

Caring for your children in a temporary shelter

- Long journeys can of course cause disruption in routine and predictability in children and their families' lives.
- The different noises, smells, people, and general environment may cause your child to feel unsafe. Creating some sort of predictability and routine during your journey can help make everyone, but especially young children, feel safe.
- Because of the trusting, caring relationship, you have established with your child, your presence is steadying and comforting.
- Your ability to remain calm and offer them comfort will help make them feel safe.
- You make all the difference!

Tips to Help Your Child to Feel Safe:

- Nest! Arrange your personal space, such as your cots, to make your own space— knowing that there is a space that you have made your own can feel comforting for the whole family.
- Move your child so that she is facing you while holding, feeding, or playing with her.
- Use a soothing voice when speaking to your child.
- Move to a rhythm—rock, sway, or gently bounce while you sing a song to calm your child.
- Distract them—tell stories, do finger play, or sing their favorite songs.
- If your children ask questions or make requests regarding being in the Hospitality Center, validate their feelings and give brief, factual information, but not enough to alarm them. For example, if your child says, “I want to go home, Mommy.” You might reply, “I know! Me too, but tonight we are staying here together.” Or “It’s hard not to be at home, but tonight we will stay here together.”
- Keep to your routines as much as you can—eating at a set time, then play, then nap, then more active play.
- Keep scary conversations away from children. If you need to have an adult conversation about losses or uncertainty around your journey, have it away from your child. When with the children, walk away from other adults who are discussing those things.

- Your children may not understand where they are or where they are going. Talk to them about the new things around them and about things they can look forward to (seeing family, learning new things, trying new foods). Talk with your toddler about the journey with simple and few words. End on a hopeful note. For example: “It’s scary to make a big move to another country, but we will soon settle and make new friends and new routines.”
- Assure your child that you will be with her throughout.

Remember: Take care of yourself as well. Children, even very young children, can sense when you are upset. Try to stay calm. Do not be afraid to reach out for help. Allow a helper in the shelter to give you a break by playing near you or in a children’s area. If another adult family member is there with you, take turns giving each other breaks.