

OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The United States offers a range of educational opportunities, from traditional Kindergarten through 12th grade schooling to higher education and post-secondary vocational training. Understanding the different school systems can be challenging. However, refugees should know that public education is available to all, regardless of ability, gender, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or social class. Additionally, they need to know that school is mandatory for children, although the exact ages for mandatory education are determined by each state. Refugee parents with children in school should also be aware that in the United States, parents are expected to be involved in their children's education.

KEY MESSAGES

- As a parent (or legal guardian) you have rights and responsibilities that pertain to your engagement in your child's education in the United States.
- There are a variety of ways that you may be able to engage with your child and the school he/she attends.
- There are benefits for both you, your child, and the school as a result of your engagement as a parent.
- You have a right to an interpreter should you require assistance in order to best engage with your child's school.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After this lesson, refugees will be able to:

- Describe the roles and responsibilities of parents (or legal guardians) in their child's education in the United States.
- Articulate at least three ways parents (or legal guardians) can engage in their child's education.
- Identify at least three benefits of parents' (or legal guardians') engagement in their child's education (both for the child and the family).
- Determine different strategies for facing obstacles that prevent engagement in their child's education.

APPLYING SUPPLEMENTAL LESSON PLANS

This supplemental lesson plan is not required, but may assist Cultural Orientation (CO) providers who are looking for ways to enhance the Education section of their CO curriculum. CO providers and their supervisors can decide to incorporate this lesson into their curriculum based on the needs of the refugee populations they serve.

The lesson plan is a suggested guide and can be adapted according to circumstances and the creative wisdom of CO providers and their supervisors. It can be used in whole, or in part, depending upon need and time available.

The lesson includes the following sections:

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- Overview
- Activity Bank
- Appendix
- Additional Resources
- Acknowledgements

This lesson can be used with the following companion resources:

- **Fact Sheet**
- **Podcast**
- **Slideshow**
- **Video**

SESSION PLAN

The following is a proposed session plan of how all three activities provided in this lesson plan can be used together. CO providers may decide to select only one or two activities based on other lessons being delivered, the group of participants, and/or time and resources.

Title	Description Overview
Discussion on Education	Use the Discussion on Education activity to help participants understand the similarities and differences around the rights and responsibilities of parents with children in school in the United States versus their country/ies of origin and/or protection.
It Takes a Village Game	Through the It Takes a Village Game, have participants explore the different ways they can engage with their child's education in the United States.
Role-Play Activity	Following the It Takes a Village Game, have participants practice different ways for parents to engage with their with their child's education through the Role-Play Activity. This activity will also help them to identify ways to overcome possible challenges, such as requesting interpretation.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Review the key vocabulary for the lesson
- Review It Takes a Village Game and adjust as necessary
- Select role plays

MATERIALS NEEDED

- **Education Fact Sheet** (1 per participant) (optional)
- Speakers and media player for **Podcast** or **Slideshow** (optional)
- Copies of role plays (as selected)
- Flip-chart
- Post-it notes
- Markers

KEY VOCABULARY

- Conference
- Education
- Grades
- Homework
- Principal
- School
- Teacher

ACTIVITY BANK

DISCUSSION ON EDUCATION

PURPOSE

To understand the similarities and differences around the rights and responsibilities of parents with children in school (comparing education systems in country/ies of origin and/or protection to the United States).

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Start by asking participants to share about the education their children received in their country/ies of origin and/or protection. Ask them whether school was required for everyone. Did it cost money? What were the responsibilities of the school? Of the parents? Record the responses on a flip-chart.
2. Provide participants with the **Education Fact Sheet**, or play the **Podcast**, and use the Education in the United States Guided Worksheet to guide participants in learning about the education system in the United States. See [Appendix for Education in the United States Guided Worksheet](#).
3. If participants are already familiar with the United States' education system, invite them to share that information.
4. Finally, ask participants to compare their country/ies of origin and/or protection with the United States. What is similar about the rights and responsibilities of parents when it comes to their child's education? What is different about the rights and responsibilities of parents when it comes to their child's education?

