

# FAMILIES TOGETHER SCHOOLS' TOOLKIT





## SUMMARY

In this Families Together Schools' Toolkit, you will find all the information, inspiration and resources you need to help the students in your school explore the issue of family separation for refugees in the UK and take steps to help families be reunited by getting involved with a UK wide campaign to bring families back together.

## CONTENTS

<b>The Families Together Coalition</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Families Together Campaign for Schools</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Campaign Activities</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Additional Activities</b>	<b>6</b>
Primary School Ages	6
Secondary School Ages	7
<b>Resources</b>	<b>8</b>
Case Studies	8
Jigsaw Template	11
Window to My Family Templates	12

# THE FAMILIES TOGETHER COALITION

Families Together is a coalition of over 90 organisations in the UK who are campaigning together to change the refugee family reunion rules. Imagine fleeing war, but having to leave your mum, dad, brother, sister or grandparents behind during a traumatic escape. Eventually you reach safety in the UK and are allowed to stay here. But your family is still in danger. The law means they can't join you. You worry about them constantly- the uncertainty and stress mean you're unable to rebuild your life.

Right now, this is the reality for many refugees, denied the right to be with the people they love by needlessly strict UK laws. Such rules are leaving vulnerable people isolated, traumatised and alone. This must change. You can help refugees reunite with their families and put their lives back together.

Currently adult refugees can sponsor only their very closest relatives to join them- their partners and children under 18 years old. This means that mothers and fathers in the UK are unable to bring their children over the age of 18 to join them. Refugee children do not have the right to sponsor any family members to join them. This means that refugee children in the UK who arrived unaccompanied are forced to live apart from their parents and siblings. Further, refugees are unable to bring elderly relatives to live with them in safety, being forced to leave their elderly parents and grandparents behind.

**We have three simple demands to change this:**

- 1. Children need their parents: Child refugees in the UK must have the right to sponsor their close family. This will allow them to rebuild their lives together and integrate into their new community.**
- 2. Fair treatment for young and old: The definition of who qualifies as family to be expanded so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can live in safety with their families in the UK.**
- 3. Bring back legal aid: The reintroduction of legal aid so refugees who have lost everything have the support they need to navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.**

In 2018, we worked with Angus MacNeil MP (SNP) on a Private Member's Bill in the House of Commons and through our successful campaigning it secured its second reading on the 16th of March 2018. Throughout the political turmoil of 2019 we targeted successive Home Secretaries, delivering a petition of more than 75,000 signatures on the 5th of February 2020. Unfortunately the government blocked the bill's progress and time ran out for the bill to become law. However, the public and parliamentary support behind the bill shows there is major support for expanding the family reunion rules.

The political climate we are campaigning in is ever changing. Yet the lives of refugees and their families remain hanging in the balance. In July 2021, the government introduced the Nationality and Borders bill to parliament. The proposed legislation outlined in the bill effectively creates a discriminatory two-tier asylum system, undermining how the UK fulfils its international obligations to those seeking asylum. The Bill will criminalise and punish refugees, depending on how they arrived in the UK, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of women, men and children who are able to access family reunion, one of the few existing safe and regular routes into the UK.

Clause 11 of the bill proposes to categorise refugees into two distinct groups, with different rights depending on how they have arrived in the UK. The bill states that refugees can be treated differently depending on which group they are in. The Bill specifically mentions one of the ways those in Group 2 (those who arrive to the UK via irregular routes such as by boat or lorry) may be treated differently is to limit their access to family reunion rights.

Over the last 5 years 29,834 family reunion applications were granted, compared with 23,665 resettlement applications granted. 90 percent of the family reunion visas granted in the last 5 years went to women and children. Any restriction on family reunion rights will result in family members being left with the heartbreaking choice to either stay permanently apart, or risk their lives on treacherous journeys in order to reunite.

All refugees should have full and equal access to family reunion rights, regardless of how they enter the UK.

