



Trauma-Informed Classroom Strategies



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Relationship Based Strategies

“Change for these children will come more easily if the focus is on the relationship, rather than on behaviour management strategies” (Child Safety Commissioner, 2007, p. 18)

Having a warm, healthy relationship with an adult can be healing for children who have experienced trauma. These relationships provide safety and grounding. Fostering these types of relationships in the classroom can create safety for all students. Strategies fostering these relationships are outlined below.

CAPPD

This acronym provides a guideline of trauma informed relationship building. It was created by the Health Federation of Philadelphia, see references for more information.

Calm

- The goal is to create a relaxed, focused state for yourself and your students. Learning to regulate emotions and return to a relaxed state after being alarmed or triggered helps children function in the neocortex, which is responsible for complex thinking and learning.

Attuned

- Be aware of children’s non-verbal cues including body language, tone of voice, and emotional state. These cues indicate how much and what types of activities and learning the child can manage. You must connect with a child on an emotional, sensory level before moving to a cognitive level.

Present

- Be in the moment and focus your attention on the child. All children can tell when people are not truly engaged or paying attention to them.

Predictable

- Provide children with routine, structure, and repeated positive experiences. This will help children to feel safe and allow them to be free to grow and explore.

Don't

- Let children's emotions escalate your own. Remain in control of your own emotions and the expression of them. The best way for children to learn to regulate their emotions is by watching us regulate ours.

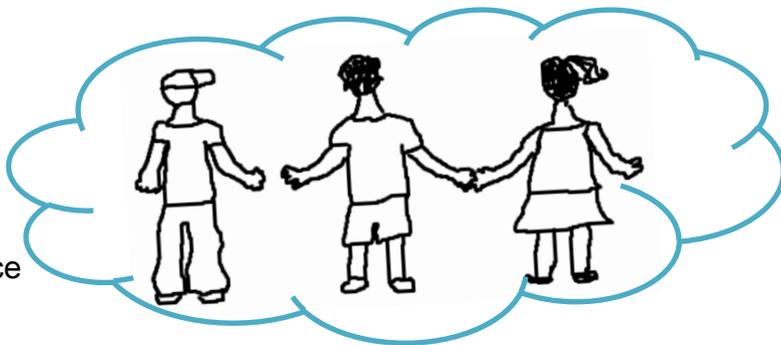
(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010)

Fostering Relationships

By connecting with students in a compassionate and understanding way, teachers can plant the seed for strong relationships to form. These relationships are integral in providing the safety children need in order to learn and grow at school.

Provide Unconditional Positive Regard

- Show genuine respect for students as persons.
- Provide kindness and empathize with the challenges students experience at home and school.
- Recognize the healing power of an adult who cares.
- Be a "Turn-around teacher" by consistently acting and responding with positive regard.



Be Understanding

- Get to know the child's history and understand where behaviours are coming from. This understanding can increase empathy for the teacher and let the child know they are understood and valued.

Get Down on Eye Level

- When interacting or talking to children, get down on eye level and make regular eye contact.

- Being on the same physical level as children can help them feel safe, more in control and connected.

Always Empower, Never Disempower

- Children may compete with their teachers for power because they believe that they can achieve safety by controlling their environment.
- Teachers are in positions of power and authority.
- Attempts at control over traumatized students are often counterproductive.
- When possible, avoid battles for control.
- Hold students accountable.

Maintain Connection

- Try to maintain a connection even if a child is distracted, acting out, or withdrawn.
- If you notice a child dissociating, try using gentle attempts to connect with them. You can say a word, “Hi” or try to gain eye contact. Ask for permission to make eye contact before engaging.

Be Nurturing

- Be fully present in your interactions.
- Validate their feelings.
- Provide comfort and physical affection when sought.
- Laugh and play games.
- Provide safe mental, physical, and social challenges.

Communicate Respect and Transparency

- Be open and honest with children. Don't hide information from them or avoid their questions.
- Be respectful in your tone, words, and body language.

- This helps promote effective communication and promotes children's sense of identity and self-worth. These experiences will help children learn to regulate their emotions and behaviours.

Foster Relationship with Caregivers

- Talk to caregivers and ask what works at home as well as what doesn't work.
- Understand parents may have trauma histories, stay calm and regulated as you would with the child.
- Acknowledge positive aspect of child to parents.

(Child Safety Commissioner, 2007; Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010; The State of Washington, 2011)

Structure & Consistency

Providing emotional consistency and clear interpersonal boundaries signals safety for children who have experienced trauma.

Be Predictable

- Providing structure & consistency in your own responses will help children regulate as their own internal structure for regulation may not be available.
- Keep regular routines, warn of disruption to routines, and give time and supervision for transitions.

Maintain High Expectations

- Provide consistent expectations, limits, and routines.
- Limits are most useful when they are immediate, related, age-appropriate, proportional, and delivered to the child in a calm and respectful voice.
- When setting limits, name the inappropriate behaviours and follow through with consequences.

Give Choices and Control

- Misbehaving is a way for children to have control. Give back control by giving choices.
- “You can finish that work standing up or sitting down”.
- “Do you want to wear your coat or carry it to the playground?”

(Child Safety Commissioner, 2007; Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010; The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Check in With Yourself

Take time to check in with yourself and note your own feelings, assumptions, triggers, and needs. Relationship based work such as teaching may be supported by understanding of your own needs, using supports, and practicing self-care.