MODIFICATIONS & TIPS

- If you already have an activity that introduces the education system, you may want to use that activity here instead of the proposed Discussion on Education. The objective should be to help participants see similarities and differences between two education systems.
- You may need to modify or adjust the use of the Fact Sheet and Podcast based on learners' literacy and/or language needs.
- The Education in the United States Guided Worksheet can also be used to create a scavenger hunt or fun competition with participants, and encourage English language learning.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE GAME

PURPOSE

To have participants explore the different ways they can engage with their child's education in the United States.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain to participants that they are going to play a game called "It Takes a Village". If appropriate, it may add value to ask participants what they think is meant by this expression.
2. Put participants in pairs or small groups.
3. Explain to participants that during the game, they will be given different scenarios and they will have to decide what they would do next. The purpose of the game is to identify solutions for being engaged in their child's education.

[\(Instructions continue on next page\)](#)

INSTRUCTIONS CONTINUED

4. Once everyone gives their answers to a scenario, provide the best next step, and the consequences of other possible solutions. You may also award points to each group. See the [It Takes a Village Game in the Appendix](#) for scenarios, answers, and suggested point guidelines. Groups may receive points based on all the answers they provide.

5. After completing the game, use the debrief questions below to summarize lessons learned during the game.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. If you have not conducted the “Discussion on Education” Activity, start by asking: What are some of the ways you can engage with your child’s education?
2. What are some of the benefits of engaging with your child’s education?
3. What will be some of the challenges in engaging with the school or your child around education?

ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITY

PURPOSE

To practice different ways for parents to engage with their child, or the school, around their child’s education, and to identify ways to overcome possible challenges, including requesting interpretation.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select from the different [Role-Play Options provided in the Appendix](#). You do not need to do all role plays.
2. Assign roles to participants. You may have a few participants role-play for the group and discuss, or have all participants perform the role play and share their experiences.
3. Provide participants with their role-play information and, as necessary, give them time to prepare.
4. Perform role play(s).
5. Conduct debrief questions below.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

1. What happened during the role play?
2. How did the parent engage with their child’s education? Were the actions by the parent positive? Could they have been improved? If so, how?
3. Were there any challenges? How did they overcome the challenges?

MODIFICATIONS & TIPS

- If conducting one-on-one CO, you may turn this into a quiz, and review the responses with the participant.
- You may elect to provide participants with answer choices for each scenario, instead of having them develop the answers.
- Ask participants to brainstorm possible consequences of their choices for the scenarios, instead of telling them directly.
- Instead of using scenarios individually, have participants review all the scenarios at once within their groups.
- You may add additional scenarios, or reduce the number of scenarios, as relevant for your given context (i.e., population, location).

MODIFICATIONS & TIPS

- You may adapt or modify the role plays to better fit your given context. The role plays will be most successful if you ensure that instructions are clear to all participants.
- As appropriate, these role plays could be transformed and used as scenarios, which can then be used to generate discussion. Conversely, you could also play a part yourself for the role play during one-on-one CO.

APPENDIX

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES GUIDED WORKSHEET (PROVIDER VERSION)

If using the **Fact Sheet** or **Podcast**, the following worksheet can be used to guide participants in understanding the materials. Providers may add additional statements and information based on client needs.

PART I: TRUE OR FALSE/AGREE OR DISAGREE

Ask participants to answer the following questions. You may first ask them to answer without the **Fact Sheet** (or **Podcast**), and then provide them with the **Fact Sheet** (or **Podcast**) to check themselves. You may give them the statements to complete independently, or in groups, or read them out loud.

1. Public school is free. (True)
2. School is mandatory for children. (True)
3. Public schools can have religious affiliations. (False)
4. Parents do not need to be engaged with education. (False)
5. Boys and girls attend public school together. (True)
6. The classroom environment in the United States is usually participative and interactive. (True)
7. Higher education is free. (False)
8. There are many ways you can engage with your child's education. (True)

PART II: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the group, ask participants the following discussion questions. They may generate responses in pairs or groups and report back, or you can have them respond directly to you. The answers provided are based on the Fact Sheet and Podcast, but you may add to the lists.

