

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN & FAMILIES



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 define and post expectations
- Offer sufficient notice and preparation when change is necessary
- Employ a 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 it impacts how we think and feel about ourselves. After trauma, children and youth can experience lowered self-esteem and self-efficacy.

- Set small, achievable goals and reward success
- Learn children's perceived obstacles and problem-solve

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 is 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 saying 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."
- Have a designated "safe space" the child can go to
- Create a safety plan with the child and family