



Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Self-care, wellbeing and communication strategies for Multicultural Education Aides

Multicultural Education Aides and other bicultural workers in schools play a vital role supporting students and families of refugee background.

Foundation House brought together 66 MEAs and other bicultural workers to share what they are currently doing and what strategies will help to sustain themselves while supporting students and families. Here is a snapshot of key practices shared, along with some suggestions from Foundation House.

Self-care: look after yourself

- Look after yourself so you are strong enough to look after others.
- Limit your workload to your paid hours.
- Use school phones rather than your own mobile phone.
- Refer students and families to experts when they need it, eg. wellbeing team and external support services.
- Talk about your work challenges and worries with other MEAs and join the [Victorian MEA Network Facebook Group](#).
- If you need support talk directly to your manager, or to the school wellbeing team or EAP.
- Identify and make time for relaxing activities to support your own health and wellbeing, eg. walks, meditation, music, art, sport.

Wellbeing: Focus on the wellbeing of students and families

- Contact students and families to ask how they are going.
- Recognise the extra stress for single parents and offer support when appropriate.
- Assist school wellbeing and mental health staff to check-in with students about their mental health.
- Show understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic adds extra stress.
- Speak up for those who need extra support.
- Work with school staff to offer activities to build student mental health, eg. group fitness sessions.
- Encourage your school to offer sessions that are culturally appropriate for families on mental health and wellbeing.
- Link families to the school wellbeing team or other services if needed.

Communication: Actively support communication between the school, students and families

- Keep school leadership informed about the special needs of your community.
- Encourage school leaders to make community statements of support in school newsletters, including translations in community languages.
- Reach out to families regularly; and even if they are not responding, try again next week.

Supporting students who are experiencing trauma reactions

Students of refugee background, including those born in Australia, may be experiencing 'trauma reactions' when they are overwhelmed by uncontrollable feelings associated with what is happening in their families home countries.

It is important to remember that distress, fear, hopelessness, anger, and withdrawal are normal responses to traumatic refugee events and don't always require a mental health intervention.

These reactions may be triggered by their families' grief, news reports, social media and communication with people in their home countries.

You may notice students becoming highly irritable and unable to tolerate frustration, resulting in their reduced control over impulsive and aggressive behaviour. Some students may withdraw and disengage.

Students experiencing trauma reactions may be helped by:

- A consistent and balanced school routine.
- Modifying task expectations to allow for difficulties concentrating.
- Flexible timelines for task completion.
- Sharing thoughts and feelings with a trusted adult.
- Time out if a student feels upset, angry or needs to be physically active.
- Access to soothing activities such as sensory toys, drawing supplies, exercise space or quiet space during time out.
- Referral to the wellbeing team if you notice the student's daily functioning remains significantly impacted over a period of weeks.



Visit the *School's In for Refugees* website for further information and resources: sifr.foundationhouse.org.au