

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

Trauma, broadly defined, is an experience that overloads someone's nervous system, or overwhelms someone's ability to cope. These can be the kinds of extreme traumatic events we might see reported on the news, events that are more commonplace but nonetheless distressing to the individual, or the kinds of stressors that are recurring and chronic, so that they build and overwhelm one's ability to cope over time.

Trauma can result in vulnerable ways of being in the world - including hypervigilance or a subdued "numbness." When children are attuned to seeing threats in their world or have their guard up consistently, this can get in the way of learning, memory, and social-emotional skills, because their brain is operating in the instinct and emotion parts of their brains, and not the part of their brains that deals with rational thinking, logic, or self-regulation.

TEACHERS HELP "SHIFT THE STORY"

Trauma reactions happen when a moment in the present resurfaces feelings and responses from a traumatic experience. Often, there is an internal narrative at play in these moments too. In this short video, Dr. Hayley Watson explains that when students consistently display behaviours that indicate a negative internal story, teachers can play a role in helping them challenge and rewrite that script.



A Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed approach is one that includes predictable routines and expectations; calm, safe, honest, and trustworthy interactions; empowering opportunities to use their voice and to make decisions when appropriate; and foregrounds their strengths. A relationship that helps students feel seen and heard is the foundation.

Safety & Predictability

Strengths-based

Relationship underpins it all

Honesty & Trust

Choice & Voice



A Trauma-Informed Parenting Approach

Many of the recommendations that are recommended for trauma-informed parenting are helpful strategies for all children. Here are some tips from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

- Be nurturing
- Be consistent - even to the point of being “boringly predictable” - outline routine changes ahead of time
- Make time every day to play and be fully present with your child
- Co-regulate and model appropriate reactions and interactions
- Warm, sincere praise when child is meeting expectations, and clear, dispassionate correction or consequences when misbehaving - much higher praise:correction ratio



Regulate, Relate, Reason

In [this short video](#), Dr. Bruce Perry explains why as caregivers, we first need to regulate (help bring their nervous system down), then relate (ensure there is connection), before we attempt to reason with a child who is in distress.

Regulate

Every child is different, but many will respond to soothing touch, some space (for a short time only), or [co-regulation strategies](#). Importantly, you will need to be calm and regulated first before you can help your child regulate.



Relate

When your child is calm, try to see the situation from your child's perspective and use your words to convey empathy. For example. “I know how that feels when someone interrupts something fun,” or “it can be really frustrating when others don't play by the rules.”



Reason

It is at this step when we can explain our rationale for stepping in or what needs to happen as a next step, but if we jump to this step without addressing the first two Rs, however logical our point of view, it will not be heard and may simply elevate emotions