

switchboard

Bullying Prevention and Response When Supporting Refugee Students

July 15, 2026





Today's Speakers



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Training Officer, Switchboard



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to...

Describe

the roles in bullying and the risk factors specific to refugee students

01

Explain

the link between core stressors that refugee students may face and bullying

02

Apply

vital strategies and considerations that may help prevent and respond to the bullying of refugee students

03



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What is bullying?

- **Unwanted** and **aggressive** behavior
- Creates an **imbalance of power**
- Behavior is **repeated** and intentional
- Types of bullying include **verbal, social,** and **physical**
- Cyberbullying involves **electronic devices** to harass, embarrass, or target someone





What roles do you commonly see youth playing when bullying is occurring?

The Roles in Bullying



**Youth
Who Bully**



**Youth Who
Assist**



**Youth Who
are Bullied**



**Youth Who
Reinforce**



Outsiders



**Youth Who
Defend**



Bullying Risk Factors

- Being **perceived as different** from peers either physically, academically, behaviorally, or culturally
- Being **perceived as weak** or unable to defend themselves
- Feeling **depressed** or **anxious**, or having **low self-esteem**
- Having **few friends** or trouble making friends



Factors That Contribute to Bullying Behavior

- Being **aggressive** or **easily frustrated**
- **Less parental involvement** or other challenges at home
- **Thinking negatively** of others
- **Difficulty following rules**
- **Exposure to violence** and/or trauma
- Viewing violence in a **positive** way
- Having **friends who bully** others



Understanding the Impact of Risk Factors



Youth Who Are Bullied

- Depression and anxiety
- Health complaints
- Decreased academic achievement

Youth Who Bully

- Fights, vandalism, and higher dropout rates
- More likely to abuse alcohol and drugs in adolescence

Youth Who Are Bystanders

- Increased mental health problems, including depression or anxiety
- Higher rate of absences