Check Assumptions, Observe, and Question

- Identify your assumptions about students, trauma, and how best to work with students impacted by trauma, and then choose to make an observation instead.
- Based on those observations, ask questions.
- Example: *Assumption* – I need to show who is boss in this classroom. *Observation* – Sarah gets disruptive whenever I set boundaries and I get frustrated and send her out. *Question* – How best do I maintain control of the class without triggering students?
- It may be helpful to record your observations to help remove emotionally charged reactions.

Remain Neutral

- Children with trauma may try to arouse aggression in adults as it is much more familiar to them than calm relationships. Remain calm when this happens, avoid power struggles.
- Reflect on your own emotions when this is happening, ask yourself what *you* need, it may be control, space, support, or all of the above. Take a step back – if you need to step away from the child do so and then go back.

Maintain Teacher Role

- Because of the intensity of trauma-informed relationships, it is normal for teachers to fantasize about taking a certain child home with them to parent, and children may in fact ask teachers to do this.
- Make time to talk to someone about this in order to maintain effective as your primary role as teacher as well as to avoid burn out

(Child Safety Commissioner, 2007; The State of Washington, 2011)

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Classroom and Teaching Strategies

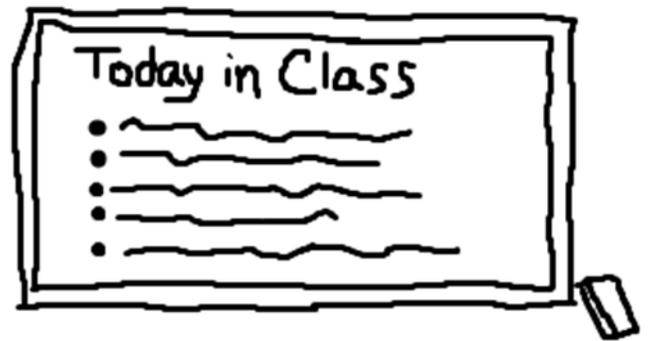
“The two primary jobs of a child are to learn and have fun.” (Ziegler, D, Jasper Mountain)

Trauma-informed teaching strategies can build safety in the classroom through consistency, structure, compassion, and understanding. New learning cannot take place if a child does not feel safe. By ensuring safety in the classroom, all students benefit from a safe and compassionate space needed to take emotional and intellectual risks when learning.

Create Physical and Emotional Safety

Physical Safety

- Be aware of personal space.
- Provide appropriate physical touch when a child seeks it.
- Ask permission before any physical contact.
- Giving unwanted or asked for affection can re-traumatize or trigger a child.
- Physical comfort can help calm children and help them learn to regulate their emotions.



Emotional Safety

- Designate time and space for child living with trauma to talk about it if they wish so the child knows it's ok to talk about what is happening for them.
- Recognize environmental triggers: weather, anniversaries of loss or trauma.
- Prepare for difficulties, for example if a child does not like to be alone, provide a buddy to go with them to the washroom.
- Support religious beliefs. If trauma is attributed to higher power let child have their own beliefs, refer to someone of this belief if needed.

- Monitor children - children are very honest. Kids with trauma are often very sensitive to teasing/bullying and can feel unsafe. Act as a buffer, and let the child know they are being watched out for.

(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010, Ziegler, D.)

Structure and Consistency

Triggers may be managed by maintaining classroom structure and consistency as the classroom becomes a more predictable space. Alert children to any changes in the classroom to provide the students time to adjust.

Classroom Routine

- Check-in at the start of each week and term: “What do you remember from last week? What stands out? Why? What would you like to be the same this week? What would you like to be different?”
- Predictable structure. Structure provides sense of safety, signals to child he/she is safe. Avoid overly rigid environments, try finding a balance.
- Discuss future activities which will take place in the next lesson, tomorrow, next week, etc.
- Establish a routine to create consistency and predictability.
- Do things at the same time and in the same way as often as possible.
- Inform children of any changes – explain how and why things will change.
- Inform students if the room or other elements of their environment is being changed or moved around.
- Stability helps children regain a sense of trust and control in their lives. It also reassures them that an adult is in charge and will help to keep them safe.
- Safety and stability are necessary for children to be able to function from the neocortex.

Monday Mornings, Daily Schedules, and Class Meetings

- Take time to outline the day.
- Use symbols and pictures of clocks for young children.

- Consider holding a brief class meeting – students can be asked to share about their weekend.
- Some teachers ask for “celebrations or challenges” (not all students will share challenges because they may not feel it is safe to do so).
- Student participation should be by choice.
- For safety, seat children in a circle so no one has their back to anyone else.
- Review rules and agreements during class meetings to provide safety.
- If you notice a change in a student’s affect, take time to connect with that student (may be later in the day or in private).
- Offer choices.

Provide Visuals

- Display a visual or pictorial class timetable. You may want to include pictures of students doing the tasks.
- Set up a shadow board outlining what students will need for each lesson or subject.
- Position clocks in view in the classroom and refer to them with cues, such as “We are half way through reading, when the big hand is on the 10 we will have recess.” This can encourage students to stay on task as they can visualize progress and an end point.

Transitions

- Provide structured play opportunities during breaks that build on social skills, team work, or sharing.
- Utilize buddy programs to help students manage change with some support.
- Prepare and engage peers to support specific students through transitions periods.

