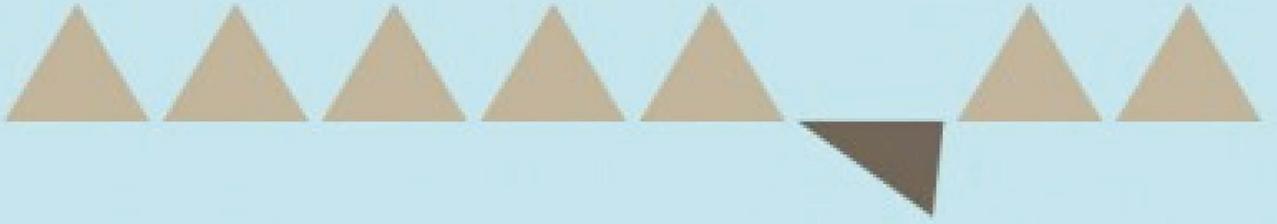


LGBTI+
REFUGEE
SELF-CARE
HANDBOOK



KAOS GL REFUGEE RIGHTS PROGRAM



This handbook has been prepared to make sense of what we feel during these difficult times and to facilitate our coping mechanisms within this period.

Kaos GL Refugee Rights Program

Our friends under the rainbow,

Being LGBTI+ and a refugee at the same time may lead to experiencing various life difficulties on its own. These difficulties may have become more apparent and troublesome to you during the Covid-19 Pandemic affecting the whole world. Due to being a refugee and LGBTI+, you may be experiencing more discrimination and exclusion than ever before in this period. You may be subject to stigmatization based on the country you came from due to Covid-19. Or, you may not be able to get the help you need because you are LGBTI+ and a refugee. Experiencing these things because of your identity may have become more upsetting and difficult for you than ever before.

In this period, your financial conditions may have worsened because of the closure of the workplaces where you work due to the pandemic. The financial aids you receive may have become much more inadequate due to the high costs of living. Or you may not be benefiting equally from the financial and in-kind assistance provided by the institutions, on the grounds of you being LGBTI+ or a refugee. Therefore, you may be more concerned about your future than ever before.

In this pandemic period, various recommendations are made by reliable health institutions and mental health organizations to protect our physical and mental health. However, some of these suggestions may seem unrealistic for LGBTI+ refugees under difficult living conditions. These suggestions made by experts may seem to be lacking understanding and empathy in the face of the traumatic effects of the difficulties you experienced. What you experience as an LGBTI+ refugee may sometimes make you feel insecure, angry and hopeless towards everyone and everything.

However, struggling to survive physically and spiritually is very valuable and meaningful in all circumstances. No matter how hard your circumstances are, there will defiantly be things you can do to protect yourself and those around you. To find the protective measures worthless or ignore them may mean directing your righteous anger towards those responsible for what happened to you towards yourselves. These protective measures do not aim to eliminate our negative emotions, but rather to identify and understand these emotions. Regardless of our circumstances, being able to express what we feel is a healthy action.

We wanted to prepare a handbook for you to make it easier to make sense of what you experience during this process. We also included some exercises that can help you relax. This information is reliable information shared by psychiatrists and clinical psychologists who are experts in this field.

Come let's take a look at how we can help ourselves and how we can be protected mentally from the negative impact of what is happening, as LGBTI+ refugees living in Turkey during this process.

First of all, we can begin by realizing what we can physically and mentally go through during the pandemic.

In this process:

- You may be afraid and concerned about your own health and the health of those of your loved ones who may be exposed to COVID-19.
- You may be experiencing disruptions to your sleep or eating patterns.
- You may be having trouble in sleeping or concentrating.
- Your chronic health problems may have worsened.
- You may feel more anxiety and stress than usual.
- You may feel hopeless or helpless.
- Your use of alcohol, tobacco, or other medicines may have increased. (Source: Psychiatric Association of Turkey)





**Let's not forget,
"Everyone can react differently to stressful
situations."**

This negative process associated with Corona virus, may have triggered or aggravated your traumatic stress that existed before the pandemic.