Explain

the link between core stressors that refugee students may face and bullying

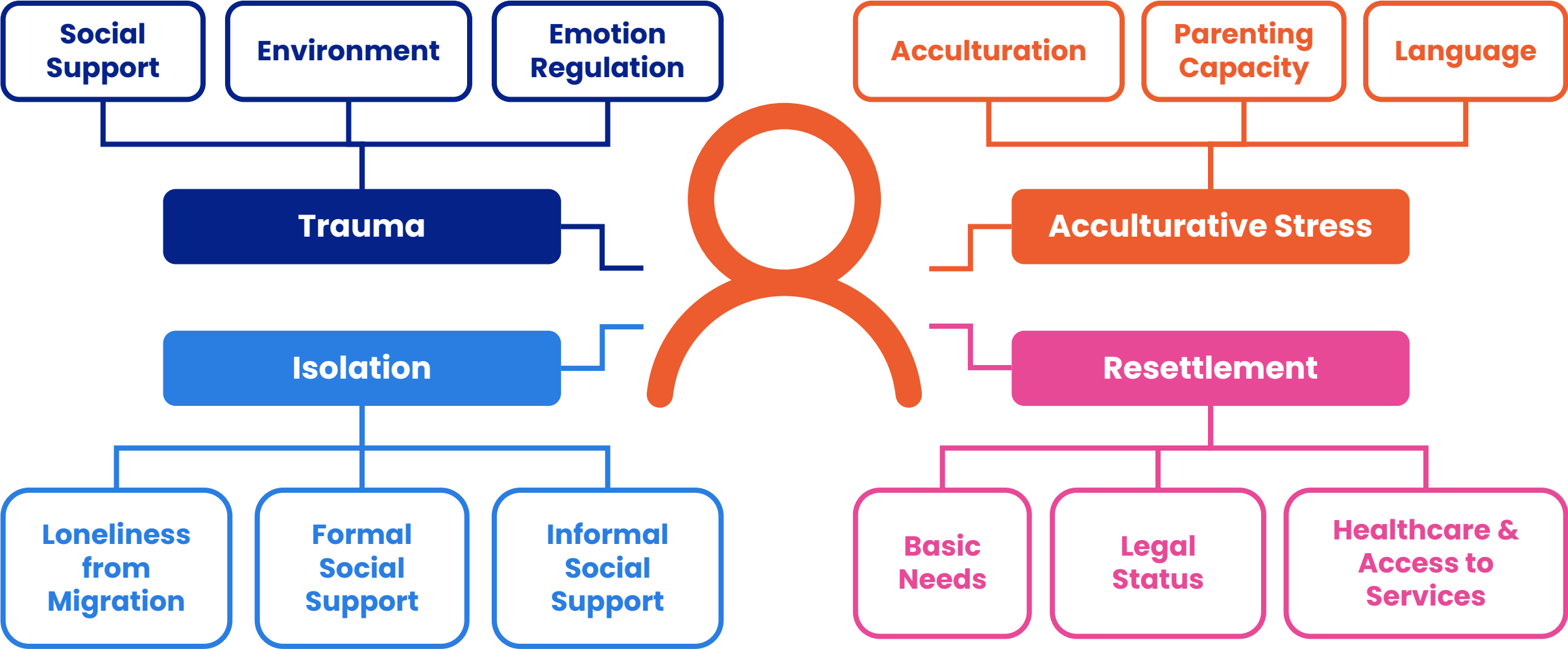
01

02

03



Core Stressors



Boston Children's Hospital. (2019). *Refugee and immigrant core stressors toolkit*. <https://redcap.link/Corestressortool>

Link Between Core Stressors & Bullying



Case Study: Ameena

- 10-year-old girl from a rural area of Afghanistan who speaks Pashto
- Has a limited educational background and currently attending your school
- Resettled in the U.S. with her family about three months ago
- Wears a hijab
- Appears quiet, plays by herself at recess and sits alone at lunch





**What are some stressors
Ameena could be
experiencing?**

Connecting Ameenah's Experience and Core Stressors

- Speaks Pashto: **language barrier**
- Has a limited educational background: **unfamiliar environment**
- Resettled in the U.S. with her family about three months ago: **resettlement stress**
- Wears a hijab: **cultural differences**
- Appears quiet, plays by herself at recess and sits alone at lunch: **limited social support**





Reflection Pause

- What might be your first step in responding to this situation?
- Who might you involve?
- What information might you want to gather before taking action?

Returning to Ameena

Ameena shared with her teacher that some students ask her questions about her hijab almost every day. While she said the questions did not bother her at first, they have become more frequent and increasingly uncomfortable. Recently, one student told her to “go back to your own country.”



Apply

vital strategies and considerations that may help prevent and respond to the bullying of refugee students

01

02

03



What has worked in responding to and preventing bullying in your work with newcomer youth?

School-Wide Prevention Initiatives

Refugee Youth Need to Feel Safe and Welcome





Cultural Considerations and Trauma-Informed Bullying Prevention Strategies

01

Bullying prevention programs

02

Policy development and enforcement

03

Collaboration with school staff and specialists

04

Parent and community involvement

05

Bystander intervention training

06

Cross-cultural training



Cultural Considerations and Trauma-Informed Bullying Prevention Strategies

Continued

07

Examining attitudes toward refugees

10

Providing training or PD on crossing cultures

08

Identifying barriers to school participation

11

Translating surveys to gather data

09

Including ELL staff in bullying prevention

12

Creating opportunities for leadership



A Strengths-Based Approach Using Protective Factors

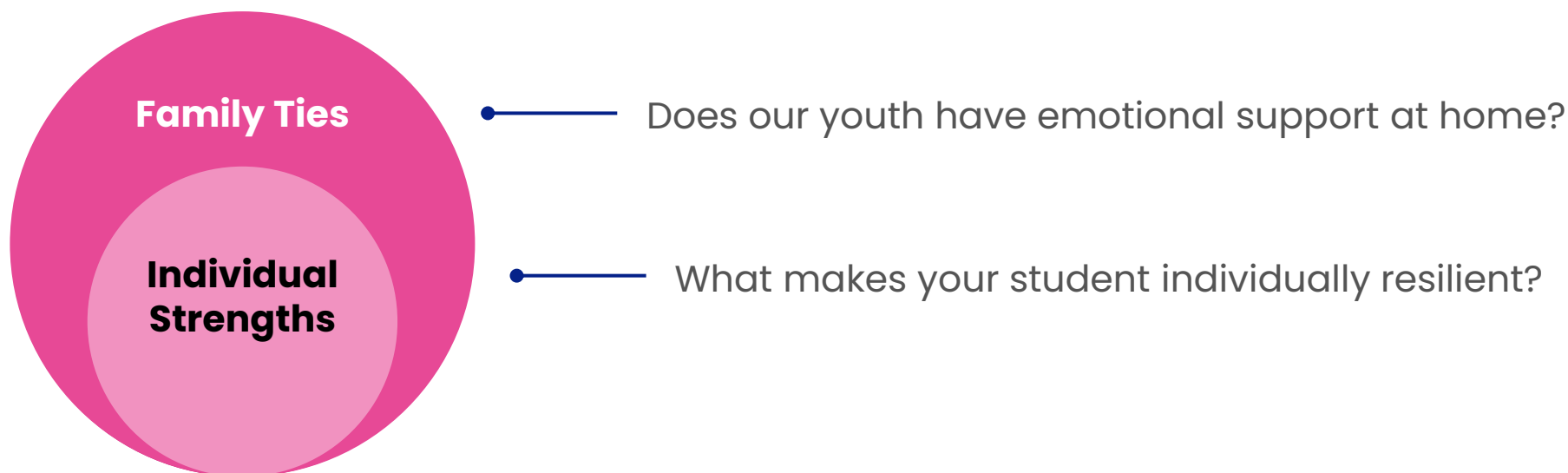
**Individual
Strengths**

A pink circle containing the text 'Individual Strengths' is connected by a horizontal line to the text 'What makes youth individually resilient?'.

What makes youth individually resilient?