(The Australian Childhood Federation, 2010; The National Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; The State of Washington, 2011, Ziegler, D.)

Discipline

Discipline may bring up many difficult and intense emotions for children who have experienced trauma, and these children may react to discipline in a variety of ways. In order to set boundaries and maintain expectations, use discipline as a way of showing children what type of behaviours are safe to express while in school, while also giving them the opportunity to try learn new behaviours.

Consequences Rather Than Punishment

- Follow inappropriate behaviour with natural consequences that are in relationship to the behaviour rather than punishments which are not related.
- Example: “Instead of going outside for recess, I want you to stay with me and we will put back the books that were spilled on the floor”.
- Understand misbehaving as attention seeking behaviour – so give the attention rather than punish it. Once attention is given the child will most likely move on.
- If possible, give choices for consequences.
- A behaviour modification program (ie. stickers) is often not effective for children affected by trauma.

Setting Limits

- Children with trauma may have difficulty with accepting limits around inappropriate behaviour because of intense shame and/or re-enacting trauma patterns.
- If there is a problem try “I see you’re having trouble moving that chair”.
- Give space for child to try again, if unable to finish/focus: “Since it took longer to finish cleaning the table, we have run out of computer time”.
- Use direct, specific, and positive language for verbal and written rules and directions. Instead of saying, “Stop being hyperactive”, say “Please walk quietly and calmly in the hallway.”

“Time In”

- Time out can replicate rejection, reinforcing a child’s shame, belief they are unlovable.
- Instead of taking the student out, ask them to join you, or sit next to you. If the rest of class is participating in an activity, talk to the child about how fun it could be to join them, ask what they need to do that.

Provide Help, Not Warnings

- If a child is upset and/or angry, something has triggered intense feelings such as shame, sadness, or fear. Recognize this reaction is not toward a particular thing or person.
- When misbehaviour happens try “I see you need help with...” (cleaning up, not kicking the table).
- Warnings/second chances may not work as the child may not have sense of attachment that motivates them to please adults

Accommodate to Child’s Needs

- Children communicate through behaviour. Think about the causes of a child’s behaviour before giving discipline.
- React to the child’s developmental age, not his or her biological age.

(Child Safety Commissioner, 2007; Ziegler, D.)

Build in Opportunities for Emotional Regulation

Many children who have experienced trauma have difficulty regulating their moods. By building in emotional regulation in class, these children are given the opportunity to emotionally regulate and process the difficult feelings they may be holding.

Structuring the Class

- Structure everyday experiences to have three distinct phases of activities to support arousal regulation: 10 minutes excitement – 10 minutes calming – 30 minutes concentration.
- Incorporate regular relaxation activities into class time.
- Utilize music in the classroom - rhythmical music such as drumming.
- Provide calming boxes or calming zones where children can have the opportunity to ground and experience tactile sensations.

Focus on Emotions

- Integrate emotional literacy activities into the curriculum to recognize, identify, and manage feelings.
- Use feeling faces to extend the range of emotional expressions that students can interpret. Draw, color, cut out magazine pictures, feelings bingo.
- Incorporate symbols for feelings to promote communication (ie. colours, pictures, headlines, signs).
- Practice different strategies and actions to respond to a feeling or behaviour.
- Facilitate opportunities for self-monitoring involving scoring, feelings magnets or visual cues.
- Model and discuss your own calming strategies to manage stressful situations.
- Use expressive learning - kids with trauma come to school with lots of emotion and poorly regulated excitement, expressive learning can be a place to process some of this.

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Clear and Flexible Teaching Instruction

Delivering Information

- Use short, clear and sequenced instructions which are repeated during tasks.

- Use multiple strategies to communicate information or instructions for tasks (ie. verbal instructions, visual reinforcement, practice, and role play).
- Provide a range of methods to reinforce behavioural expectations, include visual, auditory, sensory, words and pictures.
- Provide external cognition. Give plenty of examples of meaning making, concept linking, and organization of assignments as a child with trauma may not have cognitive ability at the time to do this on their own.

Flexibility

- Teach to individual learning style.
- Variety can provide a child with sense of control and the ability to choose what they can succeed in. Help move through this variety with ample transition time.
- Group work opportunity. Children with trauma may not be willing to participate in groups, but give children the option and opportunity as social support is very important for all children.

Classroom Rules

- Develop a shared code of conduct for all classrooms within the school.
- Involve students in developing classroom rules. Keep rules short and simple. Display visual reminders around the classroom and integrate rules into classroom activities to provide opportunities for rehearsal.

School Work

- Adapt assignments for children with trauma. Shorten assignments, give extra time.
- Give permission to leave class if a child is overwhelmed by a task. Provide additional support for organizing/remembering assignments.
- Postpone large assignments/tests following a traumatic event.
- Avoid competition.

- Foster enjoyment and fun. It is much easier to learn while having fun.

Provide Choice and Control

- Trauma intensifies children's need for control. For demanding, controlling, or stubborn children give them control over small things. For example, "Which activity would you like to do, A or B?"
- Encourage and validate children as they try new things or work independently.
- When children feel like they have choice and control, they will be calmer and less controlling. This helps build self-efficacy, trust, and a sense of identity.

(Child Safety Commissioner, 2007; Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010; The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; Ziegler, D.)

