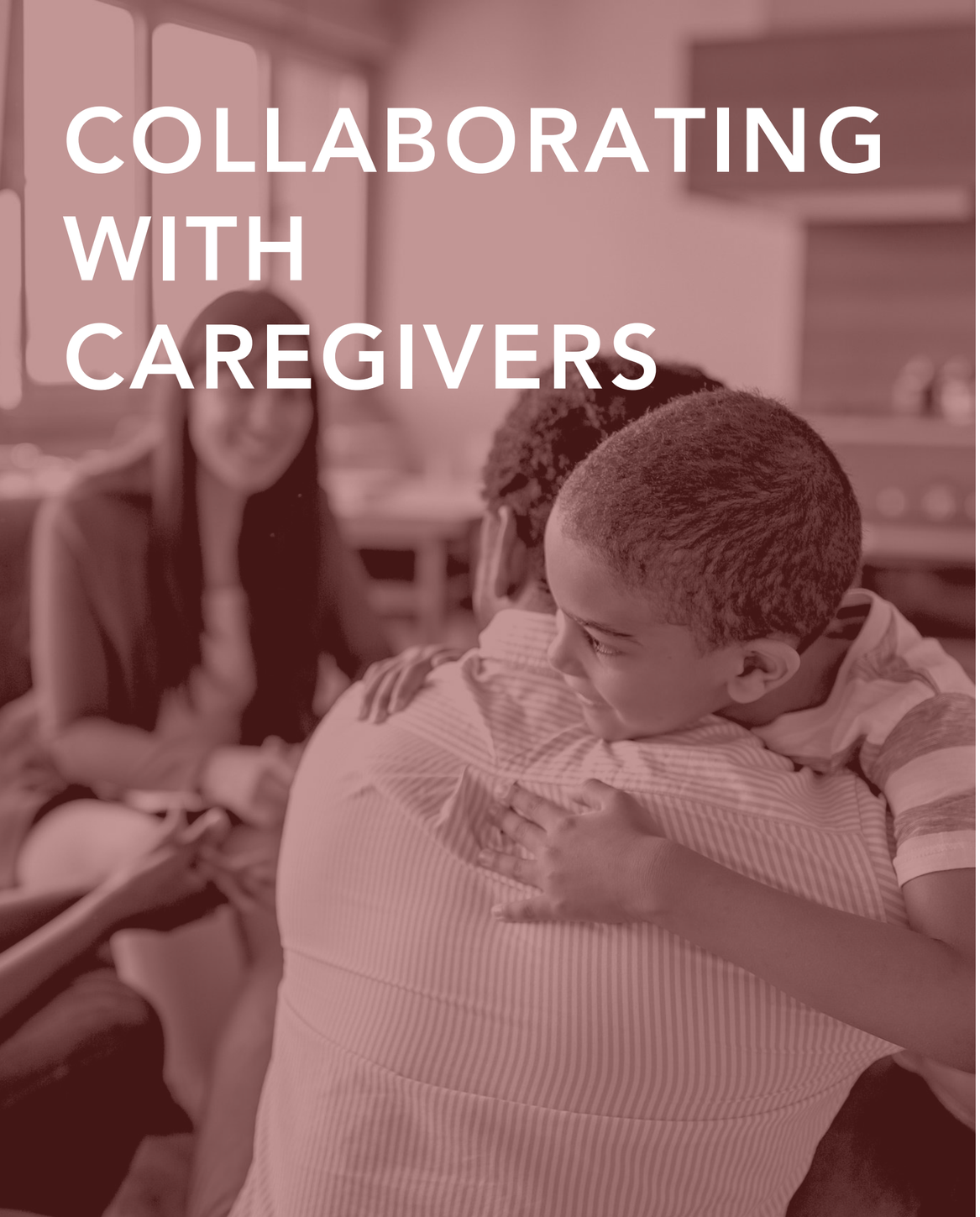
Access these handouts at https://www.refugee-youth.org/training-library/

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE SAFETY PLANNING

Safety Planning with Youth (ages 11-17)

- Provide more detailed explanations of safety, what a safety plan is and when to use it
- Can include drawing or art
- Collaborate with caregivers

Access these handouts at https://www.refugee-youth.org/training-library/



COLLABORATING WITH CAREGIVERS

- Involve caregivers to ensure child safety
- Center youth voice while respecting caregiver's authority
- Maintain a judgment-free, supportive environment
- Navigate stigma and cultural beliefs about mental health
- Ensure parents know their child's triggers and warning signs
- Engage parents in securing the physical environment and committing to actions to ensure the child's safety (supervision, monitoring, etc.)

Case Scenario: Part III

Mr. Madison responds calmly, acknowledging the family's beliefs while gently reframing the situation. Mr. Madison emphasizes that Hassan is not at fault for having these thoughts and that they are a sign that he is struggling and needs support. He highlights that many families draw on their faith as a source of strength and healing, and that caring for Hassan's safety is a shared priority.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Please share responses in the chat

- What key elements of a safety plan did you notice were included in Hassan's safety plan?
  a) warning signs
  b) coping strategies
  c) commitment from his father to increase support and monitoring
  d) reducing access to means
  e) increased support from Mr. Madison
  f) youth's commitment
  g) all of the above

- What else might Hassan include on his safety plan?