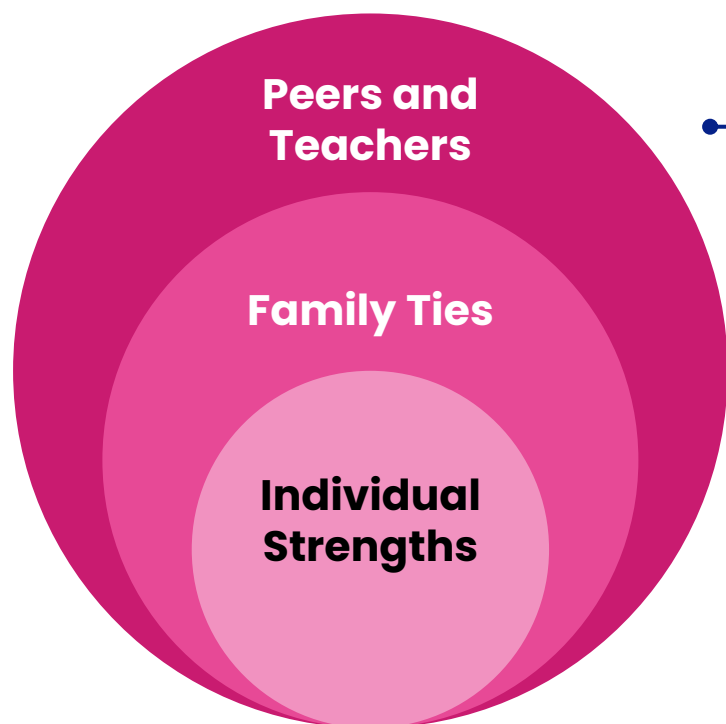


A Strengths-Based Approach Using Protective Factors





A Strengths-Based Approach Using Protective Factors



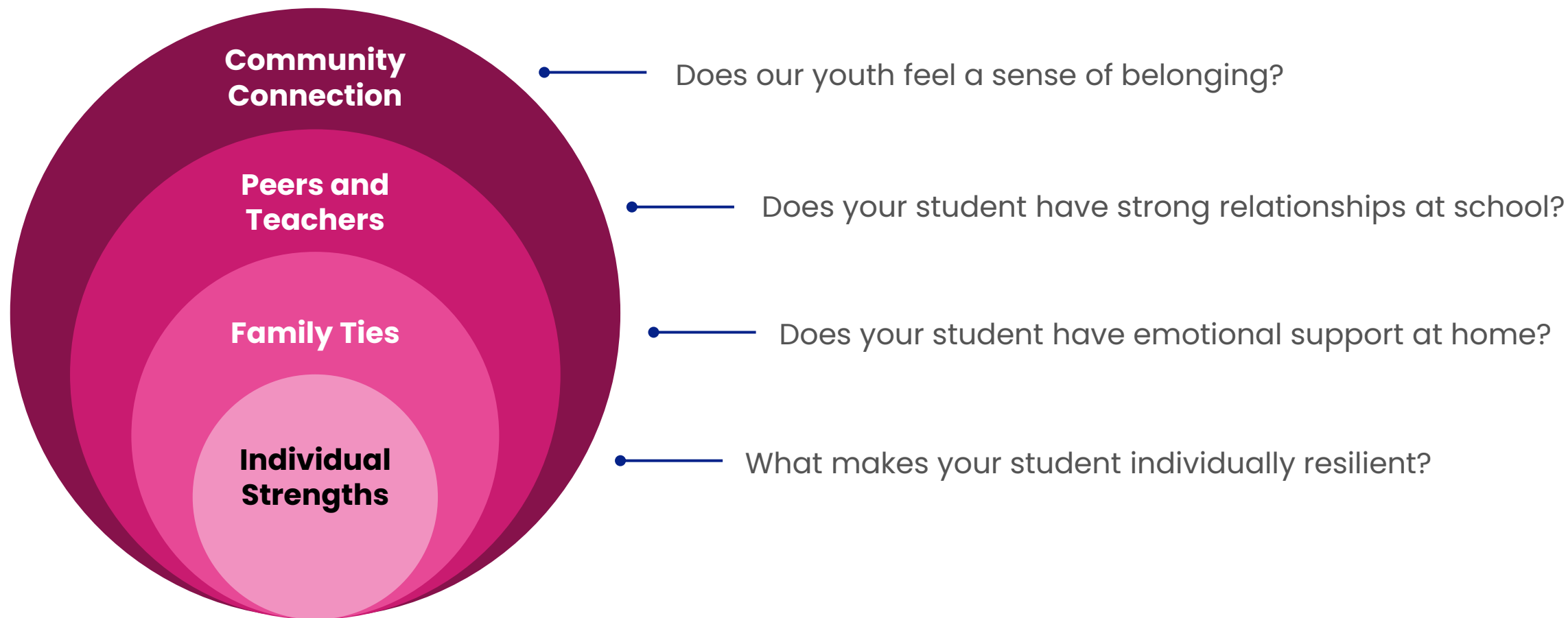
— Does our youth have strong relationships at school?

— Does your student have emotional support at home?

