

Trauma-Informed Classroom Toolkit

A comprehensive resource for supporting trauma-exposed students

From Classroom Pulse - www.classroompulse.io

Part 1: Trauma-Informed Environment Checklist

Physical Environment

- Calm, organized classroom with minimal clutter
- Designated regulation/break space available
- Soft or natural lighting when possible
- Clear sightlines to doors and exits
- Sensory tools available (fidgets, headphones, etc.)
- Predictable seating arrangements
- Visual schedules posted
- Safe space identified for de-escalation

Relational Environment

- Greet each student by name daily
- Use warm, calm voice tone consistently
- Provide predictable, consistent responses
- Repair relationships after conflicts
- Celebrate student strengths regularly
- Avoid public consequences or humiliation
- Allow processing time before requiring responses
- Model emotional regulation

Routines & Predictability

- Daily schedule posted visually
 - Transition warnings given (5 min, 2 min, 1 min)
 - Consistent daily structure maintained
 - Changes communicated in advance when possible
 - Arrival and dismissal routines established
 - Clear, consistent expectations posted
 - Predictable responses to challenging behavior
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Part 2: Adapted FBA Interview Questions

For Understanding Trauma-Related Behaviors

Safety & Security Questions: 1. When does the student seem most relaxed and comfortable? 2. Are there specific situations, people, or places that seem to trigger anxiety? 3. Does the student show signs of hypervigilance (constantly scanning, startling easily)? 4. How does the student

respond to unexpected changes? 5. Are there sensory triggers (loud noises, certain smells, crowded spaces)?

Relationship & Trust Questions: 1. Who does the student seem to trust most at school? 2. How does the student respond differently to various adults? 3. Does the student seek connection or avoid it? 4. How does the student respond to new adults in the environment? 5. What helps build trust with this student?

Regulation Questions: 1. What signs indicate the student is becoming dysregulated? 2. What helps the student calm down when upset? 3. Does the student recognize their own escalation signs? 4. What sensory inputs seem calming vs. activating? 5. How long does it typically take for the student to return to baseline?

Survival Response Questions: 1. Does the behavior look more like fight, flight, or freeze? 2. What happened immediately before the survival response activated? 3. Are there patterns in timing (time of day, day of week)? 4. Do certain demands or interactions consistently trigger responses? 5. What function might this behavior serve for survival/safety?

Part 3: De-escalation Scripts

Early Escalation (Agitation Phase)

Validation Script: > “I can see something is bothering you right now. That’s okay. I’m here if you want to talk about it, or we can just take a break together.”

Choice Script: > “It looks like you might need a moment. Would you like to take a break at your desk, or would you prefer the calm corner?”

Normalize Script: > “Everyone has hard moments. This is a tough situation. Let’s figure out what might help.”

Mid-Escalation (Acceleration Phase)

Safety Script: > “Right now, the most important thing is that you’re safe. I’m going to stay calm and stay nearby. You don’t have to talk.”

Reduce Demands Script: > “We can talk about [the task/situation] later. Right now, let’s just focus on helping you feel better.”

Offer Presence Script: > “I’m going to sit over here. I’m not going anywhere. Take the time you need.”

Post-Incident (Recovery Phase)

Reconnection Script: > “I’m glad you’re feeling a bit better. That was really hard. I’m proud of how you worked through it.”

No Shame Script: > “Everyone struggles sometimes. What happened doesn’t change how I see you. You’re still [student’s name] and I still care about you.”

Future Planning Script: > “When you’re ready—not now, but sometime—I’d like to talk about what might help if this happens again. No rush.”

Part 4: Regulation Strategies by Response Type

For FIGHT Responses (aggression, defiance, anger)

- Provide physical space (3-6 feet minimum)
- Lower your body position (kneel, sit)
- Use slow, low voice
- Avoid direct eye contact initially
- Offer heavy work activities when calmer (pushing, carrying, wall pushups)
- Provide a punching bag or stress ball
- Allow movement

For FLIGHT Responses (running, avoidance, restlessness)

- Don't chase unless safety requires it
- Provide a safe place to go TO (not just away from)
- Allow movement breaks throughout the day
- Create a "break pass" system
- Reduce environmental stimulation
- Offer proprioceptive input (weighted items)

For FREEZE Responses (shutdown, dissociation, compliance without engagement)

- Provide gentle, rhythmic input (rocking, swinging)
- Use grounding techniques (5-4-3-2-1 senses)
- Offer warm drink or crunchy snack
- Allow time—don't rush
- Use gentle, slow voice
- Provide gentle touch if welcomed (hand on shoulder)
- Reduce demands significantly

Part 5: Self-Care for Educators

Daily Practices

- Take 3 deep breaths before entering classroom
- Notice your own stress signals throughout the day
- Take lunch break away from students when possible
- Connect briefly with a supportive colleague
- End the day with a positive reflection

Weekly Practices

- Engage in physical activity
- Connect with friends/family outside of work
- Do something enjoyable unrelated to work
- Reflect on student successes, not just challenges

- Practice a relaxation technique (meditation, yoga, etc.)

Warning Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Difficulty sleeping or nightmares
- Intrusive thoughts about student situations
- Feeling numb or disconnected
- Increased irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches)
- Dreading going to work
- Feeling hopeless about making a difference

When to Seek Support

- Symptoms persist for more than 2 weeks
 - Functioning at work or home is impaired
 - Using unhealthy coping mechanisms
 - Feeling isolated or unable to talk about it
 - Questioning your career choice
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Quick Reference Card

The 3 R's of Trauma-Informed Response

- 1. REGULATE (yourself first)** - Take a breath - Check your body language - Lower your voice
 - 2. RELATE (connect before correct)** - Validate feelings - Show empathy - Maintain relationship
 - 3. REASON (only when regulated)** - Problem-solve together - Discuss what happened - Plan for next time
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