

Story of me –

The workbook manual

The Story of me workbook is designed to help war traumatized young refugees. It is also a tool for social- and healthcare professionals working with them. The book helps to understand their life story and allows to deal with difficult memories and traumatic experiences. The aim is to support psychological well-being by increasing the understanding about life events, symptoms and strengths. This also helps to settle to a new country.



The three phases

The three phases of the workbook offers the refugee a chance to reminisce and to talk about the life in the home country, the own culture, the experiences during refugee camp, the journey to the host country and the process of integration. The book's colour coding separates the themes from each other. Despite difficult experiences it is good to remind young refugees of the strengths and the resources that they have. In addition to the normal stages of adolescents development they can also face challenges related to growing up between different cultures.

Dealing with traumatic experiences

The workbook can also be used to deal with the traumatic experiences in a safe way. The traumatic events, which have emerged and been processed during the work, can always be revised, when needed.

Evaluation method

The working process allows the professionals to evaluate the adolescents mental and physical well-being, coping and cognitive skills. The process can help to address the needs for support.

Maintaining hope

A refugee has possibly experienced difficult and traumatic events. These memories might have a very prominent position in the mind and in the life story. Highlighting the positive things helps to see the good things in life. This strengthens the person's self-esteem and coping skills and builds confidence for the future, despite difficult experiences.

Expressing feelings



It is good to set aside enough time for processing the emotions and for stabilization of well-being before closing each meeting.

Timeline

The timeline is used as a therapeutic assessment and working method. The purpose is to demonstrate, illustrate and visualize the refugee's different phases of life. Some memories might come up later during the process and can be added afterwards. Visuality enables a functional approach, which can make it easier to deal with the difficult memories. The timeline can also be made on separate, larger paper and can be shared with other family members, if wanted.



Symptoms and body map

Symptom list helps to recognize mental and physical symptoms, which are known to be associated with traumas for example caused by physical or psychological maltreatment, violence, or torture. It is good to discuss about these symptoms and evaluate their impact in patient's everyday life. Sometimes it can be difficult to describe different emotions and psychological symptoms. They can sometimes appear as a variety of physical symptoms as speechlessness, withdrawal from contact or as refusal to eat.

The body map helps to identify the connection between body and mind. Different emotions are often reflected in physical experiences and vice versa. The areas, which have been injured and are causing pain or other kind of discomfort, can be colored with different colours to reflect these sensations.

At the same time, it is good to find out, which medical examinations have been done and whether further examinations are needed.

Talking about these things can be difficult. Trusting the employee helps handling the difficult issues.

Important people

The diagram picture can be helpful to name the people who are important in life and how close they are. The picture can also be used to explore family relationships and interactions.



The book for the young refugee

The final page of the workbook contains some of the key themes affecting the life of young refugee. These themes can be discussed together in confidence. Psychoeducative or other materials can be stored with the workbook. It is important to remind the young refugee of one`s right to an own story. After working he/she can keep the book.

Support for the close ones

In addition to workbook work, parallel support visits and psychoeducation can be offered to the close ones separately or together with the young refugee. It is good to decide, which topics of the workbook work can be talked about in a joint discussion with them.

Working with an interpreter

It is recommended to use an interpreter when the client and the professional do not share the same language. Remember to inform the interpreter of the therapeutic process and the wish to use the same interpreter throughout the process.



The PDF version of the workbook

<https://www.hdl.fi/tukea-ja-toimintaa/maahanmuuttajille/psykotraumatologian-keskus/tietopankki/>

Feedback or questions of the workbook work

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Mäkinen-Halttunen, M., Neste, M., Levander, M., Rekonen, S. 2019. Helsinki Deaconess Foundation. Center of Psychotraumatology. The Tortured Children and Youth Activity 2019–2021. Our story workbook– working with the refugee families.

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