



Webinar: Providing Culturally Sensitive Guidance on Caregiving Practices to Newcomers

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Transcript

Introduction

Caroline Dilts: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much, all of you, for joining today to engage in this really important topic, providing culturally sensitive guidance on caregiving practices with newcomers. My name is Caroline Dilts. I am the program manager for our refugee-related research at the Research Program on Children and Adversity at Boston College School of Social Work. I have over seven years of clinical experience working with children and families in both community and home settings, with a specialization in trauma-informed care. I'm excited to help present today. With that, I'm also delighted to introduce the rest of our speakers today.

Today's Speakers

CD: Firstly, we have Farhad Sharifi. He is a recent Afghan evacuee, a social worker, and serves as a cultural expert in the Family Strengthening Intervention for Refugees project at the RPCA, or Research Program on Children and Adversity at Boston College. Previously, he was working with internally displaced populations in Afghanistan with Jesuit Refugee Services.

CD: Maliha Raza Khan is a nonprofit consultant with over 20 years of experience. She has consulted for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Bethany Christian Services, Samaritas, and the Muslim Foster Care Association in resettlement of refugees. Previously, she served as board chair of Kalamazoo County Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Council. Currently, she serves as a board advisor for the Kalamazoo Housing Advocates and writes grants for other nonprofits. She holds a master's degree in applied clinical psychology from Delhi University in India.

CD: Audrey Montgomery is a research associate working at the Research Program on Children and Adversity, focused solely on our refugee portfolio, as well as a program coordinator at Boston Medical Center's Refugee Women's Health Clinic. She holds a master's in social work with a focus on global social work and community change from the University of Michigan. She has experience working directly alongside newly arrived communities within refugee resettlement in the health care settings.

Learning Objectives

CD: With that, I will describe our learning objectives—excuse me—learning objectives for today. Hopefully by the end of the session, you will be able to identify the common challenges that newcomer parents face in the U.S. and explain how they affect parenting skills, describe the impacts of culturally sensitive and strengths-based conversations about caregiving with newcomers, and apply trauma-informed strategies when educating



newcomer caregivers on U.S. child rearing laws, norms, and behavior management. With that, I will pass along to Audrey to get us started on our first section for this training.

1. Common Challenges Newcomer Caregivers Face in the U.S. and Their Effect on Parenting Skills

Audrey Montgomery: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much, Caroline. As she said, my name is Audrey, and I have the pleasure of introducing the first section of this webinar, which is going to focus on the common challenges newcomer caregivers face in the United States.

Discussion Question

AM: First, I want to hear and learn from you all, as you are the experts. We're going to kick things off with a Slido. We will be doing this a few times throughout the duration of our webinar today. If this is your first time using Slido, or as a reminder, I invite you to take out your mobile device, or you can go to [slido.com](https://www.slido.com) and enter the code listed on the screen, where you will then be prompted to answer the question,

What challenges have you seen affect the parenting skills of the newcomer caregivers you work with?

AM: I will provide a few moments for you all to answer, and we should see the results pop up on your screen as you do.

[silence]

AM: I'm seeing language, language, language, technology, housing, navigating available resources, cultural differences. These are great. Transportation, finances. I'm seeing language a lot, it looks like. Online safety and social media. Understanding child welfare laws. It's actually something we'll be getting into here momentarily, too.

[silence]

AM: Understanding of systems. Past traumatic experiences. These are great. Thank you. All right. Okay, thank you all so much for participating. We are going to start. We're going to jump in. I thank you again for participating. I loved learning a little bit more from you all. Also, I think that gave me a little bit better understanding of who is in our Zoom room today. Again, thank you. As we get started, I think it can be helpful to provide some key definitions and context for the topic of discussion today.

Who is a caregiver?

AM: I want to start with, "Who is a caregiver?" The Office of Refugee Resettlement defines caregiver as any person who is primarily entrusted with the child's care and who lives with the child. For families, the primary caregiver or caregivers may not necessarily be the biological parent to the child or the youth, newcomer families included. Extended family members and fictive kinship family members often act as caregivers in many cultures or have an elevated elder status in the family. For the purpose of this presentation today, we will be referring to parents and primary caregivers.



Child Welfare Statistics

AM: Again, to provide a little bit more context, let's review some key child welfare statistics as well as touch on what the stats don't say. As noted on the slide, there are approximately 17.6 million children in the United States under the age of 18 who have lived with at least one immigrant parent in the year 2022. Eighty-seven percent of the 17.6 million are second-generation immigrant children born in the U.S. to at least one immigrant parent, with the remaining 13% born abroad. Then as you'll also see on the slide there, 42% of the 17.6 million children lived in families with low income.

AM: Importantly, up-to-date statistics on the percentage of newcomer families involved in the child welfare system are not readily available, as the data is not collected uniformly on state and national levels. However, the last known data showed that children living with a foreign-born parent comprised 8.6% of all children who came to the attention of the child welfare system. In the same study, it was found that U.S.-born parents were significantly more likely to be abusing alcohol or drugs, have intellectual and physical impairments, and have recent histories of arrest.

AM: The study also revealed that children of immigrants were more than twice as likely to be subjects of substantiated reports of emotional abuse than U.S.-born parents. Differences in parenting practices, cultural expectations, as well as holistic child welfare system knowledge and access barriers may all contribute to the reports of incidents of suspected child abuse and neglect. It can be complicated to interpret emotional abuse particularly, because definitions of emotional abuse may vary across states. It is possible that cultural differences or misunderstandings may be a factor.

