

QUEENSLAND PROGRAM OF ASSISTANCE TO
SURVIVORS OF TORTURE & TRAUMA INC.
(QPASTT)



A school counselling guide
to working with students
from refugee and
displaced backgrounds



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This booklet is one of three resources in a series. The other resources are:

- A school counselling guide to working with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds (booklet)
- Students from refugee and displaced backgrounds – a handbook for schools (handbook)

Links to where teachers can obtain information.

Enrolment: <http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Pages/Enrolment-in-State-Primary,-Secondary-and-Special-Schools.aspx>

English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) policy statement [EAL/D replaces ESL]: <http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/docs/policy-statement-eal-learners.pdf>

There is also the overarching *P-12 curriculum, assessment and reporting framework* page which includes the EAL/D policy and additional supporting information for EAL/D learners: <http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/framework/p-12/index.html>

In-service training for teachers – Queensland College of Teachers for further information: <http://www.qct.edu.au/>

DETE intranet site 'Guidelines for Using Interpreters in Schools', it outlines the process for engaging an interpreter.
<http://education.qld.gov.au/student-services/inclusive/cultural/esl/interpreter-guidelines.html>

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National.

http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/index.htm

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a reference guide for **school guidance officers and school counsellors** to assist their counselling role with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds. It is one of three resources developed to assist school staff to work with refugee children and young people. There are two booklets and one comprehensive handbook in the series:

- *A school counselling guide to working with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds* (booklet)
- *A teacher's guide to working with students from refugee and displaced backgrounds* (booklet)
- *Students from refugee and displaced backgrounds – a handbook for schools* (this comprehensive handbook expands on many issues in this booklet)

REFUGEE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Of the 12,000 people who arrive in Australia annually under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program, it is estimated that approximately 40 percent are children and young people. These children have often experienced severe hardship and trauma, with experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse, abandonment, treacherous flights to safety, forced service as child soldiers, the witnessing of atrocities and even torture.

These experiences occurred during the child's natural process of cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. In some instances, there may be a long term impact on these developmental processes, increasing the child's vulnerability to ongoing mental, physical and social problems. Trauma reactions are displayed in a variety of ways (VFST, 1996):

- anxiety
- helplessness and loss of control
- guilt & shame

- loss of relationships with parents, family & community
- shattered assumptions about human existence

Maladaptive behaviours sometimes displayed by refugee children have been commonly misinterpreted as misbehaviour and even misdiagnosed as 'borderline personality disorder' or 'antisocial personality' (Barnard & Mantell, 1998). It is important that such behaviours are understood and taken into consideration in any assessment or treatment interventions.

WHY A REFUGEE STUDENT MAY NEED TO SEE A COUNSELLOR

For many students from refugee backgrounds, seeking help outside the family about emotional matters and/or traumatic past experiences may be unfamiliar. Students may be reluctant to initiate contact with a counsellor because this is a threatening and unfamiliar experience, or they may be unaware of the role of school guidance officers and the type of assistance available.

Most refugee students would benefit from being made aware of the availability of a school guidance officer, their role and how contact can be made. In fact, it is suggested that with this group of vulnerable students, the school guidance officer **initiate contact on a regular basis** so that a positive relationship is built between the student and guidance officer. The school health nurse or chaplain may also be appropriate support people within the school environment. Any referral should however consider gender and religious sensitivities.

It is particularly important that contact be made with students during transition times, for example when they are transferred to a new school. Contact should be made as soon as possible after a student starts.

REFERENCES

Barnard, J. & Mantell, J. *An early intervention model for addressing war trauma in young refugee children*, Perth, AseTTS, 1998.

Mitchell, P. *Valuing young lives, Evaluation of the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, 2000

Multicultural Affairs Queensland, *Queensland Government Language Services Policy*, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Government, Brisbane, 1999.

Plummer, S. *Trauma and children: fostering healing and supporting recovery*, University of Canberra, Canberra, 1997.

Transact, *Refugee children: a resource and guide*, Canberra, 1997.

VFST Inc. *A guide to working with young people who are refugees*, Melbourne, 1996.

