

## Program Features

Refugee youth are an especially vulnerable, yet resilient, population. They face unique challenges in adjusting to life in America. Few resources are devoted specifically to the needs of refugee youth, yet the successful integration of refugee youth into American society provides the foundation not only for their immediate family's adjustment, but that of future refugee families and the community at large.

The Refugee Youth Program is an after-school and summer program dedicated to providing support and education to refugee teenagers by teaching them skills that will help them build strong and healthy relationships with families and peers.

The program has adapted the "*Family Wellness: Survival Skills for Healthy Families*" model for use as its core curriculum. The model is presented three days a week in half hour sessions. The sessions focus on the following topics:

- Making (and Following) Rules
- What is my Job?
- Getting Along with Friends
- Changes
- Problem Solving
- Values

There is an emphasis throughout the sessions on the three basic skills of Family Wellness: *Listen, Speak-Up, and Negotiate*.

- I. Breaking the Ice
- II. Making (and Following) Rules
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Why Do We Need Rules?
  - Who Makes the Rules?
  - How Do I Negotiate Rules I Do Not Like?
  - Group Activity: Family Meetings
- III. What is My Job?
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Be Somebody
  - Get Good at Things
  - Learn Survival Skills
  - Belong
  - Project: A History of My Family
- IV. Getting Along with Friends
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Be a Team
  - Know What You Want
  - Say What You Want
  - Get What You Want
  - Activity: Knots
- V. Changes
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Rules for Change
  - Activity: Family Strengths
- VI. Problem Solving
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Working Together
  - Solving the Problem
  - Activity: Solutions
- VII. Values
  - Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion
  - Know Your Values
  - State Your Values
  - Activity: Lifeline

## I. Breaking the Ice

Materials Needed:

- Globe Beach Ball
- Small Stickers

Prepare the room by arranging participants' chairs in a circle. Welcome each participant as they come into the room and give them a sticker. When everyone is seated explain that you will toss the beach ball, and whoever catches it will introduce themselves to the group. They will answer the following questions:

- What is your name?
- Where do you go to school?
- From what country did you (or your family) come?
- How long has your family been in the United States?
- What is your favorite food or tradition from your country of origin?

After the introduction, each participant should place his or her sticker on his or her country of origin and toss the ball to another participant.

## II. Making (and Following) Rules

### **Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle. Present the following questions for discussion:

- What are some rules for sports, safety, friends, religious services, and community?
- Are the rules different in the United States than they were in your country of origin? If so, explain.
- When you first arrived in the United States, which rules were the most difficult for you and your family to understand?
- Which rules were the same in your country of origin as they are in the U.S.?

### **Why Do We Need Rules?:**

Parents, teachers, and other community leaders do not make rules just because they want to make your life difficult. Although it may seem this way sometimes, they do not make rules to be mean or to stop you from having fun. Rules are made to hold a group, family, or community together. They are also there to keep everyone safe. When there are rules, everyone knows what they can expect from each other, and they are able to depend on one another.

### **Who Makes the Rules?:**

Families work best when parents make the rules. Parents have lived longer than their children. They have had more experiences and made more mistakes. These mistakes and experiences make them better prepared to guide their children. This doesn't mean that you will always like the rules, or think they are fair, or that you can't ever ask for a change in the rules. The older you get, the more input you should be able to have in the rules and the consequences for breaking the rules. Remember that you will soon be an adult, and you will be making the decisions about your life. You may also have, and they will need your help. You will have your turn to be the boss.

### **How Do I Negotiate Rules that I Do Not Like?:**

Think for a minute about some of the rules in your house. Name two that are okay with you- rules that you would describe as "good rules."

Now, let's think of the one rule in your house is the most difficult for you. Why do you dislike this rule?

Example: Layla is 17 years old. Her parents refuse to let her stay out later than 9:30 on weekends. Layla's younger brother Abdishakur is allowed to stay out until 11:00. Layla thinks this rule is unfair, and she would like to talk to her parents about allowing her to stay out until 11:00 like Abdishakur. What should Layla say to her parents?

When trying to negotiate a rule, there are steps you can follow that will increase the chance that your request will be considered by your parents. These steps will not guarantee that your parents will agree with you, but they will go a long way in showing your mom and dad that you are being respectful. The steps are as follows:

- Pick a good time.

Layla should talk to her parents when they are happy and calm, not while they are trying to cook or work. She should also not try to change the rule on a day when she has broken it.

- Remember parents have the final say.

If Layla's parents say no, it will not help for her to argue or complain. She will have a turn to be in charge soon.

- Say what you want.

