

September 26, 2024

# Understanding Psychosocial Support Groups

Three Successful Models

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**switchboard**  
connecting resettlement experts



# Today's Speakers



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# Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1

## **Explain**

the essentials of initiating newcomer psychosocial support groups, including structuring, resourcing, and facilitating groups

2

## **Analyze**

three different models of psychosocial support groups, including their successes and challenges



1

# **Psychosocial Support Group Fundamentals**

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**In one word, what does mental health and psychosocial support mean to you?**

**i** Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



# Mental Health

A state of well-being in which every individual:

- Realizes their own potential,
- Can cope with the normal stressors of life,
- Can find productive and fruitful engagement, and
- Can contribute to their community.



# Psychosocial Well-being

A state of wellness that emphasizes the connection between psychological factors:

- Mood, attitudes, beliefs, motivation, etc.

... and social factors:

- Financial well-being, relationships, ability to meet basic needs, sense of connection, etc.



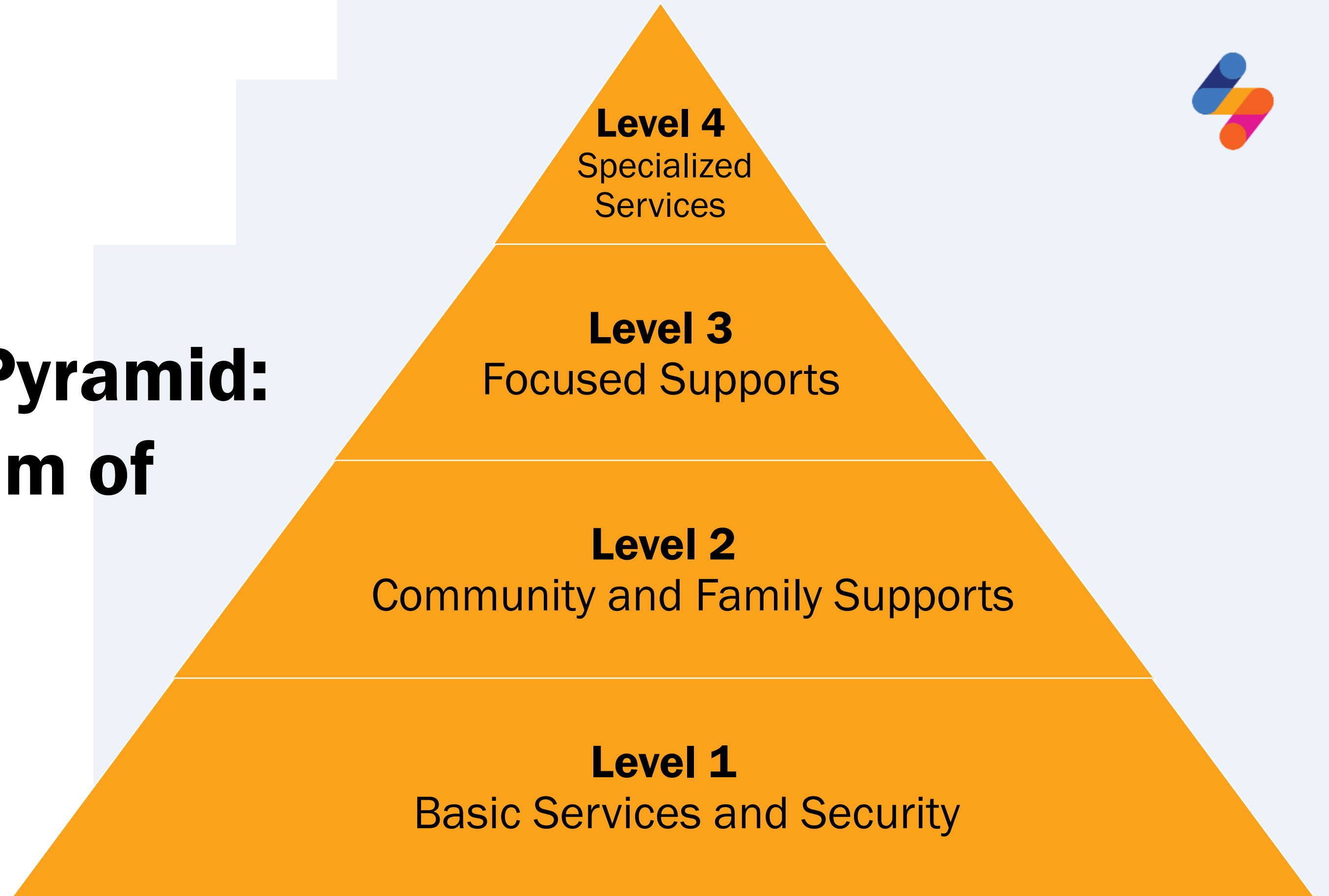
# **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)**

