



## **Our Story –**

### **The workbook manual**

The Our story workbook is designed to help refugee families settle in a new homeland. It is also a tool for social- and healthcare professionals to work with them.

The workbook helps getting to know the family, their

experiences in their home country and their escape journey. It also supports family members` integration processes in the new culture.

### **The history, present and the future**

In the book family`s past, present and the future, as well as the events, memories and experiences build a shared story. A shared story helps the family to adapt in the new situation. Working with the parents and the whole family can help children to manage better during big changes. The book can be used with the whole family as well as individually.

## Traumatic experiences

The workbook can be used chronologically or just with a few chosen themes. The first and second parts of the book provide possibilities to explore difficult memories in a safe context. At the same time, it is good to provide psychoeducation about coping strategies and discuss about ways to reduce triggers. It is also important get in touch authorities or other professionals who can give for example practical help.



## Children's voice

In the working process there are several themes, in which children can take part. The purpose is to make children's experiences as important part of the history as their parents. It will increase parents' understanding of children's experiences, worries, and needs.



It is important to provide children their own appointments. They can be implemented using My Story- workbook for children and Story of me-workbook for adolescents.

## **Supporting parenthood**

It is important to give parents an opportunity to share their experiences in a session without children. Talking about war and torture traumas requires trust in each other and might need several sessions. Also making a written document might awaken suspicions. Therefore, it is important to discuss goals and purposes of this workbook.

## **Safe structures**

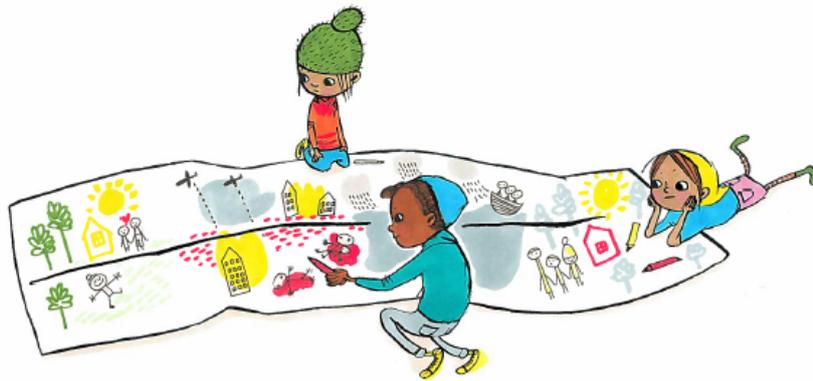
When working with memories of trauma and difficult issues it is important to pay attention to safe structures and professional's grounding and wellbeing. Supervision is recommended.

## **Expressing feelings**

In the book there are feeling scales. Symbols can help express feelings after working at the end of session. It is important to take enough time to stabilize patients and come back to "here and now" mood.

## **Working with an interpreter**

It is recommendable to work with an interpreter when there is no shared language, or when language skills are not sufficient to express emotions and thoughts. Remember to inform the interpreter about the therapeutic process and try to use the same interpreter throughout the whole process.



## **The timeline and the journey**

The timeline is a useful and versatile method in working with the family history.

The timeline can be used as an assessment and working method by visualizing different phases of life. It is a functional method, which can help family members to deal with even sad or painful events. It is also a way to work with the whole family together. It is also good for parents to have their own appointments. In conversations with parents it is possible to talk about the most difficult experiences and plan helpful interventions and support.

Additional materials, like maps and drawings, can be used when the family is reminiscing their journey. When traumatizing events have happened during the journey, memories might be fragile and illogical. Give enough time to process and take a break, if needed.

Children's memories and experiences are valuable and good to share with the parents.

It is very important to also bring up joyful moments, courage, and resilience with all family members.



## The family tree

The genogram picture can be used to find out strengths and difficulties in the family history and relationships. Talking about relatives and family members who are still in the home country is very important. You can add photographs, drawings, or other materials to the genogram picture.

## Traumatic events and trauma symptoms

When processing traumatic events it is important to ensure that patients have enough information, trust and coping skills. It is good to talk about the best way to work. Sometimes it is better to work only with the mother or father, without children. Every family member has their own experiences, coping skills and resilience with managing difficult memories.



Positive life experiences and memories are important factors that are good to be highlighted. Family members can also have various skills and strengths that have helped them to cope and survive. Every family has also their own beliefs and culture. The checklist of the most common trauma symptoms helps the patient to recognize difficulties affecting everyday life. On the same

page there is a space for talking about coping strategies. In this context it would be natural to give advice on how to increase a sense of control and self-regulation by body-oriented stabilizing methods.

## The body map

helps to identify the connection between body and mind. Different emotions are often reflected in physical experiences and vice versa. The body map can be used to name the emotions which are physically present in the body.

The body map can also be coloured with different colours for the areas that have previously suffered injuries and areas that are currently causing pain. At the same time, it is good to find out what medical interventions have been done and whether further examinations are needed.

These pages can be processed separately and be saved separately from the family book. These can be something very intimate and not to be shared with the whole family as such.

## Family roles and everyday structures



The final topics in this workbook are dealing with family changes, adapting into new roles and habits. It is good to ask the family members about everyday life's difficulties and successes. This can help to assess if any extra help or support is needed. It can also help to see their resources and skills to solve problems. It is important to map out the family support network and strengthen it if necessary.

It can be challenging to adapt into the new culture. The changes can affect marital life, parenthood, and roles between the family members, for example. Living in a new society can cause contradictory expectations, pressures, or misunderstandings. The workbook offers a neutral space to discuss those themes and at the same time strengthen the parental skills.

## **The future**

Talking about the future, imagining dreams and wishes is one way to strengthen the resilience, coping skills, and confidence despite difficult experiences.

When the working process is finished the book can be given to the family.

**We wish rewarding moments working with this workbook.**

**Other workbooks published by Centre of Psychotraumatology:**

**My story** – working with the child patients 3-13 years old

**Story of me** – working with the adolescent patients 14-24 years old

**The PDF version of the workbook :** <https://www.hdl.fi/tukea-ja-toimintaa/maahanmuuttajille/psykotraumatologian-keskus/tietopankki/>

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