



Understanding Trauma and Fostering Resilience When Working with Afghan Refugee Students and Their Families



Session 1: Understanding Trauma and Resilience

Thursday, November 2, 2023, 3:00 – 4:00 PM



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<https://www.childtrends.org/>

School Learning Conditions

Our research work spans the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, and practices that contribute to inclusive and positive learning environments for all students.

We also provide technical assistance at the national, state, local, and individual levels to improve student well-being, school safety, and instructional environments. We also help educators understand, identify, and address student and family needs.

School Health

We conduct program evaluations and provide technical assistance to support policies, programs, and practices that prioritize equity and whole child development. Our work:

- Analyzes and disseminates information related to school health policies;
- Helps K-12 leaders make informed decisions;
- Promotes expansion of school-based services; and,
- Encourages cross-sector collaboration to support student outcomes.

School Discipline

Through literature reviews, analyses of primary and secondary data, and technical assistance, we support prevention efforts and positive approaches to school discipline. This work:

- Shines a light on disparities in the administration of school discipline
- Emphasizes supportive environments as key to reducing reliance on exclusionary discipline; and,
- Aims to understand how policy changes impact school-level disciplinary practices.

Scan for more information:



School Mental Health

We identify and support policies, programs, and practices that bolster students' mental and emotional well-being. Our work:

- Improves coordinated mental health services at schools;
- Expands the availability of school-based mental health services in all 50 states;
- Improves services for LGBTQ+ youth; and,
- Identifies evidence-based solutions to address COVID-19-related mental health emergencies in youth.

School Employee Wellness

Our school employee wellness work expands the field's understanding beyond the physical and mental wellness of instructional staff, to emphasize the importance of ameliorating workplace stressors while also supporting wellness-enhancing habits among all types and levels of staff.

Child Trends has developed a framework and set of research-based tools to help education and health leaders engage in an inclusive, data-driven process to advance equitable school employee wellness.

Higher Education

We focus on understanding the learning and life experiences of those students for whom many of our nation's colleges and universities were not designed. Our work:

- Centers and uplifts the experiences of parenting students; and
- Creates learning conditions that are supportive of the needs and strengths of diverse college students.



Series Overview

This three-part series is intended to equip school and school district staff with knowledge and skills related to stress, trauma, and resilience



1

Describe how trauma, adversity, and resilience influence refugee students

2

Recognize how our own identities and experiences can influence our work with refugee students and their families

3

Identify ways schools can support positive mental health for refugee students



Applying Trauma-Informed Principles to Group Commitments

1

Be present and participate as much as you are able.

2

Respect the diverse experiences and opinions of others.



1. Safety



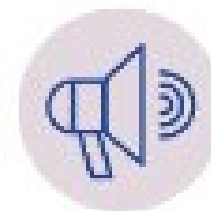
2. Trustworthiness
& Transparency



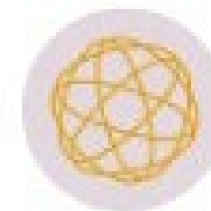
3. Peer Support



4. Collaboration
& Mutuality



5. Empowerment,
Voice, & Choice



6. Cultural,
Historical, &
Gender Issues



Session 1 Learning Objectives

- 1 Be able to recognize how adversity and trauma are similar and different.
- 2 Be able to describe the role of resilience in overcoming adversity.
- 3 Be able to identify protective and risk factors experienced by refugee students and their families.



In the chat, please share...



a description of trauma that you have heard used in your school or community.



Trauma is...