# THE FAMILIES TOGETHER CAMPAIGN FOR SCHOOLS

Families Together has partnered with the Schools of Sanctuary to run a creative campaign in schools with children focusing on themes of family. The aim of this campaign is to highlight the importance of family and to raise awareness of the devastating impact of family reunion rules in the UK which keep refugee families apart. We have put together 6 activity ideas (3 for primary school children and 3 for secondary school children) which teachers can use with their students.

The activities listed below are intended to be a guide on some activities which can be used. We are happy for teachers to create different activities centered around themes of family so long as they are creative projects i.e. a song, a picture, a poem, a short story etc. We kindly ask teachers to take photographs of all of the projects once completed so that we can upload them onto our online gallery. Ideally, photos of individual children's projects would be best, but group work photos are also fine. We will use this gallery in our campaigning to highlight support from children for families being together and the important role that family plays in children's lives.

We have also included 3 short case studies which outline the impacts of the UK family reunion rules on refugee children in the UK. These case studies can be used as a learning activity where children read the case study and identify the barrier to this family reuniting. This should give them an understanding of the challenges with the current rules.

There is also a small MP action template available which teachers can use if they want to contact their MP to show their support for refugee families being reunited. We are always happy to support with MP engagement so if you have any additional queries please do get in touch with us at [familiestogethercoalition@gmail.com](mailto:familiestogethercoalition@gmail.com)

The definition of family is open to interpretation by the teacher and the children. Family can mean parents, siblings, extended family, friends, neighbours.

We are always happy to provide further resources and information on the Families Together Coalition so please do get in touch with us.

# MAIN ACTIVITIES

## Family Jigsaw Puzzle

1. After learning about current family reunification rules using the case studies and [Oxfam learning resources](#), children draw a picture of their family onto the template of a jigsaw puzzle and cut it out. Once they've all the cut pieces, they need to piece the jigsaw back together to bring the image of their family together, representing how families should be reunited.
2. Once completed, take photos of pupils' jigsaws broken up and put together or create a short-stop motion video clip in which the broken jigsaw puzzle comes back together and share on your school website and social media, using the hashtag #FamiliesTogether and including @SchsofSanctuary and @FamTogetherCo.
3. To take this activity the next step, send students work to your MP with messages of support for family reunification. We have created a short MP template letter that you can use if you want to write to your MP to show support for refugee families being reunited.

The template can be found here;

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WrNLPpH3KpToBhWh0fChPFvM9rRgZZ9h5mH4K0ATr-E/edit>.

You can edit the template to add additional information and send copies of the activities the children have done with the letter. We are always more than happy to help with MP engagement so please do get in touch if you need any support.

# ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

## PRIMARY SCHOOL AGES

### 1. Family Tree Activity

Introduce students to the idea of a family tree. Ask children to design their own, and even draw or bring in photos of family members to add to their trees. On the back of the page, ask them to write a story about the members of their family and why family is important to them.



### 2. Window into Your Family

We have attached a template and examples of this activity. To do this activity you need to print off the template of the windows to a house and draw a photo of your family members inside. Fold the page in half, and on the inside, ask the children to write a story/poem/song about their family. Then, gather all the booklets, punch holes in the side and using some string, loop all the booklets together to create a class 'window into my family' booklet.

### 3. Why is family important?

This is an open-ended question is designed to give the children creative freedom to lead their own activity centered around the importance of family in their life. The aim is to get the children to think about what family means to them. Example activities could include a) writing a short piece titled 'why my family is important to me', or b) drawing family represents to them.

# ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

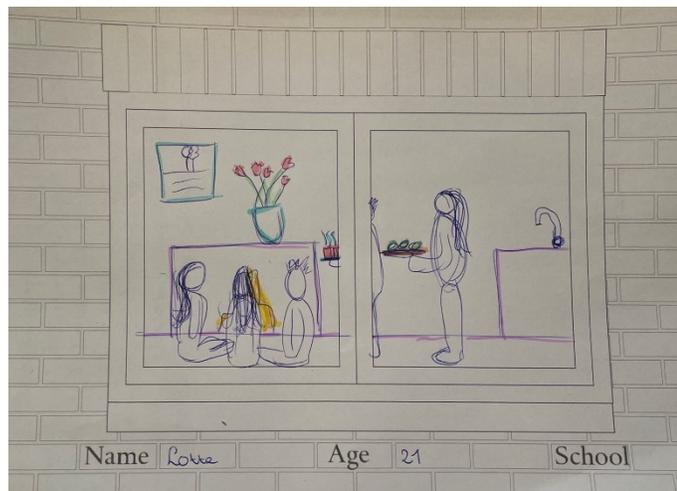
## SECONDARY SCHOOL AGES

### 1. Separation During Lockdown

What did you find difficult about being separated from family during the Covid lockdown? The idea behind this activity is to get children to think about what they missed doing with family over the last year, for example going to visit their grandparents or playing a game in the park with their cousins. This activity aims to highlight the importance of family in all of our lives, and how for a period of time we all experienced the difficulties of family separation. For most of us, we have now been reunited with our families, but for many refugee children - family separation is a feature of their daily lives. Ask the children to write a short reflection piece, answering the above question.

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### 3. What would you miss if you had to leave home?

Encourage learners to think about aspects of their life such as friends, school and community as well as physical objects such as things they own that they would miss if they had to leave home. What would you miss? What would you take with you? Why did you choose these items? Finish by asking the children how they would feel if they suddenly had to leave home? Ask them to draw or write these feelings.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case Study One

#### Separation from Older Siblings

Mona arrived in the UK with her parents when she was 14 years old. Her dad's safety was at risk in their home country so they had come to the UK to find safety. Mona missed her friends a lot and she was nervous about starting a new life in the UK.

Mona mostly missed her older sister, Maryam, who wasn't able to come with them to the UK. Maryam is 20 years old and she is Mona's best friend. They haven't seen each other in 2 years. They used to spend all of their time together, laughing and joking, cooking together, playing games. Mona loved her sister so much. She remembers painfully the day they had to say goodbye, the warmth of her sister's embrace.

Mona really wishes Maryam was here with her in the UK so they could start a new life together. She feels lost without Maryam's support and feels lonely without her company. She often finds herself daydreaming about the time they used to spend together. Although they speak often on the phone, Mona worries about when she will be able to see Maryam again.

Why was Maryam not able to join her family when they came to the UK?

### Case Study Two

#### Separation from Grandparents

Abdul arrived in the UK with his 2 parents and younger siblings. His family had lived in Syria for as long as he could remember, but they had to flee their home when the war started. They first moved to Egypt and then once they got a Visa they came to live in the UK.

The visa they got only allowed his parents and their children to come to the UK, so they had to leave their elderly grandparents behind. Abdul misses his grandmother so much; she was a second mother to them. He misses cooking with her in the kitchen, playing games in the evening, the bedtime stories she would read to him every night.

Abdul hopes to one day see his grandparents again, as the pain of the family separation is causing him a lot of stress. He feels his life in the UK is incomplete without his whole family here.

Why were Abdul's grandparents unable to come to the UK to join him?

### **Case Study 3**

#### **Unaccompanied Child Separated from Family Members**

Adnan arrived in the UK alone when he was just 15 years old. A war had broken out in his home country so he came to the UK looking for safety. After one year, he received a positive decision on his asylum case and was granted permission to stay in the UK.

Adnan's parents and younger sister are still in his home country, in Syria. The war is ongoing and the situation for them is really bad. Adnan misses them so much, he misses having dinner with them in the evenings, telling stories about their days, laughing together. He wants nothing more than to bring them to the UK to join him here where they could all live together again and be safe.

Adnan is finding life difficult in the UK without his family. He didn't speak any English when he arrived and although he has made some friends at school, he still misses his family greatly. His foster family are very kind to him, and they try to make life easy for him. But without his family, Adnan feels unable to fully restart his life here in the UK. He is worried about their safety, and worried that he might never see them again.

Why are Adnan's family unable to come to the UK to join him?

## RESOURCES

On the next few pages, please find the following resource templates:

- Jigsaw template
- Family Window (Vertical) template
- Family Window (Horizontal) template