AM: What the data doesn't say. It's important to recognize the protective factors as well that play a role in parenting. Many families migrate to ensure a better future for their children. Parents who have experienced displacement possess strength and resilience in overcoming barriers with the resettlement process to get to where they are now.

Overview of Challenges for Newcomer Caregivers

AM: On your screen, you should see some key challenges highlighted for newcomer caregivers. I will detail the first two further prior to handing it off to my fellow colleague, Farhad, to touch upon the rest.

AM: That first one is language access, which I think that you all clearly mentioned in our Slido earlier. That second one is change in parenting role norms. Then our third one, that I think will be highlighted here soon, is gap in knowledge of child welfare system. Again, I saw this one noted a few times in that Slido. The fourth is cultural or religious practice conflicting with norms. The next one, lack of culturally appropriate formal supports. The next is lack of informal supports. That last one is difference in educational involvement. Again, I think I saw all of these highlighted in some way, shape, or form throughout that Slido session we all engaged in earlier. Let's first discuss language access.

Language Access

AM: According to an assessment done in 2022 with the Migration Policy Institute, 46% of all 45.9 million immigrants age five and up spoke English less than "very well." Limited proficiency is cited as a frequent barrier for parents, as it can discourage parents from participating in their children's education and social life, which makes it harder to understand policies and laws and overall limits access to supportive services.



Change in Parental Role Norms

AM: That next one is change in parental role norms. For many new arrivals, the cultural differences generally seen in U.S. society may differ from what they are used to.

AM: In terms of gender roles specifically, many newcomers experience a change in this dynamic when mothers or women begin working in the U.S. to overcome financial stressors, which can sometimes traditionally be seen as the male and/or the father's assigned role in the family as a breadwinner. Depending on culture, newcomer fathers may not be used to playing a part in practicing parenting practices and domestic duties. The change in norms can cause tension in the family and affect the way parenting practices are implemented.

AM: Children, related to their development and socialization, tend to learn English and adapt to their environment quicker than their parents, which can overall impact a family's power structure. Additionally, the role of the parent as an authoritative figure may, at times, clash with the U.S. child welfare policies on appropriate parenting practices.

AM: Studies have shown that many newcomers, specifically from Africa, have believed that physical punishment is an effective disciplinary measure to maintain control of their children. These parents have felt that they lose a sense of authority when this is challenged by child welfare agencies. Many African parents specifically reported their children would use this knowledge against them by threatening to call their social worker or 911 if they were treated unfairly, spanked, or physically punished. The fear of having their children taken away and involvement with authorities undermines their parental power, making it difficult for newcomer parents to ensure their children's obedience. With that, I would like to pass it off to my fellow colleague, Farhad, to detail further the remaining.

Gap in Knowledge of Child Welfare and Other Systems

Farhad Sharifi: Thank you, Audrey, and thank you for that insightful presentation. This is one of the areas [where] newcomer parents need more in-depth orientation. Many don't know, as you say, or have some assumptions or misunderstanding on how child welfare system works here in the U.S. Many refugee and immigrant families are not knowledgeable about the parental expectations here in the U.S. For example, they need to know the fact that if at least very basic needs of the kids are not provided, like food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and supervision, then in that case the state might get involved, which could be something unfamiliar to the parents.

FS: These gaps in knowledge necessarily have led to some fear of the child welfare system, as Audrey mentioned. Sometimes parents get into this legal trouble because they continue to discipline their kids the way they used to do in their previous practice. It's important for them to understand what is considered child abuse here in the U.S., and just to make sure that they are not ending up in some trouble here. So that's important.

FS: Although there are many newcomer families here, they get some cultural orientation through the agencies, but they're very information-heavy, and a lot of them get overwhelmed by a lot of information. Some who have participated reported back that what we understood from all that is that spanking is illegal in the U.S., which is a misunderstanding. It's child abuse which is illegal, not spanking. Some common reasons that some families were referred to child welfare services, among them were they needed more cultural orientation, lack of parental skills, intergenerational family conflict, inadequate finance, domestic violence and, of course, inadequate living conditions.



FS: Next, some forms of punishment, like hitting, which the formal word for that is corporal punishment, is not accepted here in the U.S. There are some other practices that might be in conflict with child welfare system policy here. For example, it is reported that in Somali culture, it is common for mothers to expect their daughters to just help them alongside their domestic chores while the boys can have the freedom to socialize outside the home. Children in Mexican immigrant households provide a lot of assistance to the family in caring for their siblings, providing financial assistance. This could be considered emotionally harmful or parentification from a lens of child welfare system or policy.

Cultural and Religious Practice Conflicting with Norms

FS: Another worry that parents have is that their children being raised here in the U.S. might have a negative impact on their religious and cultural values. For example, within Muslim families, the value of respecting others and love for others and the importance of praying and fasting is important, and they expect their kids to just keep practicing them. However, a Muslim student may feel out of place if he's the only student who gets out of the classroom and to go to do his religious practices. That could be isolating for him at school. Similarly, within a Christian family, they might like to parent their kids according to Bible.

FS: If kids adapt to new clothing here, just as they see their peers, how they clothe, and which they might consider less conservative, parents may feel uncomfortable. These kinds of situations may lead to intergenerational conflict.

