

20 tips for people who look after refugees

www.mhfa-ersthelfer.de/20hinweise

The war in the Ukraine is forcing millions of people to leave their homes and their homeland. For the refugees, flight nearly always means vulnerability, helplessness and experiences that can be traumatizing. In the country in which they arrive, the uncertainty continues: Refugees may face an unclear residency status, unclear future prospects, worries about family members left behind, the lack of a regular income, health problems or language barriers.

All these things can affect mental and emotional well-being. Those who shelter or look after refugees support them in meeting basic needs such as food, sleep, hygiene and a private sphere – and this is all essential. However, through an understanding and sensitive attitude, it is also possible to help a refugee experience security and the ability to take action.

The following tips may help you provide support for refugees in initially feeling safer and more secure and then, step by step, more capable of action, more independent and more recognized.

Your attitude

1. Give some thought first of all to your own attitude about the affected person's country of origin, language and culture. Try to become aware of any reservations or uncertainties you harbor. You may be able to resolve some of your reservations by gathering concrete information.
2. Be clear in your own mind that the affected person is a victim, but also a survivor with personal sources of strength. It is important to activate these sources of strength.
3. Try to act from the position of a caring fellow human being, not as a rescuer. It is not your responsibility to have a solution for every problem.
4. Be aware of your own sources of strength and their limits. Pay attention to your own needs and the personal load you bear in this situation.
5. Keep an eye on your family members and their feelings, especially children.

In conversations

6. Communicate calmly and patiently.
7. Communicate from a position of equality – yours and the refugee's. Listen in a neutral, unbiased way and – to the degree you want to and can – give the refugee space to talk about what he or she is thinking. However, don't urge the person to speak about potentially traumatic experiences or that person's feelings.
8. Inform yourself of signs that can suggest mental health problems. Extensive information on the subject and how you can help in such cases can be found here: www.mhfa-ersthelfer.de/20hinweise
9. If you have the impression that the refugee is suffering from mental health problems, help that person seek professional support. You can find an offer (in Ukrainian) at this website: <https://krisenchat.de/ukraine>
10. Gather up-to-date information regularly on important things that affect the refugee (for example, claims to legal or financial assistance) and pass it along.
11. Show interest in the refugee and ask about his or her interests, hobbies and plans. Consider together how that person can make the most use of their interests and skills in the current situation.

Daily life

12. In conversations, try to keep the focus on the here and now and try to motivate the person to actively shape their daily life. Household activities or garden work can create a positive sense of purpose and control over the present.
13. Help the refugee regain the capacity for action and some independence by giving the person tasks that he or she can complete successfully.
14. Help the person practically with visits to authorities or with paperwork. Find out which public or private institutions offer appropriate assistance and motivate the person to take advantage of such offers.
15. Provide practical support when the person needs medical care.
16. Promote the person's familiarization with our culture, and be open and interested in the refugee's culture. Cooking and eating together are good opportunities for this.
17. Encourage the person to be active physically. Going for walks, sports and nature can help people relax and feel better.

18. Offer parents with children support with child care. Try together to find suitable recreational activities for the children.
19. If the person is open to it, help him or her develop plans for the future. This could be a language course, a training program or job. You can also find out, together with the person, what opportunities are available for children (school attendance, child care, etc.).
20. Trade ideas and information with other people who are caring for refugees.

Summary:

- You can help create a safe, secure environment in which refugees can experience normality and gather their strength.
- You can help them master their daily lives and discover opportunities for taking action.
- If you observe mental health problems, you can provide “first aid.”
- Pay attention to your own needs, your family members and your own sources of strength. Don’t expect too much of yourself.