an event, or series
of events,



experienced as
physically or
emotionally harmful

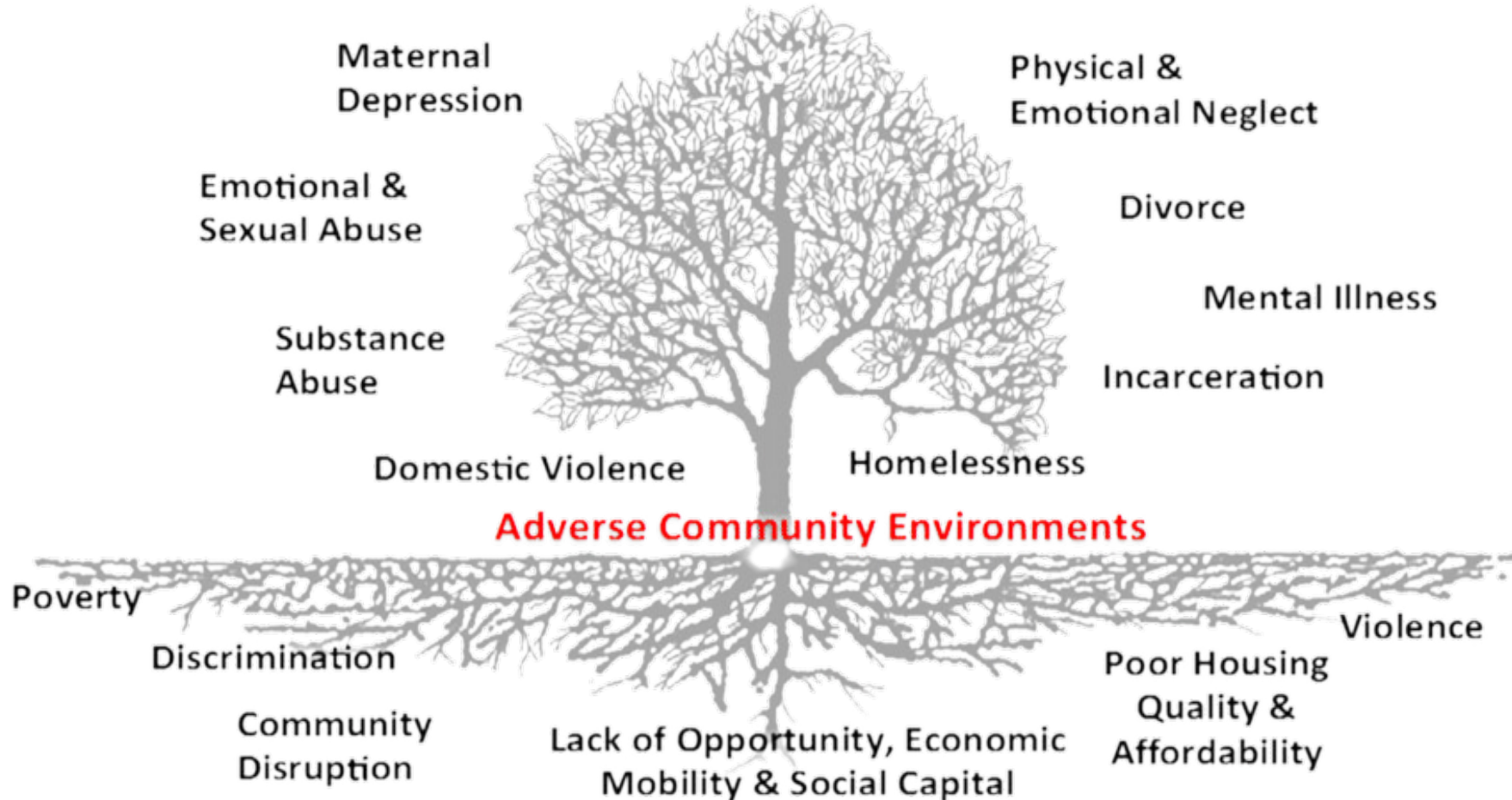


that has lasting
effects.



Adversity = Potentially Harmful Event

Adverse Childhood Experiences





Stress is a response to an event

positive

normal and healthy
response to tense situation



tolerable

response to severe or long-
lasting situation but **with**
supportive buffers in place



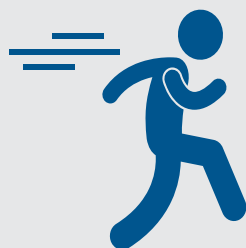
toxic

response to severe or long-
lasting situation but **without**
supportive buffers in place





Stress response in students



Flight

- avoidance
- procrastination
- withdrawal



Fight

- controlling
- defensive
- combative



Freeze

- overwhelmed
- zoned out
- unresponsive



Fawn

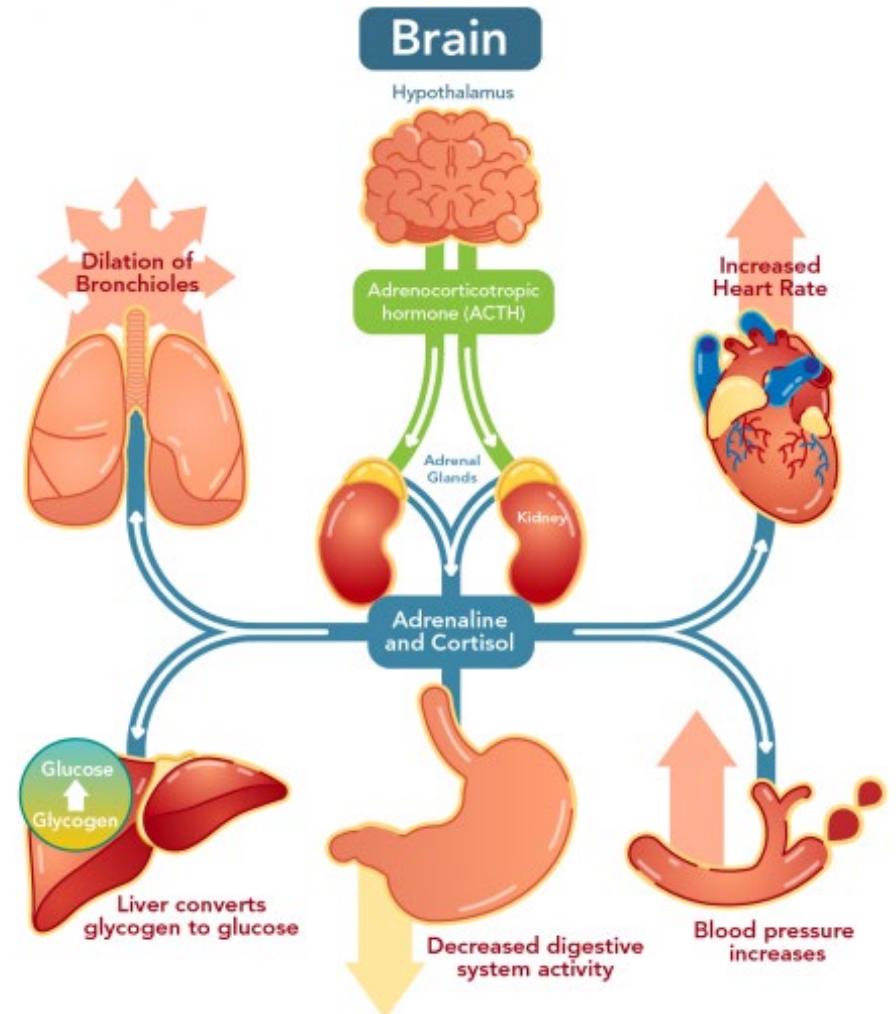
- anxious
- people pleaser
- submissive



Stress response and trauma

STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

- Our bodies have a normal process to respond to stress.
- An experience becomes **traumatic** when it overwhelms our system for responding to stress.
- Even non-traumatic stress can be damaging to well-being, especially when it is ongoing.