Composite term for any type of support that aims to prevent or treat a mental disorder, and/or protect or promote psychosocial well-being





# MHPSS Pyramid: Continuum of Support





# Psychosocial Support Groups

Purposeful gathering of individuals in groups to:

- Promote connection (social factors)
- Relieve stress (psychological factors)



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**Why should resettlement agencies run psychosocial support groups?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



# Why Run Psychosocial Support Groups?

- **Fill gaps** in traditional mental health services and provide care for clients on waitlists
- **Increase capacity** by serving many people at once and/or those ineligible for other services
- Deliver greater **cultural and linguistic accessibility** and compatibility
- Foster **social support** and **shared experience**

# Types of Groups



## Curriculum-Based

Structured set of topics, covered in a pre-determined order



## Topic-Focused

Discussion on specific topics, often identified by participants



## Open Forum

Most flexible; discussion based on interests that emerge during the meeting





# Structuring Groups



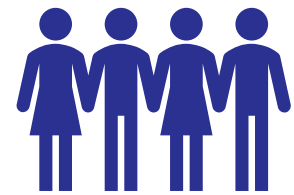
## Group Type

- Curriculum-based, topic-focused, or open forum



## Frequency

- Weekly, monthly, etc.
- Ongoing or time-limited



## Participants

- Age, language, gender, etc.
- Open or closed group



## Location

- In-person, remote, hybrid,
- Rotating or consistent



## Facilitators

- Cultural match or not



## Resources

- Funding source, staff time, etc.



# Group Facilitators

- Resettlement staff
- MHPSS staff
- Peers or community members
- Volunteers
- And more



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**What skills are important for group facilitators to have?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



# Essential Facilitation Skills

- Active listening
- Building trust
- Creating and maintaining safety
- Time management
- Encouraging engagement and participation
- Conflict and crisis management

# Resourcing Groups



## Staff Time and Training

Funding additional staff or planning time for current staff



## Overcoming Barriers

Transportation, child care, linguistic accessibility, etc.

## Program Materials and Location

Curriculum, supplies, incentives, etc.

## Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy

Pre-/post-assessments and feedback mechanisms



2

# Three Successful Models





# Attachment Vitamins

International Rescue Committee (IRC), Sacramento



# Group Description

## Attachment Vitamins

- **Helps caregivers of children 0–5 years old learn about:**
  - Child development
  - Impact of stress and trauma
  - Possible meanings of the child's behaviors
- **Promotes secure attachment and safe socialization practices**



# Group Details

## Attachment Vitamins



### Group Type

Curriculum based

### Participants

Newcomer caregivers from diverse backgrounds with children ages 0–5

### Facilitators

2 IRC staff from the community wellness team

### Frequency

10 sessions  
90 minutes each  
Held weekly

### Location

Virtual and in-person at the IRC Sacramento office

### Resources

Grant funded



# Strengths and Challenges

Attachment Vitamins

## Strengths:

- Facilitators with shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds with participants

