



Build Connections

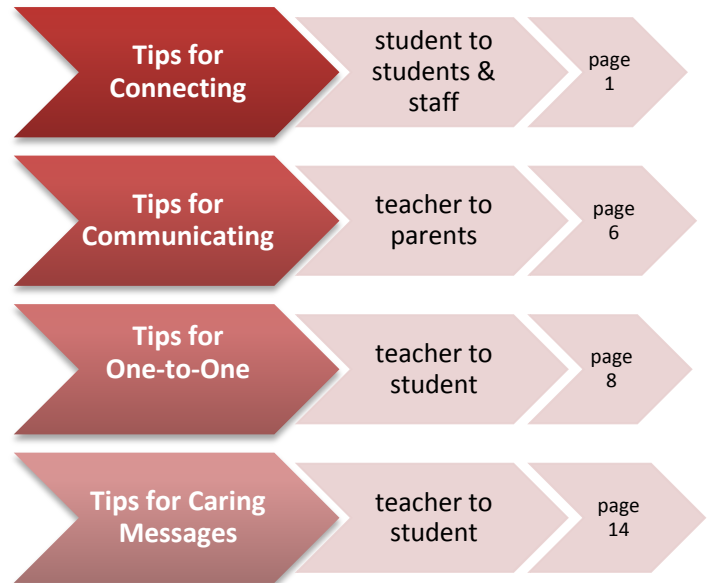
Effective approaches for supporting students with refugee backgrounds emphasize building, or re-building, safe relationships.

School staff members play a vital role as safe and caring adults.

Building safe connections for students with refugee backgrounds is foundational to success in the classroom and in the school system.

Teachers were asked how they build connections:

- with the student, especially in the first few months?
- with the student’s family?
- between the student and other students with similar backgrounds?
- between the student and first-language English speakers?
- between the student with other staff?
- for the student and family with community services?



Tips for Connecting: Build Connections		Tips from Other Teachers
Connecting with the student (Teacher to Student)		
	I meet with the family to gain an understanding of past and current living and education situations. I research the countries and cultural/religious information and a few words in their native language (hello, thank you and goodbye etc.).	
	I made sure I met new students at the door every day until they felt more settled	
	I work to find out what is unique about each child and give that child a chance to shine.	
	During the first few months of school, I try to praise each child as much as I can. Sometimes this can be difficult if the student is having a hard time adjusting but even the littlest thing can be brought to light. There is a school of thought that suggests that too much praise can be detrimental, but I feel for the first little while these students need to hear a lot of positive comments about their work.	
	This may sound too simple but a smile and a friendly face go a long way. Humour is also a key element to creating a bond with these students. I try not to let a day go by that we all haven't laughed together.	
	To establish the trust: I do what I say I will do (e.g., if I tell a student that I will help him or her get a pair of mitts, I make sure to bring him or her a pair of mitts)	