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Formal Supports

FS: Next, there is a really significant need in the U.S. for the resettlement and health providers to just provide their services in a culturally relevant way. The information provided for new arrivals, or newcomers, on parenting practices is not always seen as culturally appropriate, which makes it difficult for parents.

FS: For example, parents may be instructed to not use physical punishment, but may not be also instructed on some alternatives, like positive disciplinary strategies that are culturally appropriate. One example of such formal parenting strategies is the concept of time outs, which newcomers may not just relate to, and this is a very Western idea.

FS: It is reported also that there is inadequate training provided to the staff in areas such as cultural humility. The staff need more resources to understand the cultural and faith practices of immigrant and refugee parents. This issue could lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding. For example, the confusion between trauma behaviors and cultural rearing. My colleague, Maliha, I guess she will be talking more about this.

Lack of Informal Supports

FS: Next, in many cultures, extended family plays a significant role in child rearing.... This lack of informal support is also a challenge for the parents or newcomers here. For example, for Latino families, the concept of familismo, or the value of closeness and interconnectedness among family members, is prevalent.

FS: Raising children is seen as a communal task with extended family members' involvement. With families now separated in new environment, these kind of values may diminish, and the parents may feel just isolated in their caregiving experiences. In some other cultures they say, as I remember, many just reminded me that it takes a village to raise a kid, but that sort of setting is not available here in the new environment.



Difference in Educational Involvement

FS: Next, of course, among many barriers and challenges that newcomer parents have, language, as many of you have said—that is one barrier that has created problems for parents in participating and supporting their kids' education. They do want to help them, but this language is really a barrier for them.

FS: Besides, research also shows that immigrant and refugee parents tend to have a lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in supporting their child's education journey here in the U.S. Service providers need to communicate to parents what they expect the parents to do and remind them [of] their expected roles and responsibilities. This includes expecting them to attend to conferences or meetings with the school staff and coordinating with teachers on a regular basis.

Discussion Question

FS: With that, we have a Slido, which the question is,

What might occur if a provider does not approach discussions appropriately with a newcomer caregiver about their parenting practices?

[pause]

FS: Yes, as we see, distrust of system, hostility. They may cause the parent to feel ashamed. Isolation, misinformation, definitely, parents feel powerless. A lot of misunderstandings, that's for sure. Lack of engagement, feeling of shame or anger, of course. Misinformation. They'll be lost, definitely. Pass on the fear to the children. These are great feedbacks. Thank you so much. We are learning from each other a lot. Child abuse and neglect, the parent may face consequences, of course. Okay, thank you so much, everyone. With that, I am passing on to my colleagues, Maliha and Caroline, to discuss the next slides. Thank you so much.

2. Best Practices for Discussing Caregiving

Maliha Raza Khan: Thank you, Farhad and Audrey, for a wonderful presentation. Hello, good afternoon, and salaam to all. I'm excited to be here with you all today and share some of my insights and experiences in refugee, newcomer, and immigrant resettlement, especially with regard to parenting. Over the past 10 years, I've had the privilege of working in this field initially as a community organizer and volunteer, and later in my career, helping to resettle refugees primarily from Muslim-identifying countries. I'm based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and today I will be sharing best practices that stem from my extensive work focusing on providing culturally responsive and trauma-informed services.

Key Strategies

MRK: I look forward to discussing these strategies with you, so let's dive in. Today, we will speak on four key strategies in providing culturally responsive services to newcomer parents and caregivers. These are culturally competent service provision, a strengths-based approach, education on U.S. laws and norms, and trauma-informed education on child behavior. I will be focusing primarily on the first strategy, that is the provision of culturally competent services, and Caroline will be talking about the others. You'll notice a common theme running through all of our discussions, which is the importance of cultural humility.



MRK: Cultural humility goes beyond simply being aware of or sensitive to cultural differences. As culturally humble service providers, we stand on a platform of continuous learning with a willingness to say to our clients, "I'm not familiar with your culture, your parenting practices, or your values and norms, but I would like to understand from you." It's about recognizing that we can never know everything about our clients' cultures, no matter how much we research, and that's okay, because cultural humility is a journey and not a destination.

MRK: When you stand on the platform of cultural humility, you recognize that you don't know everything about your own culture, let alone someone else's. For example, my cultural identity has many different facets. I identify as a Muslim, a South Asian, having grown up in India, specifically in the state of Tamil Nadu, where my parents come from. So, because India is a subcontinent, each state has its different language, its different culture and traditions. If my client identifies as Indian, this certainly does not mean that I know everything about them, even if they share some similarities with my identity.

MRK: As service providers, it's about understanding that not all people from the same culture are alike and that no culture is superior to the other. Cultural humility involves a willingness to examine our own cultural biases and assumptions and to engage in self-critique. In the next slide, I will talk a little bit about macro-level interventions. While our focus is on micro-level interventions and strategies for providers addressing parenting practices with newcomers, it's essential to also recognize the significant role that organizations can play in this process.

Culturally Informed Service Provision: Macro Level

MRK: The first point is invest in qualified staff who come from the cultural backgrounds of the population being served. We can't overemphasize this point enough. Organizations can demonstrate cultural humility by acknowledging when their existing staff are unfamiliar with the clients' culture and collaborating with or hiring someone who is.