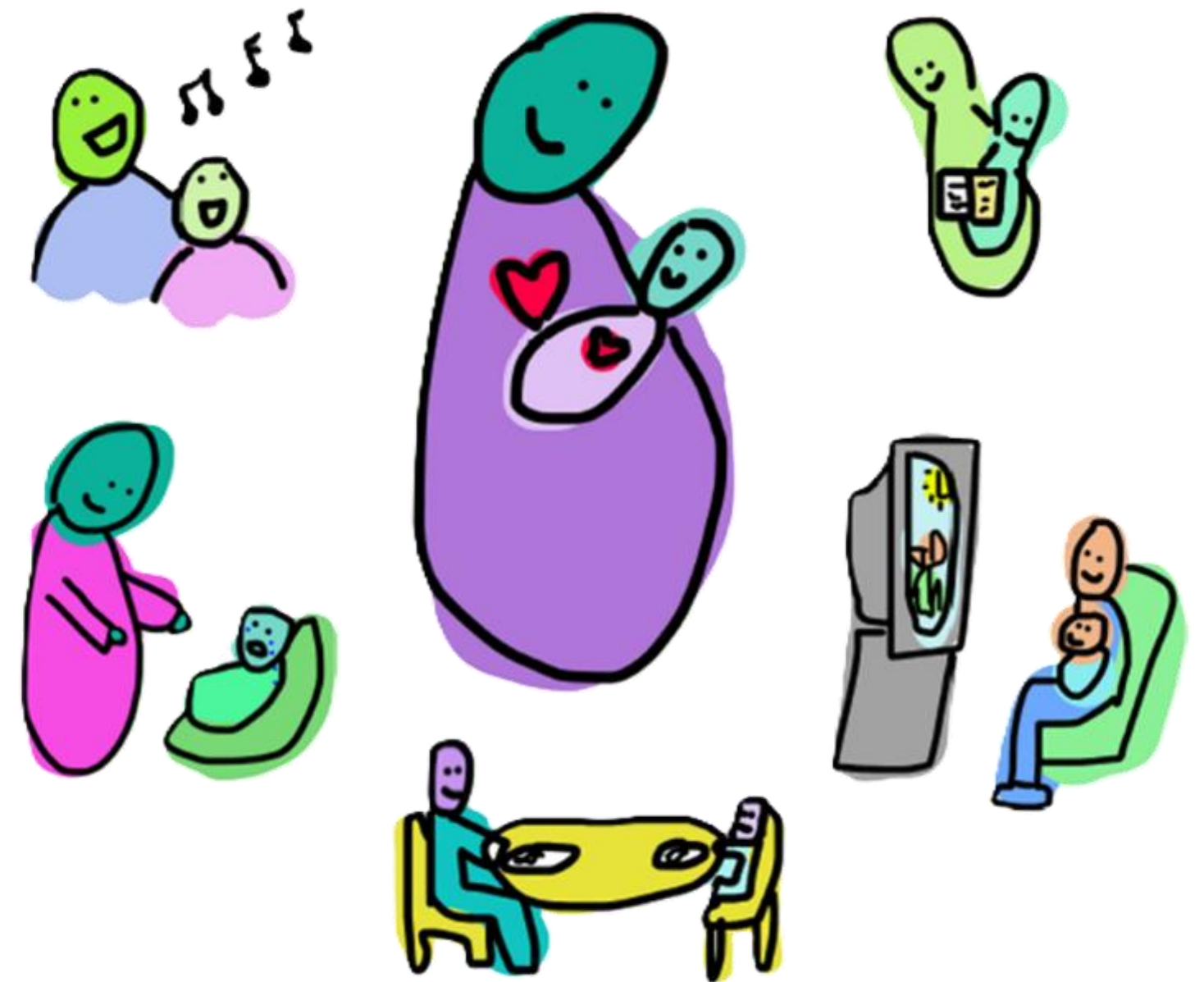
## Challenges:

- Trauma reactions of participants
- Limited resources for cultural and linguistic adaptation of materials
- Low literacy levels of participants
- Availability of mental health providers

# Addressing Barriers

## Attachment Vitamins

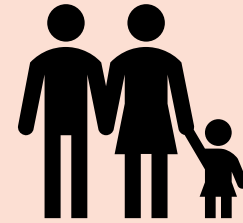
- Used more visual aids and interactive activities
- Created a safe, judgment-free environment
- Advocated for mental health resources
- Relied on teamwork!