Layla should plan what she will say. She doesn't want to have to come home at 9:30. She should tell her parents what she DOES want.

- Stick to one subject.

Layla doesn't need to mention that she also thinks it is unfair that Abdishakur never has to help her with the dishes. It is best to deal with one thing at a time.

- Avoid blaming.

Layla should avoid saying things like "You never...it's not fair...I won't." This will only make her parents angry and less like to listen to her.

- Listen to your parents' point of view.

Layla should listen while her parents explain their reasoning for having the rule in place. She does not have to agree, but she does need to listen.

- Repeat it back to them.

This is difficult, but important. If Layla's parents know that she is listening to them, they will be more willing to listen to her in return.

- Offer trades and compromises.

Although Layla would like to stay out until 11:00, if her parents continue to believe that 11:00 is too late, wouldn't it be better for her to suggest 10:00 or 10:30 than to continue to insist on 11:00 and end up angry? It is important to consider what you are willing to do to make a change work.

- Thank your parents for listening to you.

It will be easy for Layla to thank her parents if they give her what she wants.

However, it is even more important that she thank them if they refuse to change the rule. They will be more willing to talk to her again if she thanks them.

Role Play: Ask participants to remember the rule they would like to change in their house. Have them role-play talking it over with parents in groups of two. The instructor should walk around, coaching groups as needed.

### **Group Activity: A Family Meeting**

Materials Needed:

- A large piece of poster board or bulletin board paper
- Markers

A good way for families to solve problems and to know what is going on with each other is to have a family meeting. The following things should happen in a family meeting:

- Have one meeting per week.
- The meeting should last one hour at the most.
- Only one person should speak at a time.
- Making fun of each other and name-calling cannot happen.
- Everyone will have a turn to speak.
- Everyone should say one thing that is going right.
- Any problems should be identified.
- Pick one problem to solve.
- Stay focused on what people want and how to get it, not on complaints
- Plan a fun activity for next week.

Our group can also have "family meetings" to help us make decisions, plan activities and solve problems. In our first meeting, we will work together to decide what kind of rules we want to make for participation in our group. Let's try to make rules for what we want, not for what we don't want. We also need to decide on consequences, both good and bad.

Ask a volunteer to write the rules and consequences your group decides on. Have everyone in the group sign the completed version as a promise to follow the rules.

### III. What is My Job?

#### **Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle. Present the following questions for discussion:

- Describe what your life would be like now if you had never left your country of origin.
- How would it be the same, and how would it be different?
- What kinds of things are expected of teenagers in your culture? Are they different than what you believe is expected of American teenagers?

#### **Be Somebody:**

You have two jobs right now. The first is to become your own person. The second is to belong both in your family and also in your community. It is best when you and your parents work together as a team. Everyone's family is different. Some of you may have parents who are able to guide you and listen to you. Others of you may not have parents who are able to do those things, but you may have other adults and family members who can help you instead. If so, things will be easier for you. No matter what your family is like, there are things you can do to make your family and life work as well as possible. They can also help you get along with your friends and prepare you to be an adult. It is important for you to become someone of whom you can be proud.

#### **Get Good At Things:**

It is important to get good at things, because it helps you control your life, as well as feel and be successful. It is important to choose something you are interested in to get good at and then plan time to work on it. You should never be afraid to ask for help when you need it.

Ask each participant to answer the following questions:

- What is one thing you are good at?
- What is one good quality that you have (for example, honesty)?
- How long did it take you to get good at each thing?
- Whose help did you need to get good at it?
- Name one thing you are working at now.

This can be a difficult activity for some teens, and it may be culturally inappropriate for some participants to boast about themselves. It might be helpful for the instructor to point out what a reluctant participant is good at (for example, I know John is really good at soccer, or Khadija can make beautiful henna tattoos). Do not force anyone who is too uncomfortable with this exercise.

**Learn Survival Skills:**

All of us go to school, live in a neighborhood, play sports, or attend religious services. No matter who we are, we all have to learn to get along with many other people. The skills that everyone needs in order to get along with others are to *Speak-Up, Listen, and Cooperate*.

It is important that you think about what you want. It is then important that you SAY what it is that you want, without blaming or criticizing the other person.

When you LISTEN, you must be quiet first, then you should say what you here the other person say.

Finally, you should COOPERATE, meaning that you both try to find an answer or solution that works for both of you. These are the steps for cooperating:

- Take turns talking and listening
- Offer Trades
- Stop and Calm Down if You are Angry
- Try to Decide What You Both Need
- Discuss Possible Answers
- Choose the Best Answer
- Make a Plan

Remember that it is better for you to find a solution between yourselves. If you do not, an adult will.