NOTES

Links to where teachers can obtain information. (overleaf)

Acknowledgement

This booklet is based on *Preventing double trouble – a counsellor's guide to working with children from refugee and displaced backgrounds*, published by the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW), 1999. QPASTT extends special thanks to ANCORW and Catherine Breen, University of New South Wales, for their kind permission to use their work.

■ **Townsville Migrant Resource Centre Thuringowa Ltd**

467 Flinders St
 Townsville Qld 4810
 Ph: (07) 4772 4800 Fax: (07) 4772 1840
 Email: angela@townsville-mrc.org
 Web: www.townsville-mrc.org

MRC operates as an information and referral service specializing in serving newly arrived migrants. The agency offers support, information and advice on a wide range of issues including employment, health, cultural activities, legal, education and children's activities.

■ **Migrant Settlement Services Cairns**

Suite 21, 1st Floor Virginia House,
 68 Abbott St
 Cairns Qld 4870
 Ph: (07) 4041 7699 Fax (07) 4041 7655
 Email migrantsservices@centacarecairns.org

Written resources:

■ **A guide to working with young people who are refugees**, produced by VFST, 1996, ph (03) 9388 0022. Contains practical strategies for individual work incorporating family & cultural issues.



■ **Settling in – A group program for newly arrived refugee and migrant students** by Pickering, E & Phoumirath, S, produced by Old Guilford Multicultural Resource Centre 1992 and available from STARTTS, ph (02) 9794 1900. Contains a six-session program for school guidance officers and teachers to settle in new students into the classroom and school environment.

■ **The Rainbow Program** — A School based program to support refugee children and their families. Download a copy from www.foundationhouse.org.au or ph (03) 9388 0022

■ **An early intervention model for addressing war trauma in young refugee children**, by Barnard J & Mantell, J, 1998, available from AseTTS, ph (08) 9325 6272. Contains a ten-session program including work sheets.



Refugee students may need assistance from guidance officers for the following issues (Transact, 1997):

- Separation, loss, grief and trauma resulting from past experiences or during resettlement in Australia
- Difficult relationships with parents and other family members who may also have experienced torture, trauma and resettlement problems
- Post-traumatic stress symptoms such as sleep disturbances, physical health problems, behavioural issues or anxiety that affect the student's ability to cope with everyday issues
- Family relationships and roles adversely affected by trauma and resettlement
- Compounding difficulties of single parent families and loss of support from extended family members
- Difficulties with communication between the school and families due to language and cultural barriers
- Support during transition times such as school transfer



IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH POST- TRAUMA SYMPTOMS

It is important that students experiencing distress as a direct or indirect result of their refugee background, be identified as early as possible so that assistance can be offered. It should be noted that a lack of *obvious* negative responses does not automatically mean that there has been no negative impact on the student's mental health. The effects of trauma are often delayed until the initial re-settlement period has been completed, and can even manifest a number of years later, so it is important to be aware of the persistence and severity of symptoms.

The following list describes some of the ways children and young people may respond to their trauma:

- Repeatedly thinking about experiences of violence
- Feeling afraid
- Feeling sad
- Physical symptoms including lack of energy, lack of appetite, heart palpitations, headaches and stomach aches
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Lack of concentration and interest
- Getting angry easily
- Restlessness
- Not trusting others

School-aged students may:

- Express moodiness as they deal with feelings of inadequacy and attempt to establish control
- Express aggression/ bossiness in order to establish control
- Exhibit perfectionist behaviours
- Exhibit social withdrawal/apathy
- Show ongoing signs of fear and anxiety
- Re-enact the trauma
- Develop psychosomatic complaints such as headaches and stomach aches if they are not free to express their feelings (adapted from Plummer, 1997).

■ Refugee and Immigration and Community Legal Service (RAILS)

Level 1/170 Boundary St, West End Qld 4101

Ph: (07) 3846 3189 Fax: (07) 3844 3073

Web: www.rails.org.au

RAILS specialises in immigration and refugee law, as well as dealing with general law matters.

■ Multicultural Development Association Inc. (MDA)

28 Dibely St, Woolloongabba 4103

Ph: (07) 3337 5400 Fax: (07) 3337 5444

Email mailbox.mdabne.org.au

Can provide settlement support, information, advice and referral on settlement related issues. MDA can provide contacts for similar settlement services in regional Queensland.