	To establish a positive relationship: I show interest in the student; I praise the student for good choices, unique abilities, ...; I actively listen to what the student is or not telling me; I demonstrate to the student that I understand what they are experiencing; I ask them questions about things they might not want to ask or be aware of; and I regularly let them know that I am there to support them.
	I remain calm no matter what. I make sure to focus on solutions rather than on the problem.
	Sometimes eating lunch in a quiet space with one or two students during the week and just having that one-to-one time is enough. Sometimes, it's making time to read with the student individually.
	For the most part creating and building a relationship with these students has to be done instinctively and on an individual basis.
	I work to avoid pre-judgments and putting time-limits on relationships.
	I try to avoid delving into the students' past unless they specifically bring it up.
Connecting with Other Students with Refugee Backgrounds (Student to Student)	
	If at all possible, I find someone who speaks their language.
	For the first month of school we also have option time which is basically just play time. The students can build with Legos, do puzzles or play simple board games. This is a time when we just have fun together and they can start building relationships with each other as well. For some of these students playing constructively with each other (e.g., taking turns, sharing) is a skill that they have not yet developed.
	I use cooperative learning strategies as much as possible. This seems to facilitate peer connections.
	Students treated each other like a family within the classroom and were very accommodating and welcoming to new students for the most part. Building a climate where everyone is welcomed and safe is key to trust.
	At our school students each have a buddy to show them around and help them out.
	We use whole class activities that all students can succeed at. We encourage students to bring photos or artifacts from home that make them feel safe and can open conversation with others.
	We teach students to understand that everyone's opinion is valuable even if different from their own.
	I always find something to praise each student for and share with the class, so it becomes natural to feel part of a team.
	We take photos of every student in the classroom, place the picture beside our world map, and use a string to connect the picture to the student's home land. Beside the student's picture we write "hello" in their home language.
	We have a separate recess time at first to allow students to build relationships within the small class at first. Some students were ready sooner to integrate with the larger study body than others.
	On the first day of class, I ask a second year student (from a refugee background) to partner with a new student and be their ambassador for the week. This student would make sure the new students understood how to work the washrooms and help with lunchtime and recess routines.

	We take photos of every student in the classroom for our attendance wall. New students get a chance to see themselves as part of the group right away.
	During class time, I allow for a lot of partner time where students are able to interact with one another in a structured environment.
	We use after school activities designed for refugee and immigrant students to build connections.
	I also find that students from refugee backgrounds all seem to play together at recess and sit together at lunchtime. I believe they feel safest with each other.
Connecting with English-speaking students (Student to Student)	
	This can be difficult in a school that has a high percentage of English Language Learners.
	We use after-school activities designed for all students (e.g., soccer) to foster connection.
	For most students this came naturally as they wanted to learn to speak English. Giving students time to integrate with English speaking students is essential as each needs to come out at a natural pace for themselves.
	I try to encourage the students to join lunchtime clubs so they can interact with other students. I created a knitting club that I opened up to my class of students from refugee backgrounds and other grade 5/6 students and that seems to have helped.
	Our school also has “family grouping” time once a month when students are grouped together from across the grades to explore the philosophies of the Circle of Courage. During this time students from refugee backgrounds are grouped with students from all different grades and are encouraged to interact and do projects together.
Connecting with other adults in the building (Other School Staff to Student)	
	Our classroom policy is open the doors and welcome everyone into the classroom. Many adults within the school have the same fears as the students about culture and language. I believe that I can help provide understandings of the background of my students to other staff. This can help them empathize and understand the students’ behavior. I think that we need to be passionate about our students’ needs within the building and community!
	I am very lucky to work in a school with an amazingly inclusive staff. We continue to have staff development around the needs of students with trauma backgrounds. Our staff go out of their way to connect to my students during recess and during school “family grouping” times.
	I use formal and informal introductions, when appropriate, I will let the student know something personal about the teacher that might be of interest to the student (e.g., if I know the student likes animals, I might tell the student that this teacher has a dog named Rufus). My goal in doing so is to engage both individuals with each other; giving them something to talk about.
	We always had an open door policy in the classroom so the students would get used to people coming and going and I always introduced them one at a time to visitors until they knew who different people were.
	When talking to a student, I will sometimes put in a good word in relation to a staff member (e.g., I might say to the student that he can always talk to this person because she was born in a different country and so she really understands the challenges of adapting to Canada). The goal in doing so is to support the student with broadening his