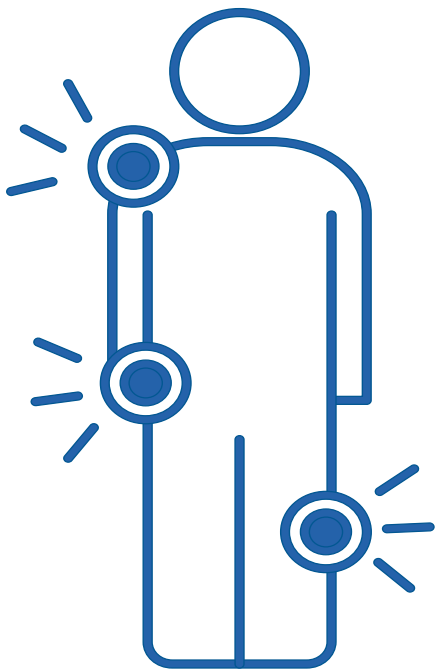








Common physical symptoms



- Increased somatic complaints (e.g., headaches and stomachaches)
- Over- or under-reacting to stimuli (e.g., getting startled easily [or not at all] by bells, physical contact, doors slamming, sirens)
- Increased activity level (e.g., fidgeting, getting out of seat)
- Withdrawal from other people and activities



Common cognitive symptoms



Some of these symptoms, such as worry and fear about safety, may be appropriate depending on current circumstances or unfamiliarity with cultural norms.

- Recreating the traumatic event (e.g., repeatedly talking about or "playing out" the event) or avoiding topics that serve as reminders
- Difficulties with executive function (e.g., impulse control, attention)
- Worry and fear about safety of self and others
- Dissociation (e.g., disconnected from surroundings, "spacing out")



Common social/emotional symptoms



It can be difficult to determine if some of these symptoms are related to trauma rather than language fluency and unfamiliarity with cultural norms.

- Rapid changes in heightened emotions (e.g., extremely sad to angry)
- Change in ability to interpret or respond appropriately to social cues
- Difficulties with emotion regulation and impulse control (e.g., angry outbursts, aggression, increased distress)
- Emotional numbness, isolation, and detachment



Common communication symptoms



It can be difficult to determine if some of these symptoms are related to trauma rather than language fluency and unfamiliarity with cultural norms.

- Language development delays and challenges
- Difficulties with expressive (e.g., expressing thoughts and feelings) and receptive language (e.g., understanding nonverbal cues)
- Difficulties with nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact)
- Use of hurtful language (e.g., to keep others at a distance)



Common learning symptoms

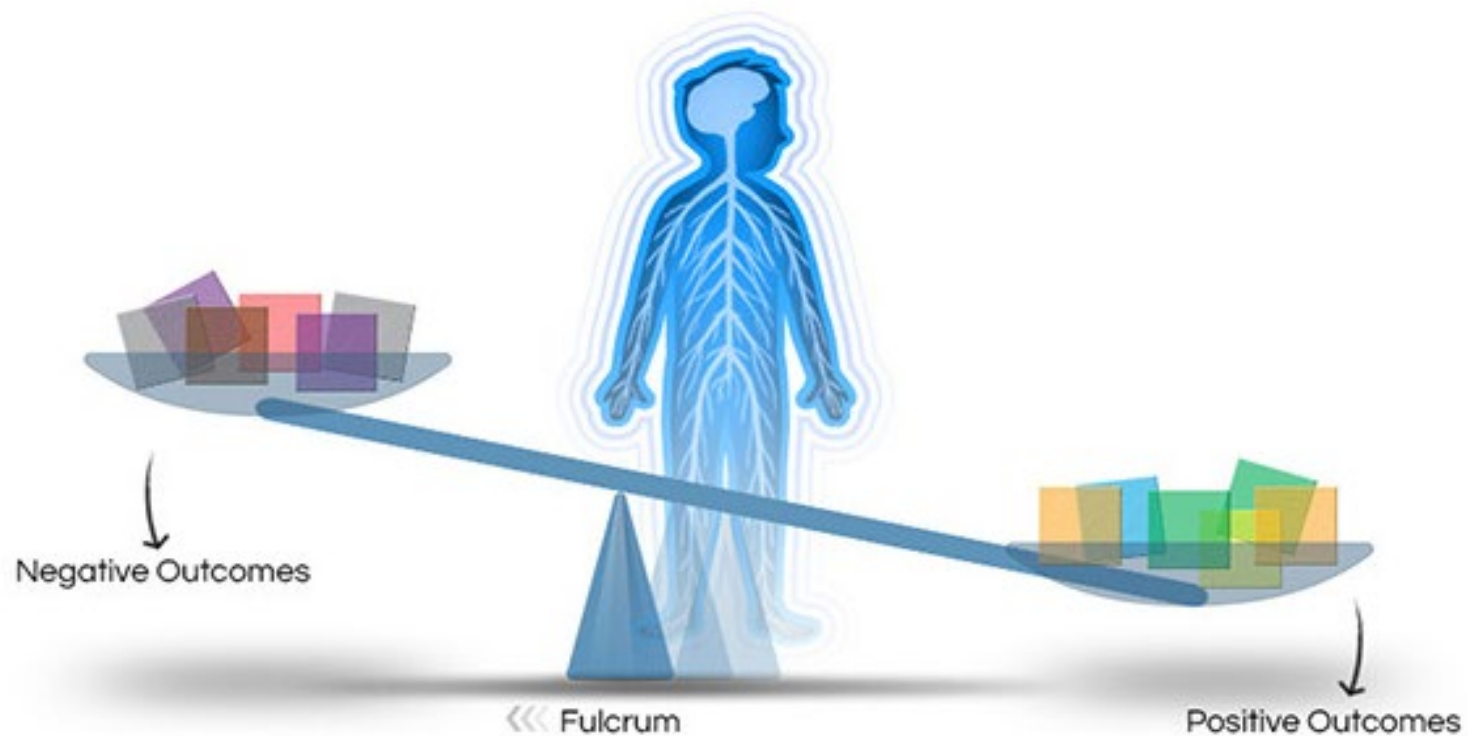


It can be difficult to determine if some of these symptoms are related to trauma rather than education gaps due to migration process, language fluency and unfamiliarity with cultural norms.