■ Multilink

38 Blackwood Rd, Woodridge 4114

Ph: (07) 3808 4463 Fax: (07) 3808 6337

Email: info@multilink.org.au

Services include settlement support, interpreting and language support, bi-cultural language support workers, a Multicultural playgroup, homework club, individual counselling, family mediation and recreational support for the southside of Brisbane.

■ Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors- Mercy Family Services

125 Queens Road Nudgee Qld 4014

PO Box 182 Banyo Qld 4014

P 07 3267 9000 F 07 3267 0569 E mfs.admin@mfsq.org.au

■ Volunteer Refugee Tutoring in the Community (VoRTCS)

Email: info@refugeetutoring.org

Web: www.refugeetutoring.org.au

Provides free in-home tutoring English language support.

■ ACCESS Inc.

4/2 Carmody St, Woodridge 4114 Mail: PO Box 10 Logan Central Qld 4114

Ph: (07) 3808 9299; Fax (07) 3208 9319

Email: manager.ihss@accessservicesinc.org.au

Can provide settlement support, information, advice and referral on settlement related issue in the Logan and Beenleigh area. Offer English and computing classes.

FURTHER ASSISTANCE AND RESOURCES

There are several agencies that can assist in working with refugee students. There are also a number of excellent written resources that may be helpful.

■ Student Services Branch

Education Queensland

Ph: (07) 3237 0815

Can provide advice about enrollment in schools, ESL services, access to TIS services and in-service training for teachers.

■ Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT)

28 Dibley St, Woolloongabba Ph: (07) 33916677 Fax: (07) 3391 6388

Email admin@qpastt.org.au

Website address www.qpastt.org.au/

Can provide counselling/advocacy, referral, in-service training for teachers, group programs in schools, access for young people to community activities and a homework club for high school students.

■ Refugee Claimants Support Centre (RCSC)

12 Bonython St

Windsor Qld 4030

Ph: (07) 3357 9013 Fax: (07) 3357 9019

Email refugees@ecn.net.au

Web: www.refugees.rg.au

Services are provided to refugee claimants only. These are people whose refugee status have not yet been determined by authorities. RCSC provides a drop in centre, English language classes, emotional support, information and referral, no-interest loans for employment purposes, limited emergency relief, computer skills, and assistance with accommodation, food, employment and health (including dental health).

■ Transcultural Clinical Consultation Service

519 Kessels Rd, Macgregor Postal: PO Box 6623, Upper Mt. Gravatt, 4122

Ph: (07) 3167 8333 Fax: (07) 3167 8322

Email: tccs@health.qld.gov.au

Web: www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/gtmhc/

Works in partnership with mental health services, can provide cultural information, mental health information, referral, advice and clinical consultation if needed. TCCS is a state-wide service



RISK ASSESSMENT

If students do display any of the signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, it may be useful to assess their risk of developing mental health problems. The following questions can assist in such a risk assessment (adapted from Transact, 1997):

- How does the student relate with other students?
- Does the student's experiences of life prior to living in Australia find expression through play, art or acting?
- Does the student have difficulty in remembering daily activities, routines or tasks?
- Does the student appear to experience mood swings?
- Is the student able to concentrate on a set task?
- Does the student appear frightened or fidgety?
- Are there any recurrent themes in the student's drawings?
- What are the student's strengths? (e.g. coping mechanisms, abilities or interests).

If the risk assessment determines that the student is at high risk, a pro-active course of action may need to be planned. If needed, consultation with, or referral to, another agency may also be considered (please refer to page 18 for a list of relevant organisations).

COUNSELLING REFUGEE STUDENTS WITH TRAUMA

Any counselling work involving young people, but particularly young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, must not only consider **therapeutic** issues, but also issues relating to **service access** and **engagement**.

Therapeutic issues

Whether the counselling intervention is short-term or long-term, there are many things school guidance officers can do to assist refugee students experiencing post-traumatic distress.

Counsellors already have the principles and tools required for working with refugee students. There are no special techniques or tools that are especially 'effective' with refugee students. However, an understanding of the framework in which counsellors work with refugee students will be helpful.