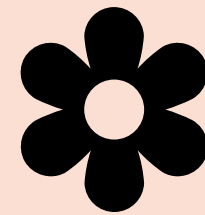


# Results

## Attachment Vitamins

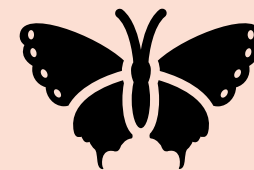


**77 caregivers** of children 0–5 years old engaged



### **Improved caregiver well-being:**

*“During these courses, I learned to be more calm with children so that my stress and theirs would be less.”*



### **Participants cited stronger relationships as an outcome:**

*“The quality of interactions with my children was good before, but now [it’s] better!”*





# Maternal Support Group

International Rescue Committee (IRC), San Diego





# Group Description

## Maternal Support Group

A supportive, community-centered program that aims to provide women with the knowledge and skills to:

- improve their physical and mental well-being
- navigate health supports and services to meet their maternal health needs



# Group Structure

## Maternal Support Group



### Group Type

Topic focused

### Participants

Afghan and Haitian women with young children or currently pregnant

### Facilitators

Different speakers each month

### Frequency

Once per month  
Ongoing

### Location

Hybrid- In person at the Women's Resilience Center and online

### Resources

Grant funded



# Addressing Barriers

## Maternal Support Group

### ■ Buy-in and Participation

- Facilitator with shared cultural and linguistic background with participants

### ■ Child Care

- Provided activities and supervision for children

### ■ Transportation

- Funding for Lyft rides
- Working with a local nonprofit to get car seats

### ■ Survey Completion

- Offered verbal surveys to pre-literate women



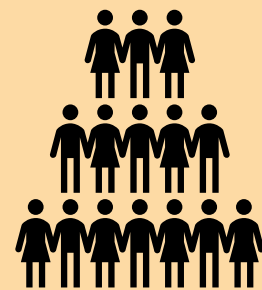


# Results

## Maternal Support Group



**100%** of participants reported being “**satisfied**” or “**highly satisfied**” with the program



Record-breaking attendance with **over 40 attendees** at a single session



Due to the program’s success, **three population-specific groups** will run next fiscal year





# Self-Defense Classes

International Rescue Committee (IRC), San Diego





# Group Description

## Self-Defense Classes



- Women learned **self-defense skills** to increase their feelings of **empowerment**
- Began as part of a research project with a local university
- Alignment with Women's Resilience Center's mission to empower women

# Group Details

## Self-Defense Classes



### Group Type

Topic focused

### Frequency

Weekly

6 months duration

### Participants

Women of any country of origin, immigration status, and time resettled

### Location

In person at the Women's Resilience Center

### Facilitators

Trained martial arts professional

### Resources

Resources provided by a researcher at a local university





# Addressing Barriers

## Self-Defense Classes

- **Building interest and participation**
  - Included pictures of the activities to increase awareness
  - \$50 incentive for one class
- **Potential for re-traumatization**
  - Trauma-informed instructor
  - Built trust and feelings of safety







“I learned a lot and really enjoyed the self-defense class. We learned what to do in a bad situation, and we learned different techniques like boxing, kicking, and other defense techniques. If something happens on the way or somewhere, we can defend ourselves. Thank you.”

**Anonymous Participant**

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**What types of groups are you most interested in starting at your agency?**

**i** Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.





# Questions?

Type your question in the **Q&A**

Click **thumbs-up**  to vote for others' questions





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# Help us help you!

Scan the QR code or click the link in the chat to access our feedback survey!

- Five questions
- 60 seconds to complete
- Helps us improve future training and technical assistance



# Recommended Resources



## Switchboard:

- Webinar: [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\): Foundations for Resettlement Caseworkers](#) (2024)
- Evidence Summary: [What is the impact of peer support groups on refugees' mental health?](#) (2024)

## Center for Adjustment, Resilience, and Recovery (CARRE):

- Guide: [Essential Concepts and Best Practices in Delivering MHPSS to People Who Have Experienced Forced Displacement](#) (2022)

## HIAS:

- Toolkit: [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) Curriculum](#) (2021)

## U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI):

- Tip Sheet: [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Groups with Afghans](#) (2024)

## National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM):

- Toolkit: [Mothers X Mothers Health Meetups Facilitation Guide](#) (2022)





# Stay Connected



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