Nurture Competence

Opportunities for Success

- Consider looking after an animal as a group.
- Consider building groups around areas of interest, instead of social ability.
- Provide small challenges with achievable goals.
- Integrate improvisational games or class puzzles for fun and flexibility.
- Find an activity the student enjoys or is skilled at and facilitate opportunity for them to invite others to participate.
- Promote the strengths and interests of the student.

Provide Guided Opportunities for Helpful Participation

- Belonging provides opportunities to be heard, to have responsibility, and engage in problem solving.
- Helping others fosters resiliency and may provide insight into one's struggles.
- Carefully plan, model, and observe ongoing interactions.
- Provide supervised and guided opportunities.

Acknowledge Good Choices

- Children with trauma may receive little praise and often don't respond well to it.
- Provide praise that is concrete, specific and delivered with a neutral tone.
- Avoid praise for about internal characteristics such as "You are such a good girl" as the child may believe they are in fact bad.
- Comment on actions so child can feel good about what they have done, and do not have to think about whom they are and if they are intrinsically good.
- "That was a good decision to not fight with Tyler; I see that was hard to do".
- "You played well in group today".
- Praise more success than failures. Children with trauma may often feel like a failure before even starting a task, make sure to acknowledge the everyday and small successes.

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008, The State of Washington, 2011; Ziegler, D.)

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Safety in the Classroom

In addition to fostering helpful relationships and using trauma-informed teaching strategies, structuring the class with safety as a focal point from which all other activities and learning stem from can help reduce a triggering environment for students who have experienced trauma. However, triggered responses can still happen. Tips for maintaining safety as well as suggestions for reacting to a triggered response are outlined below.

Maintaining Safety

Safety First

- Basic assurance of safety is required before children can focus on learning.
- The need for safety, connection, and assurance of well-being comes before academic activities.

Establishing Safety

- Create spaces for the student to move into and still be part of the class.
- Identify a safe area and/or safe person the student can access if a situation is stressful or overwhelming.
- Create opportunities for the student to make choices.
- Consider placing the student in an alternate class (with a teacher that the student has an established connection with) on days the teacher is absent.

Calm Zones and Peace Corners

- Create a space where students can voluntarily move when they feel themselves getting out of control or having a difficult time.
- Offer soothing furniture and comfort items



in that space – pillows, cushions, bean bag chair, rocking chair, blanket, stuffed animals, squishy balls, headphones to listen to calming music

- This safe space is different from where children may be sent for a time out.
- Children can choose to go there without consequence
- This space is available to all children who may be having a tough time.

Transitions

- When a child feels safe in one activity, a transition to something new involves risk. Consequently, the change becomes the trigger for the child.
- Consider playing music or singing between activities to cue children.

Self-Regulation

- Provide cool down time and space for the student that is not described as discipline.
- Recognize early warning signs and communicate these to the student verbally and non-verbally.
- Use analogies, similes, and metaphors to describe emotions and triggers
- Include stretching and physically relaxing activities at predictable times each day.
- Use physical activity such as walking to match the emotional state of a student at a particular time. Join them and slow them down to return to a calmer baseline.
- Offer sensory toys to help the student experience different feelings and then connect them to words that describe them (ie. link different textures to different feelings).
- Help students to understand the link between their behaviours and the effect on others.
- Create a calm box that contains items the student finds comforting and soothing. It may include photos, sensory objects, special toys, items that link the child to an important relationship.
- Provide tactile activities to explore an experience.
- Provide spontaneous fun activities that are not defined as a reward. Fun and playfulness can help to calm children.

- Utilize naturally occurring breaks in the day to interrupt patterns of trauma-based behaviour.

Identifying and Dealing with Triggers



Knowing triggers

- Triggers may be external stimuli from any of the five senses. Some examples may include: a teacher shouting, kind words said in comfort, slamming doors, turning off the lights.
- Triggers may also be internal. Examples may include feeling hungry, tired, anxiety.
- Triggers can be a combination of external and internal stimuli.

Minimizing Triggers when Setting Limits

- Recognize that setting limits is necessary to maintain classroom safety. However, all types of limit setting can act as triggers.
- Ignoring or removing a child can trigger feelings of abandonment or rejection.
- Name the rationale for the limit
 - “Throwing toys at people can hurt them”
- Link the consequence to the behaviour, not the person
 - “I care about you. I don’t think you wanted to hurt anyone, but throwing is not ok”
- Name the boundaries of the limit
 - “You have a 5 minute time out or I’m going to hold your toy until after recess”
- Move on. The limit has been set and consequence given.
 - “After your time out, you may look at your book or clean up your desk”
- Make adaptations – if the child has been punished by being isolated for long periods of time, have the student sit in a nearby chair. Don’t send them to another room.