**Belong:**

It is important for you to contribute good things to your family. We all take things from our families, like breakfast, bus money, and attention, so it is important that we give something back. This does not mean that you all have to get jobs so that you can bring money to your families, although that might be true in your family. There are lots of ways to contribute. You can help your parents with the housework. You can choose to work out problems like a team, rather than arguing. You can do the small things that make living in your home easy, rather than making it hard.

You also need to contribute to your neighborhood, school and religious community. You can volunteer to read to younger children, be respectful of teachers at school, or offer to help keep your mosque or church clean.

### **Project- A History of My Family:**

Materials Needed:

- Scrapbooks or Photo Albums
- Pens
- Materials for decorating (glue, stickers, etc.)

This project is designed to help participants stay connected (or reconnect) with their families. It is also designed to serve as a source of cultural and personal pride. Have each participant interview parents and grandparents, asking questions such as:

- What year was it when you were my age?
- How many people lived in your home, and who were they?
- What did your family do for fun?
- What kind of food did you eat?
- What family responsibilities did you have?
- What do you remember most about being a child?
- What do you remember about your trip to the United States?
- How were things different than you expected?
- What do you hope for, for yourself and for me?

Have participants record their answers in the scrapbook. If possible, have them bring in family photographs for you to scan and add to their book.

## IV. Getting Along with Friends

### **Cultural Comparison/ Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle. Present the following questions for discussion:

- When you first moved to the United States, was it easy or difficult for you to find friends?
- Are these friendships different from the ones you had in your home country?
- In your culture, how do friends handle disagreements?

**Be a Team:**

When you choose to be someone's friend, you are making a commitment. You are choosing to be a team, and teams do what is best for the team, instead of what is best for the individual. A team is best when all members are equal. It is not good if one person is always the boss, or if one person is always needy. All members need to be able to stand on their own.

As you grow up and things in your life change, some of your friendships may change. For example, you may go to college in a different city than your best friend, and you will both meet new people. It is normal if one or both of you feels some jealousy. It is important to let your friends know that they are still important to you. You can maintain friendships by agreeing to write letters, send emails, and hang out when you are both home for holidays or weekends.

**Know What You Want:**

If you are playing for a soccer team, and everyone on the team is really good except for one player who is truly terrible, is the team going to play well or poorly? If you sing with a group and there are three people with beautiful voices, and one person who sings off key, does the group sound good? We've already said that friends are like teams, and teams are only as strong as their individual members. It is important that we each know what we want, from our friendships and ourselves. It is a good idea to regularly think about how we spend our time, and to consider if this is how we want to be spending it.

**Say What You Want:**

If there is a problem or disagreement in your friendship, the following steps can help you talk about it:

- Choose a good time to talk.
- Stick to one subject.
- Be Specific.
- Make statements, not questions.
- Avoid criticizing.
- Do not bring up past mistakes/arguments

**Get What You Want:**

After you have learned to know what you want and say what you want, it is much easier to get what you want. You should always:

- Try to find a solution that works for both of you.
- Listen to your friend's point of view, and repeat it back to them.
- Offer trades.
- Make short-term agreements.
- Thank them for talking to you.

If you are stuck, you should:

- Take a short break to calm down.
- Make and follow rules to get through disagreements.
- Get someone else to help.

**Group Activity: Knots**

Have participants stand in a circle, and have each of them grab the right hand of someone on the other side of the circle. Then have the grab the left hand of a different person. Tell them that they have 8 minutes to work together as a team to untangle themselves.

## V. Changes

**Cultural Comparison/ Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle, and present the following questions for discussion:

- What are some changes you and your families experienced since coming to the United States?
- Which changes were the hardest?
- Which changes were surprising?

**Rules for Change:**

You and your families have been through many changes. You have come to a new country, learned a new language, and learned to live in a new culture. While these are changes that many people will never experience, change is a normal part of life. Changes occur as people get older, move into their own apartments, get married, get new jobs, have children, and die. Change can be exciting, but it can also be difficult. The following are some general rules for change:

- **Expect Change**

Remember that changes are normal. All families go through change- some ordinary and some not so ordinary.

- **Stress is a Signal that Change is Necessary**

Do you know how to tell when you are feeling stress? It could be that you feel worried or upset, or you could be angry or sick. When you are feeling like this, it probably means that you need to make a change in some area of your life, maybe find a new way of doing something.