So what is "traumatic stress"?

Traumatic stress is the emotional, physical, behavioural and cognitive responses of those who experienced a traumatic event, after the event. (Source: Banu Yilmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)

Being LGBTI+ and a refugee may mean experiencing tough living conditions. Therefore, you may experience traumatic stress very often.

So during this period, you are likely to experience both stress caused by Corona virus and traumatic stress caused by being LGBTI+ refugee.



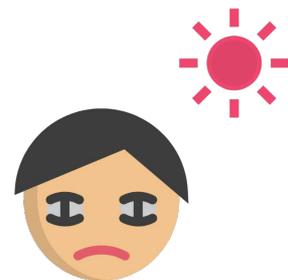
So how can symptoms of traumatic stress appear?

Let's first look at the physical symptoms:

- Decreases or increases in activity
- Inability to relax
- Changing of eating habits
- Changing of sleep habits

Behavioural and Social symptoms:

- Distancing from family and friends
- Desire to constantly explain what happened
- Communication difficulties
- Trying to cope through humour
- Anger bursts, frequent arguments
- Crying spells
- Change of eating habits
- Decrease in business success
- Increased use of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs
- Social withdrawal, reticence
- Avoiding places or activities that revive memories



Emotional symptoms

- Worrying about the safety of yourself and other persons
- Anger
- Restlessness
- Sadness, depression
- Disturbing dreams
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Feeling isolated, lost, exhausted

Cognitive symptoms

- Memory problems
- Confusion
- Slowness in thinking and comprehension
- Difficulty in calculating, setting priorities and making decisions
- Problems with concentration
- Limited attention span
- Impairment of objectivity
- Continuous thinking about the event (Source: Banu Yilmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)





In this process, it is possible to experience both Corona related stress effects and the effects of Traumatic stress.

If you see these effects in yourself, it is very important to get professional support and contact a mental health professional.

However, your financial conditions may have worsened during this period. Therefore, you may not be able to access professional mental health support.



So what can we do in these conditions?

There are some ways to help ourselves and calm ourselves when we feel severe stress and anxiety.

First, let's look at some of the things we can do to prevent or reduce the rise of stress and anxiety.

During this process;

- We can make an effort to take care of our body, to the best of our abilities. For example, we can try to choose the healthiest foods we can afford as much as possible.
- We can dance.
- We can do exercise movements.
- We can try not to lose sleep.
- We can limit the tracking of news during the day. For example, even if the channels we use to socialize online such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram may make us feel less alone these days, they can also lead to more exposure to negative news. Therefore, we can limit the time we spend on these channels. Because constantly hearing about the crisis and seeing its images can be sad and worrying.
- When our anxiety intensifies, we can create an area where we can get fresh air. Like opening a window, taking a few deep breaths.
- Once we realize that we cannot control our difficult thoughts, we can try to divert our attention to something else. For example, we can try counting by 17 in our mind. Because counting by 17 is a task that our mind is not accustomed to; our attention will be removed from our thoughts by focusing on calculation.
- We can try to remember a memory where we felt happy. We can try to dream.
- We can try to focus on good developments. We can share this information with people we love.



- We can try to remember what we love.
- We can listen to songs that make us feel good. If we do not have the opportunity to listen, we can sing and hum those songs.
- We can draw.
- We can connect with other people.
- We can share with people how we feel. Let's not forget: Expressing our emotions is not problematic, it is mentally protective.
- We can strive to maintain healthy relationships that are good for us.
- We can avoid alcohol, cigarettes and other substances.
- We can communicate with animals. For example, even watching videos of animals can make us feel better.
- We can grow plants.
- We can share these things we read with others.
- Of course, we can remember that we can sustain LGBTI+ solidarity even in the most difficult conditions.



So what can we do to relax?

