

# U.S. Laws and Refugee Status

## Learning Local Laws

### Introduction for the Trainer

#### Key Content

During this session, participants will learn the importance of finding out the local laws in their community.

#### Main Messages

Refugees are responsible for knowing U.S. laws, including local laws. This activity encourages participants to ask questions in order to seek information. Trainers should highlight the fact that asking questions in the United States is not seen as impolite, but rather as showing that you are trying to learn.



25 minutes

#### Objectives

Participants will be able to do the following:

- ▶ Describe why it is important to learn the local laws
- ▶ State that it is their responsibility to learn the laws
- ▶ Ask questions about local laws

#### Key English Vocabulary

- ▶ *cell phone*
- ▶ *local laws*
- ▶ *smoke; no smoking*
- ▶ *What's the speed limit here?*

#### Materials

- Local Law Critical Incidents (included)

## Session Preparation

Review the Local Law Critical Incidents. Choose three to four that would apply in your area. Find out about the local laws in your area that relate to the chosen Local Law Critical Incidents and write notes on this information in the space provided. Be prepared to share this information when leading the discussions during the activity.

## Trainer's Introduction of Session to Participants

In the United States, there are federal laws, state laws, and local laws. Federal laws apply throughout the United States. State laws apply in the individual states, and local laws apply in towns or counties. When you go to a different area, it is important that you learn and know the laws there. If you break a law, you can face penalties even if you did not know the law.

During this session, we will learn about local laws.

## Introductory Exercise

*Briefly review the key English vocabulary for this plan by saying the first word aloud in English. Participants say the word to a partner, and then all together as a full group. Continue in the same way with the rest of the words and the question. Throughout the session, continue to highlight the words as they come up and use the question whenever there is an opportunity. If there is time (8 to 10 minutes), use the unit vocabulary found at the end of this unit to help participants better understand key English vocabulary words.*

## Activity

Divide participants into pairs or groups of three.

Read the first chosen Local Law Critical Incident aloud to the full group. Participants then take turns asking their partner or group members a question about the laws being discussed in the critical incident. For example, they could ask, "Whose responsibility is it to take care of the ants in the kitchen—the tenant or the landlord/landlady?" or, "Who should you contact about the problem?"

After a minute, bring the full group together. Ask for a volunteer to ask a question about the law discussed in the Local Law Critical Incident aloud. Then provide participants with information about the critical incident based on what you found out about the local context.

Then read the next chosen Local Law Critical Incident aloud and continue in the same manner explained above.

Do this until all of the chosen Local Law Critical Incidents have been discussed.

Debrief the session as a full group using the questions below.

## Debriefing Questions

- ▶ What are some of the local laws you learned about during today's session?
- ▶ How did you find out about the laws?
- ▶ How did it feel to ask questions about the local laws?
- ▶ Why is it important to learn the local laws?
- ▶ If you do not know a law or something about a law, what should you do? Who can you ask?

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## Working With Individuals or Very Small Groups

When working with an individual, read a chosen Local Law Critical Incident aloud. The participant then asks the trainer a question to learn more about the law. The trainer should give the correct information before moving to the next Local Law Critical Incident.

When working with two or three participants, this activity can be conducted as already described. Within a small group, participants practice asking questions to learn the law, and then one participant asks the trainer about the law. The trainer should supply the information before moving to the next Local Law Critical Incident.

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## Variations and Considerations

If possible, group participants by language background for the activity so that small groups can communicate in a common language.

A follow-up session to help participants identify and learn more about local laws is the COR Center's activity plan, "U.S. Law, Rights, and Responsibilities: Local Laws and Customs," on page 21 of the *Extended and Enhanced Orientation Curriculum*, available for automatic download here: <http://goo.gl/roJtnj>.

## Local Law Critical Incidents

The Bigome family has a problem with ants in their kitchen.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: landlord and tenant responsibilities
- ▶ Local notes:

Khine buys a soda. It says she can return the bottle when she is finished and receive 10 cents.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: recycling programs
- ▶ Local notes:

Prabin would like to build a shed in his backyard.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: zoning laws and tenant rights
- ▶ Local notes:

The Gurung family, made up of a mother, father, and 6-year-old, recently bought a car. They are wondering what they should do so that their child can ride in the car.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: child safety seat requirements
- ▶ Local notes:

Chit Cho Hla is talking to her cousin on her cell phone while driving to visit a friend in another state.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: the use of cell phones while driving
- ▶ Local notes:

Zaid is following the speed limit while driving on the highway and crosses the border into another state.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: speed limits
- ▶ Local notes:

Rishi and his wife went out to eat at a local restaurant. They were surprised when Rishi was told he must put out his cigarette.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: smoking and public places
- ▶ Local notes:

Yamu is hoping to get a job and expects to make minimum wage.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: minimum wage requirements
- ▶ Local notes:

Abida goes to work before the sun comes up and gets home from English classes after the sun goes down. She would like to get some exercise at the park nearby before work or after English class.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: the use of public spaces
- ▶ Local notes:

Berihun's friends have been hanging out at a convenience store after school, and he would like to hang out with them.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: loitering laws
- ▶ Local notes:

Djany would like to fish in the river at the park near her house.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: fishing laws
- ▶ Local notes:

So Rey would like to carry a concealed firearm.

- ▶ Laws to find out about and discuss: firearm laws
- ▶ Local notes: