

## Tips for the Refugee Loss Simulation

- The Refugee Loss Simulation works best when the presenter can use their own stories based on refugees they know. Presenters should ask their refugee friends for permission to use their stories. However, it is possible to read the stories provided.
- It can be very uncomfortable to facilitate the simulation with refugees in the room. Make sure any refugees that are present know about the simulation and have the opportunity to leave the room if they desire.
- A presenter should be able to answer basic questions about the global refugee crisis and the refugee resettlement process before attempting to facilitate the simulation. For basic information on refugees see:
  - <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/>
  - <https://wewelcomerefugees.com/resources/>
- Multiple short videos can be shown prior to the simulation to enhance the experience:
  - Refugee: A Netflix Original. 2016. (23 min)
  - We Welcome Refugees: <https://vimeo.com/139718793> (2 min)
- The simulation can be very uncomfortable for people. No one needs to feel pressure to participate. It is best to ensure key leaders know how difficult this activity can be so they can best shepherd their people after the simulation.
- The mood in the room after the simulation tends to be very somber. It is wise to provide time for groups to process, pray, and decompress from the experience. A time of reflective worship is also appropriate. It is difficult to transition quickly to other activities after the simulation.
- The loss simulation may trigger memories from other tragic situations. Leaders must be prepared to counsel people that may be emotionally grieved for various reasons.
- The Refugee Loss Simulation is not recommended for elementary and middle school age children. The simulation may not be suitable for some high school students. Discretion should be exercised anytime the simulation is used with minors.
- The Refugee Loss Simulation is not copyrighted. However, discretion should be used regarding who and how the simulation is conducted. Please know that not all refugees have lost everything. However, all refugees have lost something. Please be sensitive.

# Loss Simulation

## SET UP:

All participants must be seated at tables with a pen or pencil. Place some sort of basket or small plastic containers on each table to serve as trash cans. A box of tissues on each table might actually be a great idea. Provide each participant 16 small slips of paper—four each of four different colors (yellow, green, blue, pink).

## INSTRUCTOR:

The instructor should be someone who understands the refugee story well and has stories to tell during this activity that have a ring of truth. This activity is most effective when the instructor is telling his or her own stories about refugees that are friends. If the instructor cannot say, "I know a refugee who..." then he or she should say, "I know of a refugee who..." or "I heard a story about a refugee who..." Before doing this activity, the participants should hear about who refugees are, what their journey is like, and how they come to live in the U.S.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Give participants a packet of papers and ask them to separate their papers into four piles.

You need to make these points before you begin:

1. It is hard for people who live in a country that is untouched by war on our land to understand the loss that a refugee suffers. This exercise will help you to understand.
2. This will not be easy, and it is not designed to be. If you are a person who has suffered tremendous trauma in your life, or if a professional has ever suggested that you might suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome or PTSD, please do not participate, but just watch this activity.
3. This is a PERSONAL activity. You will not share what you write with anyone.
4. When this becomes uncomfortable, please resist the urge to laugh or make jokes to lessen the discomfort.

## CATEGORIES:

Explain to participants that you will give them some categories and ask them to think of four things in each category. Explain that you they will write one item on each paper. There are four categories. Each one has specific instructions and restrictions. The colors are not significant, but will help to keep everything separate.

1. **Yellow:** Things You Enjoy. Give examples of things you enjoy that you would write on your papers (i.e., dinner at your favorite restaurant, date night with your spouse, etc.) Wait until everyone is finished before you move on. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.
2. **Pink:** Ways You Identify Yourself or Roles You Play In Life. Give examples of ways you identify yourself (i.e., spouse, parent, tutor, soccer coach, etc.)  
**RESTRICTION:** Instruct participants to NOT include anything about faith. For people of faith, this is a significant identity, but for the purpose of this activity, it should not be included.  
Wait until everyone is finished before you move on. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.
3. **Green:** The Physical Possessions That Are Most Valuable To You. (Not necessarily greatest monetary value, but things that you value. Give examples from your life (i.e., house, the Bible you inherited from your grandfather, etc.)  
**RESTRICTIONS:** These items must be things you can see and touch and feel. (Not ethereal things like "My Education" or "My Tenacity." Pets can be included. People cannot be included.  
Wait until everyone is finished before you move on. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.
4. **Blue:** The Four Most Important People In Your Life. (Must be by name)  
**RESTRICTIONS:** People must be living. No collective nouns are allowed (i.e., parents, children, siblings, etc.)  
Wait until everyone is finished before you move on. Instruct participants to place papers back in a pile upside down on the table.
5. Have participants put down their pens. Make sure everyone has their stacks of papers upside down and separate on the table in front of them. Remind participants of these things: (1) This is a PERSONAL activity. You will not share what you write with anyone. (2) When this becomes uncomfortable, please resist the urge to laugh or make jokes to lessen the discomfort.

