

10 Do's & Don'ts of Relating to Refugees (general guidelines)

Do's

Attitudinal

- 1) ALWAYS relate to refugees with dignity and respect, regardless of where they come from or what they believe. God loves them just as they are.
- 2) Scrap your own agenda, except to demonstrate the love of God
- 3) A willingness to listen and learn is essential. Suspend judgment!
- 4) Be willing to share yourself
- 5) Trust the Lord for every conversation and relationship. Continually turn it over to Him. He desires to work in and through you no matter how wide the cultural/experiential gap.

Practical

- 6) If a refugee understands some English (or German), speak simply and clearly with good eye contact when you speak with them. Women workers relating to men from Muslim backgrounds would do better to avoid direct/prolonged eye contact???
- 7) Despite all they have been through, many refugees have a good sense of humor and enjoy the chance to joke and laugh. That said, it is still a good idea to be careful with your humor and remember that even in the best conditions, it is often the most difficult form communication to be properly conveyed and understood cross-culturally.
- 8) Focus on relating to people of your same sex, especially if you are alone.
- 9) In spiritual conversations, focus on your beliefs about Jesus according to what is written in the Bible and your own experience of Him.
- 10) If you don't know what to do in a given situation, ask someone more experienced (in private) for advice...especially before you promise anything.

Don'ts

Attitudinal

- 1) Although God may call you to give something more of yourself, do not feel responsible to fix/meet their every need. This will lead to you getting in over your head and making promises you cannot keep. You can always offer to pray for them.
- 2) Although you may need to be the initiator in the conversation, do not feel responsible to fill every silence with words.
- 3) Although God may give you the opportunity to share your faith or aspects of it, do not feel pressured to have to do this in every conversation.
- 4) Although you may strongly disagree with their beliefs, do not criticize or put down their theology or spiritual leaders. You can disagree without being offensive.
- 5) Although you may be very annoyed by a particular refugee's behavior, do not give in to judgment or cynicism. Remember what you are like when you are hungry, tired and distraught over some situation...and then multiply that by 100!

Practical

- 6) Language/Communication- Avoid Christian jargon and idiomatic expressions. Do not speak LOUDER or s-l-o-w-e-r if the person you're talking to does not understand English.
- 7) Do not handle the Bible casually or set it on the floor. This communicates shocking disrespect for our Holy Book to Muslims, who would never do this with the Koran.
- 8) Avoid asking the following two questions: 1) *Why did you leave your homeland?* 2) *How did you manage to get here?* If they bring these things up, simply listen with compassion, but don't press them for too many details. Not only can these subjects bring up painful memories for refugees, but they can cause them to become suspicious of you since how they answer these questions is critical for their asylum cases. It may also cause them to lie to you and thereby shut down further honest communication.
- 9) Do not give out money, unless you're prepared to give every refugee you meet the same. Word will get around.
- 10) Avoid wearing clothing that is offensive to the people you are working with (i.e. shorts, tight fitting clothing and/or sleeveless shirts for women, etc.)