	or her support system. This also gives the student some control about when to reach out for help.
	We would create individual projects in the classroom (e.g., like your dream home) and have teachers come in and judge the work of the students one lunch hour. The students would present their work, and the teachers, who had no formal connection to the class, would get a chance to meet the students. These students might well be in their classes in a few years.
	I made sure to introduce the students and their parents to the principal, vice principal and school secretaries. These would be key people in the students' lives at the school.
	We have pictures of all of the staff, and their names one of our hallways. This seems to help students eventually know who is who in the school.
Connecting with individuals and services in the community (Family-Service Providers)	
	Once I began to understand a student's needs, I would use the teams offered through the my school board to gain resources for students and their families. There is a wealth of knowledge within our system.
	When students first arrive they are usually connected to a refugee serving agency. We work closely with the agency's workers to ensure the students' and families' needs are being met. If the families are not connected to any agency we ask the multicultural diversity workers to help out with any services that the family needs.
	We connect students either through extra-curricular activities (i.e., interest based), support with employment, or based on needs (e.g., student who needs funding to continue attending high school).
	"You are only as strong as how well networked you are and the resources you know beyond yourself" (Edna Sutherland, 2011.)
Connecting with parents (Teacher to Parent)	
	For me, home visits worked well. Most parents welcomed me to visit and all really want their child to succeed. They often were feeling like they had lost some control as their child learned English and Canadian ways, so having an interpreter along and reassuring them was very important. I always brought a photo along of their child working in the classroom and parents immediately put it up on the wall as a symbol of its importance. Parents needed to know that there were no secrets around what I was teaching and what their child was doing at school, that they were partners.
	I also invited parents into the classroom, many times they wanted to stay and share their skills (cooking or weaving).
	I was fortunate that I was able to have a reading time at the beginning of the day. Parents were allowed to come to read to their children. We tried to find multilingual or picture books to make this successful.
	One year we had a luncheon where families brought food from their home countries. We set it up in the gym. This was highly successful with families with refugee backgrounds. Everyone was an expert in their own ethnic food.
	We try to make house visits when we can and if necessary with an interpreter present.
	Face-to-face meetings at their home, at school, or in the community (e.g., at particular functions or at their Church) were good ways to connect. Over time I have found that regular calls, even for sharing good news was important to families.

<p>It is often difficult to connect to the parents as they have a difficult time getting to the school for interviews because of work schedules, transportation or lack of navigation skills. Speaking to parents over the phone is also difficult as an interpreter is usually needed and is not always available. We had someone from a local refugee serving agency to act as a liaison between the home and the school.</p>

Tips for Communicating: Meeting with Parents or Caregivers with Refugee Backgrounds	
Before you begin:	
	Best Method? Reflect upon the best way of communicating this information. Is it best to meet in person? With a translator? With a member of the community as support?
	Be sensitive to your “position of authority.” Remember that the person you are meeting may have been hurt by former authority figures. Consider seating that is on the same level, building rapport before rushing into conversations, making sure that the environment is comfortable, free from distractions, surprises, etc.
	Time. Build in more time than you think might be necessary for the interaction.
	Stay calm. Understand that your emotional state will communicate messages of danger or safety. These messages are easier to pick up than English conversation, and very apparent for people who are sensitive to possible threat. Avoid feeling rushed or anxious. Take enough time to start in a calm state and maintain a calm state.
	Resilience. Remember that the person in front of you is resilient in ways that we yet do not know. Avoid confusing resilience with current circumstance or intelligence with English language skills.
	The Value of School. Remember the value that refugee families often place on school as “the way to get a better life.” Tap into the family’s strengths around education (e.g., economic mobility, hope for the future).
	Be explicit. Is the reason for the meeting clear? Does the parent or caregiver have an understanding of the parent role in schooling (e.g., come to meetings, support homework activities, ask questions) (See also Raising Children Handbook for expectations around roles, etc.)
	Consider “switching heads”. Imagine yourself in the same position in another country. What would help you?
During the interaction:	
	Speak slowly . Pitch of voice, rhythm, rate of speech, emphasis and emotions vary among cultures.
	Speak clearly .
	Vocabulary: Keep your vocabulary and sentences direct and simple. If using a translator, pause every 8-10 seconds to allow the translator to translate. If using a translator, address communication to the family.
	Avoid the use of metaphors, jargon, popular sayings or complicated terminology.
	Use examples to illustrate your point.
	Allow time for a response.
	Use visuals (diagrams, photographs, etc.) whenever possible. Link verbal and visual cues.
	Write down key information (points, details) and give the participants a copy.
	Acknowledge and support the other person’s efforts to communicate.
	Check for comprehension frequently. Ask, “What did you understand me to say?” “Tell me, please, what I said” “What does that mean to you?”
	Repeat and paraphrase patiently. (…more)

