



Even young immigrant and refugee children experience culture shock, and every child will experience it in their own way. By learning to recognize the signs of culture shock, and by responding appropriately, you can help refugee children and families to build their resiliency and cope with life's challenges today and into the future.

## RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO CULTURE SHOCK

Possible Signs of Culture Shock	Response
<p><b>PHYSICAL SIGNS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becomes ill easily (e.g., upper-respiratory infections, low-grade infections or weight loss)</li> <li>• Tires easily/has difficulty sleeping/needs frequent sleep</li> <li>• Is listless/lacks energy or is unable to sit still/has increased nervous habits (e.g., nail biting)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage family to keep the child home if they begin coughing or showing signs of a cold.</li> <li>• Encourage family to practice cold and flu prevention (e.g., dressing their child for the weather, washing hands frequently, having a balanced diet and getting lots of sleep).</li> <li>• Allow the child to sleep more often and for longer periods.</li> <li>• Encourage families to provide outlets for active play.</li> <li>• Ensure you make time for active play in your program.</li> </ul>

Possible Signs of Culture Shock	Response
<p><b>EMOTIONAL SIGNS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has extreme anxiety on separation</li> <li>• Demonstrates loss of emotional control</li> <li>• Emotional display is more volatile or more passive than usual</li> <li>• Demonstrates regressive behaviour (e.g., wetting pants, sucking thumb)</li> <li>• Is withdrawn or apathetic</li> <li>• Is unable to engage in play.</li> <li>• Remains in one area of the room.</li> <li>• Lacks focus, easily distracted</li> <li>• Displays different behaviour at home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure a gradual separation and assign one consistent caregiver for the child and family.</li> <li>• Observe, stay close and move in quickly to help if the child seems aggressive.</li> <li>• Provide outlets for emotional expression (e.g., physical activity, creative and sensory play).</li> <li>• If the child is staying in one area, bring toys to them or guide them to another area.</li> <li>• Create a “safe haven” where children can retreat to when they are not ready to engage in play.</li> <li>• Encourage the child to join in activities, but do not require it.</li> <li>• Encourage the family to use their first language at home.</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOCIAL SIGNS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is dependent on one caregiver</li> <li>• Prefers to play alone/Is fearful of others or unaware of them</li> <li>• Remains rigid when picked up</li> <li>• Is aggressive OR very passive in their play with others</li> <li>• Has difficulty forming relationships with others.</li> <li>• May avoid eye contact</li> <li>• Observes others for long periods of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow time to observe others. Model language and play strategies.</li> <li>• As the child grows more confident, encourage broader interactions.</li> <li>• Help build friendships by engaging two children in play and then gradually retreating.</li> <li>• Provide the words needed for social play.</li> <li>• Use simple language and avoid complex phrases.</li> <li>• Use playful ways to engage the child.</li> <li>• Reduce expectations and pressure in play/learning.</li> <li>• Encourage all parents/caregivers who speak the child’s language to use it.</li> </ul>

*NOTE: The symptoms listed in this tip sheet can have causes other than culture shock. Also, the strategies suggested are meant to help programs support immigrant and refugee families experiencing culture shock, but you know your program best. Use only the ideas that work best for the unique challenges and strengths of your program, children and families.*

*This resource was adapted from “Caring for Syrian Refugee Children: A Program Guide for Welcoming Young Children and Their Families”*

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