

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN & FAMILIES

EXPOSED TO TRAUMA



Predictability

Predictability involves repeated patterns of behavior and is important in reducing stress. Consistent routines and expectations are particularly helpful for traumatized children who have often experienced a lack of predictability and safety in their lives.

- Describe your role and how the day will unfold.
- Use signs or storyboards to visually depict upcoming activities.
- Provide reminders and countdowns for upcoming activities to aid in transitions.
- Clearly defined and posted expectations.
- Offering sufficient notice and preparation when change is necessary.
- Consistent tone, warmth, and empathy.

Choice

One of the most significant impacts of trauma on children and youth is a lost sense of control. Providing safe ways for children and youth to exercise choice creates opportunities for regaining control and power, which is important for development and growth.

- Only provide choices that you can agree to:
 - "Where would you like to sit?"
 - "Which activity would you like to start with?"
 - "Who else would you like present in the room?"
- Prepare to create opportunities for choice ahead of time (e.g., creating multiple options).
- For young children, offering "forced choice" will be helpful:
 - "Would you like the blue or red book to write in?"

Self Efficacy

Self efficacy is the belief we have in our abilities and competencies and impacts how we think and feel about ourselves. After a trauma, children and youth can experience lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy.

- Setting small, achievable goals and rewarding success
- Learning children's perceived obstacles and problem solving

Normalize & Validate

Normalizing a child's experience and their trauma response helps children, youth, and families to feel that they are not alone. Validation is simply the act of letting someone else know their experience is real. Validating feelings are particularly important for children and families who are trying to figure out their own emotions.

- Acknowledge the value of their issues and feelings.
 - "What I hear you say is that things are really overwhelming right now."
 - "I know so many families who have been through difficult and scary things that have had similar feelings."
- Show appreciation for efforts and actions.
 - "I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter."
- If appropriate, provide education on child trauma, letting children and families know that they are not alone in experiencing child maltreatment, that their reactions are common, and that there are effective paths to healing.

Safety

A sense of physical and psychological safety can be eroded for children and youth exposed to trauma. Enacting all of the applications in this handout helps to create a sense of psychological safety. Each child responds uniquely to trauma and their sense of safety, to an extent, will differ. Be sure to ask the child and youth what makes them feel safe.

- Create a physical sense of calm (e.g., lighting, minimal harsh sounds).
- Remain in an open posture
- Interact with the child or youth on their level (e.g., sitting on the floor).
- Affect Modulation:
 - Reflect back the intensity of their emotion without the anger or distress. "Wow! So glad you told me that, let's talk about the rest of your day to see what's going on and how we can help."
- Having a designated "safe space" the child can go.
- Create a safety plan with the child and family:
 - [Safety Planning Through the Eyes of Children](#)
 - [My3 Safety Planning Application](#)