

Topic: Housing

Activity: Avoiding Pests: A Critical Incident for Refugees

Objective

- ✓ Participants will better understand the consequences of household pest problems in the U.S.
- ✓ Participants will review strategies for avoiding common U.S. household pests

Lesson Time

20 minutes

Materials

- Critical incident (included)
- Optional: Flipchart paper, markers, tape

Introduction

Participants may be unfamiliar with strategies many Americans follow to avoid household pests, such as storing food in sealed containers, regularly cleaning countertops, washing dishes immediately, taking out the trash daily, and keeping apartment doors closed. In addition, they may not know the responsibilities both tenants and landlords have to meet sanitation standards.

Practice

(Note: Feel free to change names to reflect your participants.)

1. Put participants into small groups of 2-4 and ask each group to choose a spokesperson.
2. Read “Avoiding Pests: A Critical Incident for Refugees” aloud, pausing after each set of reflection questions.
3. In small groups, participants discuss the reflection questions. Listen in on the discussions to check for understanding.
4. After the last set of reflection questions, bring the large group together and ask the spokesperson from each group to summarize the main ideas from their group discussions. Discuss as necessary.

Reflection Questions

- What happened in this critical incident?
- Why was Mari’s landlord angry?
- What could Mari have done differently?
- What should Mari do now?

Variations

- Give flipchart paper to each small group and have groups draw and present the highlights of their discussion.
- If literacy levels allow, prepare flipchart paper with reflection questions for each small group and have groups write and present their answers.

Further Resources

For an in-depth presentation on cockroaches and bedbugs, see the Refugee Housing Project’s interactive PowerPoint (<http://www.refugeehouse.org/PDFFiles/Pests.ppt>).

Avoiding Pests: A Critical Incident for Refugees

Mari* is a woman who arrived in the United States with her family two years ago. At first, she was happy with her family's apartment and found it very clean. After a few months, however, she started seeing insects in her kitchen. She found cockroaches near her open bags of rice and mung beans and ants near the fruit on her table. She tried moving her food to different locations in her kitchen, but over time the number of insects increased. She occasionally saw a mouse in her kitchen.

Mari felt frustrated. Although she tried hard to keep her apartment clean, she could not find a solution. She wanted to tell her landlord, but she felt embarrassed and worried that her landlord would think she was dirty or lazy.

Stop and reflect:

- What happened so far?
- What do you think Mari is doing wrong?
- What would you have done if you were Mari?
- Who could Mari ask for help?

One day, Mari's landlord told her that neighbors complained about cockroaches, and he wanted to check Mari's apartment. When he saw the pests in Mari's apartment, he became angry because she had not told him about the pests. He gave her instructions:

- Always keep food in sealed containers
- Clean countertops regularly
- Wash dishes immediately
- Take trash out every day
- Keep the doors to the apartment closed

He also put some powder and pest traps in her apartment to get rid of the pests.

He told Mari pests were normal and she shouldn't be embarrassed, but in the future she should follow his instructions and tell him about any problems right away. Her landlord told Mari that if she did not follow his instructions in the future, her family could be evicted. He said he would come back to check on the apartment in two weeks to check on the cleanliness of Mari's apartment.

Stop and reflect:

- Why was Mari's landlord angry?
- What could Mari have done differently?
- What should Mari do now?