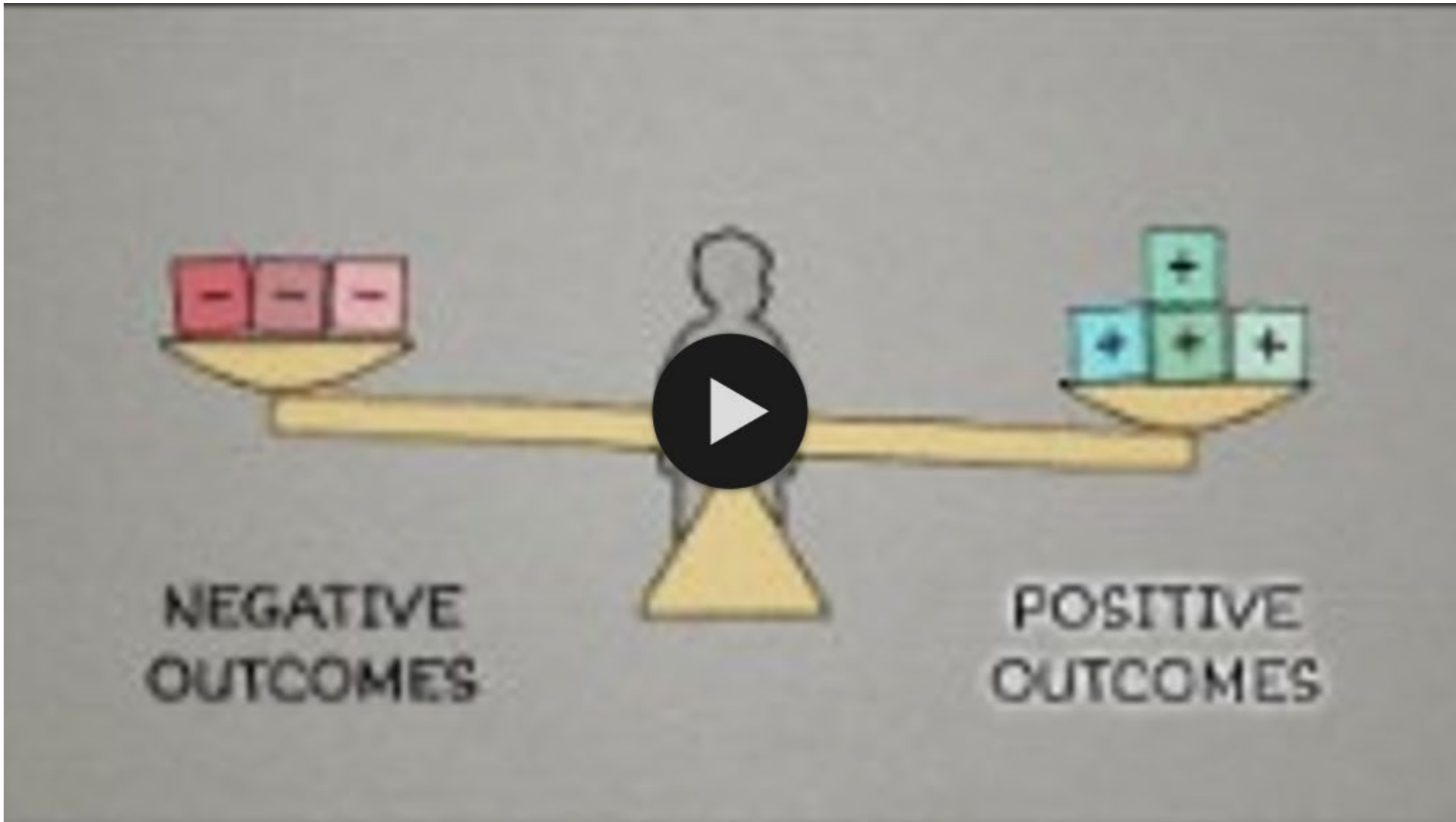
- Absenteeism and changes in academic performance/engagement
- Difficulties with authority, redirection, or criticism
- Difficulties listening and concentrating during instruction
- Difficulties with memory (e.g., may require more repetitions)
- Difficulties generalizing learned material in different contexts