1. What are some different ways you can engage in your child's education?

Answers:

- Find out if the school offers school tours or an orientation
- Ask your child what s/he learned about in school that day
- Ask your child what they have to do for homework
- Attend ESL classes, if offered, at your child's school
- Attend parent-teacher conferences
- Help with an extracurricular activity, such as a school sports team or a club
- Volunteer in your child's classroom
- Walk your child to the bus or school
- Work with your child on her/his homework

2. What are the different types of education available to adults?

Answers:

English language and literacy classes
Training courses
General Education Development (GED)
Vocational and technical schools
Community colleges (usually 2-year programs)
Colleges or universities (usually 4-year programs)
Graduate schools (for advanced degrees)

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES GUIDED WORKSHEET (PARTICIPANT VERSION)

PART I: TRUE OR FALSE/AGREE OR DISAGREE

Identify whether the following statements are True or False. Circle the correct answer.

1. Public school is free. True False
2. School is mandatory for children. True False
3. Public schools can have religious affiliations. True False
4. Parents do not need to be engaged with education. True False
5. Boys and girls attend public school together. True False
6. The classroom environment in the United States is usually participative and interactive. True False
7. Higher education is free. True False
8. There are many ways you can engage with your child's education. True False

PART II: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the **Fact Sheet** or **Podcast** to answer the following questions.

1. What are some different ways you can engage in your child's education?

2. What are the different types of education available to adults?

IT TAKES A VILLAGE GAME

The following scenarios can be used for It Takes a Village Game. You may cut out the scenarios or read the scenarios to participants, and request responses. Possible answers may vary; some participants could give two of the possible answers in combination, or provide an answer not listed. You will therefore need to adapt as necessary. The points and recommendations are to be used as guidelines. You should adjust the language as appropriate for the participants.

SCENARIO 1:

It is the first day of school and your child has returned from school with a lot of documents you do not understand. What do you do?

Possible Answers	Points and Recommendations
Do nothing and expect your child will understand the information	0 points - This is problematic because often there may be documents that a parent needs to sign.
Go online and see if you can get more answers about the documents there	1 point - This could help, but ensure that the website you are viewing is credible and connected to the school.
Ask for help from neighbors	1 point - This may not provide the most accurate interpretation of the documents but may be more efficient than going to your Resettlement Agency or school.
Bring the documents to your Resettlement Agency and ask them what to do	2 points - This could be a positive approach, especially during the initial resettlement period. However, over time, parents should be encouraged to communicate with the school directly.
Contact or go to the school and ask them about the documents	3 points - This would be a good solution. Parents could also ask if the school has any of the documents translated.

SCENARIO 2:

Your child is doing homework, and you realize you don't understand what they are learning at school in the area of _____ (select subject). What do you do?

Possible Answers	Points and Recommendations
Do nothing and assume that as long as the child understands then it is fine	0 points - This does not demonstrate having an active role in the child's education. This could have other consequences; for example, not knowing if your child is having difficulty understanding a particular subject at school.
Ask another adult (neighbor or family member) to explain what the child is learning	1 point - This could be an option, but it does not provide a regular mechanism that can be used over the long-term.
Ask the child what he/she is learning	2 points - This promotes a positive relationship between the parent and the child. However, this may pose challenges for certain participants based on cultural norms.
Use a library or reliable online resources to learn more about the subject your child is studying at school	2 points - This helps to build self-sufficiency and also promotes accessing community resources. It is important that parents use credible and reliable resources.
Request a meeting with the teacher to better understand what the child is learning	3 points - This is a good solution and it will allow you to develop a better relationship with the teacher and the school.

SCENARIO 3:

Your child has stopped doing homework in the evenings. What do you do?

Possible Answers	Points and Recommendations
Do nothing and assume that your child doesn't have any homework	1 point - While it's possible your child may not have homework on occasion, it is always better to ask.
Speak to your child about why he/she is not doing any homework	2 points - Having a conversation with your child would be a positive place to start.
Contact the teacher and ask about assignments	2 points - It may be necessary to contact the teacher, but speaking to your child first would be useful before contacting the teacher.
Check online to see what assignments your child is supposed to be working on	2 points - Sometimes schools have online portals for parents and students to review assignments and student progress, so this may be a good solution.

