

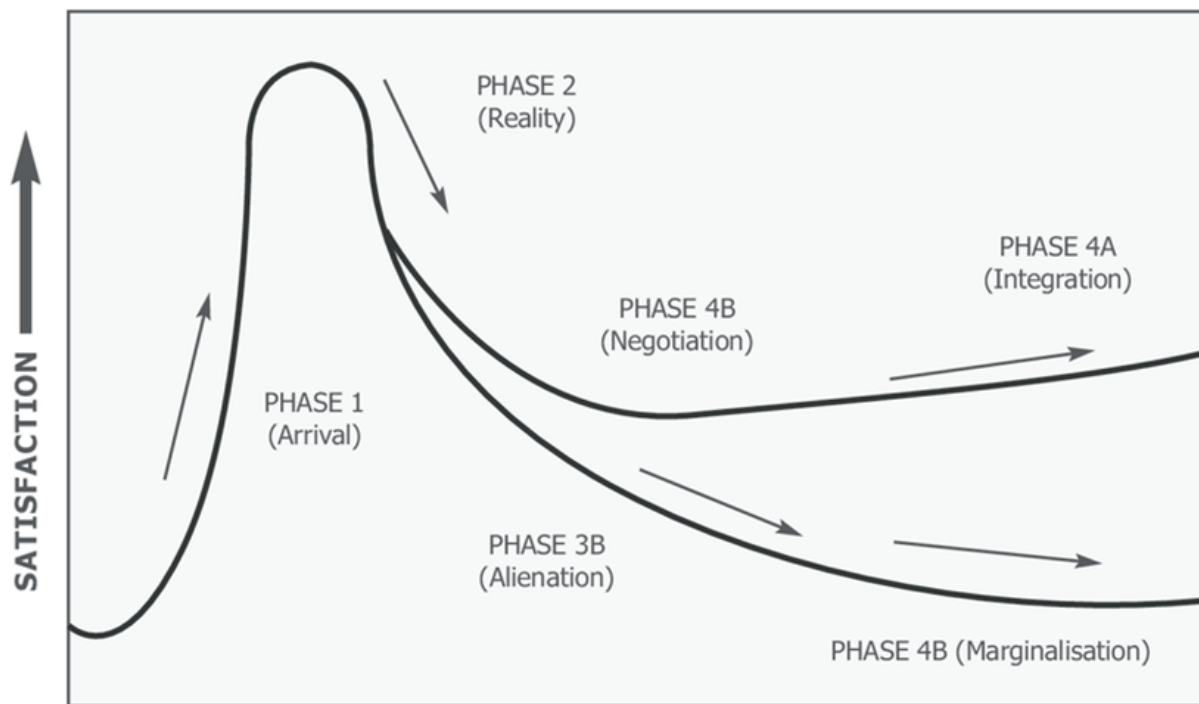
# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

## 1. Understanding the Adjustment Period

The resettlement experience comes with several stages of adjustment. Sponsor Circles should be aware of possible stages the newcomers may be experiencing, including:

- **Honeymoon:** excitement, anticipation, hopefulness, eagerness
- **Hostility:** frustration, anxiety, anger, depression, fear, mistrust
- **Humor:** learning new things, understanding culture, meeting new people, feeling more comfortable
- **Home:** feeling adjusted, comfortable, hopeful, positive, able to cope, teaching and supporting others.

Sponsor Circles can help newcomers through these stages in various ways, including providing friendship, support, and community connections; linking newcomers with people, events, goods, and services from their own culture; and organizing time for social and recreational interactions.



Source: [www.cvt.org](http://www.cvt.org)

## 2. Supporting the Adjustment Period

Refugee newcomers often have an adjustment period when certain symptoms may appear that will later dissipate once certain factors are in place. Factors that can help improve newcomer mental health include: employment, language acquisition, meeting new people, and being able to send money to family.

Before assuming that there is a mental health problem, Sponsor Circles should do their best to gather more information while continuing to respect the newcomers' right to privacy:

Listen to and empathize with the client: Is this a global distress issue having to do with the stress of adjustment, of paying rent, of learning English, of missing loved ones, of uncertainty of where loved ones are? These stressors are very common for newcomers. Or, is it a more serious mental health problem?

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**Ask questions, be curious, engage in conversation: Helpful prompts can include, “What is going on?” “What made you upset today?” “What happened?” “Tell me how you are feeling” “How long has it been going on?” “Have you been treated for this issue in the past? With medication?”**

### 3. Western Model of Therapy and Mental Health Services

Newcomers might be unfamiliar with or uncomfortable with aspects of the Western model of treating mental health. Some considerations include:

- Difficulties in “translating” mental health concepts
- Stigmas around mental health terminology
- Difficulties in admitting problems
- The thought of sitting in a room one-on-one with a stranger and working through details of their life is not only foreign, but can be misunderstood and therefore viewed as not helpful
- Many (not all) newcomers are resistant to taking medications as they see this as either
- admitting they have a problem or in some instances they believe the medication will make them worse.
- Explaining the model and process before bringing a newcomer to an appointment/assessment is helpful for expectation management.

Just because there is resistance, does not mean that Sponsor Circles should not encourage and pursue mental health services if they feel they, or at least an assessment, could be beneficial to the newcomers. Ultimately, newcomers’ autonomy to make decisions around their own healthcare should be respected, however.

### 4. Most Common Mental Health Concerns for Refugees

It is important to be aware of some of the most common mental health concerns that might arise for the newcomers you are supporting. These include:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Adjustment Disorder
- Panic attacks
- Lack of sleep

**It is important, however, to remember that not all newcomers have mental health problems.** Just because someone has witnessed and experienced traumatic events, does not mean that they necessarily have PTSD, etc. Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function.

## 5. When to Pursue Mental Health Care

For assistance locating long-term mental health resources, talking through a problem, or exploring mental health treatment options, **call 211** to speak with a live person who can help.

- 211 conversations are confidential, can be made anonymously, and are available in 180 languages upon request.
- If you prefer to text, use web chat, or search for resources online, [click here](#) to find more ways to contact your local 211.

**Sponsor Circles may consider encouraging the newcomers to access mental health care in the following circumstances:**

- When the newcomer expresses that they need extra support, or
- When the newcomer is exhibiting behaviors that are concerning and more chronic, for example:
  - not sleeping
  - not eating
  - not being able to get out of bed or to leave the house
  - paranoid/hyper-vigilant behavior
  - experiencing audible/visual/tactile hallucinations
  - experiencing constant panic attacks
  - expressing or threatening violence of self or others

## 6. Recognizing and Responding to Emergencies

Sponsor Circles should be prepared to watch for and recognize signs of emergency, which can include:

- When a newcomer has expressed suicidal thoughts in the present / has expressed a plan
- When a newcomer has expressed homicidal thoughts
- When a newcomer is incoherent, unable to respond, and has a flat affect
- When a newcomer is expressing hallucinations - visual, audible, tactile
- When a newcomer is acting erratically, exhibiting bizarre behaviors, sexually defiant behaviors, violent behaviors
- When there is a real or perceived need for immediate professional assistance

If a Sponsor Circle recognizes signs of emergency, the following actions should be considered, as appropriate:

- Have a plan ahead of time by being aware of local mental health services in their area and culturally appropriate support, such as a faith community
- Call 911 - explain that it is a mental health emergency that needs a mental health professional present when responding
- Bring the newcomer to the emergency room and explain that there is a mental health emergency. The emergency room attendant will assess and admit the newcomer to emergency psychiatric care if they deem necessary.