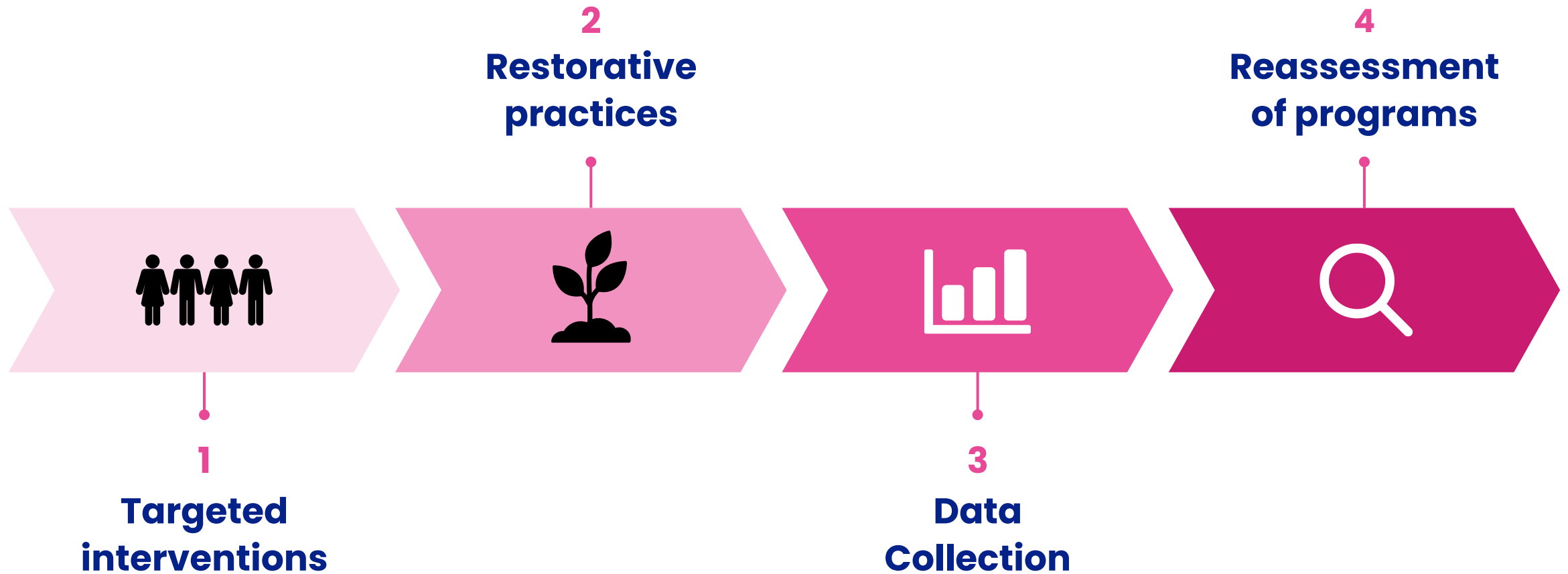
— What makes your student individually resilient?



A Strengths-Based Approach Using Protective Factors



Bullying Response Strategies



Case Scenario: Amani



- Amani is a 14-year-old girl from Democratic Republic of Congo
- Attends a local community center leadership program
- Recently, Amani becomes withdrawn and anxious, and shares that:
 - Other youth are making fun of her accent
 - They are imitating her speech and laughing at her
 - She no longer wants to attend



What are some protective factors that Amani may have?



Thinking about your role: How can you respond in a way that promotes safety and trust?

Case Scenario: Naw Moo

- Naw Moo is a 10-year-old girl from Myanmar
- She attends a youth peer support group where the facilitator notices she rarely speaks
- Several other youth are making comments about her clothes and lunch, and they laugh at her
- Naw Moo feels ashamed and worried about her family being judged
- Her family reports she is acting out at home, exhibiting aggressive behaviors





What might be your first trauma-informed response to support Naw Moo?



Case Scenario Debrief: Naw Moo

- A trauma-informed response would focus on:
 - Restoring safety
 - Reinforcing belonging
 - Validating emotions
 - Building strengths
 - Addressing harmful behavior
 - Creating opportunities for positive peer interactions
- The goal: create environments where all youth feel respected, welcome, and able to participate fully



Key Takeaways

- Newcomer youth face **added stressors** (e.g., language barriers, isolation, discrimination) that can **increase vulnerability** and risk of bullying.
- **Bullying impacts all involved** (those who are bullied, those who bully, the bystanders) and is shaped by culture, belonging, and access to support.
- Prevention and response should promote **safe environments** that use **trauma-informed care** to support healing, accountability, and the youths' strengths.