	Understand that smiling can be agreement or apprehension or politeness.
	Understand that silence can be non-acceptance or disapproval or agreement.
	Avoid making assumptions about people and resist stereotyping.
	Short: Make sessions short and concise. Communicating across languages is tiring.
	Be patient.
	Invite exchange of cross-cultural information . For example “I am interested to know more about how you view this in your family” instead of ignoring or avoiding. Consider, “Who would you like to be part of this process?”; “What do you think are the reasons for this?”; “Do you agree with the recommendations or the plan?”
	Support follow-up. Provide a list of agreed-up follow-up activities using clear language. Provide your contact information. Consider supporting the family to organize administrative papers and appointments into a binder. This binder, belonging to the parents or caregivers, can be brought to other meetings. This can help to reduce duplication of services, clarify directions for involvement, and prioritize services.
<p>Adapted from: BC Ministry of Education (2009). Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools” citing Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Cross-Cultural Communication,” pages 14-16; and Calgary Health Region (2010). “Cultural Competency Check Card “ adapted from West Australia Transcultural/Mental Health Centre, “Understanding Cultural Diversity in Mental Health”</p>	

Tips for Safe One-to-One Connections: Supporting Social and Emotional Development



The connection that teachers build with students can be a powerful factor in student success. Basic connections are made in one-to-one contexts. Teachers can:


- create opportunities for positive interactions with students having difficulty in the classroom
- use these one-to-one interactions to strengthen connection
- use this connection to foster social and emotional development
- leverage the connections to help engage students, and to assist in times of distress

The following teacher-created lists focus on safe and creative ways to build connection with students:

In the classroom	On the playground or in the school yard
In the school	For out-of-school supports.

Building Connection: Inside the Classroom		
Use Humor	Meditate	Share
Visualize Together	Rest	Joke
Play or Listen to Music	Tell and Listen to Stories	Play Charades
Use Movement	Play Sports	Use Tent Time
Drink Water	Have Class Pets	Cooperative Games
Use Different Types of Light	Grow Class Plants	Play Anagrams
Touch	Provide Stuffed Animals	Use Word Scrambles
Read	Have Comfy Furniture	Play Crosswords
Provide Varying Sounds	Post Work	Have Birthday Parties
Provide Fidget Toys	Have a Daily Helper	Create Circle Time
Take Breaks	Wickey Sticks	Do Brain Gym
Talk	Errands to the Office	Welcome Activities
Use Rhythm	Have Volunteers in Classes	Access Safe Internet Sites
Take Walks	Do One on One Time	Do Crafts
Take Time Outs Together	Have Safe Private Talks	Have a Magazine Box

Provide and Prepare Food	Have Herbal Teas	Use Pebble Mats
Art	Have Hot Chocolate	Have Harmony Balls
Write	Read to Students Daily	Do Yoga
Play Games	Silent Reading	Have Massage Pads
Use the Wii on Smart Board	Listening Centers	Use Bubble Wrap
Journal	Watch Movies that Foster Discussion	Have Cuddly Blankets
Create and Read Poetry	Play Chess	Provide Lego
Have a Dress Up Box	Be Conscious of Room's Lighting	Use a Wobbleboard
Use the iPod Together	Have a Wow Board	Create a Treat Bucket
Your Ideas:	Your Ideas:	Your Ideas:

