

Refugee Loss Simulation

SET UP & SUPPLIES:

Provide each participant 16 small slips of paper—four each of four different colors (this example uses orange, green, blue, purple). Place some sort of **basket or small plastic containers** on each table to serve as trash cans. Have tissues available to give as needed, but don't mention having them.

All participants must be seated at tables with a pen or pencil or have clip boards as a writing surface. Family members and/or best friends should not sit together.

INSTRUCTOR:

The instructor should be someone who understands the refugee story well and has stories to tell during this activity that have a ring of truth. This activity is most effective when the instructor is telling his or her own stories about refugees that are friends. If the instructor cannot say, "I know a refugee who..." then he or she should say, "I know of a refugee who..." or "I heard a story about a refugee who..." **Before doing this activity, the participants should learn about refugees, what their journey is like, statistics, how they come to live in the U.S., etc.**

INSTRUCTIONS:

Give participants a packet of papers, make sure everyone has pens.

Say: "Please separate your papers into four piles by color. Purple, Green, Blue, Orange"

You need to make these points before you begin:

1. *It is hard for us, as people who live in a country that is in our lifetime untouched by war on our land to understand the loss that a refugee suffers. Not to negate the trauma of 9/11, but that was not an outbreak of war. This exercise is designed to help us grasp the realities of other peoples who live in war torn lands.*
2. *This exercise is not easy, and it is not designed to be. If you are a person who has suffered tremendous trauma in your life, or if a professional has ever suggested that you might suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, PTSD, please do not participate, but just watch this activity. But do not opt out because you don't want to feel uncomfortable.*
3. *This is a PERSONAL activity. You will not share what you write with anyone.*
4. *When this becomes uncomfortable, please resist the urge to laugh or make jokes to lessen the discomfort.*

CATEGORIES:

Say: *I will give you some categories and ask you to think of four things in each category. There are four colors of paper and four categories. Each one has specific instructions and restrictions. The colors themselves are not significant, they are simply to designate the categories. You will write **one item on each paper** in each category.*

1. **Purple** Things You Enjoy. *Write on your purple papers examples of things you enjoy. (i.e., dinner at your favorite restaurant, fishing, hiking, playing or watching sports, reading, video games, shopping, etc.) Wait until everyone is finished before you move on. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.*
2. **Green:** *Ways You Identify Yourself or Roles You Play In Life.* On your green papers write examples of ways you identify yourself (i.e., spouse, parent, student, teacher, athlete, tutor, soccer coach, team leader, etc.)
RESTRICTION: Instruct participants to **NOT** include anything about faith. For people of faith, this is a significant identity, but for the purpose of this activity, it should not be included.
Wait until everyone is finished. Instruct participants to **place their papers back in a pile upside down on the table.**
3. **Blue:** Physical Possessions That Are Most Valuable To You. (Not necessarily greatest monetary value, but things that you value. Give examples from your life (i.e., house, pets, technology, the Bible you inherited from your grandfather, car, jewelry, tools, etc.)
RESTRICTIONS: These items must be things you can see and touch and feel. (Not ethereal things like "My Education" or "My Tenacity." **Pets can be included. People cannot be included.**
Wait until everyone is finished. **Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.**
4. **Orange:** The Four Most Important People in Your Life. These must be by name, **write one name on each card.**
RESTRICTIONS: People must be living. No collective nouns are allowed (i.e., parents, children, siblings, etc.)

Wait until everyone is finished. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.

5. Have participants put down their pens. Make sure everyone has their stacks of papers upside down and separate on the table in front of them. **Remind participants of these things:** (1) This is a PERSONAL activity. You will not share what you write with anyone. (2) When this becomes uncomfortable, please resist the urge to laugh or make jokes to lessen the discomfort.

SELECTED LOSS:

Say this: *Refugees make heartbreaking decisions when violence breaks out and they have to flee their homes. You will have 30 seconds to **choose one paper from each stack that you will lose.** Tear up the slips that you chose and discard them in your basket. **Put the remaining three papers from each stack upside down in stacks in front of you as you finish.***

Instructor: *Ready, Set, go.* Count down 30 seconds and tell participants to hurry (For example, yell out, “15 seconds! Hurry!”)

Say this: *Fleeing your home because of war is a horrible experience. Someone give me one word—and one word only—to explain how that made you feel.*

Instructor: Take answers.

Say: *“Refugees around the world flee homes and villages on a regular basis having to choose whether they take their family photos, clothes, or scripture books.”*

A true story: *I know of a young mom from Burma:*

The young Burmese mom was at home enjoying the day with her three-year-old daughter while her seven-year-old son was across their town at school. Her husband was out working when she heard the sounds of war. An army had attacked their town, guns and explosions rang out from the direction of the school. This young mom had to make a horrible choice. Frantically she considered her choices, “Do I take my daughter and run to the school to find my son—knowing that we all may be killed in the process? Do I run away with my daughter to keep us both safe and hope my son survives? Do I give my daughter to my neighbor and let them run away while I find my son, knowing that I might not find my daughter again? Should I look for my husband? Oh what should I do??”

