

Factsheet 16: What is counselling for children, young people and families?

Many children and young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced direct or indirect trauma because of persecution and conflict. Additionally, if people do not have the opportunity to heal from trauma, they can unknowingly pass its impacts on to future generations. Their children may experience high levels of stress, difficulties with attachment and disconnection from their culture and community.



QPASTT's work with families, children and young people focuses on ensuring trauma is not a barrier to growing, learning and thriving in Australia.



Counselling for children and young people

QPASTT has counsellors who specialise in supporting children and young people. They partner with parents to help children and young people make sense of the things they have experienced and adapt to life in Australia. QPASTT also runs a range of groups and activities for children and young people.

Children often have difficulty using words to express their thoughts and feeling and counsellors use a range of ways to help. This includes art, play, games and movement to help the children not only process their traumatic memories, but to assist with their physical, sensory and cognitive development.

Play is a child's language and toys are their words. We help children heal in the way that is the most natural to them. This is why it is important that they be included in the counselling process.

Parents can help by:

- Assisting their child or young person to get to appointments
- Meeting with the child/young person's counsellor to help them understand what is happening in the home
- Working with the counsellors to find the solutions that will be the best for their child or young person

QPASTT values the wisdom of parents and will therefore not work with children and young people under the age of 16 without parental consent.





There is no time limit for QPASTT counselling.

Our counsellors can work with you and your child or young person until all goals for counselling have been achieved.

What to expect when your child or young person is referred for counselling:

- An intake worker will visit with you to understand the needs of your family and make referrals to other services as appropriate
- The counsellor may also visit the child or young person at school and speak to their teachers to understand how the child or young person is functioning in the school environment
- Your child/young person's name will then be placed on a waitlist for counselling
- Once your child/young person has been allocated a counsellor, the counsellor will most likely meet with you before they meet with your child, to get a better understanding of how they can assist. They will set goals with you for the counselling so that everyone is aware of what is being worked on in sessions
- The counsellor will meet with your child and young person on a regular basis to work toward these goals
- The counsellor will meet with you regularly to let you know how your child/young person is progressing in counselling, ask about changes you are seeing at home and talk about strategies that can be implemented at home to help you and your child reach the goals you have set

How trauma affects families

The challenges of settlement along with experiences of trauma can impact the mental health and wellbeing of all family members and future generations.

Some of the effects of trauma and settlement on families can include:

- Understanding different cultural norms and expectations in Australia
- The impact of trauma for individuals within the family – parents/carers, children and young people (see *Factsheet 3: The impact of trauma on adults* and *Factsheet 4: The impact of trauma for children and young people*)
- Changes to caretaking roles
- Challenges caring for children and teenagers, especially through transitions
- Stress in parent relationships
- Feeling isolated and disconnected, and not knowing where or how to seek help



Support for parents and families

Parenting in a new country can be hard. Parents and young people can struggle with understanding the different cultural expectations and norms in Australia. Children often learn English and understand Australian systems and culture more quickly than their parents, which can lead to conflict. QPASTT has specialised programs for parents and carers to support them to navigate these challenges in a culturally safe way and help families thrive.

Family counselling

At QPASTT, counsellors specially trained to work with families can provide support for families to:

- Strengthen relationships
- Improve communication and understanding between family members
- Find solutions to their challenges

- Reflect on their challenges of caring for children in a different cultural context
- Understand the impacts of trauma on family dynamics

Family counselling can take place with one family member or multiple generations. It can take place in one of our offices and other settings where appropriate.

To speak with QPASTT or find out more about our services, please call 07 3391 6677 or visit qpastt.org.au.

QPASTT is the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. It is a community organisation which provides a variety of flexible and culturally sensitive support services to people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma. QPASTT has offices across Queensland.