

Survival Topic #8: Transportation

Questions to Ask:

What kind of transportation did you use in your country? Did you drive?
How do you usually get somewhere? Do you take the bus, drive or walk?
What kinds of transportation have you used to travel?

Topics to Share:

Discuss how you use transportation in your daily life. Tell your mentees about how you learned to drive. What kinds of transportation have you used while traveling?

English Language Learner Tips:

Telling time is a critical skill, especially when using public transportation. Practice with a clock or add moveable arms to a paper plate. You can expand this to digital clocks and then to reading bus schedules. Be sure to teach them, if they do not already know, how to tell time with a 12 hour cycle. Be aware of the differences in cultural relationships with time.

Do a role-play about asking for bus information. If your local bus company has an information line, you can have the refugees call or look online for specific information. See if they understand what is said to them and if they can remember the directions. Help them to ask for clarification if they need it. Listening comprehension is a critical but difficult skill for people who are just starting to learn English. You may have to practice a lot.

A driver's manual is difficult for most refugees to decipher, but many have learned how to drive quite well. You can help pick out the key points in the driving manual for practice.

Role-play a driver's test, either in a real car or in an imaginary one.

Other Notes:

If a family does not have a car (which they probably will not) they will need to know how to get around using public transportation. Being able to get around can develop skills toward self-sufficiency. Mentors can help by teaching refugees how to use the local systems. For example, how do you read a bus schedule? When do you give the driver money and how much does it cost?

Biking or walking might be alternatives as well. If they chose to use a bike, be sure to teach the basic safety rules for biking. If they don't already have a bike, you may help them find an inexpensive or used one. A good resource for the Chicagoland area is: workingbikes.org.

They might ask you how they can learn to drive. Coaching people through this process can be time-consuming, but it can be a valuable skill. In Chicago, however, this is usually not as much of a priority. Check with us before embarking on driving lessons.

If they have access to a car, emphasize that a written test to qualify for a learner's permit is a must. In many states, they also need insurance. Be sure they know there must be a licensed driver with them and that they should not have children with them or extra passengers in the back seat.

Be sure to clearly communicate the commands such as right, left, slow down, and stop. (You should not be the one teaching them if there is a language barrier.)

Safety is a key issue. If your mentees drive, make sure they have car seats for their children and know how to use them. Even when walking, it is important for your mentees to obey safety rules. Make sure children know how to look both ways before crossing the street. Those who ride bicycles should be encouraged to wear helmets.