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Recommended Resources

Switchboard

- Tool: [Addressing Bullying: Scripted Conversations](#) (2025)
- Blog: [Fostering Resilience for Refugee Students](#) (2024)
- Evidence Summary: [What Works to Prevent the Bullying of Refugee and Newcomer Children and Youth](#) (2024)
- Guide: [Bullying Prevention and Response when Supporting Students](#) (2024)

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)

- Guide: [I'm Being Bullied at School – What Should I Do?](#)
- Guide: [Talking About Bullying With Children And Families](#) (2023)
- Amaze LAC, Video: [¿Qué es el bullying? \(México\)](#)



Addressing Bullying: Scripted Conversations

Author: Switchboard

Addressing bullying is a **critical component of ensuring a child's safety and well-being**. It is essential to have ongoing discussions with both the child and their caregiver to reinforce awareness, encourage open communication, and provide guidance on how to handle such situations effectively. Below is a structured script designed to facilitate these conversations, helping caseworkers navigate discussions with both the caregiver and the child. Please note that each case is unique, and the approach should be tailored to fit the specific needs and circumstances of the child and their caregiver.

When addressing serious matters such as bullying—like in any conversation—language barriers can prevent clients from fully understanding their rights and responsibilities, as well as key aspects and processes of service provision. To avoid misunderstandings, caseworkers should ensure that a qualified interpreter is present to facilitate clear communication. Using family members as interpreters can lead to misinformation for both caseworkers and clients. To learn more about working with interpreters, caseworkers can review the following Switchboard resources: [Introduction to Working with Interpreters](#); [Overcoming Challenges in Interpretation](#); [Scripts for Working with Interpreters](#); and [Making Sense of Mobile Apps: A Collection of Interpretation, Translation, and Integration Apps for Newcomers](#). They can also review this tip sheet from the National Accreditation of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages: [What to Expect from an Interpreter: Communicating Effectively with Your Child's School](#).

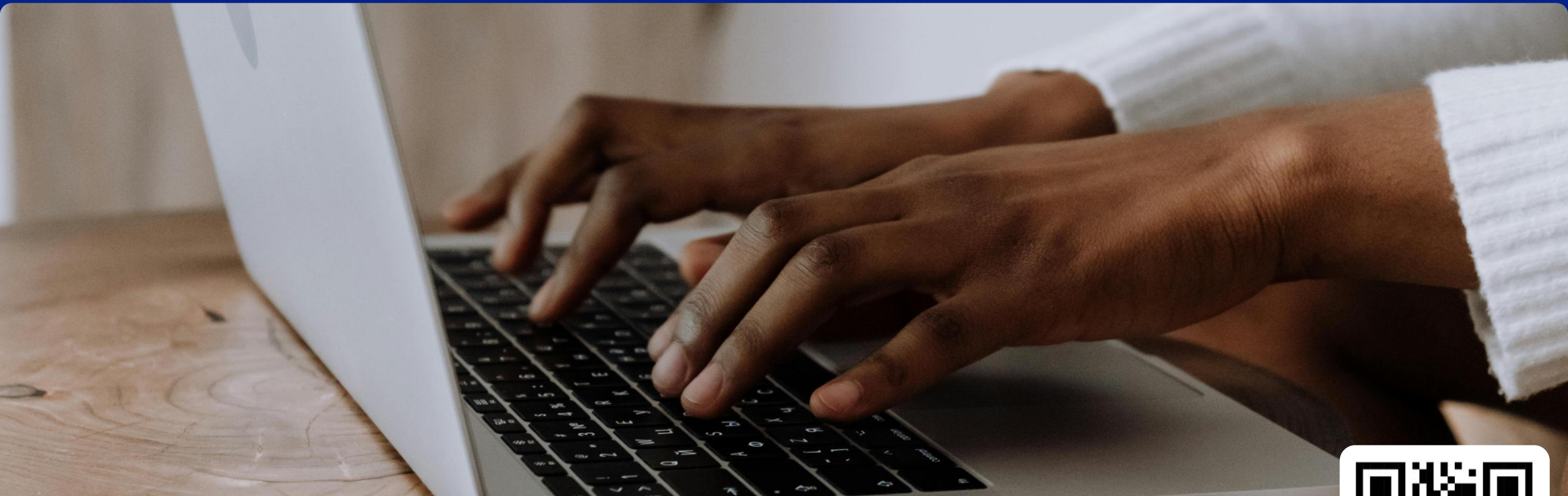
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