When people are fleeing violence, they make decisions that most of us cannot imagine having to make.

UNKNOWN LOSS: Make sure all piles are turned over in front of each participant.

Say this: *“From this point forward, you will not look at anything written on any of your papers until I instruct you to do so.”* (Say it again for emphasis.)

“Without looking at what is written on any of your papers, take the piece of paper that is in the middle of each pile and throw them away—without looking at anything written on any of the papers.”

Say this: *“Refugees live with the unknown—sometimes for a short time and sometimes forever. How does it feel to not know what you have lost? Someone give me one word to explain how this made you feel?”* (Take answers.)

“The Burmese mom chose to take her daughter and run away with her neighbors in the hopes of staying alive. Once they came to a place of safety, she left her daughter with her neighbors and filled with anguish went back to look for her son—not knowing if he had been taken, killed or injured. It had been several hours since the attack. She had no idea what had happened to her son or her husband. She found her son—slightly injured, but OK. She couldn’t find her husband. Her home was destroyed. She returned to the place of safety to tell her children of their father’s loss and they departed for a refugee camp. This mom and two children lived for two years in the refugee camp before the father made his way there. Imagine sitting in a refugee camp for two years not knowing if your father, mother, brother, husband or wife is alive or hidden away somewhere else. Not knowing if your home still stands or if there will be anything to return to in your

hometown. Imagine the thoughts, questions, concerns. Refugees live with the unknown—sometimes for a short time and sometimes forever.”

LOSS OF CONTROL:

Make sure all piles are face down in front of each participant. Tell a story about a refugee who lost possessions and family members along the journey.

As you tell the story, walk around the room (or have someone else walk around) removing papers from in front of people. If possible, have other people take the papers away while you focus on telling the story.

Always leave at least one “people” (Orange) paper.

For some people leave only two papers, for a few, leave three.

In a couple of instances walk past someone and don't take anything only to return and take from them as well later.

A true story: *“I know of a man from Iraq who told the story of when his family had to flee. He was about eight years old when his parents decided that they needed to get out of Iraq. They had the resources to leave the country and take a boat to India. The family filled their car with their prized possessions—the trunk, under the seats, to the rooftop.*

They had to drive across a long desert road, which would take two days. They set out on this desert road and soon came to a check point where armed soldiers forced them to stop their car and get out. The soldiers went through the family's possessions and kept what they wanted. Then they told the family to get back into the car and keep going.

Over the next two days, the family came to check point after check point, and the same thing happened every time.

Sometimes the soldiers were very mean and aggressive. The family was terrified, desperate to get to the end of that road.

By the time they reached the last check point, there was nothing of great value left to be taken, but the soldiers forced the family to unpack their clothes and final few belongings. The soldiers became angry when there was nothing they wanted.

At gunpoint, they told the father and oldest sister to stand aside and they began to push the rest of the family—the mother, the son and the younger daughter—back into the car.

Everyone began shouting and crying. The father spoke loudly, instructing his family to be quiet. And then he begged the soldiers to allow his oldest daughter to leave with her mother, but they refused.

Dejected, the father instructed his wife, son, and younger daughter to leave without them and through tears told his son to take care of his mother and sister. Distaught and fearing for their lives, they drove away.

The mom, son and young daughter were able to leave Iraq on a boat, they went to India, and eventually came to the United States. These events happened over 20 years ago, but this family has never found any information about the father or the sister. The family assumes that they are dead and prays that they did not suffer before their lives were ended.

That is only one refugee family's story. There are tens, hundreds of thousands more just as, or even more, horrifying.

Say this: *How did it feel for you to sit and have things taken right in front of you? Someone give one word to explain how you feel. (Take answers.)*

“Now you have some time to look at your papers to see what/who you are left with. Usually this is very difficult.”

Ask again for **one word** to explain how this makes them feel.

“When we come to the table to serve in a refugee community, we bring wisdom, knowledge, and experience that a refugee does not have. But a refugee also brings wisdom, knowledge, and experience that we do not have. We must value them and their experiences. Although you have not actually lost anything, hopefully you have gained a better understanding of

what refugees around the world go through. When everything is stripped away, it's easier to see our similarities rather than our differences. I pray this has helped you to do that. And when you see the news reports, read the negative facebook posts, I pray that your heart will recall this experience and lift up the hurting ones up in prayer. Thank you for participating."