

Peer support

Many refugee and asylum-seeker pupils arrive during the school year. They may therefore arrive in a student teacher's class at unplanned times. They are also likely to be moving into the area for the first time. They will have experienced often very sudden dislocation and loss. They will have lost access to many of their social and family networks (see [Supporting emotional needs](#)).

This experience of loss can impact on a new pupil's confidence and self-esteem at a time when he or she has to negotiate living in a wholly new cultural environment. Refugee and asylum-seeker pupils can experience racism in their host communities, may not speak English and can be wholly unfamiliar with a school's systems and routines.

Refugee and asylum seeker children therefore need an especially positive welcome and to be offered pathways to friendship to be able to feel safe, settle into school and identify with the school learning environment.

Good practice

One strategy that has been found to be effective for all new arrivals, including refugee and asylum-seeker children, is where teachers link them with helpful classmates who support their settling into school routines and learning activities. They can show the new pupil around the school, help with timetable information and introduce the new pupil to school staff and other pupils, including those who speak the same language.

These "buddies" can help refugee and asylum seeker children feel included in activities, part of break-time and lunchtime play, and learn English in a supportive environment. Indeed some schools have developed buddies with specialised roles, such as being a "playground buddy".

When planning peer support for newly arriving refugee and asylum-seeker pupils it is important to acknowledge the friendship and assistance pupils already offer each other and link any new initiative with existing school peer support systems. Teachers will also find it helpful to consult pupils, including other refugee and asylum-seeker pupils, about how best to develop peer support and how to provide ongoing support to the pupils involved. Circle Time sessions, for example, can be used to consult and involve pupils and for further developing peer support skills.

Remember to reward pupils' befriending roles and make sure the role has high status in the school.

It can be helpful if a 'buddy' is someone who speaks the same language as a new arrival, but it is also important that a 'buddy' is someone who can confidently include new pupils in classroom activity and social networks.

Teachers can promote a welcoming environment by raising awareness of the experiences and needs of refugee and asylum-seeker pupils. There are a range of opportunities in the curriculum to do this ([Link to Teaching and learning about refugees](#)).

A welcoming environment can be further developed by promoting active citizenship in citizenship and PSHE lessons. These can link to anti-bullying programmes and social skills taught in the PSHE curriculum. Pupils can raise awareness amongst their peers, for example by making presentations, displaying their work or conducting a school assembly. They can consult other pupils, perhaps through written questionnaires. Resources can be developed to promote a welcoming ethos around the school or classroom, for example through multi-lingual posters, artwork, and booklets outlining the role of buddies.

Frequently asked questions

Should we bother with a formal peer support scheme when the pupils seem welcoming anyway?

A formal scheme ensures that all new arrivals are offered the chance of help and friendship. Schools that experience many new arrivals during the year have found it useful to have a more structured buddy scheme. When asked about their experiences of a new school, new arrivals talk about feeling fearful and left out. They mention that making friends can be the biggest hurdle they face.

How can you make children become friends?

Peer support does not introduce a long-term friend to a new arrival. A buddy helps the immediate needs of each new pupil to be met. This may include linking the new pupil to other friendship groups. Being a buddy needs to be voluntary.

How can I support buddies effectively?

Regular training and accreditation is important to provide buddies with the necessary skills and encouragement. Training can for example include activities to help pupils empathise with new arrivals and role-playing a buddy's responsibilities. Buddies will need to be debriefed, and this can help the monitoring and evaluation of the peer support offered.

Authors

Bill Bolloten
Tim Spafford

Last updated 24th September 2005

Key Readings

Hartley-Brewer, E. (2003) *Stepping Forward - Working together through peer support*. London : NCB Publications. Available from the National Children's Bureau (<http://www.ncb.org.uk>), this publication clarifies the breadth and scope of peer support and offers explanations of the different approaches. It provides a number of examples to demonstrate how peer support is being developed in different settings, and offers practical guidance for developing and implementing programmes.

Smith, C. (2004) *B.E.S.T. Buddies*. London : Lucky Duck Publishing (<http://www.luckyduck.co.uk>)
A comprehensive training programme introducing a peer buddy system to support students starting secondary school.

Further Reading

Childline in partnership with Schools (CHIPS) (2002) *Setting Up A Peer Support Scheme*. London : Childline. Retrieved on 24th September, 2005 from:
<http://www.childline.org.uk/pdfs/peersupportscheme.pdf>

DfES (2003) *Managing Pupil Mobility: Guidance*. London : DfES [DfES/0781/2003 and DfES/0780/2003]. Retrieved on 24th September, 2005 from: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/documents/pmguidance.pdf>

- This downloadable report provides a useful toolkit for schools wishing to develop the role of support staff in assisting the integration and achievement of new arrivals. Guidance on developing a buddy scheme is given in section 6.2.

Copyright NALDIC 2011