Resilience = Protective Factors

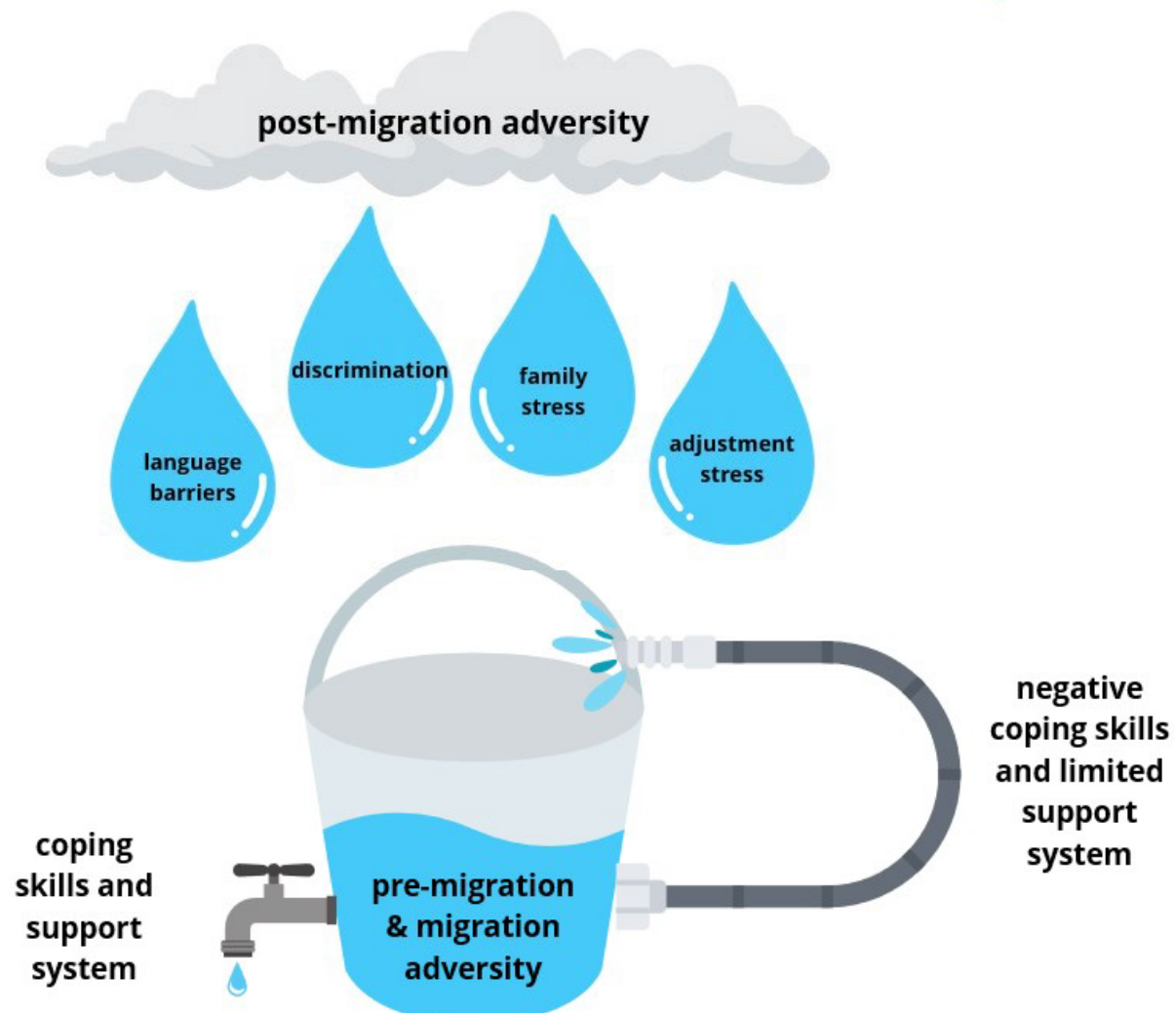


Over time, the cumulative impact of positive life experiences and coping skills can shift the fulcrum's position, making it easier to achieve positive outcomes. Play *Tipping the Scales: The Resilience Game* to learn more.