Building Connection: Inside the School Building		
		
Stay in Close Proximity	Say, "Good Morning"	Acknowledge Student's Work
Use Hallways	Create a "Break Out" Room	Access Administrative Secretary for Support and a "Go To" Person
Create Quiet Spaces ... and Teach Others to Respect Quiet Space	Go Get a Drink	Join in a Game
Offer Snacks	Check in "Have you eaten breakfast?"	Use Humour
Walk	Go to the Library	Give Choices about What Space
Teach Skill of Asking for a Break	Eat Breakfast in Class	Feed the Student
Laugh	Smile	Touch
Listen	Play with the Student	Build a Customized Emotional Toolkit
Find the Student's Passions (e.g., cooking, plants, etc.) and Build into School Activities	Use "Roots of Empathy" Program	Find Jobs within the School (e.g. Set up Pool Tables, Cafeteria Tables, etc.)
Find Leadership Jobs	Make Positive Posters (Affirmations)	Show the Student's Work
Support Intramurals	Facilitate Participation in School Activities	Ask, "What do you need?"
Provide Stress Balls	Provide Writing Material	Provide Art (Expressive) Material

Walk with the Student in the School When the Student is in Distress	Pair with another Student (Buddy Activities)	Allow a Run in the School Gym to Assist to De-Stress
Drawing Clubs	Quiet Spots to Sit	Cozy Spots In The Library
Use Aromatherapy	Create Sports Clubs	Play Intramurals
An Administrator to Talk To	Garden	Invest in School Fish Tanks
Create a Peer Helpers Team	Foster Integration	Drink Water
Use Computers	Provide Food	Have Exercise Areas/ Clubs
Lunchroom Helpers	Office Helpers	Create a Knitting Club
Form a Chess Club	Have a Thought Of The Day For The School	Use Doodle Boards
Use Affirmations	Provide and Do Puzzles	Have Fun Movies/Winter Lunch Hours
Have Singing Groups	Create Class Clerical Support Groups	Have Weight Rooms
Use a Welcoming Committee	Enlist the Secretary's Support	Form a Computer Club
Playing in Gym	Recycle	Create a Sensory Room
Make a "Walk Of Stars"	Decorate the School	Have Cooking Programs
Do Art	Create Posters	Do Random Acts of Kindness
Have One on One Gym Time	Model Patience	Create Safety
Build Trust	Build Relationship	Use Class Games
Use Reframing (Looking at this in another way, shifting perception)	Listen, Allow Venting, Validate Feelings	Find a Mentor in the School
School Wide "Positive Behaviour Programs"	Structured Extra Curricular "Fun" Activities	Create opportunities to Share <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With Other Students - With Other classes - With Other Adults - At Assemblies
Create Supportive Peer Caring	Acknowledge Feelings, Needs	Give Time and Space Without Deserting the Student
Your Ideas:	Your Ideas:	Your Ideas:

Building Connection: On the Playground or School Yard



Walk at the Same Pace on the Playground	Create a Rhythm	Run
Match Level of Play	Keep Proximity To Child	Redirect with Task or Activity
Find a Quiet Place (Remove Audience)	Remind Throw a Ball	Push a Swing
Teach Social skills	Be Present for Transportation Times	Wave "Goodbye"
Walks	Play Ball Games	Paint and Play Games on Asphalt
Make a Creative Playground	Drum	Play Hide and Seek
Play Zipper	Play Kick the Can	Have a Jump Rope Club
Play Tag	Play Tetherball	Play Simon Says
Play Follow the Leader	Create Snow Angels	Make an Obstacle Course
Do Cloud Watching	Create Mud Pies	Joke with the Kids
Do Brain Gym	Make Sand Castles	Have Team Building Tasks
Use a Parachute	Do Rock Collecting	Paint
Play Trust Games	Use Sidewalk Chalk	Create a Walking Club
Form a Running Club	Painting Rocks	Create a Quiet Sitting Space
Teaching About Nature	Feeding the Birds	Low Organized Games
Watch Ants	Fly Kites	Pick Up Garbage
Weaving In Frost Fence	Make Snowmen	Play In the Leaves
Have Picnics	Have a Tug of War	Do Yoga
Make Daisy Chains	Walk Together on the Playground	Create Dance Routines
Do Pilates	Create and Perform Plays	Braid Hair
Blow Bubbles	Have Storytelling	Ride Bikes
Guide the Student to De-Escalate	Mirror Intensity But Not Emotion	Validate Emotional experience
Play with Student in Playground Activities	Play with Child with Other Students	Instruct in Rules of Games
Give Practice time for Skills	Listen	Your Ideas:

Building Connection: Outside-of-School Possibilities



Note: Connecting with students outside of the school day and the school environment requires professional judgment. Maintaining healthy professional boundaries is part of the important modeling for healthy relating in a Canadian context. With that said, the following teacher-generated ideas can be powerful in building connection with students who resist connection within the classroom or school context.

Connect with guardians or parents through: - email - call - home visits	Share Food, Snacks	Have Shared Appreciation of Music
Find an interest student is into	Call the student at home	Drop off homework
Use a daybook	Give a stuffed toy	Use silence ... just sit with the student
Pursue grants to summer camps	Provide connections to resources outside of school, make referrals	See to basic need (e.g. coats for kids, community programs, etc.)
Talk to student about outside of school activities	Facilitate activities outside of school	Explore students' outside interests
Journal	Use Vision boards	Watch extra curricular activities
Keep in contact over the holidays (e.g., e-mail)	Send birthday cards / letters	Continue to maintain professional boundaries
Visit students in external programs	Introduce ideas "What to Do" outside of school	Take training together
Have a book club	Garden	Ride horses
Go and watch one of the student's events (e.g., soccer game)	Have a class pet that goes home	Do recreational activities
Say "Hi!" when meeting in the local community (e.g., at store)	Provide resources for activities	Invite families into school communities
Do intramurals	Have community drama clubs	Care for a Neighbour's Pet
Walk Pets	Play Catch	Help find employment
Phone Calls	Group for Students That Like To Fix Cars	Research Other Cultures
Do dog walking	Find working with animals	Hike
Swim	Have craft classes	Ski
Take art classes	Take music lessons	Do landscaping
Help elderly members of the community	Do winter activities	Sew
Volunteer	Play paintball	Watch movies

Play laser tag	Participate in spiritual activities (e.g., church, mosque, etc.)	Access community programs
Play video games	Form and participate in clubs	Meditate
Use Facebook/MSN/D2L/Computers	Volunteer at the Humane Society	Go to camp
Have an individual fitness program	Support Phone Lines	Biking
Mountain bike	Walk	Watch Sports Events
Help the Homeless	Skate Board	Your Ideas:

Tips for Caring Messages

Students with refugee backgrounds are sensitive to verbal and non-verbal messages. Intentional messages of safety and caring can build strong connections between teachers and students.

Key Message	How to Convey in Classroom Setting (examples)
I am interested in you	Take a few minutes out of class preparation time to watch the student at something the student enjoys (e.g., physical education, art, etc.)
I accept you	When a teacher or adult brings students to you regarding yet another incident of fighting on the school grounds, communicate your frustration with compassion and calmness.
Adults can be helpers	Just before the student is about to engage in a difficult activity, tell the student that you are there to help.
I am consistent	Tell the student that you are always around for 5 minutes after lunch begins if the student wants to talk. Be there.
I am safe	When the student complains about playground issues, listen, provide support and take action.
You have competencies	Comment the very first time the student follows the routine of joining the group and sitting without touching anyone else.
I will be here even when things get tough	Make a point of listening to the student's side even when the student is clearly to blame for a fight.
I can read your signals and will respond to them	Notice when the student comes in more quietly than usual from recess. Take a moment to ask how the student is doing.
Adapted from Hamre and Pianta, 2006	