SCENARIO 4:

You receive your child's report card, and he/she is doing well, except for in the subject of English. What do you do?

Possible Answers	Points and Recommendations
Do nothing and hope that your child's grades will improve	0 points - It is not advisable to do nothing as it is expected in the United States that parents have an interest in their child's success in school.
Identify possible tutoring options for your child or find extra English classes available in the community	1-2 points - It is good that the parent looks for extra support either within the school or from the community, though this option may or may not cost additional money (depending on services).
Request a parent-teacher conference to discuss the child's progress	2 points - It may be very useful, after speaking with your child to also speak with the teacher. This may help in identifying ways to help your child do better.



SCENARIO 5:

Your child has expressed interest in attending university after high school. What do you do?

Possible Answers	Points and Recommendations
Do nothing because you know the family cannot afford university	0 points - While higher education does cost money, there are options, including scholarships that may help. There is a lot of variation in the cost of higher education and ways to pay for higher education (loans, scholarships), so it is important to research specific schools, tuition, and costs.
Talk to a neighbor or other adult about what they would do	1 point - While talking to others can be helpful, this should not be your only source of information.
Conduct research online about how to help your child find information about higher education	2 points - Conducting research online can be helpful, but ensure you are obtaining the information from credible sources. You can check with the Resettlement Agency, library, or school guidance counselor for credible sources on higher education.
Contact the school and determine what assistance they can provide	2 points - The school should be able to direct you to some resources on higher education, and they usually have staff members that can help students and parents with these decisions.

ROLE-PLAY OPTIONS

The following role-play prompts can be used to help participants practice being engaged in their child's education, and may be adapted as necessary.

OPTION 1:

_____ (child) has arrived home from her first day of school in the United States and her _____ (parent) is home when she arrives.

Prompt:

You will read your secret role information and have a conversation between the child and parent about the first day of school.

Role of Child:

You are in the _____ grade, and you have had a busy first day at school. You liked your teacher, but did not meet many new friends. You are nervous about learning English, but excited about math and science classes. You have been given different documents to give your parents to sign. You must bring them back by the end of the school week.



Role of Parent:

You are excited to hear about your child's first day of school and want to ask them questions about their teacher, if they have made new friends, and what they learned at school.

OPTION 2:

_____ (teacher) has requested a meeting with _____ (parent) about _____ (child).

Prompt:

You will read your secret role information and conduct the parent-teacher conference.

Role of Parent:

Your child has given you the date and time of the parent-teacher conference. You speak some English, but are much more comfortable in your own language. You have asked the school to provide an interpreter for the meeting. When you arrive, you don't see an interpreter and ask again before the meeting begins. After the school has provided the interpreter, you are surprised by the teacher's comments about your child, and want to know how you can help.



Role of Teacher:

You are anxious to meet the parent. _____ (child) has been doing overall well, but you are concerned about why the child hasn't been completing homework assignments. This is negatively impacting the child's grades. When the parent asks for an interpreter, you have to ask her to wait while you find someone to assist.

Note: CO provider can act as interpreter or can have a third person added to the role play.

OPTION 3:

_____ (parent) is at the bus stop with their child. There are other parents and children at the bus stop discussing an upcoming event at the school.

Prompt:

You will read your secret role information and have a conversation with another parent at the bus stop.

Role of Parent:

You have been trying to find ways to be more involved with the school, and so when you hear there is an upcoming event at the school, you ask questions to find out what the event is, and whether you can help by volunteering.



Role of Other Parent:

You are active in the school and know about the different ways parents can be involved. You know they do not need any help for the upcoming event, but there are other ways parents can be involved with the school, including a different event in three months. It would be great to have the help ahead of time.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services: Schools**
- **Educational Handbook for Refugee Parents**
- **Involving Refugee Parents in their Children's Education**
- **National Education Associations: A Parent's Guide to Helping Your Child Do Well in School**
- **Raising Children in a New Country: An Illustrated Handbook**
- **Raising Teens in a New Country: A Guide for the Whole Family**
- **United States Department of Education: Helping Your Child Series**

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