The three core issues to consider within such a framework are:

1. Fundamental cross-cultural practice
2. A recovery framework (see pp. 10-11 for one such framework)
3. An awareness of own counselling style and position on relevant issues e.g. racism

It will also be important to be aware of and consider the **family context** of the student. Some refugee students may have lost their families, be separated indefinitely from family or living in a different family context, such as a nuclear family. Students who are living in a family environment are often affected by trauma and resettlement issues experienced by their parents and there may be strained family relationships. This should always be determined so that appropriate supports can be put into place for the young person. Such students may receive very little, if any, emotional support at

Guidelines for the use of an on-site interpreter:

1. Introduce everyone and establish roles.
2. Arrange seating to facilitate communication between yourself and the client.
3. Establish ground rules speaking through the interpreter to the client
4. Maintain eye contact with the client if culturally appropriate (rather than engaging with the interpreter).
5. Speak directly to the client, on first person terms.
6. Speak slowly and clearly but naturally. Avoid jargon.
7. If you feel that the client and interpreter are speaking together and excluding you to the extent that you are not establishing communication with the client, you should stop the interview. Restate the ground rules and start again.
8. Summarise your discussion periodically throughout the interview to ensure the same understanding of what is being said.
9. With consecutive interpreting, use short sentences.

helplessness, guilt, anger, idealisation, dread and horror, personal vulnerability and avoidance reactions (VFST, 1988). Vicarious traumatisation is an occupational hazard for workers who are in regular, empathic contact with traumatised people. It is important that counsellors seek support and assistance for themselves as early as possible. The resource guide at the rear of this booklet may be of assistance.

CONCLUSION

School guidance officers, and indeed schools, can be an integral part of the resettlement and recovery process of refugee students. The regular contact and emotional support that school guidance officers can provide refugee students can greatly contribute to their recovery and prevent the development of long-term problems.

USING INTERPRETERS

The *Queensland Government Languages Services Policy* (MAQ, 1999) states that whenever possible, professional interpreters should be used by Queensland Government agency employees to communicate with persons unable to satisfactorily communicate in English.

The Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) provides both over-the-phone interpreters at short notice and on-site interpreters that are booked a couple of days in advance. It is important to establish language, ethnic and gender preferences for interpreters and to request these from TIS.

The TIS telephone number is 131 450. Telephone interpreters can be accessed 24 hours per day. On-site interpreters should be pre-booked by fax on 1300 654 151 with reasonable notice. Request forms are available from TIS.

TIS will request a client service number for all interpreting jobs. To facilitate the use of TIS, Education Queensland has a centralised client service number that can be used by school staff. **Education Queensland pays for the cost of professional interpreters if the Education Queensland Code is used.** To obtain the client service number, please telephone the School and Commonwealth Resourcing Unit on (07) 3237 0778.

SUPPORT FOR COUNSELLORS

The counsellor's role can be demanding and difficult at the best of times. Working with traumatised students, although rewarding, can add additional challenges to a counsellor's workload. Counsellors can also be affected emotionally by the trauma experienced by their students.

Sometimes counsellors may experience emotional responses that mirror the kind of feelings their students experience. This is called 'vicarious traumatisation'. Such emotional responses can include