STEP 4:
Connect with Professionals

RESOURCES & REFERRAL PATHWAYS

- **988** National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- **911** and location of nearest emergency room
- Local walk-in centers or mental health urgent care locations
- Local mobile crisis numbers
- Current providers (mental health, resettlement provider, pediatrician, etc.)
- Options for mental health services (if not already connected)

POST-CRISIS FOLLOW-UP

With youth/families:

- Follow up more regularly with the youth/family
- Revisit the safety plan and revise as needed
- Continue to assess for suicide, self-harm, and safety concerns

Individually:

- Debrief with your supervisor
- Thoroughly document the identified concerns and all actions taken
- Engage in self-care

With your team or agency:

- Debrief with affected staff and larger team
- Share lessons learned and adjust internal processes
- Recognize secondary traumatic stress and the emotional impact of crisis work and high-intensity cases

Case Scenario: Part IV

He begins to follow steps from his safety plan, including reaching out to trusted people and returning to activities like soccer. His father makes an effort to check in and spend more time with him, gradually becoming more comfortable talking about Hassan's feelings.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

Please share responses in the chat

- What signs of improvement did you notice in Hassan?
- What would you continue to monitor or adjust in your services with this family moving forward?

Conclusion & Resources

PRESENTATION TAKEAWAYS

- Suicidal thoughts are common among children and youth, with some evidence suggesting higher rates among newcomer youth.
- Acculturation-related stressors can increase vulnerability to suicidal ideation and behaviors for newcomer children and youth.
- Suicide can be prevented by recognizing warning signs, taking immediate action, addressing stigma, and preparing to respond before a crisis occurs.
- Safety planning can be tailored to meet the needs of newcomer children and youth of varying ages.
- Continued follow-up and support are essential for sustained safety and well-being.

REFLECTION

Based on today’s training, share one thing you will do differently to support newcomer children and youth experiencing suicidal ideation or mental health crises.

REFUGEE-YOUTH.ORG

HOME ABOUT US U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS FOR FAMILIES FOR PROVIDERS

العربية 简体中文 **English** Français Deutsch Kreyol ayisyen کوردی فارسی پښتو Português Русский Español Afsoomaali Kiswahili Українська اردو Tiếng Việt

REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MENTAL HEALTH OF NEWCOMER CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- USCRI RYRC | Addressing the Mental Health of Refugee Children & Youth Part I: Practical Strategies for Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive Support
- USCRI RYRC | Addressing the Mental Health of Refugee Children & Youth Part II: Facilitating Effective Conversations with Youth and Families
- USCRI RYRC | Best Practices for Working with Refugee and Newcomer Youth
- MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA | Children's Mental Health Matters

SUICIDE PREVENTION AND SAFETY PLANNING

- USCRI | Safety Plan for Younger Children, Safety Plan for Older Children Using Pictures, Safety Plan for Older Children
- USCRI | Safety Planning with Foreign National Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking
- USCRI | Self-Harm Among Migrants and Refugees
- INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE | Suicide Prevention in Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration Settings
- SWITCHBOARD | Safety Planning for Suicidal Ideation
- SWITCHBOARD | Suicide Prevention and Safety Planning
- NAMI | Navigating a Mental Health Crisis
- NAMI | What to Do If Your Child Is in Crisis
- NAMI | Kids, Teens, and Young Adults
- NCTSN | Suicide and Refugee Children and Adolescents

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DE-ESCALATION SKILLS

- INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE | De-escalation in Resettlement, Asylum and Integration Settings
- SWITCHBOARD | De-escalation in Practice: Strategies for Supporting Newcomers Experiencing Crises

ORGANIZATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

- SWITCHBOARD | Critical Incident Response: Toolkit for Developing Organizational Policies and Procedures

RESOURCES FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

- Call 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- USCRI RYRC | Community Resource Directory
- USCRI RYRC | Simple Ways to Support your Child's Well-being (Arabic, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Kiswahili, Pashto, Spanish, Ukrainian)
- USCRI RYRC | Supporting your Child's Well-being through Connection and Open Communication (Arabic, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Kiswahili, Pashto, Spanish, Ukrainian)
- HEALTHY CHILDREN | Teen Suicide Risk: What Parents Need to Know (English, Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, Korean, Russian, Simplified Chinese, Tagalog, Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese)

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013–2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2024.
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- Each Mind Matters Resource Center | Presentation for Suicide Prevention 101
- NAMI | What You Need to Know About Youth Suicide
- Mental Health America | Know the Signs

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Common barriers faced when engaging newcomer parents & caregivers
- How to promote child & youth safety through meaningful engagement between providers, parents, and caregivers
- Culturally responsive strategies to promote trust and strengthen engagement
- Practical guidance and resources for newcomer parents and caregivers on child safety and well-being

Wednesday, August 26, 2026
2:00-3:30pm ET

Register here:

hhttps://refugees-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_9zKp3YL8RX25kcX59tpUew#/registration

This webinar explores practical strategies for refugee and newcomer-serving providers to build trust and strengthen engagement with parents and caregivers, promoting the safety and well-being of refugee and newcomer children and youth.

. This session is designed for professionals working in resettlement, education, child welfare, youth services, and community-based programs.

USCRI received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Grant #90RB0054. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of USCRI and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS/ACF.

refugee-youth.org

Presented by USCRI's Refugee Youth Resource Center

U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

Thank You!

Contact Us:

refugeeyouthrc@refugees.org

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