MRK: In talking about my own personal experience, when the Afghan crisis happened, many resettlement agencies were taken quite by surprise. Those agencies, for example, Bethany Christian Services in Kalamazoo, who proactively reached out to the local community organizations, they hired Afghan staff, they brought in the Afghan experts that could talk to their staff about Afghan culture and Islamic traditions and practices. They were able to scale their services quickly.

MRK: Research also suggests that qualifications for cultural advocates should be that the person is literate in English and has a grasp of the American culture, as well as a rich cultural knowledge and language proficiency of the refugee community. These cultural advocates—and I've played that role myself on different occasions—serve as cultural ambassadors. They help translate American culture and norms while acting as role models for newcomer parents.

MRK: When a newcomer parent sees someone like themselves who has successfully navigated the challenges of raising children in America while maintaining their cultural values and identity, it reassures them in ways that training programs alone may not be able to achieve. They may also be able to help distinguish between the trauma behaviors versus cultural practices that Farhad mentioned.

MRK: The next suggestion is that organizations can also encourage and provide opportunities for professional development for staff to strengthen their knowledge in culturally competent practice. This is especially important for those providers who may not come from the same cultural background as the people they serve.



MRK: The third point is that if an organization has the capacity and funding, it could be worthwhile to host regular parenting programs and multicultural events and gatherings. An example could include bringing a staff member from the child welfare system to educate on child protective services and parents' rights and responsibilities in relation to the system. Trainers and resource providers that belong to communities that are similar to the client's culture, who can answer the questions that parents may have, explain the American norms and values in a relatable way in the context of the parents' own culture, would be invaluable.

MRK: The fourth point is that it's important to emphasize the value of collaborating with community organizations composed of members from the same community as the parents that you are serving. For example, there are many Afghan resettlement and community aid organizations in Michigan that can provide cultural assistance and resources when working with Afghan refugees.

MRK: Similarly, in different states, you'll have similar organizations that serve, say, for example, the Central American community, or the Syrian community and so on. These organizations can offer linkages to community resources and cultural ambassadors, translators, community advocates who can help navigate various challenges and processes. Many newcomers face trust and credibility issues. Especially if they've heard negative things about nonprofits in the U.S., particularly those with a historically Christian affiliation. Collaborating with community organizations helps to bridge this trust gap, and these partnerships can also enhance the organization's credibility and effectiveness by leveraging the community's internal resources and fostering a sense of trust and familiarity.

Culturally Informed Service Provision: Provider Level

MRK: In the next slide, I will talk about culturally competent service provision at the provider level. The first point is meeting the family where they are. This is a key concept for culturally sensitive service provision. This involves obtaining a good understanding of the family's culture, traditions, practices, and mores and to provide services proactively and creatively.

MRK: For example, one of the Afghan families that I was serving, the agency approached me and they said they are unwilling to bring their children to the physician for a specialist assessment and checkup. The agency asked me to speak with the family and sort of persuade them or convince them to do so. When I spoke to the family, they said, "Well, the physician is a person who identifies as a male, and we don't want our daughters to be seen by a male doctor."

MRK: Now, the challenge was that Kalamazoo where I'm based, it's a small community, and a female pediatrician of that specific specialty was just not available. One way was to take them outside Kalamazoo, but then we thought of it in a different way. I asked them if they would be willing to take their daughters in if I and another female advocate was also present during this visit and make sure that everything was okay. This approach helped the family understand how the system worked. Once they were comfortable, they were no longer afraid to take their children to the pediatrician.

MRK: The next important point is that it's common for refugee parents to not only lack English proficiency, but sometimes they're not even literate in their own native language. In this case, you or a cultural advocate could use your phone to record a message instead of sending a text, which we've done on many different occasions. If you don't speak their language, there are many different apps like LanguageLine or Tarjimly. They provide a hotline number that you can call and you can request language support on demand. These kind of apps are extremely useful.



MRK: The next point is that there's also immense value in identifying local terminology or idioms related to complex concepts like trauma and distress. For example, in Afghan culture, the word *tashweesh* is used in both Dari and Pashto to describe significant worry and anguish. Families can better understand what they are learning through culturally relevant terms and examples.

MRK: The last suggestion is for you to participate in professional development opportunities focusing on cultural humility. Frankly, there are so many different things that one can do to develop one's own cultural humility and responsiveness apart from formal training. Like reading books by different authors from different cultural backgrounds, listening to podcasts, watching international films, visiting cultural museums, exhibitions, learning about the history of different cultures, traveling, exploring your own culture, and questioning your own assumptions and biases.

MRK: The last one alone should be a great opportunity to learn and grow. There's a lot to say on this topic, and we can probably have a whole webinar dedicated to this alone, but time is short. So, I will hand it over to my colleague, Caroline. Thanks for listening.

Strengths-Based Approach

CD: Thank you, Maliha, and I love all your examples. Wonderful. Just continuing on, whether you come from the family's cultural background or if you don't, I think employing a strengths-based approach is absolutely crucial when you're fostering these kind of discussions related to parenting. One thing to remember—and this can be tough for some people if you have strong opinions—is that religious beliefs can be a strength for families, and it can be a protective resource for them. It's really important to be culturally sensitive when you're discussing some of these topics.

CD: Take time to really educate yourself on the religion of the family you work with. If you're not familiar with those kind of beliefs, it can really go a long way in promoting positive engagement with the family and to understand more about the motivation behind some of the practices that families are doing. If you're facilitating a program or an intervention, really think about the way the material is approached. Is it culturally appropriate for the people that you're serving? If it's not, maybe look into adapting the material by keeping the core message there, but also adapting the material so that it's delivered in a way that the families can find accessible.