- **Expect to Feel Resistance in Others and Yourself**

Change is hard. People usually try to continue without making any changes for as long as possible. Just remember that change is normal, and it is also normal to not want to change. Hopefully, this will help reduce the amount of time you spend fighting change.

- Take One Step at a Time.

Change takes time. It is easier to deal with if you are able to focus on one small step at a time.

- Ask Someone for Help if You are Stuck.

Who helped you when you first arrived in the United States? Did you have a caseworker, a relative, or someone else from your country that helped you? If a change is too difficult, ask someone to help you. Parents, friends, teachers and religious leader are all good sources of help.

### **Group Activity: Family Strengths**

Have each participant think of three changes that their family has experienced in the last 5 years. Have them choose the change that they believe their family handled best. Then, ask them to write (if possible) what things were like before the change happened, then how things are now since the change. Have them include all the difficulties faced in dealing with the change. Participants can share their stories if they are comfortable. Emphasize how much strength it takes to come through changes successfully.

## VI. Problem Solving

### **Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle and present the following questions for discussion:

- How are problems solved in your community?
- Who is involved in problem solving?
- How has the process changed since you came to the United States?

### **Work Together:**

When you have a problem, you may try to solve it yourself. You may or may not be successful, but chances are you will need to involve someone else. Solving problems can be easier if you work together. These are some steps for working together:

- Ask for help.

Some people are very comfortable asking for help. They are used to talking to neighbors or relatives when they are having a hard time. For others it is more difficult, possibly because they feel asking for help means you are too weak to solve their own problems, or because they do not want to burden others. It is okay to ask for help when you need it. People who care about you want to help you, and it should not be considered a sign of weakness to ask for help.

- Talk it Over

When you talk about the problem, it can help you think more clearly. Say what you want, and listen to the other person's response. Acknowledge any thoughts, feelings or fears you might have about the problem.

- Get Clear on the Result You Want

Take time to think about what you want things to be like once the problem is solved. Be sure that you include everyone who is needed to solve the problem, and plan a time to solve the problem.

### **Solving the Problem:**

After you have scheduled a time for everyone involved to get together and work on solving the problem, it is a good idea to make a plan. The following steps can help make the process easier:

- State the Problem.
- Write or Discuss the Results You Want.

Be sure to be as specific as possible.

- List all Possible Solutions.

Listen to everyone's ideas, and do not dismiss anyone's idea as stupid or impossible.

- Review the List Together

Go over the list with everyone needed to solve the problem.

- Each Person Should Choose Two Solutions They are Willing to Carry Out.

- Decide on a Solution

After your group has decided on a solution, decide what tasks need to be done and who will carry them out. Plan to meet to evaluate the progress of the solution.

### **Group Activity: Solutions**

Divide the participants into groups of four. Have each group choose one member's problem to solve. Give them time to go through all problem solving steps, including making action plans. Have each group share its problem and the solution decided upon.

## VII. Values

### **Cultural Comparison/Group Discussion:**

Arrange participants' chairs in a circle, and present the following questions for discussion:

- Name some things that you think are right and some things that you think are wrong.
- How do you decide what is right and what is wrong?
- Are there things that were right or wrong in your home country that are not in the United States?
- Do you and your parents agree about what is right and what is wrong? If so, how do you handle those disagreements?

**Know Your Values:**

When you are a small child, your parents tell you what is right and what is wrong. An important part of getting older is beginning to decide for yourself what you believe in. You need to pay attention and notice what your feelings are in different situations. Your feelings help you realize what is really important to you. For example, if you feel really uncomfortable in a situation, there is a good chance that whatever is happening goes against your values.

**State your Values:**

Once you are clear on your beliefs about right and wrong, it is important to remember that what you do is more important than what you say. You can say that you believe it is wrong to hit other people, but if you are constantly beating up your little brother, your words have no impact. It is good to talk to your parents about your values and beliefs and to try to work through any conflicts that exist. Take turns talking and listening to them, and try to understand their point of view.

**Group Activity: Lifeline**

Give each participant a piece of paper numbered 10 to 25, with spaces for 30+ and 50+. On a large tablet write many different “firsts,” such as kiss, party, drink, sex, marriage, apartment, baby, job, car, use makeup, sleepover, etc. Have participants write each first by the age they believe it is appropriate for it to happen. Ask participants if they think the things they want for themselves are the same as the things their parents want for them. Would their parents want these “firsts” to happen earlier, later, or not at all? Discuss whether or not the participants have told their parents what they want. Ask participants what they believe will influence the decisions they make in their lives. This exercise also works well if parents are present and able to complete it at the same time, filling in what they would like for their children. This will encourage discussion.