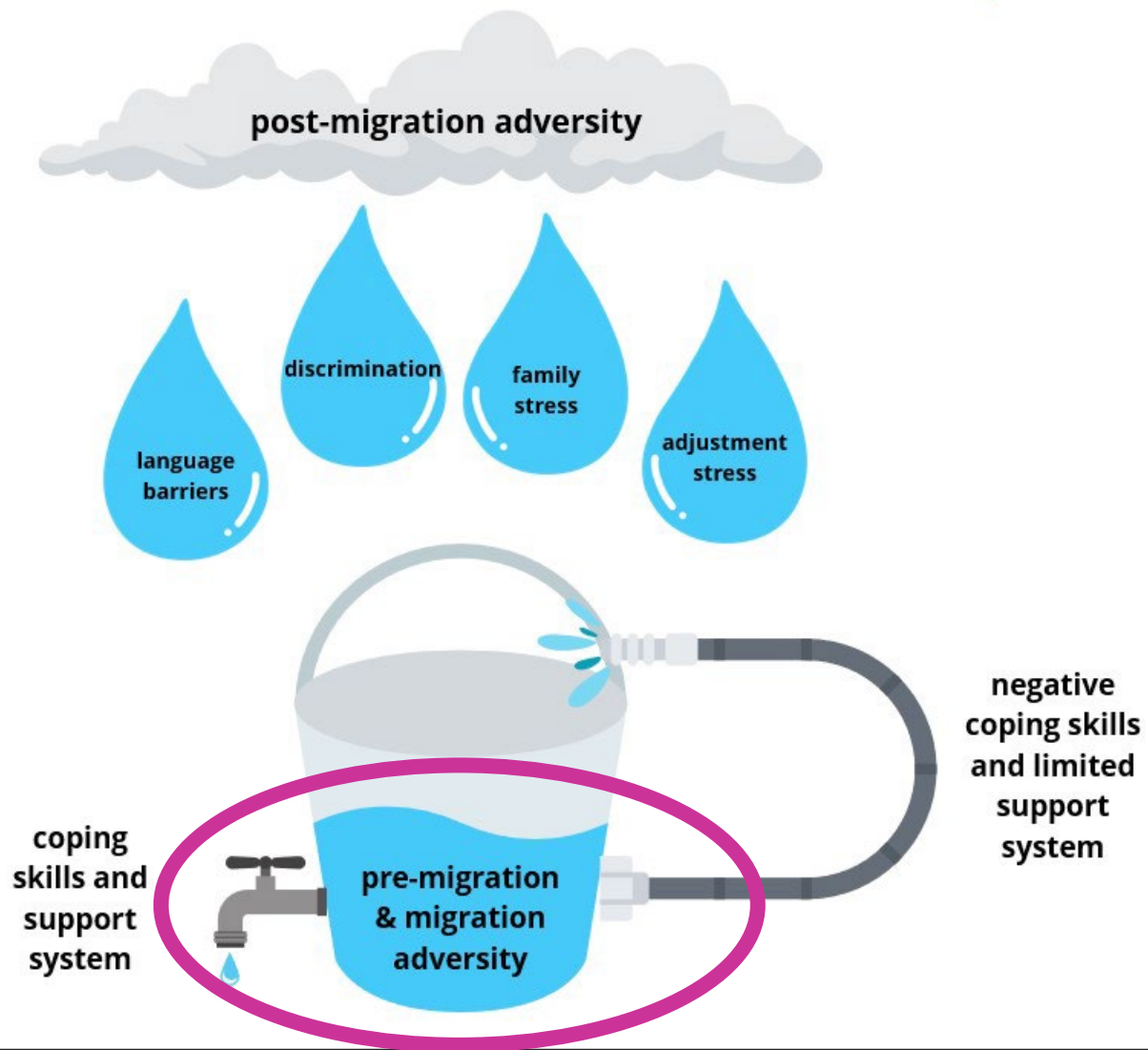


Stress Bucket for Refugee Youth





Stress Bucket for Refugee Youth

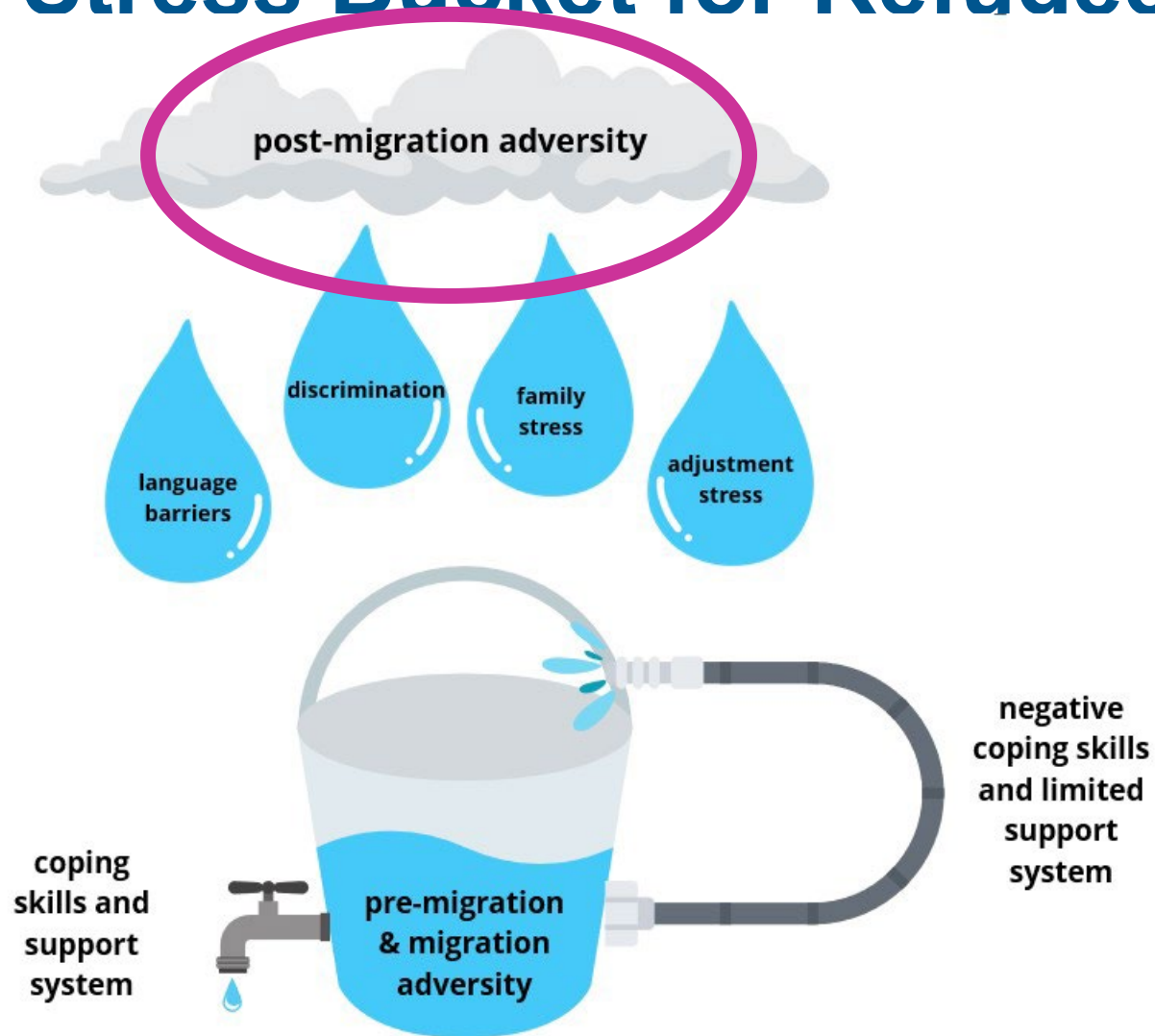


Pre-migration and migration adversity

- Community violence
- Chaotic departure from their homes
- Death of loved ones
- Leaving loved ones behind