CD: Something to keep in mind too though, with religious beliefs, is to avoid initiating those direct discussions, because that can be a highly sensitive subject for people. Remember that every family is different, so you can't make assumptions or generalizations about how they practice their faith. How one family practices Islam, for example, may be different from how another family does. Just keep that in mind when you're doing this. Even though it's encouraged to not initiate those direct discussions, families might want to bring them up anyway, which is okay.

CD: Providers should be trained on just how to manage those kind of discussions and any questions that might come up with their faith. I think something that I always like to say is just also to be culturally curious, and to be curious in an appropriate way when families are engaging in maybe a discussion about religion that you're not as familiar with. When it comes to cultural norms and religious practice, the provider's role is not to change anyone's beliefs or opinions, even if they strongly contradict what you believe in. It's not your place. You want to present opportunities for parents to learn evidence-based positive parenting strategies and to really help them understand the laws and norms surrounding caregiving in the United States.



CD: Something to keep in mind is that there really is a lot of inherent power dynamics that exist between refugees and between resettlement agencies or organizations that are working with them. They are assisting them with some complicated legal processes and resettlement processes. Families might feel intimidated with some of those power dynamics and might even give up their culture or acquiesce to things that they normally wouldn't simply do because they feel threatened by speaking up or asserting their own beliefs and practices and how it will negatively impact their immigration process.

CD: It's also important to remember that it might take a few times for some of this information to really sink in for families and to really be processed. Families are taking in a lot of information, and it can be very overwhelming. From a provider standpoint, it might be frustrating for you at times to be repeating information or tiring, but this is part of the process of resettlement and trauma-informed practice.

CD: In using a strengths-based approach, providers can identify the value and skills that each person brings and can utilize those observations and those things that they hear from parents to empower them. I think that it's important to really pay attention to what families are saying to you, and you can always bring those comments back later on.

CD: An example of an empowering statement for a parent—maybe the parent you were working with was talking about their goals for the future, and they really want their kids to go to college and to have a good education. Going back to that, if you're trying to engage the family with the education system, an example of an empowering statement that you could use is, “I can really see how much you value education when you told me about how much you want your child to go to college and how you want them to have a good education here. Your enthusiasm's going to go a long way to help you when you collaborate with their teachers.”

Education on U.S. Laws and Norms

CD: Going into that a little more specifically on education, so we'll move on to the next one, thank you. As I mentioned previously, most resettlement organizations provide short-term cultural orientations for new arrivals, but a lot of parents could benefit from more information on some of the policies that surround parenting in the United States. I have a couple of resources that I'm going to share in the chat, and they will also be shared at the end of the slides so that you guys can all see them and use them.

CD: I'll just talk through a few of them just now though, but we have a resource from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, and it will tell you more about the statutes in each state surrounding child welfare so that if you're educating a family on this, that you can provide accurate information. There's also many—I'm sure a lot of you have probably used USAHello. There's a lot of informative articles from USAHello on U.S. culture for newcomers.

CD: While these resources are important, some newcomer caregivers might not be literate in English or even in their native language if it's translated. It's important that you still are reading through these materials when you're educating instead of just handing them to families so that you can really process and talk through some of the concepts that are brought up. There's a lot of misconceptions right now of the child welfare system that can bring about fear in newcomer parents.

CD: It's really important to clearly explain to them the role of CPS and Child Protective Agencies to families. Every state has different policies. Really make sure—and as I said before in this resource that I'm going to send



in the chat in a moment that you can look through and see exactly what your state requires so that you can educate people appropriately.

CD: There's also another great resource that I'll be adding to this as well that is from the Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services. It provides some helpful information about common child welfare terminology and how it works and some common indicators of abuse. Additionally, Switchboard has a webinar or a program on foundations of mandatory reporting for refugee service providers that could be helpful as well. I'll make sure to just put some of these in chat. Oh, did it not go all the way? Let me try that again. Sorry, everyone. This will also be included in the end as well, like I mentioned before.

CD: Again, all states have laws surrounding public schools, as many of you are probably aware. Most all states, excuse me, have laws where children must attend public school or a state-approved program. Caregivers really should be aware of this. A lot of newcomer caregivers might not take this as seriously and not understand that it's a law. It's really important to discuss attendance issues with your families as well and how this can impact them.

CD: Caregivers also should learn their rights in the education system. That includes the right for them to ask for changes to their child's classes and activities as well as to help with any safety issues, like if the child is experiencing bullying. Also, explaining their cultural or dietary practices, explaining that to the administration and how to accommodate them can be a challenge for families. It's important to discuss that with them as well and how to approach those situations because most schools should be able to work with you on that.

CD: For example, Muslims do not consume pork or pork products, but some schools might only serve food like that one day a week or something. They might not serve any halal-based food. Parents really need to effectively communicate with the school to ensure that those dietary restrictions and also faith-based practices are being respected.