Responding to a Triggered Response

Sometimes a child with trauma will have extreme outbursts. During this time they will be highly unregulated with intense affect and will not respond to logic or argument. Have a prepared plan within the classroom and the school in case this happens. Include the child in the plan so they have some choice if they are triggered. When a child is triggered:

- *Establish safety*
 - Ensure all other students/staff are safe and move child away from others to safe space of their choosing.
 - Seek assistance from other adults if needed.
- *Maintain a calm presence*
 - The most effective way to help a dysregulated child is to be calm yourself.
 - Use a soothing tone when talking to the child, let them know you are there to help them.
 - Let child know what you are doing every step of the way: “I am going to walk closer to you know. I am here to help you”.
- *Calm the child*
 - Child may need a certain parent/care taker to join them when triggered.
 - Child may need time to be alone, let them choose what they need.
 - Child may need to go home afterwards.
- *Talk about it*
 - Once child is calm, talk about what was going on, especially before enacting any punishment.
 - Provide a story with what you saw, check for mistakes, misunderstandings.
 - Don't enter into argument if child does not tell the truth or blame others.
 - Reflect on social consequences, if other children are afraid or do not want to play with them after seeing triggered response.
- *Give natural consequences*
 - If something was broken, the child will have to fix it.

- If the child has hurt someone, they will have to apologize.
- *Debrief with other students*
 - Talk about what happened with the class, allow for concerns to air out.

(The State of Washington, 2011, Child Safety Commissioner, 2007)

After a Triggered Response

Reflect

- Acknowledge that the behavior may be a traumatic response to something bigger or more complex than what is observed in the classroom.
- Acknowledge and respect boundaries of child and parents.
- Assume there is a possible link between stimuli in the classroom and the complex behaviour of the child. Look for that stimulus configuration.

Remove triggers

- Take a role in removing the trigger. When possible, provide the student with choices. Remove the stimulus or support the student to remove the stimulus.
- Take steps to reduce any residual stress (embarrassment, shame, humiliation, or harassment) in the classroom.

Debrief

- Take care of your own needs. Do what you need to soothe after an event, go for coffee, eat a muffin, talk to friends.
- Seek support if it is available in your school.

(The State of Washington, 2011, Child Safety Commissioner, 2007)

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Trauma-Informed Classroom Activities

Children impacted by trauma come to school holding huge amounts of emotions and fears.

Classroom activities can allow children to process these feelings as well as build capacity to regulate emotion.

Creating Safety

Safety Plans

- Applicable to individuals or groups
- Develop and practice safety plans for fires, school lock-down, tornados, etc. to promote a sense of control and predictability.
- Create individual safety plans

Read Stories

- Read familiar and rhythmic books
- Familiar stories help to provide a sense of control and predictability.

(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010; The State of Washington, 2011)

Activities that Promote Safety

Safety Hand

Aim

To help children identify safe resources. This activity can be used with anxious children.

Materials

Paper, markers, pen

Method

- Trace the child's hand on a blank sheet of paper. Ask the child to think of five grownups that he or she trusts and can tell if anything terrible happens, or feels unsafe. Write the names of the people down on the fingers of the drawn hand.
- For children who are old enough to use the telephone, have them draw a ring on the finger saying, "This is who you need to call." Add the phone numbers to the picture.
- Practice reciting the names and phone numbers to help the child remember the safety contacts. Explain that if one person is not available, won't listen or doesn't believe them, then move onto the next person until the child finds someone who takes him or her seriously. Remind the child that the hand is always with him or her and the safety contacts are people the child can always talk to.

(Hobday & Ollier, 1999, pp. 77-78)

Feeling Good

Aim

To help children build safety, resources, and sensation awareness

Materials

Paper, markers

Method

- Ask the child to draw a picture of a time when he or she felt (content, satisfied, happy, or excited) recently or before the (accident, abuse, etc.) occurred.
- Have the child study his or her artwork, close his or her eyes, and locate the place in body where they are able to feel the goodness. Encourage the child to allow that feeling to spread and grow.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, p. 389)

Safety Boxes

Aim

To help children feel a sense of safety, express emotions, and understand traumatic events

Materials

Boxes

Magazines, photographs

Tape, glue, scissors

Paper, construction paper, markers, oil pastels

Method

- Ask children to collage images of safety, comfort, and protection on the outside of the boxes. On the inside, collage images that represent their fears, anger, sadness, and other experiences of vulnerability.
- Focus on how the children can obtain comfort or protection. This activity is meant to contain expression of feeling and help children focus on the acquisition of self-help skills.

(Loumeau-May, 2008, pp. 89-90)

Creative Expression & Movement

- Drawing, painting, singing, clapping patterns, music, dance, puppets, clay, play dough, play
- Allow children to feely talk about their artwork and experiences without too much interference
- Role play different scenes that children may have had negative experiences with (ie. hospital visit, police officers, social workers, etc.). This activity may help to reframe children's experiences in a safe environment.
- These activities can help decrease anxiety and ground or calm children.

Outdoors

- Give children the time and space to run, jump, climb, scream, and play outside.
- Physical activity helps decrease anxiety and stress. Hide and seek is a good outdoor game because it comforts children to be lost and then found.

Free Play

- Allow time for unstructured play
- Free play can help calm and refocus children. It is thought that unstructured play can help with the pruning of excess neurons in the brain.
- Children benefit from childlike play – play that is creative, imaginative, active, and all-consuming
- Children exposed to trauma often lose the ability to engage in childlike play. Their play is often focused on stress, win/lose situations, control, and conflict which can actually create a negative cycle. Adults may need to refocus their play to help children learn or re-learn childlike play.

Poetry

- Poems can help students express complex ideas with few words. Some examples of poems that can be completed in small groups of 2-4 include: Cinquains, Bio Poems, and Diamante Poems

Journal Writing

- Inform students when collecting and/or reading personal journals, so they can exclude information or thoughts they want to keep private.

