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PRIVATE
REFUGEE
SPONSOR
Ontario
NETWORK

STRIVING TOWARD BEST PRACTICE

Being Aware of Mental Health Behaviours

Sponsors are not the experts, they are individuals who learn from the experts, share information with each other based on their experience. In a settlement, sponsors often witness behaviours that are not well understood. The behaviours might reflect, emotions that look and feel like grief, separation, withdrawal from decision-making, being overwhelmed, immense stress and even terror. Traumatic reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations. These may be rooted in a pre-arrival experience, the experience of migration, and the stresses of settlement. You might see what looks like anxiety, depression, extreme fatigue, or flashbacks to trauma. There is a need to shift the conversation from what's wrong to what happened.

Key Guidelines:

What does it look like:

- Withdrawal
- Extreme fatigue, anger, grief, sadness, guilt
- Unable to make decisions
- Substance abuse
- Psychosomatic disorders

What prompts those behaviours?

- Feelings of intense fear and being overwhelmed
- Feelings of loss of control and helplessness
- Acute stress
- Grief about leaving behind family, friends who are in danger
- PTSD

- Depression
- Anxiety

How might sponsors respond:

- Help newcomers build bridges to their past self through empowerment
- Recognize diversity between cultures
- Help newcomers connect to community cultural resources for dealing with grief
- Never expect gratitude from newcomers for the settlement
- Be compassionate, build trust and listen actively; don't try to take over; respect confidentiality
- Encourage physical activity; take a walk to have a conversation to lessen stress
- Exercise curiosity, proceed gently, respond non-judgmentally
- Encourage ways to address distress – yoga, dancing, gardening, community cooking, listening to music
- Help newcomers rebuild a sense of control and empowerment
- Seek advice and counsel from experts, if behaviours are significant and intense and unresolved over time; may need supportive counselling and psychotherapy
- Potential consideration of newcomer “ask” to sponsor family members

Connections:

- Trauma informed care: <http://traumainformedcareproject.org/about.php>

Reference:

- PRSN Workshop, Trauma-Informed Care, November 2023