

Refugee children ...

Have been on the run for a long time when they arrive in the Netherlands. They generally have a whole history behind them. The things they have seen are not meant for children's eyes, but especially not for children's brains. Without knowing the adults around them, they form ideas about themselves, their family and environment that are not right, due to their lack of 'normal' experience, and are not tested against reality. They grow up with their distorted ideas and their behavior is therefore not always understandable, because we do not understand the background.

However, they are primarily children. Their normality must come first. I see people fleeing too quickly with the idea of flight and trauma. They lose sight of the child. They pay too little attention to the language problem. They want to get started with trauma, without real knowledge of what this means. But most of the time the child has a normal question that asks for explanation and education instead of treatment. In large numbers, people are trained in trauma treatment, EMDR, which would then be evidence-based, which is not truly the case. It is therefore in the hands of people who have followed training without knowledge and experience with trauma and development. This creates a misdeed that threatens to cause serious damage.

Like everything else, we risk losing sight of what really works. Namely contact, kindness and an attitude that we do not know, but are willing to learn and, on top of that, the contribution through their own knowledge. No one is quite an expert about a child, than the child himself. There is still too little attention in education for the only evidence-based approach that has been soundly proven over almost a century: the non-specific factors we just mentioned. If we do not know in our own country what causes trauma and criminal behavior or whatever, we should be careful to call out that we know how to solve the trauma of refugee children. Engaging in new groups without having the experience with them.

We are full of giving help, not observing, which is primordial. We offer trauma help, think that it is evidence-based and do copy-paste on the child and then on the refugee child. With the best of intentions often, but naively and sometimes just with commercial motives.

In the lack of modesty, the risk is also that we cause damage! Since 1980 I have been working with refugees, in particular unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, and have learned that there is no single answer to a complex multiple question. That what you do today does not always work in the long run. And that the refugee does not give feedback easily and that you can continue on the wrong track without knowing.

We should not think too quickly that we know how to take care of them and integrate them and get rid of their trauma.

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