CD: Excuse me. I think another thing to keep in mind for organizations is to explore the capacity for some stronger partnerships between the organizations and the school. An example is that, in our program with our collaboration with an agency in Michigan is that the agency was really noticing a lot of parents were not very educated on what the school system looks like and a lot of incoming Afghan arrivals in particular. The agency actually partnered with the Lansing Public School District, and they held an "Afghan literacy night" is what they called it. Essentially they brought in a lot of Afghan families within the school system where they were able to learn from the teachers and learn more about what their kids are doing at the school, what the policies are. They even were able to partner with some health programs too, to come in to just provide a little bit of health knowledge too to the families. It was a really great turnout and a great program. If you have the capacity to do something like that, I think it's a great idea.

CD: Another thing to discuss with families is also just the norms around what's considered neglect. For example, leaving a child home alone without supervision could be against what your state statutes are, which again is in one of those resources that I sent there if you needed to look in specific spots. Caregivers should understand those policies before they do engage in anything like leaving a child unsupervised.

CD: It also would be worthwhile to educate parents about the threat of abuse in various settings because many refugees might come from community cultures where children are reared by the entire family, excuse me, and they might not be as familiar with some of the other settings where abuse could be seen, like in school settings, religious settings, and online. It could be very helpful to educate on these things.



Trauma-Informed Education on Child Behavior

CD: One other thing, of course, is trauma-informed education on child behavior. Newcomer families are facing numerous challenges in resettlement. Their experience is going to affect children and youth differently than adults. It's important to incorporate trauma-informed education with caregivers when you're discussing behavior management.

CD: Often, children who come to the U.S. who are refugees or immigrants, they might lack a sense of control due to not having a say in the decision to leave. This loss of control, among the other stressors of separating from loved ones and losing the place they call home, can lead to mental health symptoms. I'm sure many of you are familiar with some of these common symptoms, to train caregivers on what this might look like.

CD: These are some symptoms that are seen really at any age. Stomach aches or headaches, crying, fear or anxiety, sadness or hopelessness, nightmares, trouble sleeping, sleeping too much. Difficulty managing emotions and behaviors. Excuse me. It's really helpful if organizations can provide training to staff on distinguishing between what constitutes culture as opposed to trauma behavior. During the initial evacuation and the resettlement of Afghans, it was reported that some staff were struggling with identifying whether a child acting aggressively, for instance, was part of their culture and how they were reared when more often it was actually a symptom of their repeated and generational trauma.

CD: That is where I will end that section and we'll move on to a case study, which Maliha will share with us a little bit about, and then we will move on to a Q&A after we go through the case study. Thank you, Maliha. I'll pass it off to you again.

3. Applying What You Learned: Case Study: Amina

Case Scenario: Amina

MRK: Thank you very much, Caroline. Today we're going to talk about a case study, which is actually a composite, and it's based on a very real situation that occurred when I was working with an organization that supported foster parents that identified as Muslim. However, it does have elements of other refugee and immigrant foster parents and caregivers that I supported during my career, and these elements are there to aid our learning. Here's the case study.

MRK: Amina, an immigrant woman, married John, an American, when he was working in a country which has elements of Nigeria and Somalia. Raised in a conservative Muslim family, Amina adhered to traditional values where girls covered themselves; they were restricted from going out except for education or work and they did not freely mingle with males. Girls were also expected to help mothers with their housework or chores and so on. The couple had two daughters together, and later Amina accompanied John back to the U.S. with their now preteen daughters.

MRK: Upon returning to the U.S., though, Amina and John faced significant challenges in their marriage, primarily due to their starkly different child-rearing practices. In her home country, Amina's upbringing had involved strict guidelines on behavior and responsibilities for girls, which she tried to enforce with her own children. Conversely, John, who was raised in a liberal American family, had different child-rearing practices, allowing the children to stay out late, paying them for chores, which is a very common thing here in Western families.



MRK: For Amina, she found that absurd because she believed that chores should be part of the home responsibilities without monetary incentives. The children, as sometimes happens, often played their parents against each other, taking advantage of their different parenting styles. Tensions peaked when one of the daughters, she stayed out late at a friend's house and refused to come home when asked.

MRK: Amina was frustrated and adhering to her own cultural norms, she raised her hand to discipline her daughter. The daughter called her father, who yelled at Amina, further escalating the conflict. The friend's parent, who was witnessing this altercation, they called Child Protective Services. Although the CPS case was dismissed, it was a very traumatic experience for Amina, amplifying her sense of isolation and misunderstanding in her new environment.

MRK: Ultimately, the cultural and parenting conflicts led [to] Amina and John divorcing. Amina continued to face challenges in navigating the cultural landscape of parenting in the U.S., and despite these struggles, she at a later stage aspired to become a licensed foster parent, driven by her desire to provide a loving home to children in need. But when Amina applied to become a licensed foster parent, the licensing agency reached out to her now-grown children for feedback, who then recommended that Amina should get more education and they would not recommend her to get a foster care license without sending her through this education.

Discussion Question

MRK: That's the case study as we have it. We'll go on to Slido in the next slide, and please go to [slido.com](https://www.slido.com) and answer the question that's on your screen.

What is one parenting challenge that Amina faced as a newcomer caregiver in the U.S.?

MRK: Great. Gender role differences, yes. Lack of understanding in cultural practices. Lots of cultural differences between the two of them. Yes, understanding the U.S. norms, conflict in child discipline methods, cultural shock, very true. We see a lot of cultural differences. Yes, emotional issues, child care system understanding and reconcile her upbringing with the child welfare laws and so on. Yes. I think we have excellent feedback, great understanding of the case study.

