

Responding to the Special Needs of Refugee Children:  
Practical Ideas for Teachers

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Introduction to Early Childhood Education

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When becoming a teacher, there are many obstacles thrown at you unexpectedly. Going into a career as an educator, one knows that they will be facing behavioral problems, emotional problems, as well as physical and mental disabilities within the classroom. The problem is that many teachers tend to forget that there are other issues that come about such as multicultural differences, religious views, and even different backgrounds and life styles. For example, there is an increasing number of children entering the United States from other countries that have been through horrible situations and are seeking safety and help. These families and children are known as refugees.

“There are about 12 million refugees in the world and almost half of them are children” (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Frater-Mathieson 2007). These children come from families that have fled their home country “due to fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (Judith Szente). Not only have these children entered a new country with strange surroundings, they have also had horrible experiences along the way. Many of the refugee children have witnessed or even experienced rape, or murder of family and friends. These children are in need of help and after entering school in the United States, it is the duty of our teachers to provide them with the help they need.

Many of the refugee children need help coping with trauma and culture shock. The teachers that have refugees placed in their classrooms, need to know how to work with a traumatized child. Some of these children will be aggressive and have behavioral problems while others will be respectful and polite. Many teachers are not ready or prepared to deal with the emotional stress that the children possess. It is hard to deal with the emotional stresses that the refugee children possess if the educator is unaware of what

the child has been through. Unfortunately, sometimes there is no way of finding out the past of a child. Many times the families are unwilling to share their traumatic experiences. The refugee children most often can not even speak English, and therefore the teacher is going to have to find other ways of communication.

There are many activities that teachers can do with their students in order to help communicate with not only refugee children, but all members of the classroom. Teachers can help children understand emotions by playing games with pictures and drawings. Sign Language symbols are also a great thing to get the classroom familiar using. If children that have various languages can communicate with each other through Sign Language, the classroom will be a more friendly and safe atmosphere for everyone. These are only a few suggestions for teachers, there are many other classroom activities that teachers can use to bring all the children together as one.

The article, *Responding to the Special Needs of Refugee Children: Practical Ideas for Teachers*, is a wonderful article for future and current teachers. It provides information on how to deal with refugees that come into the classroom. I will be able to take the information from this article and apply it not only if I have refugees in my classroom, but with all of my students. The activities given in the article that are meant to bring communication into the classroom as well as assisting children with their academic development, can be used with refugee students as well as all the other members of the class. The article also gave me ideas on how to keep families involved with their children academically. I really enjoyed this article and have learned valuable information that will help me become a dependable educator in the future.

## Bibliography

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