Dialogue Journals

- Provide opportunities for students and teachers to write back and forth in a journal format. Teacher responses need not be lengthy or ask too many questions. Responses should not be judgemental or critical.

Double Entry

- Students can divide their journal pages in half designating one side for taking notes (quotes, definitions, or other information from the text) and the other side is used for making notes in the form of thoughts, questions, or comments (written reflection). This format helps students to have a written conversation with themselves about the meanings and understandings from the first column.

Writing Strategies

RAFT – role, audience, form, and topic

- This writing strategy may help students personalize the concepts they are reading and make connections between what they are reading and their own experience.
- Role: Is the author a thing, a concept, a person, or animal? What do I already know about this role? What do I need to know?
- Audience: To whom are you writing? What do I already know about this audience? What do I need to know?
- Form: What form do you want your writing to take?
- Topic: With regard to the topic, what do you want to write about?

Alphabet Books

- Alphabet books can help traumatized children learn to organize their thoughts, helping them to master content. This activity can be done individually or in small groups on a variety of topics.

Interactive Storytelling

- Read simple, short stories with pictures and big wording. Engage children in the story as you read along. Some examples include: How do you think the character feels? What happened at the start of the story? What do you think will happen next? Have you ever done anything like this?
- This will improve children's literacy skills, sequencing skills, and narrative cohesion. It will promote the development of the neocortex and help improve engagement with others.

(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010; The State of Washington, 2011)

Feelings Based

Vocabulary of Feelings

- Take time to reflect on the affective dimensions of teaching and learning
- Practice yourself – How are you feeling? What are you thinking? How do you act when having those feelings?
- Then observe your student's behaviours – How are they acting? Based on what they say, what might they be thinking? What are the underlying feelings?
- Practice using the vocabulary of feelings
- Integrate and model what you are learning when reading stories, dealing with conflict, sharing personal stories.

(The State of Washington, 2011)

Teaching Affect Modulation

- To help children maintain optimal levels of arousal

- Introduce a range of activities to help children understand degrees of feeling
- Some examples include: Richter scale, “How angry are you?” Draw control knobs with numbers from 1-10, thermometers with temperatures, pie graphs.

(The State of Washington, 2011)

Activities that Focus on Feelings

The Size of a Feeling

Aim

To help children identify different feelings and gain awareness of the intensity of those emotions.

Materials

A variety of balloons

Method

- Ask children to choose a balloon colour to match their feeling. Blow up the balloon to a size that matches the intensity of their feeling. Discuss how they could make the feeling smaller.

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Mapping the Day

Aim

To help children identify and link their thoughts and feelings.

Materials

Paper, crayons, markers, pencils

Method

When I got here today:

I was thinking about ... home, me, family, something else

My body is/was feeling ... relaxed, happy, sad, mad, worried

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Sensation Body Maps

Aim

To help children identify and describe their emotions and sensations

Materials

Butcher paper, markers

Method

Preschool – 3rd grade

- Have the child lie down on butcher paper while someone traces the entire body with a marker. Help the child to make a coding key to describe sensations and emotions that they feel, using a variety of colors and/or markings. Children are instructed to color and mark different places on their body map where they feel different sensations and emotions using the key.
- Examples of coding keys:
 - Blue = sad
 - Orange squiggly lines= nervous
 - Pink polka dots = happy
 - Black = numb
 - Purple curvy lines = energetic
 - Red = hot and mad

Brown = tight

For 3rd graders and older

- Have each child make a “gingerbread” person shape on a large sheet of paper. Ask them to make their own coding key on the bottom of the paper. Have them fill in their body map to indicate the location of any sensations and emotions they are feeling in the moment. Be sure to encourage the expression of both comfortable and uncomfortable feelings.

Variation

- A simple version of this for very young, shy, or learning-disabled children is to have them choose two colors for their coding key: one color for comfortable (feelings they like) and the other for uncomfortable feelings (ones they don't like). The outline of the gingerbread person can be pre-made by an adult.

(Levine & Kline, 2007, pp. 392-93)

Teaching Attunement

Aim

To help children identify their own emotions and accurately read other people's emotions.

Method

Ask children to share or draw how they are feeling. Today I feel...

The second portion of the activity focuses on other people's feelings. Discuss the following:

- How can you tell if someone is happy? Mad? Sad? Scared?
- How does it feel when no one listens to you?
- When someone is speaking to you, you should look at them.
- You can understand someone if you listen to their words and watch how they behave.

(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010)

Emotional Matching

Aim

This activity helps children accurately identify emotional expression.

Method

Use pictures of different facial expressions and various scenes (scary, calm, exciting, sad, etc). Ask children to match the facial expression to the appropriate scene.

(Health Federation of Philadelphia, 2010)

Down-Regulation Activities

Stuffed animal breathing – Ask children to lie on the floor with a small stuffed animal on their stomachs. Cue them to have the animal rise and fall with each breath.

Robot /Rag doll – Children walk stiffly like a robot and then flop around like a rag doll.

Spaghetti – Ask children to move their arms and legs like uncooked spaghetti, then like cooked spaghetti.

Bridges – Have children raise and lower their arms like in the game London Bridges. Cue them to breathe in as their arms go up and breathe out as their arms go down.

Giraffe/Turtle – Children pretend to be giraffes reaching for leaves on high branches, then they pretend they are turtles pulling their arms, legs and head into their shells.