Let's take a look at a few exercises

FOCUSING EXERCISE

Now and Here

Stand up. Keep your legs slightly open to the sides. Try to adjust your posture angle until you feel that you are in complete balance. Let your arms be on the side and free. You are standing and in balance. Close your eyes and listen to the sounds.

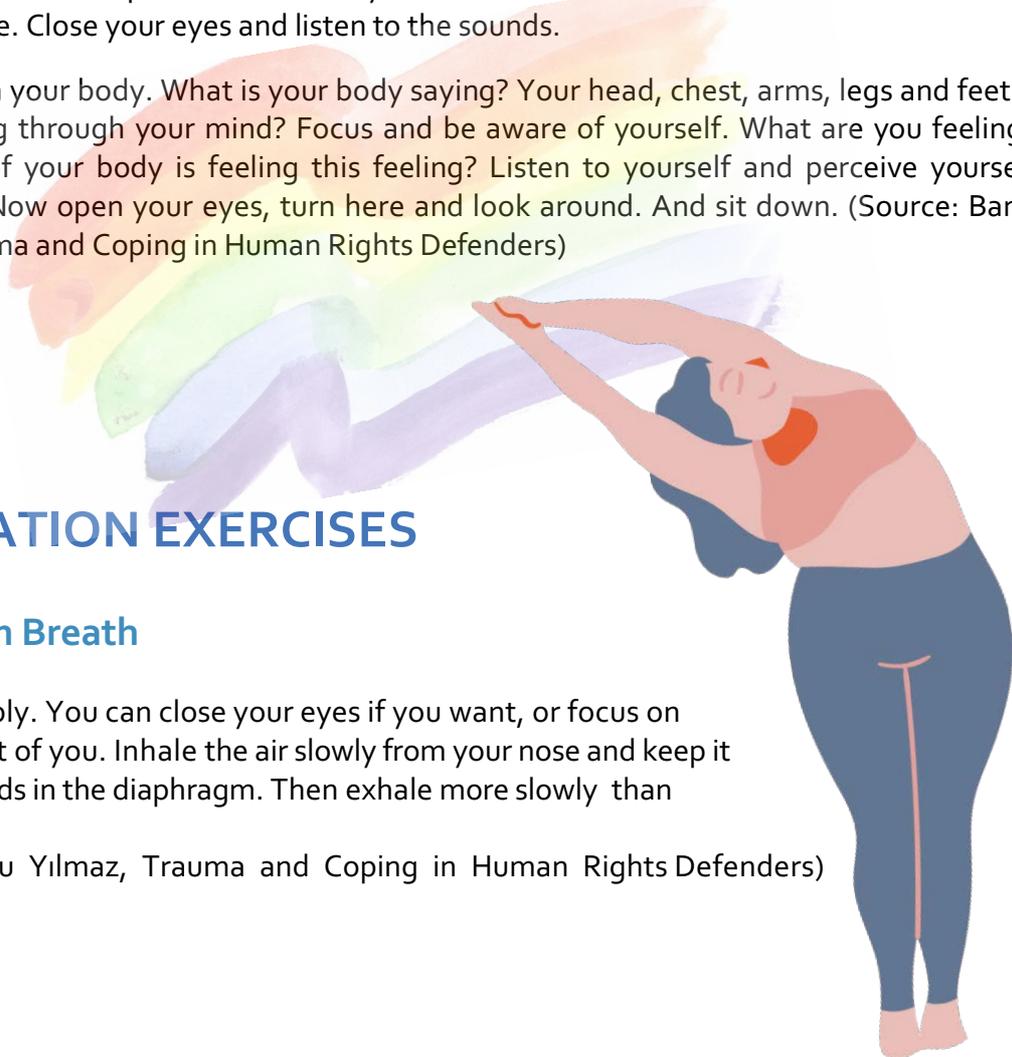
Now focus on your body. What is your body saying? Your head, chest, arms, legs and feet... What is going through your mind? Focus and be aware of yourself. What are you feeling? Which part of your body is feeling this feeling? Listen to yourself and perceive yourself thoroughly. Now open your eyes, turn here and look around. And sit down. (Source: Banu Yilmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)

RELAXATION EXERCISES

Diaphragm Breath

Sit comfortably. You can close your eyes if you want, or focus on a spot in front of you. Inhale the air slowly from your nose and keep it for two seconds in the diaphragm. Then exhale more slowly than your mouth.