#### SELECTED LOSS:

*Say this: Refugees make heartbreaking decisions when they have to flee their homes. You have 30 seconds to choose one paper from each stack that you will lose. Tear up the slips that you chose and throw them away. Put the remaining three papers from each stack upside down in stacks in front of you as you finish.*

Instructor: Count down 30 seconds and tell participants to hurry (For example, yell out, “15 seconds! Hurry!”)

*Say this: Fleeing your home because of war is a horrible experience. Someone give me one word—and one word only—to explain how that made you feel?*

Instructor: Take answers. Connect to refugees fleeing a village and having to choose whether they take their family scripture book or a coat. I usually tell this story: “I have a friend from Burma who was at home with her three-year-old daughter one day while her seven-year-old son was across their town at school. Her husband was out working. An army attacked their town coming from the direction of the school. This woman had to make a horrible choice. Do I take my daughter and run to the school to find my son—knowing that we all may be killed in the process? Do I run away with my daughter to keep us both safe and hope my son survives? Do I give my daughter to my neighbor and let them run away while I find my son, knowing that I might not find my daughter again? Should I look for my husband?” Point out that when people are fleeing violence, they make decisions that we cannot imagine having to make.

#### UNKNOWN LOSS:

Make sure all piles are turned over in front of each participant. Say this: *From this point forward, you will not look at anything written on any of your papers until I instruct you to do so. (Say it again for emphasis.) Without looking at what is written on any of your papers, take the piece of paper that is in the middle of each pile and throw them away—without looking at anything written on any of the papers.*

*Say this: Refugees live with the unknown—sometimes for a short time and sometimes forever. How does it feel to not know what you have lost? Someone give me one word to explain how this made you feel? (Take answers.)*

I usually follow up from the earlier story and say this: “My friend from Burma that I mentioned a moment ago chose to take her daughter and run away with her neighbors to keep them both alive. Once they came to a place of safety, she left her daughter with her neighbors and came back to look for her son—not knowing if he had been taken, killed or injured. It had been several hours since the attack. She had no idea what had happened to her son or her husband. She found her son—slightly injured, but OK. She couldn’t find her husband. It would be two years before they would be reunited in a refugee camp.” *Imagine sitting in a refugee camp not knowing if your brother is alive or where your mother is nor if they are safe. Not knowing if your home still stands or if there will be anything to return to in your hometown. Did your neighbors make it out safe? Refugees live with the unknown—sometimes for a short time and sometimes forever.*

#### LOSS OF CONTROL:

Make sure all piles are face down in front of each participant. Tell a story about a refugee who lost possessions and family members along the journey. As you tell the story, walk around the room removing papers from in front of people. If possible, have other people take the papers away while you focus on telling the story. Always leave one blue paper (people). For some people leave only two papers, for others take all, for a few, leave three or four. In a couple of instances walk past someone and don’t take anything only to return and take from them as well later. I usually do not allow children younger than 5<sup>th</sup> grade to participate in this activity. If you have younger children participating, leave them three or four papers.

I usually tell this story: “I know a man from Iraq who told me the story of when his family had to flee. He was a boy when his parents decided that they needed to get out of Iraq. They had the means to leave the country and take a boat to India. The family packed up the car with everything they wanted to keep—up to the roof of the car. The family had to drive across a desert road, which would take two days. They set out on this desert road and soon came to a check point where armed soldiers forced them to stop their car and get out. The soldiers went through the things they had packed and kept what they wanted. Then they told the family to get back into the car and keep going.

Over the next two days, the family came to check point after check point, and the same thing happened every time. Sometimes the soldiers were very mean and aggressive. The family was afraid. By the time they reached the last check point, there was nothing of value left to be taken, but the soldiers forced the family to unpack everything and show it to them. They became angry when there was nothing they wanted.

At gunpoint, they told the father and oldest sister to stand aside and then made the rest of the family—the mother, the son and the other daughter—to get back into the car. Everyone began shouting and crying. The father spoke loudly and told everyone to be quiet. He begged the soldiers to allow his daughter to leave with her mother, but they refused. The father instructed his wife, son, and younger daughter to leave without them. He told his son to take care of his mother and sister. Distraught and fearing for their lives, they left.

The family left on a boat, went to India, and eventually to the United States. These events happened 20 years ago, but they have never found any information about the father or the sister. The family assumes that they are dead and hopes that they did not suffer before their lives were ended.

*Say this: How does it feel to have things taken right in front of you? Someone give one word to explain how you feel. (Take answers.)*

Tell the participants that you are going to give them some time to look at their papers to see what they have left. Usually this is very difficult. Ask again for one word to explain how this makes them feel. Point out that when we come to the table to serve in a refugee community, we bring wisdom, knowledge, and experience that a refugee does not have. Point out that a refugee brings wisdom, knowledge, and experience that we do not have. Remind the participants that they have lost nothing. These are just pieces of paper that represent the most important things in our lives. When everything is stripped away, it's easier to see our similarities rather than our differences. Thank the participants for engaging in this exercise. Acknowledge that it is a difficult thing to lose so much—or even to consider losing it.