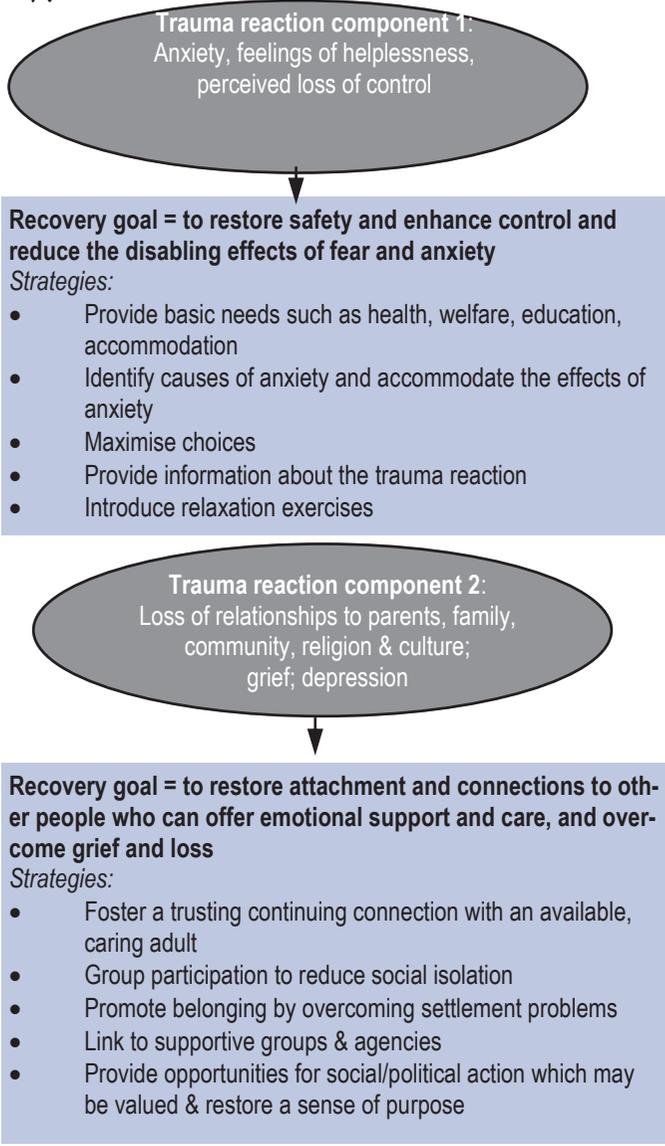
home. The school guidance officer may be the only supportive adult available to the student.

The framework on pages 10-11 is useful for understanding four essential recovery goals for refugee young people and how the counsellor can assist this process (VFST, 1996:34).



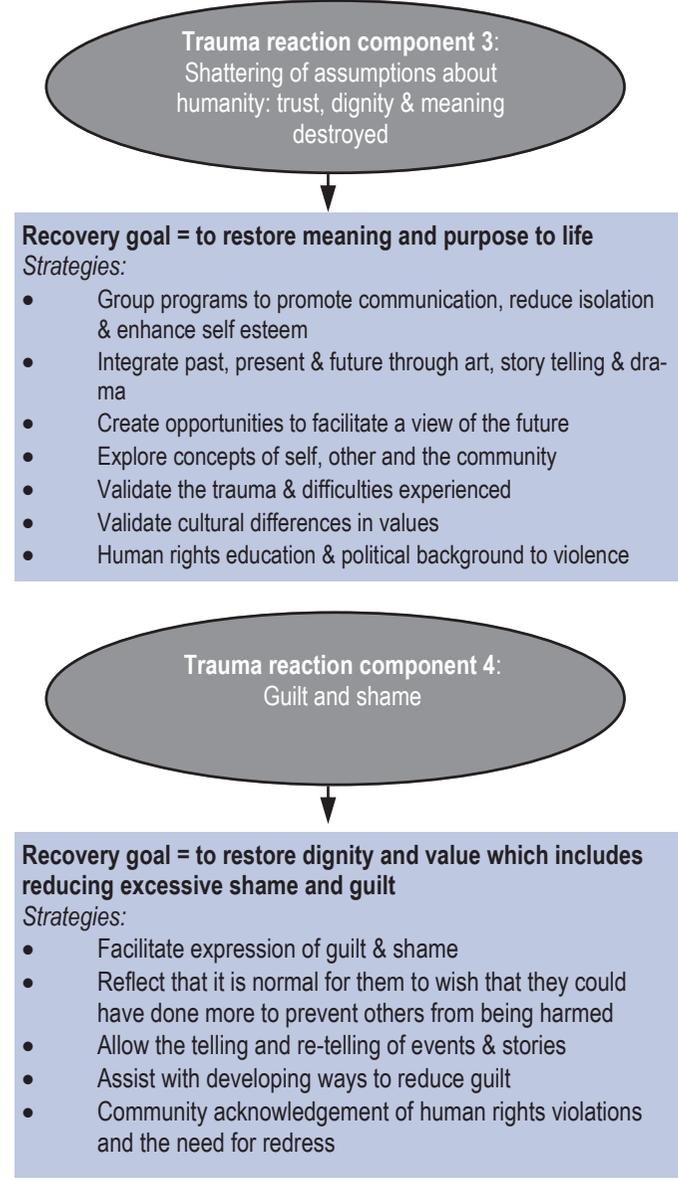


A RECOVERY FRAMEWORK (VFST, 1996)