(Source: Banu Yilmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)



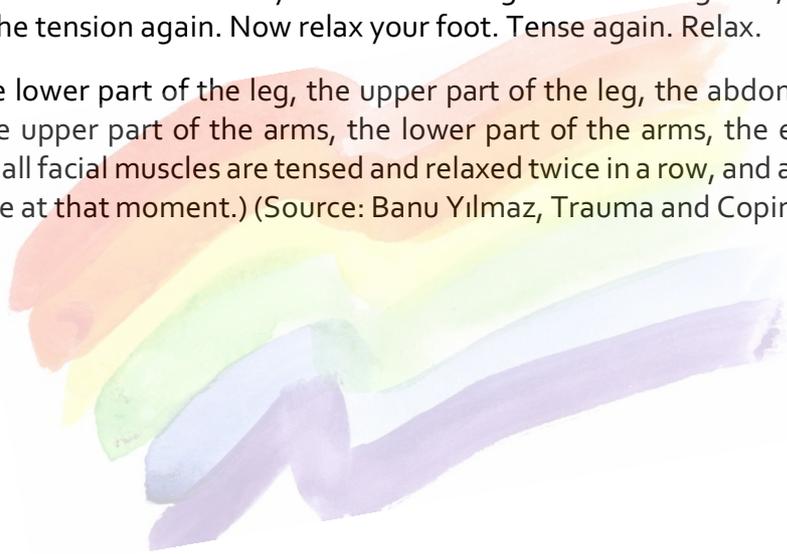
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Sit comfortably, but avoid a position that will make you sleep.

Starting from the muscles of the feet to the muscles of the head, monitor the sensations that you feel during the tension and relaxation.

Please tense the muscles in your feet. Focus all your attention on the tension in your foot. Keep this tension for a while. If you start thinking of something else, try to divert your attention to the tension again. Now relax your foot. Tense again. Relax.

(Likewise, the lower part of the leg, the upper part of the leg, the abdomen, the chest, the shoulders, the upper part of the arms, the lower part of the arms, the eyes, the nose, the forehead and all facial muscles are tensed and relaxed twice in a row, and attention is focused on that muscle at that moment.) (Source: Banu Yılmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)



The Safe Place

"Sit in a position as comfortable as possible. Close your eyes. Now, think about a place where you feel safe, peaceful and comfortable. This place can be a place that actually exists, or it can be a completely fictional place. Make sure you find a place where you are completely safe and nothing will bother you. This place can be a riverside, a garden or any place where you feel comfortable. Now take a deep breath. Continue keeping your eyes closed and breathing. Imagine a picture of your safe place and try to see yourselves there. Are you there? Can you see yourself? Look around you. What do you see? Try to see all the details. What types of colours are there? Try to see different colours. Try to reach and touch the objects around you. Realize what it feels like. Remember, this is your safe place and you can put anything you want there. When you go to this place, you feel comfortable and peaceful. Are there any voices? Or is it completely silent? Feel the silence. What scents are there? Breathe and try to notice the scents. You can find anything you want in this special place of your own. Are you alone in this place? Or is there someone with you? Now for a moment, try to see yourself in this place and watch yourself from the outside. Look at yourself. How are you? What are you doing? Look around once again. Find a name for this place. With that name in mind, take a look at the environment again at your safe place. Try to hear the voices or the silence, smell the nice fragrances. Remember, this is your private place and it will always be there. You can go there anytime you want to feel peaceful and safe. When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and return to the room. As you open your eyes, realize that you are more peaceful and calm." (Source: Banu Yilmaz, Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders)



Equalization

In this technique, which enables controlling thoughts that involuntarily enter the mind, the aim is to raise awareness about the environment and our body through our senses and bring it back to the current moment.