MRK: Let's go on to the next slide. Let's continue the case study as to what thereafter happened.

Case Scenario: Amina (continued)

MRK: The agency took the feedback from her grown children seriously, and they decided to support Amina through a very tailored education program. The agency recruited a cultural ambassador to provide Amina with the necessary education. This ambassador was proficient in both her native culture and U.S. norms, offering a bridge between those two worlds. The education program for Amina included the following elements:

MRK: First, parental skills training. The ambassador educated Amina in effective parenting skills that were culturally sensitive and aligned with U.S. norms. This included positive disciplinary strategies and the importance of communication and understanding in the parent-child relationship. The cultural ambassador used a strengths-based approach, and the training emphasized recognizing and utilizing the strengths that Amina brought from her cultural background. Her resilience, a strong sense of responsibility, her commitment to family values—these were highlighted as assets in her role as a foster parent.



MRK: Amina also received ongoing mentoring from the cultural ambassador, who provided support and guidance as she navigated her new role. The mentorship included practical advice, emotional support, and strategies for dealing with cultural conflicts in parenting.

MRK: Understanding that Amina had experienced trauma, especially from the CPS incident, the program included education on trauma-informed care, and this helped Amina address her past experiences and provided her with the tools to support children who might have faced similar traumas. Through this very comprehensive and very culturally sensitive training, Amina gained a deep understanding of the expectations and norms surrounding parenting in the U.S.

MRK: She learned to integrate her cultural values with the requirements of the foster care system and created a harmonious approach to caregiving. Now, with these new knowledge and skills, Amina successfully obtained her foster care license, and she went on to provide a loving and supporting home to refugee youth, many of whom faced similar cultural challenges. Amina's journey highlights the importance of culturally sensitive education and support in helping immigrant and refugee parents navigate new parenting landscapes.

MRK: Amina's case underscores the critical need for cultural competence in social services, something that we have been talking about throughout this webinar. And by leveraging these systemic strategies, such as involving cultural ambassadors, and individual strategies like personalized mentoring and strengths-based education, we can help people like Amina transform their parenting approach. Her success story serves as an inspiration for other immigrant and refugee parents and caregivers striving to adapt new cultural norms while maintaining their cultural identities. Over to Caroline.

Discussion Question

CD: Thank you, Maliha. Thank you for sharing your example from your own work. Before we jump into the Q&A, we just want you guys to do one last Slido about,

What is one strategy you learned today that you can use when providing parenting education to newcomers?

CD: I know we had to go through some extensive material quickly, but hopefully we are giving you a little bit more of a jumping-off point to help you in engaging in these discussions.

CD: Getting to know the culture is absolutely important. Being sensitive, cultural ambassador, and explaining and asking questions of understanding, providing a comprehensive orientation, and using the cultural differences of parental strength. Wonderful. Creating culturally competent material for staff. Don't make assumptions, I love that. Bringing in an expert on the topic, yes, definitely for the staff. Don't take anything for granted. Providing workshop opportunities, absolutely. Active listening. Strengths-based approach. Yes. These are all great.

Q&A Panel

CD: Great. I'm so glad that you guys were able to get a little bit out of this training, but we still have a little bit of time to hear from our experts on the panel to answer any questions that you all have. One that I was looking at that I thought was interesting, and we can probably go ahead and jump into is,



How do you see the importance of a series of nurturing fatherhood program serving as a roadmap and guide while helping caregivers discover and cultivate their parenting potential—as a lot of Afghan newcomers have been affected with so many different factors, like cultural differences, language, justices, Islamic perspectives, and other socio-emotional conflicts?

CD: This is specifically about fatherhood programs. I guess I'd like to hear what your all thoughts [are] on the importance of engaging fathers into this discussion. Anyone wants to jump in?

MRK: Yes, Caroline. I could try to tackle that question. It's a complex question. It has many elements. I can speak in regard to refugees and newcomer parents from Muslim-identifying countries and many cultures in South Asia, Asia, Middle East. The mother is the one that is most closely involved in caregiving and parenting and so on. It's not to say that fathers are not involved, but in the daily day-to-day, providing the values and transmitting the norms, and so on, mothers are very deeply involved in child rearing.

MRK: That itself then becomes a cultural challenge because when you're bringing in the father to help in child rearing, it can be seen as a little bit of challenge in terms of culture. For example, I can talk about my own specific culture where fathers are more providers and they go outside, they work, whereas mothers are supposed to be the ones to take care of the kids and discipline them and so on.

MRK: Fathers are only brought in when the child is being extremely naughty and then the mother says, "Wait till your dad comes home. I'm going to complain to him." The father is more of the authority figure. That's something that we need to approach with great sensitivity when we are involving fathers in understanding U.S. parenting norms and so on. That itself can become a sensitive issue. We want to play it by the ear, and we want to be really sensitive to that specific culture and what role fathers play in the child rearing before we approach that.

CD: Yes, I definitely echo what you're saying. I think it's important in terms of just caregiving in general to have both parents, if there are two parents involved, to really be teaming up together because we don't want one parent who says one thing and then the other parent says another thing and then the kids get confused. There could be behavioral issues that come from that.

CD: I think it's very important to try to engage all caregivers. This can be very difficult, though, with a lot of newcomer families. We've just found in our own work that a lot of the fathers who are working here might work odd hours or they're working really a lot. The scheduling can be really hard if you wanted to connect with both parents on an issue or something. I really encourage everyone to just be flexible with your scheduling in terms of just even just logistically thinking about this problem.

