

Information for volunteers on dealing with mentally stressed refugees

Important in advance

Not every traumatic situation that people experience, results in a traumatic disorder that requires treatment. Those people affected can show a normal stress reaction to an unusual situation for days or a few weeks. This reaction can manifest itself, for example, in feelings such as helplessness, fear, depression, anger or aggression, emotional numbness or sleeping difficulties, intrusive memories, brooding, nightmares, inner or outer restlessness, social withdrawal and avoidance of things or news related to the experiences. All these feelings or reactions are signs of appropriate trauma processing and not signs of mental illness.

However, if the feelings are so strong that everyday life no longer works, or you have the impression that you are overwhelmed with the care of this person, or the symptoms last longer than a few weeks or, for example, you are consuming addictive substances, it is advisable to get a professional opinion.

Tips and examples for concrete handling

- Provide information about your own role and situation in which you meet each other
"Hello, my name is ..., I am a volunteer and will help you today to find a place to sleep."
- Give attention and sympathy (pay attention to body language, radiate calmness); Listen when the person wants to talk, but don't ask probing questions from your own accord
- Involve familiar people/ additional help and agencies
"Do you have relatives in Germany?" / "Are you traveling alone?"
- Simple and clear language
- Calm tone
- Manageable dosing of information
- One subject after another/ don't get hectical
- respond to the respective needs in the near future
"Today we will first clarify your sleeping place, tomorrow we will look for other topics."
- **Take your own signs of being overwhelmed seriously**, take breaks, exchange ideas with others
- Show empathy, stay authentic
"I see you're tired/ exhausted.", "I don't know right now, but we'll find out."
- Nurture hope, focus on the here and now, convey security, but don't give false promises or false information
"You are safe now and you will be helped here.", "Come on, now let's look for something to eat."
- Accept any feelings and perceptions as being ok, recognize the experiences of others and do not try to convince them of your point of view
"It's normal for you to experience strong feelings. That is appropriate for your situation."
- Appreciate personal interactions first
"Everyone deals with difficult situations in their own way."
- Observe your own limits!