Sit in a comfortable position, while your hands and feet are relaxed.

Start breathing slowly and deeply.

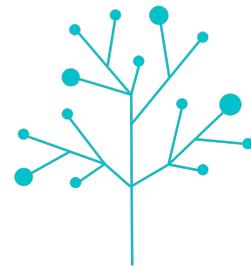
Look around and repeat the names of five objects that do not cause any discomfort or stress in your mind. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

Now listen to the sounds you hear around you and pass five voices in your mind that don't cause you any discomfort or stress.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

And now try to pay attention to your bodily sensations and how you feel, and pass through your mind the five sensations that do not cause you any discomfort or stress.

Breathe slowly and deeply. (Source: Izmir Metropolitan Municipality- Preventive Mental Health during Pandemics Booklet)



Progressive Muscle Relaxation-2

Sit comfortably, but avoid a position that will make you sleep. Slow down your breathing. When you're ready, you'll tense your first muscle. Make sure to tense each muscle group until you feel the tension well (but without pain) and continue tensing for five seconds; then you need to relax the same muscle group and feel this relaxation for ten seconds. You will repeat this twice for the same muscle. Try to feel the difference between how your muscles feel when they are tense and how they feel when they are relaxed.

- First, Clench your right fist to tense your right hand and forearm, wait five seconds, let go, and feel this relaxed state for ten seconds. Now again clench your right fist and feel the tension in the forearm, wait and release.
- Now, to tense your right upper arm, bend your lower forearm over your shoulder so that your muscle appears. Feel the tension for five seconds and let go, maintain the relaxed state for ten seconds. Repeat tensing and relaxing in the same way. Continue tensing and relaxing by squeezing the following muscle groups for 5 seconds, then slowly relaxing.
- Forehead (raise your eyebrows as much as possible, to look as if you were surprised, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Eyes and cheeks (squeeze well, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Mouth and chin (Open your mouth as wide as when you yawn, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Neck (raise your head, from a sitting or prone position, as if you are looking at a point in the ceiling, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Shoulders (tense your muscles while bringing your shoulders closer to your ears, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Back (Push the shoulders back as if you were trying to bring them together, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Chest and stomach (Breathe deeply, with your chest and stomach swelling, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Hips (Tighten the muscles in your hips, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Right thigh (Tighten your right thigh, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Right lower leg (Slowly Stretch your toes towards yourself, tense your leg, hold for five seconds and relax)
- Right foot: Stretch your toes in the other direction, hold for five seconds and relax.
- Apply the same exercises you did for your right leg and foot, to your left leg and foot as well. (Source: Izmir Metropolitan Municipality- Preventive Mental Health during Pandemics Booklet)





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This guide has been prepared under the valuable guidance of the Psychiatrist Dr. Özge Yenier Duman.

References:

- Başkent University Stress Management Application and Research Center - COVID-19 Guide in Terms of Psychological Health
- Izmir Metropolitan Municipality- Preventive Mental Health during Pandemics Booklet
- Clinical Psychologist Banu Yılmaz, Guide to Trauma and Coping in Human Rights Defenders
- Psychiatric Association of Turkey - Coping with Stress and Mental Health during Coronavirus Disease Pandemic
- Cover Image: Patrick Smith-Narcolepsy





You can send an e-mail for other issues you need legal and psycho-social counselling for to the address refugee@kaosgl.org in Arabic, Farsi, English and Turkish.

You can get counselling through our Farsi translator by calling the phone line 0545 340 82 12 between 10: 00-18: 00 on Tuesdays.

You can get counselling through our Arabic translator by calling the phone line 0541 720 79 23 on Thursdays between 10:00 and 18:00.