<p>Refugee students may have a range of practical needs that are unmet, compounding their mental health, behaviour and school performance issues. Young people with complex problems in particular, have often had negative experiences involving a merry-go-round of referrals between agencies and often fall through the service gaps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may not be possible to provide a range of services as a school guidance officer, but it is possible to directly and actively follow-up other services that do provide the services required. • Advocacy on behalf of the student will also assist in building a trusting relationship, whilst ensuring that practical needs are met.
<p>Young people often fail to present for appointments even when the therapeutic relationship appears to be progressing well. Once again, those with the most complex needs may be those that find it difficult to engage and follow-through with appointments. A lack of resources and pressure to provide a service to those students that do actually present for assistance may mean that counsellors have little opportunity to follow-up those that drop out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active follow-up is required by the counsellor to find out if there are any barriers for the student and how they may assist the student to overcome these. Although this may be difficult to achieve, it needs to be borne in mind that the needs of these students may be even greater than the needs of students that do attend appointments.

ENGAGEMENT ISSUES	STRATEGIES
<p>Young people have different communication styles and needs. Students from backgrounds in which they have experienced repressive authorities are often wary of active questioning styles and may fail to engage with the counsellor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, communication needs to be developed on multiple levels: about emotional wellbeing, resilience and mental health; engagement in therapeutic alliance; and communication to foster partnerships in service development. • Communication needs to be clear and open and above all convey the message that the student's perspective is understood and respected. • Assessments and other processes that require information gathering need to be done over an extended period to avoid interrogative communication with the student. • Considerable time is needed to develop a trusting relationship before the student will talk openly with professionals about their problems. • Informal modes of communication, such as play-ground chats, can assist in building trust.
<p>Counsellors can feel that they have little knowledge of the cultural context of refugee students and can become disempowered in their capacity to work with this group of students, thereby shying away from such work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsellors are not expected to know about every culture, tradition or ethno-specific practice! • Having an attitude of curiosity and compassion will go a long way and be appreciated by students. • Recognise the symptoms of disempowerment – see p. 15 regarding vicarious traumatisation. • Seek assistance from a relevant specialist agency – see p. 17.



Service access and engagement

Facilitating service access and engaging young people in an ongoing therapeutic relationship can be challenging for busy school guidance officers. It can be particularly challenging with students with complex problems, such as refugee students.

There are however, a range of 'youth friendly' practices that can assist counsellors to increase the access and levels of engagement of refugee students. The foundation on which most of these strategies are based is **flexibility** on the part of the counsellor.

The tables on pages 13-15 provide an overview of the core issues related to access and engagement and some practical strategies to address these (adapted from Mitchell, 2000).



ACCESS ISSUES	STRATEGIES
<p>Refugee students are often unfamiliar with a formal service system such as that found in Australia. Seeking help outside the family is often also unfamiliar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate contact with refugee students on an ongoing basis, particularly during transition times (see p.4). Explain the role of the school guidance officer and how assistance can be provided. • The counsellor may need to be highly visible by visiting different areas of the school ground where refugee students hang out. This also facilitates the development of a more trusting relationship between the counsellor and refugee students.
<p>Young people, especially those with complex problems tend to drift into and away from services and return at a later stage for further assistance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and expect this. • Do not close cases when students fail to show. Returning students should be treated as ongoing clients, if possible, not new clients who are expected to join the waiting-list.
<p>Young people with the greatest problems tend to be those who find it the most difficult to attend scheduled appointments. Young people with mental health problems who are homeless, who are misusing substances, who are involved in the juvenile justice system, who have experienced abuse or neglect or those from chaotic family environments often find it the most difficult to keep structured appointment schedules.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that failure to keep appointments is not an expression of not requiring assistance. • Interventions need to be offered in locations convenient to young people in a range of different settings. • Further contact may need to be initiated by the counsellor.