Caterpillar/ Butterfly – Children pretend to move like a caterpillar still in a cocoon, then stand up and spread their wings to fly.

(Kinniburg & Blaustein, 2005)

Calm Breathing

Aim

To help children calm down

Method

Ask the children to put one hand on their chest and the other hand on their belly. Guide them to breathe in through the nose, counting to four. They will feel the belly rise as they do this. The hand on their belly should move the most. Next, ask them to hold the breath for a second or two. Guide them to breathe out through the mouth, counting to five or longer. They will feel the belly fall as they breathe out. Repeat as needed.

(Garland, 2014)

Mind Jar

Aim

To help children calm down and focus

Materials

Small jar, glycerin, clear dish soap, different colours of glitter

Method

Fill a small jar, half with glycerin and half with dish soap, to create a 2-5 minute descent time for the glitter. The greater the proportion of dish soap, the faster the glitter will fall. Add 2-3 tablespoons of glitter to the jar. Close the jar tightly and store it on a protective plate (It will leave a stain on wood if it

leaks).

Turn the jar upside down and gently shake the glitter around. Ask the child to sit quietly, without talking, to watch the glitter drift to the bottom of the jar.

(Garland, 2014)

Scribble Wars

Aim

To channel aggressive actions into a neutral activity

Materials

Paper and drawing tools

Method

When children are having a disagreement and affect is high, introduce the idea of having a 'scribble war' together.

1. Provide each child with a pencil/pencil crayon/crayon and a piece of paper
2. Set a timer for one minute (or a time otherwise determined to be appropriate)
3. Say "go" and start the timer
4. The children should try to 'outscribble' one another in this time

This works within the high affect that children often display when getting upset. By channelling that energy into a neutral activity like scribbling, they have a venue to act out their high affect in a safe and often fun manner. This can allow them to expend energy in a non-violent or threatening way.

(James, 1994)

Mandalas

Aim

To help children relax and self-regulate

Materials

Pre-made drawing of mandalas

Pencil crayons, markers

Method

The process of coloring or drawing mandalas can provide a sense of centering or balance within.

(Sanders-Martin, 2008, pp. 127-29)

Mental Grounding Exercise

Aim

This activity brings awareness to the present

Method

- Describe objects, colours in environment
- Describe 5 objects you see
- Describe 5 sounds you hear
- Hand child 5 objects to feel
- Name 5 colours you see in the room

(Adapted from The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Positive Imagery

Aim

Letting go of negative thoughts and emotions can help children calm down, re-focus, and have positive experiences.

Method

Ask children to imagine a nice place in their minds that may be familiar or comfortable. Always allow children to keep their eyes open when engaging in visualization or relaxation activities. Ask them to take three deep breaths and let any “bad or negative” thoughts drift away as they breathe out. Cue them to focus on their nice place and imagine it using all their senses. What does it look like? What do they see, smell, or hear?

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Up-Regulation Activities

I Spy

Aim

This activity helps children become present and attuned.

Method

- Ask children to identify other children with certain traits such as hair/eye colour, shirt colour etc.
- This activity helps children learn about their peers and relate to others.
- Consider moving around the room to focus on different areas/objects

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Treasure Hunt

Aim

This activity can help to create safety and ground children.

Method

- Ask children to look for certain objects around the classroom. Repeat the activity often.
- Repetition can help decrease hyper-arousal
- The physical movement may energize (up-regulate) and/or calm (down-regulate) children

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Simon Says

Aim

To help children become present and calm

Method

- Guide children to do a range of large motor movements (ie. touch toes, arm circles, reach up high, jump up and down, shake your hand, leap frog, etc).
- This activity promotes the use of higher-level brain functions such as attending, planning, and organizing.
- The physical movement may energize (up-regulate) and/or calm (down-regulate) children

(The Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010)

Alternating Regulation States

Different Bubbles

Aim

To learn to alternate between states of high and low activity and affect

Materials

Bubble blowing supplies

Method

- The objective in this activity is for children to practice blowing bubbles of different sizes. Ask the children to try and blow large bubbles. They will soon discover that to do this they must use a long, slow, soft breath. Next, ask children to try and blow small bubbles. In order to do this the children will have to use forceful quick breaths. Get the children to alternate between blowing big bubbles and blowing small bubbles.
- By using their breath to make the bubbles bigger or smaller, they are learning control over their physical state, which can be translated to using physicality in order to control their own affect. By alternating these states, teachers and practitioners can assist in children learning how to go back and forth between physical and emotional states by modulating their own breath.

(Arvidson et. al., 2011)

Exploding Red Light, Green Light

Aim

To help children learn the concept of freezing and self-control. This game teaches children the idea of expressing emotion through sound and movement.

Method

- The game is played similarly to the game red light, green light. Players attempt to reach the leader, who calls out “green light” for players to begin moving and “red light” when they must stop. When the leader catches a child moving after red light has been called, the child must return to the starting line. The child is asked to “explode” while returning to the line. Explosions may include yelling, “Boom! Kapow! Crash!” letting out noises of frustration, or challenging the leader. Explosions directed towards the leader, gives the children permission and the context to express anger or resistance in a contained activity.

(Haen, 2008, p. 233)

Walk like a Turtle, Run like a Bear

Aim

To help children practice modulating different levels of affect.