Stress Bucket for Refugee Youth



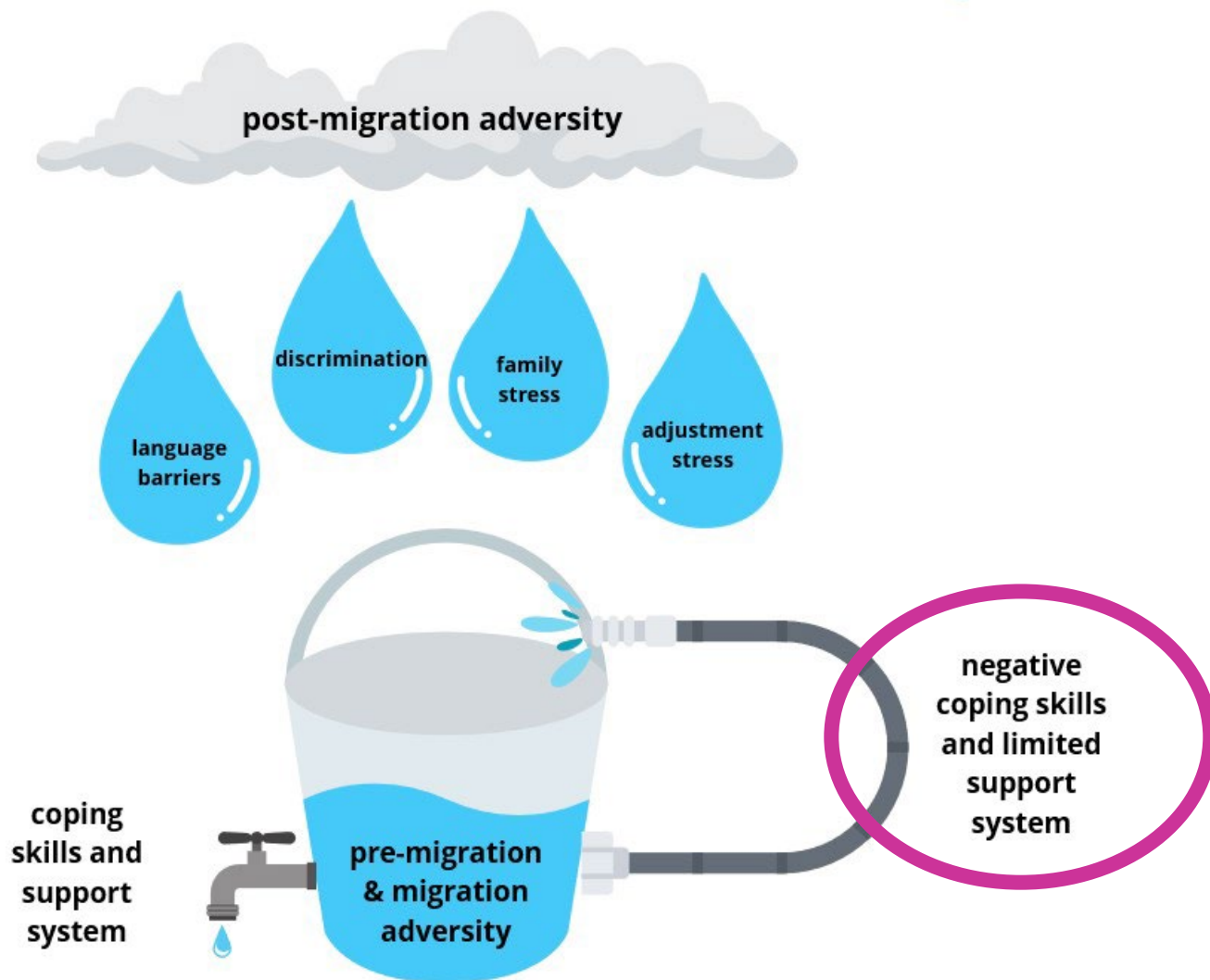
Post-migration adversity

- Islamophobia
- Having their name constantly mispronounced
- Unfamiliarity with US education system
- Uncertainty about their legal status(see brief linked below)

<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-temporary-immigration-status-has-affected-afghan-evacuees-us>



