Arezoo’s Backpack: tools, tips and traits for a young refugee’s journey

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Clinical Master Class
Wednesday, 21 February 2018
Meet Arezoo
Demographics

- Age: 16 years old
- Country of birth: Iran
- Ethnicity: Iranian
- Religious affiliation: Baha’i
- Transit country: Turkey (2011 – 2015)
- Year of arrival to Australia: mid-2015
- Referral to STARTTS: early 2017
Genogram

All parties currently reside in Australia
Presenting Issues

- Referred to STARTTS by Ryde CAMHS for relationship difficulties with family members

Upon STARTTS’ assessment:
- Sleeping difficulties (intermittent)
- Concentration difficulties
- Low motivation
- Social isolation
- (Perceived) poor academic performance
Assessment

- Comprehensive biopsychosocial semi-structured interview
- Test of Variable Attention (TOVA)
  - The TOVA is a neuropsychological assessment that measures a person's attention while screening for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (or ADHD).
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
  - The SDQ is a brief emotional and behavioural screening questionnaire for children and young people. Total Difficulties Score = 21 (Abnormal 20 – 40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Symptoms Scale</th>
<th>Conduct Problems Scale</th>
<th>Hyperactivity Scale</th>
<th>Peer Problems Scale</th>
<th>Prosocial Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 (Abnormal)</td>
<td>4 (Borderline)</td>
<td>5 (Normal)</td>
<td>5 (Borderline)</td>
<td>9 (Normal)</td>
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Factors (both intrinsic and extrinsic to the young person) that reduce the likelihood of poor mental health and/or improve social and emotional wellbeing

- Individual (e.g. temperament, physical health)
- Family (e.g. positive relationship/s with parent/s)
- Peers (e.g. inclusive group norms)
- School (e.g. connections to staff and/or peers)
- Community (e.g. safety and inclusiveness)
Case Formulation: a complex interaction of stressors

- **International Events**
- **Impact of Traumatic Experiences**
- **Resettlement Challenges/Seeking Protection**
- **Normal Life Cycle**
- **Australian Environment**

Interventions to reduce complex interaction of stress factors

Interventions to strengthen internal and external protective factors

Cultural / Religious Aspects
Socio-Political Background

Restore balance and a sense of control

Aroche and Coello, 1994

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Interventions

- **Narrative therapy**
  - “Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives.” ([https://dulwichcentre.com.au/what-is-narrative-therapy/](https://dulwichcentre.com.au/what-is-narrative-therapy/))
  - Non threatening approach

- Psychoeducation

- Biofeedback and Heart Rate Variability (HRV)

- Attempted referral to Family Therapy
Outcomes

- Client has been able to reorganise her understanding of the refugee journey and subsequent life challenges
- Relationship with her mother has seen improvement (intermittently)
- Client has been able to successfully engage in paid employment
- Client has been able to commit to completing HSC
- Client reports less experiences of anxiousness in context of school work

- Client continues to work on:
  - increasing social connectedness
  - relationships with her family members
Reflections

- The essence of this work has been the strong therapeutic relationship

- Is the therapist viewed as a secure attachment figure?

- Is the therapist representative of the ‘idealised mother’ for the client?

- The therapeutic relationship is characterised by pride and strong unconditional positive regard on the therapist’s part
Conclusion

“My journey is now one of learning and growth... so that I may become the best version of myself that I can be”