

Emotional Support – You are not alone!

Objectives:

- ✓ Participants will understand that seeking assistance for emotional health challenges is normal and seen as acceptable in U.S. society.
- ✓ Participants will understand that confidential services are available to support their emotional health.

Time: 20 - 30 minutes



Materials:

- “Evangeline and the Firewood” Story
- Reflection Question Cards

Presentation

In the U.S., there are people whose job it is to help support families to get along well and deal with the challenges or problems they face as individuals or as families. These professionals - sometimes called “counselors” - work with Americans as well as refugees that are now living in the U.S. Many Americans go to these professionals to talk about the problems they are facing, and this is considered normal.

Counselors are trained specifically to help you manage distressful feelings and to learn new ways of coping. In the U.S., many people go to speak with a professional counselor during difficult times for a lot of different reasons – often on a temporary basis at least until they feel better.

Depending on the location, counseling services are available in private offices, public clinics, family support agencies and sometimes ethnic community organizations that offer supportive groups. Your resettlement agency can refer you to one that is best suited to you. You may be able to find out which organizations offer emotional health services in your town at the local library, as well.

In the U.S. these community services for emotional health are “confidential” by law. That means that a counselor is not allowed to tell anyone about what you discuss – or even that you are participating in these services at all. This means that no one will find out, not even your family or friends, if you do not want others to know.

Unless the counselor speaks your language, an interpreter will probably be necessary for these services. These interpreters have to maintain your confidentiality or privacy, as well. If you have a preference for the type of language, gender or anything else about the interpreter, it is important that you tell your resettlement caseworker or the counselor. It may not be possible for them to get an interpreter of your preference. However, if it is, most will try to accommodate this so you feel as comfortable as possible.

If you ever feel that life is too hard and your usual way of coping with everyday activities isn’t enough, or if you see a family member or friend in that situation, a professional counselor can be a very helpful source of help. These types of services may be available in (name of refugee’s current location) if you need support now, as well as once you get to your new community in the U.S.

Exercise

The trainer divides the class into small groups of four to five (these could be the same groups as the previous lesson). The trainer reads out one segment at a time of “Evangeline and the Firewood”, conveying the emotion of the story to the class. After each segment of the story, the trainer instructs the class to discuss the relevant reflection question as a small group. The trainer emphasizes that participants should talk about Evangeline rather than about themselves. At the end, each group is then invited to report back one major take-away to the larger class.

Reflection Questions

- ? What did you learn from Evangeline’s story?
- ? What helped Evangeline feel comfortable going to a counselor?
- ? What else could Evangeline have done to make sure she got help?

Expansions and Variations

- ∞ Have volunteer story-tellers read the story instead of the trainer.
- ∞ The trainer or volunteer story tellers read the story all the way through, and then each small group discusses all the reflection questions together at the conclusion of the story.
- ∞ If short on time, read the following scenario (p. 104 in English version of revised CAL Welcome Guide): After 6 months in the U.S., Namina starts missing home. She knows this is normal, but over time she starts feeling sad a lot, and only leaves her house to go to work. What should Namina do? Why is it important for Namina to pay attention to how she is feeling?

Learning English

Counselor
Confidential

Coping
Distress

Emotional Health
Challenges

Training Aids and Materials

Evangeline and the Firewood

Evangeline had always been a strong and cheerful girl. She would sing on her way to collect firewood. Her beautiful singing voice carried across the countryside and was uplifting to everyone who heard. Even though life was hard, Evangeline's lively spirit persevered.

When she was eight, the trouble came to the community. That's when she and her family went to (Rwanda). They felt a little safer, but some of the trouble followed Evangeline. She didn't dare tell anyone about some of the trouble. Better to stay busy. She gathered bundles of firewood and carried them home on her back. Day after day she collected more, carried the bundles of firewood on her back and put them down at the door of her home. She stayed so busy collecting firewood that one day she forgot to put the firewood down. She carried a bundle on her back all the time. When she ate, when she slept, the firewood was always there.

Evangeline was still very strong. That's what helped her and her family find some safety during those hard times. But, she was quieter and serious more of the time. The firewood was heavy, and she became more tired with every passing day.

What does the firewood represent?

By the time Evangeline went with her family to the U.S. she was a young woman. Her first few months were exciting, and she felt hopeful. She could barely feel the bundle of firewood. It was smaller, but the firewood was still with her wherever she went. She was so used to carrying it she didn't even remember it was on her back.

Over time, the difficulties of making a new life in the U.S. were more evident. Evangeline started thinking more about the troubles from her past. She often had difficulty sleeping and had bad dreams at night. The firewood now seemed very heavy. It weighed her down, and her back hurt.

Then one day Evangeline was walking down the street in her new town, and she heard a bird singing overhead. She stopped to listen, and she started to cry. She cried - not because of the trouble from her past and not because of how tired she'd been carrying all that wood. She cried because she missed singing. Evangeline's inner strength was reignited, and she knew she needed to get help.

What signs helped Evangeline see she needed help?

Evangeline didn't want to speak to the Pastor at her church because she didn't want anyone in her community to know. She asked her Resettlement caseworker to help her get a counselor and a female interpreter who could speak (Kinyarwanda).

The day of her first appointment with the counselor she didn't know what to expect, and she felt nervous. The counselor reminded Evangeline that everything they talked about would be "confidential". Then the counselor said, "Evangeline – please let me help you carry that firewood. It looks very, very heavy, and you don't have to carry it all alone."

It took time, but with every visit, Evangeline left another piece of firewood with the counselor. Every time she left, she felt a little bit lighter. Until one day she walked down the street of her new town and noticed she could stand upright. There was nothing left on her back. Best of all – she started singing again.

What happened to the firewood?