Stress Bucket for Refugee Youth

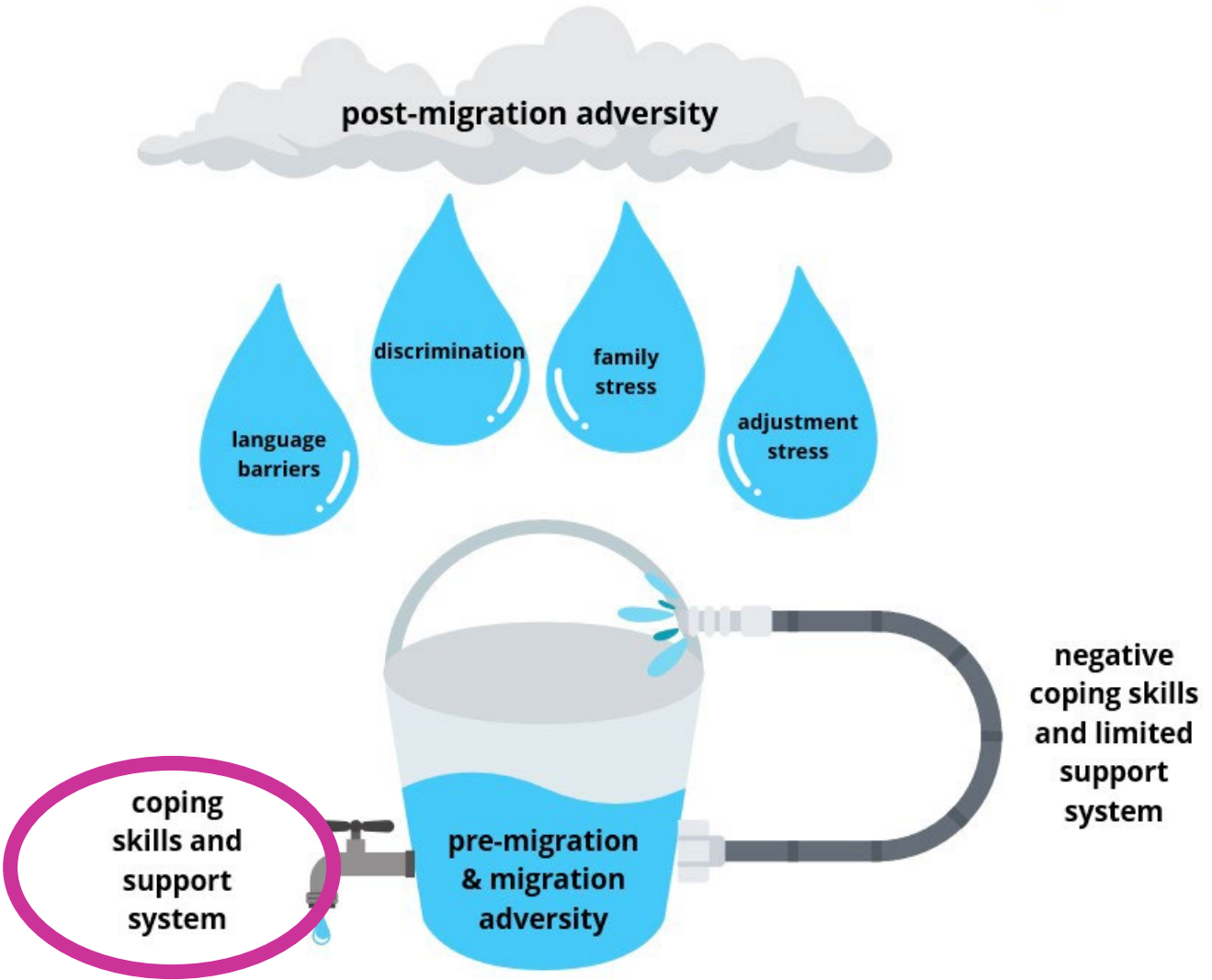


Negative coping skills and limited support system

- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Aggression



Stress Bucket for Refugee Youth



Coping skills and support system

- Supportive family connections
- Cultural values including family & faith
- Supportive relationships in new school/community
- Access to support services at school in a language they are comfortable with



Learning what is in a students' stress bucket

<https://learninginpractice.padlet.org/sarahbracken/welcoming-newcomer-afghan-students-and-families-95oxbiq19djggx1d>

Padlet
Sarah Bracken • 2 • 10mo
Welcoming Newcomer Afghan Students and Families
Refugee Educator Academy at the Center for Learning in Practice

Resettlement Process

Welcoming Schools

Resources from the Virtual Learning Event on Oct. 2

Language & Culture Resources

Upcoming Events

News & Contextual Info

- 12 Ways to Support Afghan Refugee Students (by Larry Ferlazzo)
- "Welcoming Afghan Students and Families" virtual learning event recording
- Afghan Students (Primer) from USAHello
- Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice Course Part 1
- "98 Countries Pledge to Accept Afghans After U.S. Military Departs"
- 12 Ways to Support Afghan Refugee Students (Opinion)
- Welcoming Afghan Students and Families
- Dari Language Resources
- Refugee Educator Academy: Deepening Connections & Building Conditions for Learning
- An older article (2015), but still helpful in imagining context for some Afghans who made the choice to leave their homeland.
- Session 1 Resources: Texts, Videos, People to Check out, etc
- Dari Language Resources
- Farsi Language Resources
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) to Support Clients Affected by the Crisis in Afghanistan

<https://coresourceexchange.org/working-with-afghans/>

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Afghan Backgrounder

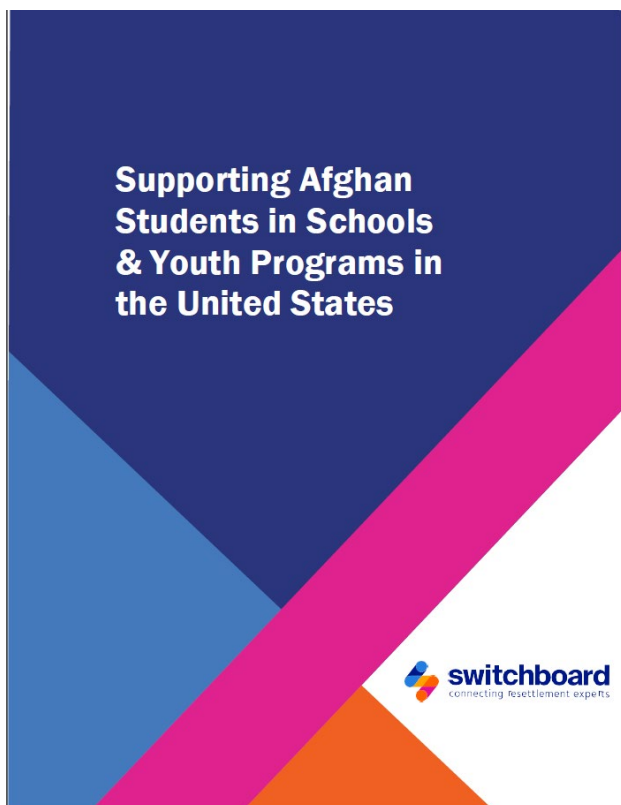
DOWNLOAD FULL PDF

This backgrounder contains historical, political, and cultural information intended to cultivate a general understanding of Afghans who are arriving to the U.S. The ongoing crisis in Afghanistan is complex and spans decades. CORE produced this backgrounder to aid U.S. Resettlement Agencies (RAs) and their local affiliates to provide culturally appropriate Cultural Orientation (CO) and other services to newly arrived Afghans. The



Learning what is in a students' stress bucket

<https://coresourceexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Toolkit-Supporting-Afghan-Students-in-Schools-and-Youth-Programs.pdf>



Sample Scripts: Engaging with Family Members

- Thank you for everything you have done to support [student name] as they transition to a new school. Is there anything I can do to help right now?
- I recognize how much new information you're hearing. It can be overwhelming learning so much information so quickly.
- When it comes to [student name]'s education, what is the most important thing to you right now?
- I understand you have concerns about [topic]. Can you tell me more about what you think?
- It sounds like you are thinking that [summarize viewpoint]. Did I get that right? Did I get anything wrong?
- Thank you for sharing your perspective with me. Would it be useful for me to explain [topic] further, to help you make a decision?
- I respect your decision. I'm always happy to talk to you about this again. If you have further questions or thoughts on [topic], please contact me at [contact information].



In the chat, please share...



- Did anything from the presentation or discussion today surprise you?