CD: I think my main point here is that I think that bringing in fathers is a very important program. I like the idea that was brought up in the Q&A here. Does anyone have any other thoughts on that question?

CD: Another question that came up that I thought was interesting was,

[Are] there any organizations that provide information sessions about child care expectations or child care systems in the U.S.?

CD: I believe one of the resources I sent is from the B-R-Y-C-S or BRYCS. They cover that. I understand why that would be really important to have someone presenting this information. I know an agency that we've worked



with has partnered before with CPS or someone from the child welfare system who came in and literally presented on what the policies [are] and what are some of the common things that we need to be aware of when it comes to child welfare. I think partnering with these agencies is really important.

CD: I guess my question to the group too is just,

[Are there other ways that we can collaborate more efficiently with child welfare systems?](#)

CD: No other thoughts on that?

AM: I can jump in a little bit here to add, if that's okay. I think just something that we touched upon that I'm thinking about is really collaborating with local resources, because when it comes to child care expectations and laws, it changes and varies so much by your state and your environment. I like the idea of connecting with your local CPS offices or local social workers or local community-based organizations who are at the forefront of working alongside our child care system.

AM: I similarly am trying to go through my head of, okay, what are some local organizations that I have right down the street from me? They definitely vary. I don't know if that's a fully fleshed-out answer. It certainly can depend on where folks are living and where they're receiving resources and services or what access they have locally. Please feel free to add to that, my fellow colleagues.

CD: No, absolutely. I think a lot of—if we're wanting to just move on to the next question, I think most of the ones that I'm seeing in this chat are along the same theme about resources and lists of resources or organizations that people know of. We have,

[Are there resources on forms of discipline to recommend and encouraging dialogue and respect? Any resources on parenting classes and cultural ambassadors and also on just focusing on child safety?](#)

CD: In addition to the ones that I put into the chat, do you all have any other recommended resources that are out there that you would like to share with the group?

MRK: I don't have a list of resources right off the bat but from my experience working with newcomer refugee parents and families, the first thing I would do is to look around in my own community to figure out what community organizations are functioning in your local neighborhood or local community. That would be my first port of call.

MRK: I can give you an example because I primarily dealt with refugees that were from Muslim-identifying countries. My first port of call would always be the local Islamic center because for Muslims, the Islamic center is their center of their communities, the center of their social life and so on. If you want to source cultural ambassadors or you want to source that information or resources, then the first port of call should be the Islamic center. You could walk over there and speak to the imam and put your challenge to the imam, and then the imam could then locate the right person that could be able to help you with that specific challenge.

MRK: For example, somebody asked a question that, "Where can we get cultural ambassadors, for example?" In an Islamic center, say, for example, in an Islamic center in Detroit, you would have the Somali community,



you would have the Nigerian community, you'd have the Syrian community, you'd have the Afghan community. All of them would congregate there, especially on Fridays.

MRK: The imam would generally get to know which communities are represented. He or she would be able to help with that, the imam or the committee head or the president. They would be able to help locate the right person. I'm sure with other communities as well, there would be those centers where either it would be the religious center or it would be a community center where the community congregates to.

MRK: That should be your first port of call if you're trying to source cultural ambassadors, those help with, say, translators or even experts who identify with that specific culture, but then they could come over to your agency and provide that training or just advise or help, answer questions, talk to the clients that you are serving. These informal resources have been extremely useful in my experience. Those informal resources have been really useful. We've been able to source mentors, we've been able to source experts on different areas, legal experts who also identify with the culture that we are serving. There's immense potential in approaching community organizations.

AM: I can just add to that. Thank you, Maliha. That was great. I'm also thinking in addition to the community-based organizations, some more informal resources might be—I think even someone might've mentioned this in the chat—libraries, schools. I know a great way that we've, in the past, tried to connect with communities is through WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, things like that, connecting with the community leaders. Again, access to resources and organizational support, agency support can vary so much since some of those informal resources we can tap into are great support systems as well.

CD: Yes, thank you. I also just want to echo something that someone did say in the chat as well about child welfare specifically. I think this is a great point that it can be helpful to also ask child welfare agencies where their cultural gaps are. How can we benefit from each other, like having a reciprocal relationship and working with child welfare? How can we help each other learn from each other? This could really help maintain that relationship and lead to a more successful engagement, as our attendee wrote here, so thank you. I think that that's probably all the time we have right now for questions, unfortunately.

Conclusion

Reviewing Learning Objectives

CD: Thank you, everyone, for coming. We love to present on this information, and we hope that you were able to learn something. Again, just to go back to our learning objectives, we hope you were able to identify some of those common challenges that you see for newcomer parents and how it affects parenting skills; describe the impacts of culturally sensitive and strengths-based conversations; as well as apply trauma-informed strategies when educating newcomer caregivers on some of these laws, norms, and on behavior management.

Recommended Resources

CD: I do want to point out too that we, again, have some recommended resources so you can go beyond this webinar to learn more about this topic and how we can help our families.



Stay Connected

CD: Thank you again for all who engaged. We just hope that you can continue to engage and stay connected with Switchboard. We have a survey at the end that we would love for if you have a couple of seconds to just answer, it would be very helpful for us to learn how we can do better in our webinars and what's working well and what's not. Thank you so much.

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