Materials

A large space to move around

Method

1. Have children line up at one end of the room with enough space between them to move around comfortably and safely.
2. Ask the children to travel to the other side of the room emulating an animal that you call out.
3. Call out an animal name for the children to act as (e.g. bear, tiger, snail, mouse)
4. When the children have all made it to the far side of the room, call out another animal name, trying to choose one that has an opposite type of movement
5. The idea in the animal selection is that you go between animals that run, are big, and are loud to animals that move slowly, are quiet and are small.

The idea behind this activity is to get children to practice modulating different levels of affect as they emulate each animal. By switching between a 'high affect' (e.g. bear) and 'low affect' (e.g. turtle) animal, the children are in essence controlling their own current level of arousal.

(Arvidson et al., 2011)

Slow Mo

Aim

To allow safe recognition and expression of aggressive or hyper-aroused behaviours

Materials

No materials required

Method

- This intervention involves getting children to act out their aggressive or hyper-aroused behaviour in an exaggeratedly slow manner. When a child is having difficulty controlling their aggressive actions, the teacher or practitioner asks the child to act out that feeling and state what is contributing to this state very slowly using deliberately drawn out language and actions (the practitioner can model this so it is clear to the child). The child then is able to express how they are feeling, but also get to practice controlling their own affect.
- When the child is asked to draw out his/her aggressive feelings, it inherently works against the ramping up of volatile affect. By slowing the aggressive process we are effectively asking the child to learn how to monitor and modulate their level of arousal. After learning the technique they themselves can monitor when they might need to use Slow-Mo and then be able to have control over their aggressive compulsions.

(James, 1994)

Assertiveness Skills

Giraffe talk: Non-violent communication

Aim

To teach assertiveness skills for secondary students

- Developed by Marshall Rosenberg (1990)
- Asserting ourselves non-violently requires that we stick our necks out

Method

Four parts to Giraffe Talk:

When I observe...

Describe events without using evaluative judgements, blaming, labelling, or name calling. Practice using "I" statements.

I feel...

Identify the feelings associated with the event (ie. "I feel angry and hurt" and NOT "You made me feel angry")

Because I imagine...

A statement of what I think the other person may be thinking or believe about me.

I want... (or) would you please...

This is a request for a specific action that the other person can do to help you meet your needs. The request should be framed positively without a demand, threat, or guilt-shaming manipulation. The listener to your giraffe talk has the right to say no to your request.

(The State of Washington, 2011)

DEAR MAN: Interpersonal Effectiveness

Aim

A technique used when making requests, asking for things, initiating discussions or saying no, resisting pressure, and maintaining a point of view. Not every step has to be followed.

Method

Describe the situation

Tell the person exactly what you are reacting to. Stick to the facts and avoid judgemental statements.

Express your feelings or opinions

Describe how you feel or what you believe about the situation.

Assert wishes

Ask for what you want. Be direct.

Reinforce or reward the person ahead of time by telling them the positive consequences

(stay) Mindful

Maintain your position. Keep asking for what you need or continue saying no (broken record technique).

Appear confident

Make eye contact and maintain a tone of voice that is convincing.

Negotiate

Ask the other person what they would suggest you do. Your answer may still be no, but you can offer an alternate solution.

(Developed by Linehan, 1990; The State of Washington, 2011)

Communication Skills

Fancy Fridays

Aim

To promote social skills in children

Method

An activity for early elementary students

On these days, the teacher and a selected group of children eat lunch together. Set up an area of the room as a restaurant with a tablecloth, napkins, and silverware etc. Teachers and other adults model appropriate behaviour and conversation. Children attend Fancy Fridays on a rotating schedule so no one is excluded.

(Craig, 2008)

Photo Scrapbooks

Aim

To improve social skills and communication

Method

Take classroom photos of the teacher, students, and any helpers. These can be dated and stored in a digital or paper scrapbook. The scrapbook can be used to help students review the history of their relationship with the teacher and others. This can create opportunities to discuss how children were able to reconnect with others after disagreements or misunderstandings.

(Craig, 2008)

Listening with Empathy: An Exercise

Aim

To increase empathy and communication skills

Method

Older elementary and secondary students

- Divide children into groups of three or four. One student in each group is asked to be the teller and the other students will be listeners. Read the directions of the teller, the listener, and then discuss the five characteristics of a good listener.
- Teller: Describe an event from the past where you felt happy, sad, angry, scared, or confused. What happened? How did you feel at the time? Most important, give the listener details about your feelings.

- Listener: Practice the five characteristics of being a good listener. Listen for which emotion or emotions are being described. When the teller is finished, use words from the feeling chart to describe the intensity of emotions you heard. How intense were the teller's emotions when the event happened? What are they like now?
- Five characteristics of a Good Listener
 1. Acknowledge that you are listening (ie. "I hear you, [name])
 2. Show empathy (ie. smile, nod head)
 3. Face the person speaking and maintain good eye contact
 4. Maintain open posture
 5. Acknowledge what you heard and ask clarifying questions (ie. I heard you say that ... by that do you mean ...)

(The State of Washington, 2011)

Identity Webs

Aim

To enhance children's sense of identity

Method

Create a poster, asking children to draw or write the following:

- The thing I am best at
- Something I don't like
- Something I did last week
- Something I will do next week
- A word I like to hear
- A memory I have

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